

ton people pretty near sent me down to visit ye, liked your new girders an' beam connections. In fact I was to run over an' take a look at it if I had time. 'Twas a fine big work for a little firm the likes o' you an' Lester," he ran on, slightly puzzled by Connelly's manner, "An' a pretty bad thing for the R. & S. O. Ye'd never guess a flood like that could take out a bridge like yours. How did she go, Jeff?"

Connelly reached for the plans of the bridge and the big Irishman drew out his pipe and lighted it. It went out unnoticed as he listened to Jeffrey's story. For a long minute after it was finished neither man spoke. The old engineer did not lift his eyes as he put his next question.

"Had the R. & S. O. people taken it over?"

"No."

"Will they?"

"I haven't heard from them definitely. I think there is some trouble about it."

McKilligen reached for the specifications. He studied them in silence.

"I daresay ye'd make a pretty good case against them if ye cared to fight it out," he said, without enthusiasm. "Ye'd a' solid rock foundation, no doubtin' it."

"McKilligen!"

The eyes of the old man leaped suddenly to Connelly's face.

"Ye won't!" he cried. "Shure ye're the same lad!"

A mist of tenderness swept across the steely blue of his eyes.

"Then, what's for ye?" he questioned, softly.

"Pat, I don't know. It's an enormous puzzle. Lester would put it into court; but I feel just like you do about it. I knew that might not prove a good foundation. It's all right to say it couldn't happen once in a thousand years. It did happen. If the R. & S. O. refuse the bridge and the loss is ours, then the question of a suit will come up again—Lester and I threshed it out pretty well this morning—and if it does it means that the firm will dissolve. I think it does. But an hour ago I had decided to give in to Lester and fight it out. Poverty's an awful wall to be up against, Pat."

"Tis shure, but I've known a man up against a worse."

"Oh, so have I; so have I; too well!"

He walked over to the window, his hands shoved deep in his pockets. The Irishman's eyes followed him wistfully. The young engineer was very dear to his heart.

"I can't decide, Pat," Connelly said at last, turning away from the window. "I know the R. & S. O. will fight it in spite of MacDonald. If I were all alone I wouldn't hesitate, but there's my wife and baby, and Lester to be married next month—all these people depending on this thing. Am I right, or am I wrong about it? I cannot think of anything else. And through it and over it all, Pat, there's just one thing I want—to build the Charteris River bridge again."

"Yis," breathed McKilligen. "Oh, yis. That's it. Shure, I sometimes think purgatory 'll be just lookin' at our old mistakes; and after it's all over the good Lord 'll just turn us back an' let us do them over agin right.—Shtrikes me 'twould be a big enough heaven for most of us."

He stood up to go.

"No, thank ye, Jeff. I've got to see Kells an' McGinnis about some steel they're shippin' us; an' I take the eleven train back west. No, I'll not see you again for long, an' I'm loath to leave ye in such a tangle. But don't ye ever think, boy dear, that ye're down an' out. What's a bridge, more or less?—an' what's a failure, so ye're ready to pay its price?"

"Pat," said Connelly, "I thought you'd think—"

"So I did, Jeff; but not now. Now I'm thinkin' only of the pluck of ye. Goodbye, lad."

"Goodbye, McKilligen. It's been good to me to see you."

Connelly sat down again and drew the papers toward him. He wished, if possible, to reach his decision before he heard from the R. & S. O. Lester was for fighting out the matter in court. He had consulted Mallison and Mallison, the most prominent lawyers of the city, and they had unhesitatingly declared it a good case. Lester urged that it would vindicate the firm. If they could prove

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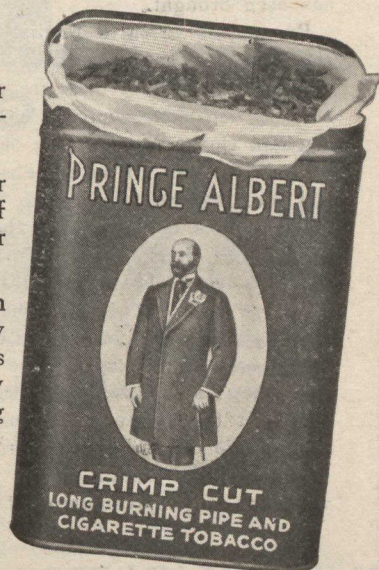
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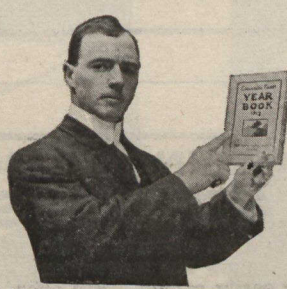
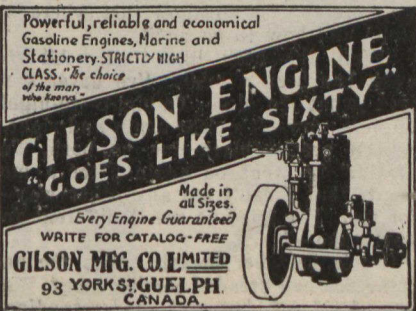
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