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The Eel River Conspiracy

By JAS. A. TUCKER.

FERNCROFT had hurried north by the first train, in response to a telegram from Mahaffy asking him to come to the mills at once. One of the company's tugs would be waiting at the lake end of the railway to convey him to the North Shore. Ferncroft wondered why Mahaffy and not Brigsdall had wired, for Mahaffy was assistant bookkeeper and Brigsdall was supposed to take charge whenever Ferncroft had to "go out" to Ontario on business.

Ferncroft was manager of the Eel River Lumber and Construction Company (Limited). With two large mills north. He was an ambitious fellow, who had spared himself little leisure in many years, and it was most annoying to have his driver call to his mother in law, since he had cast his lot with the Eel River Company six years before, thus cut short five days early by a recall. But Brigsdall was "bust" on the yellow paper came to hand he was on the cars, leaving a little white-haired woman waving a kerchief and biting back her tears of disappointment as the train puffed away at its momentary stop at the flag-station.

When Ferncroft got off the train he went straight to the wharf, but the wharfage's office was locked up and the little harbor deserted, no lights either of tug or other craft showing along the pier-side. The red eye of the lighthouse peered into the night from the little bowldery point beyond.

The manager was disappointed, exasperated, yet believed there was doubtless some good reason for the tug's not being on time. A man accustomed to keeping engagements punctually and to insisting upon a like promptitude in every department of the big business under him, the captain of neither the "Heron" nor the "Hare" would have dared to keep Dayley Ferncroft waiting overnight without reason.

The only thing to be done was to go up town to one of the hotels and await developments. The Shannon House was the nearest to the wharf, and at that Ferncroft chose to bide his time.

It lacked but a few minutes of ten when he reached the Shannon. House having shaken hands with the proprietor, an old friend, he settled himself in an armchair in the common room, for a smoke. There was still a goodly company of local beaux sitting about smoking and chewing, and discussing current topics in their own provincial way. The advent of a substantial appearing stranger held the assemblage together rather later than usual, on the chance that he might be drawn into friendly discourse and ensnared into "setting up the drinks."

But Ferncroft busied himself only with his pipe and the daily paper and coolly ate the local "spongers" detached themselves and floated away. The mill-manager paid so little heed to what was going on that he was not aware for five or six minutes after the room had become perfectly quiet, that there still lingered one individual, apparently asleep in an armchair in a corner, but really eyeing Ferncroft attentively from under the brim of his pulled-down plug hat.

A loud yawn from the foxing gentleman drew Ferncroft's attention to his presence. The stranger stretched his arms, pushed his plug hat up over his brows and made a remark about the dullness of waiting over in such a place. Ferncroft was not an uncomplaisable fellow, and met halfway the stranger's effort to start conversation. He learned that the man with the plug hat—a most unusual article of attire up north—was an "American," and wanted to reach Little Rapids to inspect a line. This being his first visit to Canada, he had been misinformed as to routes, and now found himself at the end of the rails, with seventy miles of water between him and his destination, waiting for a chance coaster or lumbering tug to take him to Little Rapids.

"Lucky you spoke," said Ferncroft. "Here's my card. I'm on the way to to-night to take me over. Little Rapids is just thirty miles further up the lake. You can come along with me. Once at the wharf, an Indian or a fisherman to take you to the Rapids."

The "American" seemed delighted with his good fortune, and before going to bed insisted on Ferncroft's taking a drink with him. "This Canadian whiskey's all right," said he, "and I must say I have found Canadians all right, too, 'a far's I've tried 'em. Now, if that there tug gets in the right time, you'll be able to call me, won't you?"

Ferncroft sat up in his room long after the rest of the house was dark, waiting for the whistle of the "Hare" or the "Heron." But two "wonders" without any sound coming from the harbor, so the manager reluctantly "turned in," not a little troubled to know why he had been sent for at all, why Mahaffy had wired the messenger, and why no tug had met him though the telegram had promised one at the wharf when he stepped off the train.

It was broad daylight before he awoke. As he "thumped" downstairs for breakfast, Spielman, the "American," came racing up, three steps at a time. "Oh, I say, that tug of yours hasn't ever got in yet, but there's a little steamer named the 'Honest Dollar' docked at the wharf. Ran in about six o'clock. Owned by a Green Bay, Wis., man, who's on board with two friends and the crew. They're going to cruise up Little Rapids way and leave here at about another hour. They're going to take me over there, and drop you along, too, and drop you off at Eel River, if your boat don't happen along in the meantime."

