

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE:

Or, The Tragedy of the Wild.

CHAPTER XI.—(Cont'd)

The afternoon saw him still struggling, but now wearily, and in a state of collapse. His headlong course had taken the inevitable turn. He had swung round in a great circle, and was heading again for the hillside where the dugout stood. Now he often fell as he went, for his feet lagged and caught in every unevenness the ground presented. Once he lay upon the ground so long that it seemed as if he would rise no more. But as the afternoon waned and the evening shadows gathered, there came some-where close behind. He showed no fear of them, but presently staggered to his feet and dragged wearily on towards the hut. It was the forest instinct obeyed mechanically.

He came to the hut; he passed the door. Again it was habit that guided him. He kept on, and went round to the door of the lean-to. It stood wide open, and he plunged within and fell headlong upon his blankets. Nor did he stir again; only there came the sound of his stertorous breathing to indicate that he slept.

Black night closed down. The forest cries awoke, and their chorus rang out as the moon mounted in the heavens. The wolfish legions hovered at the edge of the woods and snuffed hungrily at the air. But the scent of blood had passed, and they came not too near.

And Nick's slumber of exhaustion was haunted by painful, incoherent dreams. With the curious freakishness of a disordered mind he was beset by a vision of the dark, ferret face of Victor Gagnon. The trader seemed to be hovering threateningly over his rude couch, and behind him, less distinct, but always recognizable, was the fair Aim-sa. The whole night the sleeper was depressed by some dreadful threat which centered about the vision of these two, and when at length he awoke it was with the effect of his dreams hard upon him.

The fair fresh daylight was streaming in through the open door. Nick roused. He turned uneasily, shivering with the cold, for he had slept where he had fallen. Suddenly he sat up. Then, with a leap, he was on his feet and wide awake, and the name of Victor Gagnon fell from his lips. A frenzied desire to have his life possessed him, nor did he seek the reason. His body was refreshed, and the blank of memory had passed from him. A gleam of reason shot athwart the darkness of his brain. It was only for an instant, then it was gone again, but that instant sufficed. He remembered that Gagnon knew of the treasure, the only person except himself who knew of it. Victor had robbed him. A wild laughter shook him. Ay, that was it. Victor was the thief; he should die. After that—Aim-sa.

The hideous truth was revealed. His untutored brain had broken under the strain of recent events. Horror had driven him to the verge of the abyss in the depths of which lurked insanity; his final loss had plunged him headlong down. He was mad!

CHAPTER XII.

Two men occupied the back room of Victor Gagnon's store. The proprietor, small, alert, with eye and brain working swiftly, and an expression on his dark face indicating the angry nature of his thoughts. He was sitting with his feet on the stove rail and his hands spread out to the warmth. The other man was beside the parchment-covered window. He was immensely tall, and was clad in grey wolfskin from head to foot. His broad shoulders were broadened by the fur covering till he looked a giant. He had just thrown back a cavernous hood from his head, and it now hung down his back. His fur cap was removed, thus displaying a coarse mane of long black hair, and a face as sombre and strong as the world to which he belonged.

The room was untidy. The bed stood at one end, and the tumbled blankets upon it looked as though they had not been straightened for weeks. A small table supported the remains of a frugal repast, and the floor about it was littered with food and crumbs. Everywhere were signs of half-breed slovenliness.

For some moments silence had reigned. The North, that Land of Silence, makes men sparing of words, and even women only talk when it is necessary. Just now, there was that between these two men which held every thought to the main issue.

Victor's attention was for the moment upon a rough-hewn chest

which was standing on the floor at the big man's feet.

"An' why didn't she come right along with you?"

"Mebbe 'cos she's smarter nor any o' us; mebbe 'cos I jest didn't want her to. There's somethin' 'tween you an' me, Victor. That needs some parley."

The big man spoke quite calmly, but his very calmness was portentous.

"Smarter?" said Victor contemptuously, ignoring the latter part of the other's remark.

"That's what I said," went on the giant, in dispassionate tones. "Davie reckoned as it wasn't jest safe to light right out lest them fellers found they'd been robbed o' their wad. She's stayin' around to put 'em off'n the trail. They're dead sweet on her, an' ain't likely to 'spect who's got the stuff while she's around."

Victor nodded approvingly. His face was less angry. He knew Davie would serve him well. A silence fell again. The stove roared under the forced draught of the damper. Then the big man spoke as though he had not broken off.

