WESBLOCK

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN
AUTOMATON

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WESBLOCK

The Autobiography of an Automaton

By
Harry McDonald Walters

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PREFACE

THIS work is in the form of a book. Outwardly a book, it is not a book in the ordinary sense. It is only an artless yarn. Wesblock is a common type, and he writes himself down as he knows himself or thinks he knows himself. His tale is not thrilling, except in so far as the understanding reader can see that he escaped being one of the great army of the unfit by a very narrow margin. Wesblock has in fact written as much for himself as for you. His story is an attempt to take stock of himself, and to discover whether life as he has experienced it is really worth while. If the book helps one poor soul to find what Wesblock found—that it is really worth while—it will have fulfilled its mission.

What he has said of persons and things only expresses his own opinions. They may not appear true to you; but they were true to him according to his light. He preaches sometimes; but not at you—at himself.

You may know more about Wesblock and his kind than he does, if so you can make a great book from this yarn by adding what you think necessary and rejecting what you know to be incorrect. Whatever impression the story of Wesblock makes upon you is the impression intended to be made.

The great failure of Wesblock's life was brought about by many causes, the first of them far back in the beginning of things. He learned to think and know

too late to be of much use to himself or his immediate family, and this he tells you in his own way. You may know some of the people to whom he refers, and you may think he is not fair in some of his characterisations. He is, however, just as fair to others as he is to himself. Finally it may be as well to warn the Preface-reader that this is a story without a plot and without a hero.

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WESBLOCK

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN AUTOMATON

CHAPTER I

In a little mean street, which ends at a steep hill running down to the river through the Quebec suburbs of Montreal, stood about fifty years ago a tiny old-fashioned church built entirely of wood after the dog-house style of architecture. So lacking in imagination were the builders of this place of prayer that they went no further than the name of the street for the name of the church. The church was gloomy and cheerless within and looked as if it were partitioned off for cattle. The pews were all very high, plain and closed with doors. A narrow little winding stair led to the pulpit, a high and massive affair overhung by a huge sounding board. A large cushion of faded red rep trimmed with coarse woollen fringe and tassels decorated the reading-desk, which was flanked by two pretentious lamps of hideous design in wrought iron. The place had the odour of a damp cellar, and the air of a religion, stern and unforgiving to the sinner, and not very promising to the saved.

The little street is not to be found now, while the little church is a wreck, and its remains are smothered by

places of business. But in the early sixties it was a power among the plain, severe, hard-mouthed people who worshipped there an unforgiving God of wrath.

Nearly a year before I arrived on earth a marriage took place in this church between a boy and a girl. The boy was a lean, hatchet-faced youth with sharp eager blue eyes, set in a face marked already with experience of the world. He was dressed in decidedly foppish style, with a resplendent waistcoat and a collar of the old-fashioned " choker " type. His dress coat had brass buttons and very long tails, and his tight lavender trousers, matching in shade his kid gloves, were strapped down to the verge of splitting.

The little girl who was marrying the boy was a beautiful sad-eyed thing with rosy cheeks, a sensitive mouth and freckles on her nose. Her hands and feet were small and shapely. Her monstrously ugly clothes and extravagant hoops did not mar her appearance.

It was a very solemn function, this marriage; no music, no flowers, no guests; just a handful of the immediate relatives of the bride and groom. The father of the boy would almost have passed for the elder Weller; being a large, horsey-looking man, who might be otherwise characterised as an old buffer. The old buffer's wife was a little prim woman dressed in grey.

The father of the bride was a military-looking man, tall and slim, with curly black hair; his wife a hook-nosed woman with a face like one of the old Spanish inquisitors.

The marriage being over, the small solemn crowd of wedding-guests drove away to a small sombre house in a highly respectable street, and made merry without the least appearance of joy.

If it is true that we human creatures are much affected by things that happen in the critical months before we come into the world, then the doings of the small house in that small Montreal street ought to be of some account in this chronicle. But since this is a true record, and I have no facts to go upon, I pass on now to the ordinary beginning of a boy's life.

CHAPTER II

I ARRIVED in the city of Montreal long before the time of telephones, electric street cars or automobiles. It was a dark morning in the month of January of the year One—I call it the year One because that is what it was to me.

