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OCTOBER 15, 1914

Our Serial Story. PETER.

A Novel of Which He is Not the Hero.

By F. HOPKINSON SMITH.

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Chapter XIV.

The Scribe would willingly omit this chapter. Dying men, hurrying doctors, improvised stretchers made of wrenched fence rails; silent, slow-moving throngs following limp, bruised bodies,—are not pleasant objects to write about and should be disposed of as quickly as possible.

Exactly whose fault it was nobody knew; if any one did, no one ever told. Every precaution had been taken each charge had been properly placed and tamped; all the fulminates inspected and the connections made with the greatest care. As to the battery—that was known to be half a mile away in the pay shanty, lying on Jack Breen's table.

Nor was the weather unfavorable. True, there had been rain the day before, starting a general thaw, but none of the downpour had soaked through the outer crust of the tunnel to the working force inside and no extra labor had developed on the pumps. This, of course, upset all theories as to there having been a readjustment of surface rock, dangerous sometimes, to magnetic connections.

Then again, no man understood tunnel construction better than Henry MacFarlane, C.E., Member of the American Society of Engineers, Fellow of the Institute of Sciences, etc., etc. Nor was there ever an engineer more careful of his men. Indeed, it was his boast that he had never lost a life by a premature discharge in the twenty years of his experience. Nor did the men, those who worked under him—those who escaped alive—come to any definite conclusion as to the cause of the catastrophe: the night and day gang, I mean,—those who breathed the foul air, who had felt the chill of the clammy interior and who were therefore familiar with the handling of explosives and the proper tamping of the charges—a slip of the steel meaning instantaneous annihilation.

The Beast knew and could tell if he chose.

I say "The Beast," for that is what MacFarlane's tunnel was to me. To the passer-by and to the expert, it was, of course, merely a short cut through the steep hills flanking one end of the huge "earth fill" which MacFarlane was constructing across the Corklesville brook, and which, when completed would form a road-bed for future trains; but to me it was always The Beast.

This illusion was helped by its low-browed, rocky head, crouching close to the end of the "fill," its length concealed in the clefts of the rocks—as if lying in wait for whatever crossed its path—as well as its ragged, half-round, catfish gash of a mouth from out of which poured at regular intervals a sickening breath—yellow, blue, greenish often—and from which, too, often came dulled explosions, followed by belchings of debris which centipedes of cars dragged clear of its slimy lips.

So I reiterate, The Beast knew.

Every day the gang had bored and pounded and wrenched, piercing his body with nervous, nagging drills; propping up his backbone, cutting out tender bits of flesh, carving—bracing—only to carve again. He had tried to wriggle and twist, but the mountain had held him fast. Once he had straightened out, smashing the tiny cars and the tugging locomotive; breaking a leg and an arm, and once a head, but the devils had begun again, boring and digging and the cruel wound was opened afresh. Another time, after a big rain, with the help of some friendly rocks who had rushed down to his help, he had snapped his jaws tight shut, penning the devils up inside, but a hundred others had wrenched them open, breaking his teeth, shoring up his lips with iron beams, tearing out what was left of his tongue. He could only sulk now, breathing hard and grunting when the pain was unbearable. One thought comforted him, and one only: Far back in

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE.

1815

his bulk he knew of a thin place in his hide,—so thin, owing to a dip in the contour of the hill,—that but a few yards of overlying rock and earth lay between it and the free air.

Here his tormentors had stopped; why, he could not tell until he began to keep tally of what had passed his mouth: The long trains of cars had ceased; so had the snorting locomotives; so had the steam drills. Curious-looking boxes and kegs were being passed in, none of which ever came back; men with rolls of paper on which were zigzag markings stumbled inside, stayed an hour and stumbled out again; these men wore no lamps in their hats and were better dressed than the others. Then a huge wooden drum wrapped with wire was left overnight outside his lips and unrolled the next morning, every yard of it being stretched so far down his throat that he lost all track of it.

On the following morning work of every kind ceased; not a man with a lamp anywhere—and these The Beast hated most; that is, none that he could see or feel. After an hour or more the head man arrived and with two others went inside. The head man was tall and fair, had gray side whiskers and wore a slouch hat; the second man was straight and well built, with a boyish face tanned by the weather. The third man was short and fat; this one carried a plan. Behind the three walked five other men.

All were talking.

"The dip is to the eastward," the head man said. "The uplift ought to clear things so we won't have to handle the stuff twice. Hard to rig derricks on that slope. Let's have powder enough, anyhow, Bolton."