"But that ain't only the reason, I guess. I wanted her to stay. You an' me are goin' to talk, Victor Gagnon."

The trader glanced angrily at the man with the hood.

"See here, Jean Leblonde, you allus had a crank in yer head, an' don't cotton to cranks anyhow."

"But you'll cotton to this," replied Jean drily.

"Eh?"

"It's nigh on to three year since you an' sister Davie took on together," he went on, ignoring the interruption, and speaking with great feeling. "Guess you said as you'd marry her when you was independent o' the Company. It was allus the Company. Didn't want no married traders on their books. An' you hadn't no cash pappy. That's how you sed. Mebbe it's different now. Wal? When are you goin' to make her a de-your wife?"

There was a look in Jean's eyes that brooked no denial or evasion. He had driven straight to the point, nor was there any likelihood of his drawing back.

"You're pretty rough," said Victor, with an unpleasant laugh. He was inwardly raging, but, like all men of no great moral strength, feared the direct challenge of the other.

"We ain't polished folk hereabouts," retorted Jean. "We've played the dirty game o' the White Squaw for you clear out. Davie's most as dead sick of it as me, but wher' she went into it fer a frolic an' to please you, I had my notions, I guess. I come clear away down from Peace River nigh on two summers ago jest fer to see that you acted squar' by that misguided wench. An' that's why I done all your dirty work in this White Squaw racket. Now we've got the boodle you're goin' to hitch up wi' Davie, or—"

"Oh—what?" broke in Victor contemptuously.

"Or not one blazin' cent o' the stuff in this chest'll you touch."

Victor sprang from his seat, and his eyes shone furiously.

"You—you—" But his fury was baffled by the solemn, determined stare of the other. A moment more and he dropped back in his seat.

Then the great Jean lowered his eyes to the hewn chest upon the floor. The lid had been forced open, and the bags of gold dust, so carefully arranged by the Westleys, were displayed within. Presently he looked back at the angry figure bending towards the stove.

"Guess I'll git blankets out o' your store," he said.

Victor remained rapt in moody silence.

"Ther' ain't room fer two to sleep comfort'ble in tha' bed o' yourn," he added significantly as the other showed no inclination to speak.

At last Victor looked up, and the dark half-breed blood slowly mounted and flushed his narrow face.

"You're goin' to stop here—wher' the stuff is?"

"I guess."

The trader looked long into the cavernous moose eyes of the hooded man while he choked down the rage which consumed him. He knew that he was a prisoner in his own store. Resistance would be utterly useless against such a man as Jean Leblonde.

In his scheme for obtaining wealth Victor had omitted to take

into consideration one of the great factors of a life of wrong-doing. A man may not engage in crime with those whom he has wronged; interested service can alone avail, but it needs the backing of a mind unprejudiced.

Victor had sought to obtain good service, forgetting the manner he had treated the sister of Jean. The ways of the half-breed are loose in the matter of morals. Davie, he knew, loved him. She was a strong, passionate woman; therefore he had not bothered about Jean. That Jean could possibly have scruples or feelings, had never entered his head. Davie had given her love, then what business was it of her brother's the manner in which he, Victor, chose to accept it? This is how he argued when he fully realized the position in which he had thrust himself. But his argument went no further.

Jean was a man strong and purposeful. He had waited long for such an opportunity, and he was not the one to forego his advantage without enforcing his will. If Victor wanted his share of the proceeds of the robbery he must fulfil the promise which, in a passionate moment, he had given. Davie was as clay in his hands. Jean was different. He was possessed of all the cunning of the half-breed nature, but, looked at from a half-breed point of view, he was a good man, an honest man. A half-breed and husband, or a dutiful son. He will shoot an enemy down in his tracks; while yet he is a good father is a man of much badness and some good. Jean was a little above the average. Possibly it was because his affections were centered upon but one creature in the world—his sister Davie, to wit—that he felt strongly in her cause. He knew that, at last, he held Victor in a powerful grip, and he intended to hold on tight.

Jean was as good as his word, and took up his abode in Victor's store. Nor would he permit the removal of the treasure under any pretext. This brother of Davie's understood the trader. He did not watch him; it was the chest that contained the money that occupied his vigilance.

Victor was resourceful and imaginative, but the stolid purpose of the other defied his best schemes. He meant to get away with the money, but the bulldog watchfulness of Jean gave him no opportunity. He was held prisoner by his greed, and it seemed as if, in the end, he would be forced to bend to the other's will.

