



There is a great and very grim teacher of truths whom men call experience, and many cherished illusions that were to us as gospel have been destroyed by the same. Once I deemed myself a good judge of character and fancied I could read the minds of my fellow-creatures. Give me a smug-faced youth with bright blue eyes and words of guile and behold I trusted him. Yea, I took him to my bosom!

Cary was a smug-faced youth with bright blue eyes, and in consequence he was my friend. Our friendship began some years prior to the date when I commenced to hearken to the grim teacher of truths—before I became experienced, in short.

Yet even now there is much in Cary that I like; he has a vile temper, but experience demands not perfection; he is unprincipled, but alack the lesson of life teaches us that all men are more or less base!

It came to pass that Cary and I invested in a bark canoe, in which we proposed venturing into strange lands. We talked bravely, even boastfully—man is prone to self-glorification! The purchase of that canoe was contemporaneous with the advent of experience, before alluded to. We made many voyages and suffered innumerable mishaps. These were preparatory to the great climax; it is of the last that this narrative treats.

One very hot Saturday afternoon the thriving village of St. Johns, P.Q., was visited by two very hot *voyageurs*. Each *voyageur* had a grip in his hand and a look of determination in his face. The last was particularly noticeable, so much so that it was quite visible despite the great beads of perspiration engendered by the sultry weather. Need I add that Cary and myself were identical with these two?

There is a fort at St. Johns which is garrisoned by a company of soldiers. We did not wait to inspect these—our time was too valuable. But we saw in the distance a square building of grey stone, with the Union Jack floating proudly over it. We stopped a small boy and from him learned the reliable information given above. On reaching the express office, where our canoe was awaiting us, I made a discovery. I had forgotten to bring my flannel boating trousers; accordingly I besought my companion to wait until I purchased a pair; and, for that end, I started in search of a clothier. After some difficulty I succeeded in possessing myself of a pair of homely-looking brown jeans for the sum of half a dollar. These details are all given with a purpose, for it was this little mishap that gave me the first inkling as to what manner of man my friend was. Had I not gone for that homely pair of jeans it may be that this tale would not have been written; and moreover, perchance, I should never have had cause to gaze upon that base Cary with mournful regard—never have come to learn the lesson that experience teaches. From what very small happenings spring those impulses which go to turn the course of a life!

On returning in triumph with my purchase, I found my friend standing in front of the express office smoking a cigar; he was leaning against a telegraph pole in an attitude the studied grace of which attracted my admiring attention while I was yet two blocks off. There was an indescribable something about the perspective of his figure that excited instinctive awe. I marvelled much, but could find no satisfactory solution; as I drew nearer, I observed that he was gazing meditatively up at a window across the street. This particular window was much the same as any other; it had green blinds and the sash was drawn up, presumably to let the air into the room. A damsel, passing fair, clad in a fresh, cool-looking white suit was seated there. I only gave her a hasty

glance; girls in windows do not like to be stared at, I am told; they think it rude. But in that hasty glance it came to me that she was peering furtively at some object in the street.

"Hullo! you back already," said Cary, dreamily. "Didn't take you long, old man—get the trousers?"

I replied in the affirmative, and endeavoured to hurry him off to help to launch the canoe.

"All right! I'm coming," he said, absently.

Accordingly I entered the express office where the canoe was, put my parcel and the two grips into it, then as Cary did not appear, I crossed to the window which looked out into the street, and beheld the following remarkable performance in dumb show.

First I noticed that my friend was looking particularly pleased, and even as I watched him his expression broadened into a grin—and the girl at the opposite window was highly amused. She was laughing heartily. Then, behold, Cary lifted his hat and bowed—it was a neat, graceful bow, and the sun shone on his golden hair. He has beautiful hair, has Cary; it flashed like a crown of glory. I never saw a crown of glory, but methinks it must look much as does Cary's hair when he bows with uncovered head in the sunlight. And the girl became intensely grave all of a sudden; she tossed her pretty head, hesitated a moment, then suddenly, as if impelled by some irresistible impulse, she smiled and kissed her hand (Cary said she was mesmerized, but I cannot vouch for that); thereupon she withdrew and was seen no more.

My companion came in with a quick stride, his face wreathed in smiles; he seized his end of the canoe as if it were a feather, and off we started. This was the first blow to my hitherto much belauded judgment of men. Alas, that I must add that it was not the last!