The offer was a good one. Ferncroft was anxious to get to the mills. The confounded tug still failed to make her long-delayed appearance, and at the last moment Ferncroft put his grips on the "Honest Dollar" and stepped aboard, leaving word with the wharfinger for the "Hare" or the "Heron," if either of those craft should report later.

The run across the lake had been both quick and pleasant. The "Honest Dollar" was a speeder, though rather old and shabby vessel. The company was decidedly congenial. Mr. Antrous of Green Bay and his two friends, Misener and Flood of Chicago, were good fellows, who smoked only the best cigars and knew how to entertain a stranger. They had placed both their campariot, Spielman, and the Canadian mill-manager under a last-minute obligation by their generosity and hospitality.

The two great stacks of the Eel River mills and the top of the big sawdust consumer had been looming up in the distance for some time, when Ferncroft went down into the little saloon of the "Honest Dollar" to get a newspaper from his overcoat, that he might show the "American" gentlemen a certain editorial on an international dispute then at a critical stage.

To his consternation the door was slammed behind him with great violence, and the key was instantly turned in the lock and withdrawn. At first he suspected some practical joke, but no heed was paid to his calls. He saw from one of the portholes that the yacht was changing her course. The door was opened and he threw his weight repeatedly against the door, hoping he could burst it open. But it was a mortified lock—he could make no impression.

He sat down and tried to think out what it could all mean. He was confused. So many odd things had happened for a time his sense of reality and most alarming occurrence that he lost seriously pondered as to whether he was dreaming—whether he was himself, Dayley Ferncroft. Of course he was not dreaming. Certainly he was himself.

Step by step he reviewed what had occurred: First, Mahaffy's telegram. Why Mahaffy and not Brigsdall? Second, the disappointment as to the tug. Why had either the "Hare" or the "Heron" failed to meet him, after being explicitly promised?

Third, his chance meeting with Spielman and the curious circumstance that the dresy stranger was also waiting to take passage across the lake. Who was Spielman? What did he, Dayley Ferncroft, know of him except what he had received from the gift tongue of the stranger himself?

Fourth, the coincidence of an "American" steam yacht coming along at the right moment to take him to act as his pilot to his destination. Might not Spielman and the other Yankee be confederates in a conspiracy?

In the light of the fact that he was now unquestionably a prisoner, connected, had a sinister significance, and Ferncroft cursed himself for a putty-headed clump for not having been more astute.

But why should there be any conspiracy, and if there was one, how had the conspirators managed to enlist the services of Mahaffy, the assistant bookkeeper? These were problems that Ferncroft was trying to figure out when Spielman's voice sounded loud outside the door.

"Look-a-here, you! We don't mean any harm by you if you only take things cool and sensible. We're going for a little trip along the shore. I'll only last a day or two, but you've got to stay with us. Why, you'll know later on. Now, as fellows want to decent and let you have the run of the ship, so the door'll be unlocked providing you promise to take things cool and not make any trouble."

The cheek of the fellow was amusing, even to one in Ferncroft's predicament. "But supposing I won't come to terms?" said Ferncroft. "By heavens, I think I can make it interesting for you should find it so."

"Oh, that's easy enough said," was the rejoinder. "Better be sensible, old man. Remember, we're seven to one."

That sounded decidedly like a threat. Ferncroft felt his gorge rising. "Well, I'll be damned if I'll promise anything to a gang of traitors," he shouted back. "Very well, Mr. Ferncroft," said Spielman. "We'll be under the painful necessity of seeing that you're not left in a position to make trouble."

That sounded even more ominous. Would the fellows be guilty of murder? Or did they only mean to keep him in confinement? If the latter, they must exclude themselves from the cabin, and where else in the boat could they find decent shelter from wind and weather? Ferncroft was under the necessity of making a choice. He chose the latter. "Better be sensible, old man. Remember, we're seven to one."

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15th some thirteen thousand and odd dollars were to be paid out to the Eel River Lumber Company's men—sawyers, mill-hands, teamsters, lumbermen, raftsmen, tugmen and other employees—representing the earnings of many months. Twice a year the money came from the head office in Ottawa by express messenger over the Canadian Pacific, and leaving the railway twenty miles north of Eel River Mills, was brought down stream in a canoe or through the bush by trail. As a precaution, the semi-yearly pay-days were never allowed to fall on precisely the same dates in successive years, and only two persons at the mills, in addition to Ferncroft, were aware when the cash envelopes would reach Eel River this summer. Those two were Brigsdall and Mahaffy. Both were absolutely trustworthy men, but in some back in a vision, Ferncroft beheld Spielman forging Mahaffy's name to his telegram. Spielman, he divined, was the head and front of the conspiracy. He was not to be trusted. He would be resorted to get Mahaffy and Brigsdall out of the way at the last moment.