And no word came from Davie. No word that could cause alarm, or tell them of the dire tragedy being enacted in the mountains. And the two men, one for ever scheming and the other watching, passed their time in moody silence.

It was the third day after the foregoing events had taken place, and mid-day. Victor was in the store standing in the doorway gazing out across the mighty foothills which stretched far as the eyes could reach to the east. He was thinking, casting about in his mind for a means of getting away with the money. Jean was at his post in the inner room.

It was an unbecoming time of the year. The passing of winter in snow regions is like the moulting season of fowls, or the season when the furred world sheds its coat. The dazzling whiteness of the earth is superseded by a dirty drab-grey. The snow lasts long, but its hue is utterly changed. And now Victor was looking out upon a scene that was wholly dispiriting to the mind used to the brilliancy of the brooding winter.

The trader's thoughts were moving along out over the stretch of country before him, for in that south-eastern direction lay the town of Edmonton, which was his goal. It would be less than a fortnight before the melting snow would practically inundate the land, therefore what he had to do must be done at once. And still no feasible scheme presented itself.

He moved, impatiently, and a muttered curse escaped him. He asked himself the question again and again while his keen, restless eyes moved eagerly over the scene before him. He took a chew of tobacco and rolled it about in his mouth with the nervous movement of a man beset. He could hear Jean moving heavily about the room behind him, and he wondered what he was doing. But he did not turn to see.

(To be continued.)

HIS RELATIVES.

"You are my nearest relative," said Willie to his ma; "But when I need some money My closest one is pa."

A tourist once happened to meet the usual "oldest inhabitant" of a village. In the course of conversation he asked the ancient how old he was. "I be just a hundred," was the reply. "Well, I doubt if you'll see another hundred years," said the tourist, trying to make conversation. "I don't know so much about that, maister," was the hopeful response. "I be stronger now than when I started on the first hundred.—London Tit-Bits.

NEW CURE FOR CANCER.

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What appears to be a very promising experiment for the cure of cancer has lately been made in Germany. A fungus bearing the name of *Mucor racemosus malignus* has been grown in malignant tumors of certain animals. This is not the irritant but a dead culture of it, which applied to the growth, causes it, as alleged, to subside. This remedy, called antimeristem by its discoverer, is not a specific but, like tuberculin, consists of the fungus itself and its decomposition products. In action is also resembles tuberculin, for after injection a febrile reaction takes place. It must be used only when an operation has become impossible, and even at that advanced stage cures have been effected. There is also a remedy of much the same nature for tumors for which no operation can be made. This is called antitumor and contains substances which go to build up the cartilaginous tissue of the animal body. The fact that cartilaginous tissue does not suffer from cancer led a Berlin pathologist to the idea of using this substance to stop the further development of the cancer cells. After injection of antitumor a strong reaction sets in also. What success these remedies will have remains to be seen.

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PRIZE "C"—\$100.00 to be given to the farmer in each Province who furnishes us with the photograph showing the best of any particular kind of work done on his farm during 1911 with "CANADA" Cement.
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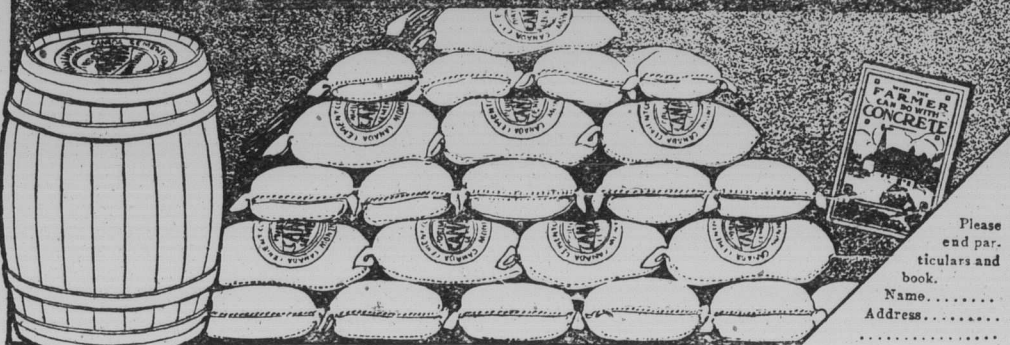
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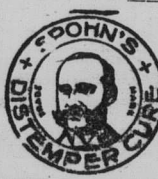


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Brown—"Yes, I'm acquainted with your wife, old man. I knew her before you married her." Smith—"Ah! That's where you had the advantage of me. I didn't."

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