Man cannot imagine eternity—Time that always was and always will be, without beginning or end. Hence the word *Time* to indicate the small measure of the infinite duration of eternity that insignificant man can grasp. The year 1913 in which I write means to most of us nothing more than the year following 1912, or so many years since a certain event vital to us. We can say " a thousand years ago " but only a very few are capable of conceiving such a period, and as for " world without end," we cannot think it. For these reasons I say I arrived in the year One:—a wee, puny, unappreciable atom of a creature, weighing considerably under three pounds. Naked, wailing, hairless, incomplete even to the finger-tips, I was considered by the old women who hover about on these occasions as a distinct failure.

So small a specimen being difficult to adapt to the usual swaddling clothes, I was simply wrapped in cotton wool and put to bed in a cardboard box near the fire, without much hope or expectation on the part of my parents that I would survive.

At the time of my birth my father and mother were a most unsophisticated couple of very tender years,

my mother being seventeen and my father nineteen. It is not clear to me even now how far my insignificant start in life under their charge was destined to affect my later career. But as I look back, it seems of a part with the whole course of petty circumstances that made me into an automaton.

Before I learnt to speak and began to think, I grew very much as other children do. From a comparatively formless lump of human clay, I developed into a sturdy, well-shaped chubby urchin. At four years of age I was considered worthy of having my photograph taken, and one of my first recollections is of that remarkable incident and the Scotch cap with silver buckle which I donned for the occasion. This brings me to the childish litany of "Why?" and "How?" so often heard during these early days. By this time I had already become dimly conscious that being alive was a great mystery. The "Why" and the "How" of it gave me indeed much thought. I had questions to put on the subject every day; but received very unsatisfactory answers from my parents. Other children, moreover, did not help me much; for they did not understand me.

The fact of my being born in the middle of winter may account for my loving that season beyond all others as a small boy. Winter was so different then from what it is now. The snow was not cleared away as soon as it fell but was allowed to accumulate till spring. It lay upon the sidewalks or was shovelled into the street until it was sometimes six or seven feet high. Huge mounds of it bordered every street, with passages cut in steps through the frozen barriers, here and there, to allow of the coming and going of the townsfolk. When walking on one side of the street

you could not see the people on the other side, and the sleighs were on a road as high as a man's head above the walk. The street cars were built on runners, and passed along any convenient street that offered a clear road. They were drawn by horses, an extra pair being stationed at the foot of every hill to help the car up the grade. The floors of these vehicles were carpeted with straw, and after dark they were lighted by small smoky oil-lamps.

The streets themselves were lighted by gas-lamps, and at dusk men with ladders could be seen running from one lamp-post to another, and climbing up to kindle a dim flame which only made the darkness less black. But to return to the snow-mountains, for so they seemed to me, children would dig wonderful houses and castles out of their dirty-white heaps. For other reasons I learnt to love the snow. I discovered that by climbing on top of a broad bank of it, where I could lie on my back and look at the sky, it was possible in that attitude to think wonderful things. One day, while sprawling in bliss on top of such a bank, and chewing a hole in one of the beautiful red mits knitted by my mother, I was surprised by a gentleman of an inquiring turn of mind who had spied me and climbed up after me.

"What are you doing there, my little man?" he asked.

"I'm dreaming," I replied.

"Dreaming, about what?" he inquired.

"About being alive," I answered. The man laughed.

"You can't be dreaming about being alive," he said; "you are alive."

"Yes," I said, "but why?"

"Good gracious child," he exclaimed, reaching into

his trouser pocket, "here is a penny for you, go and buy candy. No one can answer that question."

At another time, after a dream on the snow, I ran into my mother and told her I had seen God. She was shocked, and even inclined to be angry. She threatened to whip me for telling her such a lie, but could not in reason do so, for my questions were too much for her.

"How do you know I did not see God?" I asked.

"Because no one can see Him," she answered.

"Did any one ever see Him?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"How do you know?"

"We are told so in the Bible."

"Who put it in the Bible?"

"Good men."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, Jack, you are too young to understand. Go away and don't tell lies; go and play!"

But I wanted sorely to understand this great matter. Whether I really believed that I had seen God, it would be hard to say. Either I deluded myself, as many imaginative and emotional children do, or half in innocence, half in childish slyness, laid a scheme to surprise my mother. For the mystery of my being continually teased me.

The question whence I had come was not to be set aside; and I cross-examined my mother about it frequently without getting much information. The only reply I got was that God had made me, which I understood as well then as I do now.

This question of mine, "How do you know?" became a byword in the family. Father thought it very amusing, and used it very much as an actor uses a bit

of gag. It is a very disconcerting question when put earnestly.