Then the coast would be clear to make the projected haul. Fourteen thousand dollars amongst seven men was a sum not to be sneezed at.

The yacht steamed ahead for ages, as it seemed to Ferncroft. But when they came and took him in of the cabin and carried him ashore at a little deserted fisherman's cabin on a wild, rugged part of the coast that he could not remember having ever seen before, he was bewildered until another day. Ferncroft knew not whether it was the mainland or a large island on which he was being landed, nor could he decide which would be preferable—to be set free such an inhospitable region, without means of succor, or to be longer a prisoner in the hands of men who might not hesitate to add murder to their other crimes. Nor was his mind so set on escape that he forgot the intentions. A quantity of provisions was landed, and Misener and Flood being left behind to guard the prisoner, the yacht steamed away again as night was falling.

The mill-manager was kept under the closest surveillance all that night and next day—the 10th of August—but was otherwise not ill-handled. At dusk the "Honest Dollar" came back, and taking the two guards on board, steamed off, leaving Ferncroft with several days' provisions, but sans the slightest idea as to the part of country to which a stranger's misfortune had banished him. To attempt to discover whether he was on an island or the mainland, and in the latter event, to seek a way to some habitation, would be hopeless until another day should dawn. Ferncroft knew the chances of his getting out in time to block the contemplated robbery must be slim indeed, since it stood to reason that the yacht would have four days still to elapse before the receipt of the money at Eel River, would have scarcely placed him where he could get in touch with civilization in the interval.

Thinking it was his only chance, he banded his resources for a supreme effort, he resolved to spend the long night as comfortably as possible in the deserted cabin, and to be up bright and early the following morning. When day dawned, his first task, after breaking fast, was to seek an elevation from which he might discover something of local topography, for his whole subsequent course must be governed accordingly.

The land was not heavily wooded, but rough, bowlder-strewn, and shouldering abruptly out of the water. Mahaffy was his with difficulty from the cabin around the circling coast-line. Ferncroft sought some stream whose course he might follow back into the interior without fear of losing his way, and he gotting cut off from his base. At length he found a tiny rivulet, and paralleling its rugged bed, he ascended till he reached an open space, whence he could see with his eyes, and some miles distant, other islands and the high, hazy outline of the mainland.

This was a disappointment, but it was at least well to know the truth at once. Descending again to the cabin, Ferncroft refreshed himself and resolved, if possible, to make a circuit of the island, which could not be above four or five miles in circumference. He was thoughtful as he thought of the "Honest Dollar," "I may discover something that will assist me in some unlooked-for way."

So he set out, and, after proceeding a couple of miles, was relieved about noon to find a small raft that had drifted ashore in a little cove. With anything that might serve as an oar, it would have been impossible for him to have navigated the rude craft back to the cabin.

He therefore returned to the latter on foot, and, having done up his provisions in a bundle in the lining ripped from his coat, he knuckled a board from the shanty with the help of a large stone, and, taking both bundle and board, started off again for the cove. Reaching there, he sat down to eat, and with his back to the shore, he whittled at the plank till he had produced something that bore a rude semblance to an oar. Then this modern Robinson Crusoe lay down and slept, resting his head on the plank, and he was fast asleep when he was wakened by the sound of the boat reaching, if not the mainland, an island close thereto.

And Fate seemed propitious. For the next day—the 12th of August—was wonderfully calm and calm. But the navigation of a craft composed of railway ties and three-inch planks is at best a slow and toilsome process. Had a wind sprung up, Ferncroft would have been driven out to sea, and indeed the slightest measure of wind from any direction would soon have brought discomfiture, for the slightest wave would have washed the plank off his low-set, waterlogged craft, destroying his small stock of food, which might yet be so necessary, and adding discomfort to peril by drenching his garments.

The sun beat down from a cloudless sky and back again from the mirror-like surface of the lake. After five hours of hard, unremitting toil, Ferncroft had made scarce so many miles. He was commencing to give up heart, when the red sails of a Mackinac boat, flapping idly off the shore of the nearest island, caused his heart to leap within him.