The fat man nodded and consulted his plan with the help of his eye-glasses. Then the three men and the five men passed in out of hearing.

The Beast was sure now. The men were going to blow out the side of the hill where his hide was thinnest so as to make room for an air-shaft.

An hour later a gang in charge of a red-shirted foreman who were shifting a section of toy track on the "fill" felt the earth shake under them. Then came a dull roar followed by a cloud of yellow smoke mounting skyward from an opening high up on the hillside. Flashing through this cloud leaped tongues of flame intermingled with rocks and splintered trees. From the tunnel's mouth streamed a thin, steel-colored gas that licked its way along the upper edges of the opening and was lost in the underbrush fringing its upper lip.

"What's that?" muttered the red-shirted foreman—"that ain't no blast—My God!—they're blown up!"

He sprang on a car and waved his arms with all his might: "Drop them shovels! Git to the tunnel, every man of ye: here,—this way!" and he plunged on, the men scrambling after him.

The Beast was a magnet now, drawing everything to its mouth. Gangs of men swarmed up the side of the hill; stumbling, falling; picking themselves up only to stumble and fall again. Down the railroad tracks swept a repair squad who had been straightening a switch, their foreman in the lead. From out of the cabins bareheaded women and children ran screaming.

The end of the "fill" nearest the tunnel was now black with people; those nearest to the opening were shielding their faces from the deadly gas. The roar of voices was incessant; some shouted from sheer excitement; others broke into curses, shaking their fists at The Beast; blaming the management. All about stood shivering women with white faces, some chewing the corners of their shawls in their agony.

Then a cry clearer than the others soared above the heads of the terror-stricken mob as a rescue gang made ready to enter the tunnel.

"Water! Water! Get a bucket, some of ye! Ye can't live in that smoke yet! Tie your mouth up if you're going in! Wet it, do ye want to be choked stiff!"

A shrill voice now cut the air. "It's the boss and the clerk and Mr. Bolton that's caught!"

"Yes—and a gang from the big shanty; I seen 'em goin' in," shouted back the red-shirted foreman.

The volunteers—big, brawny men, who, warned by the foreman, had been bind-

*This Letter
tells its Own
Story*

Fort William, Ont.

June 22, 1914.

J. Lawrence Routly, Esq.,
Branch Manager,
Imperial Life Assurance Company,
Fort William, Ont.

Dear Sir:

I want to thank you and the Imperial Life Assurance Company, which you represent, for the prompt and generous treatment I received in the settling of my husband Thomas Buttar's claim.

I wish to express my appreciation of the Automatic Non-Forfeiture clause contained in your policies. Had it not been for this the insurance would have been lost, as Mr. Buttar failed to pay his premium in full when it fell due 15th of January last.

I will always recommend your Company to those wanting insurance.

Yours very truly,

I Buttar

**THE IMPERIAL LIFE
Assurance Company of Canada
HEAD OFFICE - TORONTO**

Branches and Agents in all important centres

Write to-day for particulars of our FREE TRIAL OFFER



Our "Gravity" design gives greatest convenience, as well as ease of operation with quick and thorough work. Do not overlook the detachable tub feature.

So I said to myself, I will do with my "1900 Gravity" Washer what I wanted the man to do with the horse. Only I won't wait for people to ask me. I'll offer first, and I'll make good the offer every time. Let me send you a "1900 Gravity" Washer on a month's free trial. I'll pay the freight out of my own pocket, and if you don't want the machine after you've used it a month, I'll take it back and pay the freight, too. Surely that is fair enough, isn't it?

Doesn't it prove that the "1900 Gravity" Washer must be all that I say it is? And you can pay me out of what it saves for you. It will save its whole cost in a few months in wear and tear on the clothes alone. And then it will save 50 to 75 cents a week over that on washerwoman's wages. If you keep the machine after the month's trial I will let you pay for it out of what it saves you. If it saves you 60 cents a week, send me 50 cents a week till paid for. I'll take that cheerfully, and I'll wait for my money until the machine itself earns the balance.

Drop me a line to-day, and let me send you a book about the "1900 Gravity" Washer that washes clothes in six minutes. Address me:

**B. K. Morris, Manager, Nineteen Hundred Washer Company
357 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario**

Power Washers

If you have electricity or Gasoline Power available let me tell you about our "1900" Power Washers; wash and wring by electricity by simply attaching to any electric light socket—no work at all, or the same machine can be operated from a Gasoline Engine.

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