Our family, I may explain, taken in all its branches, was a very large one, and of the common sort that would be called middle class in England. My father, who was the only son of my grandmother's third husband, was a King to all the tribes,—to the grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, the various great aunts, and the one great-uncle and the one great-grandfather—who lived during my childhood. They all bowed down to him, and he dominated them, although by calling he was only a book-keeper in a wholesale grocery firm. My mother, let me add, was the eldest daughter of a Civil servant in the Montreal Post Office.

My seventh year is a very distinct memory, as a period of my life associated in my mind with very momentous happenings. Up to the age of seven I prospered in my health although I was never what is called robust. It was very nearly my last year, for fate, not satisfied with bringing a weakling into the world before its time, now visited me with scarlet fever and all the dreadful complications known to that disease. I lay for months in bed, part of the time delirious, and was reduced to a mere skeleton. I remember the sufferings of convalescence, but have no very distinct recollection of the actual illness, beyond the delirium it brought on, which left a curious impression on my mind. During its course I seemed to be two personalities, distinct but attached, one capable of observing the other. I strove and argued continually with myself, and again the great question of where I had come from haunted and worried me. Clearly I must have come from somewhere, and must also have had existence prior to my arrival; but where

had I been? Nearly my whole delirium turned upon this question. "God made you," I would say to myself; then I would scream aloud, "How do you know, how do you know?" repeating it over and over again consciously, but unable to stop and rest. I had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and remembered that Topsy had wisely remarked, in reply to a similar question, "I specks I growed." But the suspicion that I had grown was not satisfactory to me; I wanted to know. And here I may pause a moment to reflect that among my memories is none of learning to read. It seems to me that I always knew how. No doubt my mother taught me while I was still very young, using the newspaper as text-book. Before I was seven I had read many books, or mother had read them to me, for she was a very good reader and loved an understanding listener.

Scarlet fever was a very much more dreadful disease when I was a child than it is now-a-days. Not only have methods of treatment improved greatly, but the disease itself is not so deadly, or perhaps man's resisting powers have increased. It is a pity that diseases like everything else do not grow old and weak and lose their power to destroy.

After I had been ill for several weeks a consultation of the doctors was held, and they declared solemnly that my recovery was impossible, since with every organ diseased or weakened I could not live. In any case it hardly seemed worth while to live, for I was both deaf and dumb. However there must have been within me some great vital power of resistance that the doctors did not know about, seeing that I finally made a kind of recovery, and persisted on my precarious way.

Trained nurses were not common in those days. I

probably should have died if they had been. Only the great love of a mother can give the nursing that I received. Surely many times she must have wished that death would end the horrible struggle, but still she fought for me and hoped.

I was naturally of a tender, clinging and dependent character, and my illness certainly intensified those unfortunate characteristics. As I recovered, mother taught me things. I could not hear or speak; but I could see and use my hands, and she taught me to knit and tat and crotchet. These small and much despised things, I believe, helped to save my life. If I had been forced to lie idle amidst the great silence of deafness, unable to speak, I surely would have died of mental inanition. Using my hands renewed my interest in life. Speech at last came slowly back, hearing to some extent, and for the second time in my life I learned to walk.

I can see myself now as I struggled up on my poor shaky pins. How I sweated and trembled. How proud I was! I was exultant because I could stand up. I felt as though I were some wild and blood-thirsty barbarian who had slain a powerful enemy by a great feat of strength. I stood up on my own legs, every nerve atingle, every muscle trying to do its office. I held on to chairs and tables while the moisture fairly trickled down my face, and even the backs of my hands were wet. "Ah ha!" I said to myself, "I knew I could do it."

I made an effort to walk from one chair to another, only a couple of steps, and fell prone upon my face. It was a disaster, a great failure. I was heart-broken and burst into a violent fit of crying, refusing to be comforted. This little scene broke my mother down. I

had never seen her weep when I was fighting the scarlet fever. Now we wept together.

My mother at this time was twenty-four years of age. She was very beautiful. Her hair, which she wore severely plain, was black as jet. Her cheeks were pink, and soft and velvety to the touch; on one of them she had a mole. Her eyes were dark and deep set, with dark shadows under them. Her expression was sad, sweet and full of love; her smile pleasant but wistful. She had a great heart, but not much mind of her own, being completely dominated by my father, whom she worshipped with a foolish worship.

There was a kind of tacit conspiracy between my mother and me against my father. He expected to have his own way in all things; but in a great many cases he only thought he had it.