We paddled for about half an hour along the canal; we hoped to reach Chambly in good time for supper, but we reckoned without our host. I don't know exactly what that expression means, but it seems to read correctly.

The Richelieu is an historical old stream; I am, according to my lights, a great lover of history, and as we sped bravely along with a steady current in our favour (we had portaged from the canal to the river) I pictured in my mind the many stirring scenes those banks that were on either side of us had witnessed in the past.

Here it was that Champlain, the great, the wise and pious, had paddled so often with his Huron allies to do battle with the Five Nations. Here a quarter of a century later De Courcelles' gallant band marched through the snow to punish the same turbulent chiefs. What a troop of heroes have passed and repassed, borne along, even as we two were, upon the bosom of this old flood! Sometimes the soul of we poor modern mites is thrilled! Mine was, for I was busy reflecting upon the glorious past, when the Indian loitered hereabouts looking for scalps, when the hardest hitter was the best man, and boys dreamt not of glorious deeds while cooped up in dreary offices; they went forth and were duly scalped instead. Ah, they were brave days these!

But the most interesting reverie must needs be ended. There is a busy world about us which is, alas, unmindful of the sublime ecstasy of historical contemplation! In this particular instance Cary personated the busy world; he was not influenced by our surroundings—at least he did not indulge in ecstatic contemplation.

He stopped paddling suddenly and remarked tersely:

"Rapids!"

Thereupon I also ceased paddling, and we both thought very hard for a very long time. The result of our cogitations

was that we decided to continue—and we did continue. First one shoot was passed safely, then a second, then a third. But at the fourth we shipped considerable water.

There chanced to be a likely landing place near at hand on the east shore and I turned the bow towards it, for we wished to empty our craft. When we reached this, Cary was the first to jump ashore. As he did so he gave utterance to a yell that froze my blood.

I object to having my blood frozen and was about to protest violently, when he said impressively:

"Look at the colour of the water we have shipped!"

I did as requested; it was a deep crimson; and my companion went on sadly,—

"I'll bet it is that feather pillow! I stowed it under the forward deck when we left St. Johns—thought maybe it might get wet or something if not under cover!"

He looked at me, as he spoke, in a peculiar way. I made no reply. That feather pillow was very precious to us. It was not so much its intrinsic value, but there were associations connected therewith which caused us to set great store by it. We had never used it before—in fact it had only come into our possession a few days previously.

Slowly and very sadly, for our hearts were heavy with dread, we pulled the canoe high up on the beach. Then Cary felt under the fore deck and brought forth an object which he proceeded to unroll. I watched him with a profound interest, not unmingled with anxiety, until, as it gradually assumed shape, I saw it was a coat—moreover, it was his coat. Then I sat down on a rock and laughed. Joseph's famed garment was surely a joke to this one! A *habitant*, who had presumed to witness our late wild career down stream, strolled up at this juncture. He stared first at me, then at my disgusted comrade—and his glance was comprehensive. There chanced to be another rock handy, and being a *habitant* with a quick appreciation of the ridiculous, he squatted thereon and forthwith joined me in unrestrained mirth.

Cary heeded us not; with an indescribable gesture, he cast the gorgeously streaked article of apparel to the ground, and once more felt under the deck. This time he fished out a red mass from which flowed a copious stream of crimson liquid. Then he held it out so as to allow me a good look, and even as I beheld it I became aware of the fact that life was not all hilarity; it was indeed our precious pillow!

My friend placed it on the beach and then held up his hands, dyed a deep crimson. Then he eyed his trousers, which were also of the same gory hue from the knee down. I looked at my jeans, which I had purchased at St. Johns; they were considerably the worse for wear, but with them was no responsibility. And, as I contrasted the difference which fate had observed in dealing thus, I burst again into laughter. Even the best of men are liable to rejoice complacently to find that fate has borne with them more kindly than with other people—and who am I that I should be superior to the best of men?

At this, Cary addressed me for the first time since he had discovered the damage done to his coat.

"You are a duffer!" he said, reproachfully, and I became a duffer. One hates to give one's crew just cause to call one a duffer.

"What shall we do with it?" demanded Cary, fretfully, after a pause. The *habitant* had partly recovered from his attack; he had risen from his seat and stood regarding us with a grin. We both turned towards him involuntarily as Cary spoke, and then we eyed each other guiltily.

(To be Continued.)