The sailboat was at a distance of about two miles. Redoubling his efforts, Ferncroft soon came within hailing distance of the craft. The latter, he perceived, was not to be moved by a boat-length to come to his aid, but at last he pulled up alongside and was taken on board. The men on the smack—five in all—were pleasure-seekers out

for a cruise from one of the south shore ports. Briefly Ferncroft related to them his astonishing adventures, which, though at first disbelieved to credit, they were finally persuaded to believe.

The very thing that had so far aided the mill-manager in his desperate effort to get back to civilization now put a stopper on all further progress. For the calm continued persistently, and notwithstanding that a liberal reward was promised if a telegram line were reached inside of twenty-four hours, the sailing smack lay helpless and idle off shore all that day. At midnight, however, the calm burst in a great thunderstorm, and the 13th of August broke with a clear sky and a gust-blowing breeze from the south-east, which, though a contrary air, was better than none at all.

It was forty miles from Mackinac Island to the nearest telegraph. Tackling against the wind, sixteen hours were consumed in covering the distance, and the 14th of August had come. Into being ere Dayley Ferncroft could get a telegram through to Ottawa, or receive the news of what was occurring and asking that the message be repeated instantly to Eel River.

Had another day elapsed the conspiracy would have been successful. For the pay-money was even then en route from Ottawa, and on the morrow would have been brought down from the railway line to the mills by canoe. A forged telegram from Ottawa, however, imperatively ordered Brigsdall to a point several hundreds of miles west on supposed business for the company. By some other means, it is assumed, Mahaffy would also have been gotten out of the way, and with the three head men of the mills absent from their posts, Spielman and his gang could have completed their job without anyone being aware of the fact until long after they had got away on the yacht to some United States port, and, deserting the craft, become lost to justice in the multitudes or the solitudes of the great Republic.

The "Honest Dollar" it turned out, was but a rented vessel, engaged from a Cleveland dockyard ostensibly for a two weeks' cruise. How Spielman and his confederates became possessed of their information about the money was not suspected till it was recalled that a mail-bag had been stolen from the Eel River post-office about six weeks prior to the date of the projected robbery. Amongst the letters in that bag was one in which reference was made to the approaching pay-day.

As the result of his pluck, Ferncroft had the satisfaction of thwarting the further plans of the robbers. They, however, made good their escape, jumped their boat at the "American Soo," ere the slow-going authorities had got the chase well under way, and disappeared as completely as if the Great Lakes had swallowed them up.

The controversy as to what is the longest word still goes on. We have already mentioned several claimants, of which "antidisestablishmentarianism" (twenty-eight letters) appears to be the longest legitimate English word. As to the longest word in any language, a writer in the "Living Church" thinks the following word bears the palm, namely, "Llanfairpwllgwynglgogocheroddrilwyttylsegirgogoch." It is the name of a village in North Wales, says the writer, "and while Llanfair is a Welsh name, the name pronounced recently I heard the name pronounced with perfect ease and fluency by a young Welshman." But, according to another clerical correspondent of the same journal, this word simply "isn't in it" with the Greek word for "hash," of one hundred and eighty-one letters, to be found in Liddell and Scott's unabridged Greek lexicon: "Lepidotrichoselachogelochelonelepisandrim-upotrimmatiosiphorabomelotekatakachumetochitaphosphatopieris-teralektronotopkephalokikloplekio-lagelosraraphothepanogaterugon." After this it is expected that the controversy will languish.

Wireless Telegraphy and the North Pole.
It has been suggested that wireless telegraphy may play an important part in future Arctic explorations. The conditions surrounding Arctic travel are such, says the "Electrical Review," that the principal difficulty is found in maintaining communication with a base of supplies. It is believed that wireless telegraphy has now reached a point where, at least, it promises such development that future exploring parties will be able to carry along apparatus and keep constantly in touch with their base camp. If this proves to be the case, much of the terror of the Arctic will be removed, and exploration will be made both easier and safer, with the possibility that this "it" is instrumental will enable the discovery of the pole at no far distant date.

The Mikado of Japan is a man of much energy and endurance, and is constantly smoking cigarettes. He is fond of outdoor sports, and has warmly encouraged the introduction of football into Japan. He is a hunter and fisherman of no mean reputation and is a good shot with a rifle. His devotion to lawn tennis is marked, and he is clever as a winder of the racket.

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