When I recovered from the scarlet fever, our fortunes took a turn for the better. Father became a partner in the firm for whom he had worked since his thirteenth year. We moved from our middle-class environment into a new house that he had bought in a better neighbourhood. We kept a horse, too, which afforded mother and me a great deal of pleasure.

My father's name was John H. Wesblock. He came, as I have already hinted, of a long, unillustrious line; and while his name and many of his peculiarities became mine, I have added no lustre to the commonplace stock from which we both sprang.

The personality of my father was peculiar. He was a curious mixture of good and evil. As he was an Englishman, of course he thought there was only one person in the house of any consequence, and that person the head of the family—himself. He had wonderful powers in some directions, and was very weak in others.

He was very self-opinionated, and had an uncertain temper which broke out on slight provocation. I can hardly say that I remember him at that time with great affection. I feared him without respecting him. His vanity was abnormal. His dress was showy and extravagant and he loved display of a kind that did not cause him any great effort or trouble. He always looked so well dressed that he appeared altogether too new. He wore a low-cut dress waistcoat showing a vast expanse of white shirt front, a frock-coat with ample skirt, light trousers, generally lavender or pale tan, and white gaiters over exceptional shoes. His feet and hands were very small.

He was a prosperous self-made business man with great ambition, but love of luxury sapped his energy and he never arrived. Both he and mother were very religious in the old early Victorian way which I always thought did not tend to make our home happy and cheerful, in fact I have seldom seen an extremely religious home which was a happy one.

I was a sad disappointment to father. He despised my puny body, but I generally over-reached him when it came to a contest between my desires and his wishes, for I was endowed, as many physical weaklings are, with a deep and skilful cunning. Like most cunning people I was a brilliant liar. I lied in self-defence and for advantage, as many common liars do, but besides this I loved to elaborate facts, and laid many traps to gain my little ends through playing on my father's weaknesses. If I were to classify liars I would divide them into Moral Liars, Fancy Liars, Slovenly Liars and Immoral Liars.—The Moral Liar is one who never lies for wickedness but only for utility and to gain good ends. The Fancy Liar is one with an imagination so

lively that the embellishment of facts is something he cannot resist. The Slovenly Liar is one who is too lazy to observe, so lies to save trouble. The Immoral Liar is one who backs up wicked designs, scandal and libel with lies. I was none of these but was in a class by myself. I was better than some liars and worse than others.

My father had a friend he called Eddy who was a typical specimen of the fancy liar. I found him very entertaining. I calculated from the personal experiences he related that Eddy must have been about one hundred and six years old although he looked younger than father. He had played marbles with several of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and related experiences of that day—political, social, scientific and sporting—wherein he had personally figured. He had studied for the bar, the ministry and the army. He was a mechanic and a hunter; had run a marine engine and hanged greasers in Mexico and Indians in Arizona, lassoed wild horses on the Prairies and dug gold in California. An anachronism here and there did not trouble him in the slightest.

When I began to get about after my illness I found myself dull and listless ; I wanted nothing but peace, and hated all physical effort. As there was no promise of my ever developing sufficient energy to *make* myself, the delicate and complicated operation of making me was left to tutors, parsons, teachers and the like. I was carefully and expensively educated, much against my will; for I most heartily hated every teacher I ever had, especially those who were parsons.

When I look back over those years during which I passed through many forming hands, I find that it was

not so much the teachers whom I hated, but their methods. No one of them ever aroused in me the interest and love of acquiring knowledge which I long afterwards developed in myself. The same fatal failing still exists among teachers. It is but rarely that a teacher can be found who has the teaching faculty born in him and the power to present knowledge to the young in an attractive form. In fact, it appears to be the aim of most educational institutions to make learning as unattractive as possible, and in this they succeed gloriously, especially in denominational schools.

I was a delicate and dreamy boy, and was having great trouble with my ears, consequently my education was frequently interrupted by sickness, and even when comparatively well it was necessary to keep me continually interested or I would fall asleep. I was tired for nearly fifteen years, and until I was of age never enjoyed six consecutive months of even fair health. Meanwhile a small brother had arrived on the scene, who brought new life into the house. He was destined, as you shall hear, very few years.

As everything appertaining to my father had to be a credit to him, strenuous efforts were made to bring me up to the standard; but from the start I was a failure both physically and mentally. I was educated one way and another; system could not be applied to me. Schools made but little impression on me, with the exception of one particular boarding school, kept by a Church of England parson in a small village not far from Montreal. This parson, Canon Barr, was a crude, rough, wicked, ignorant, self-opinionated, hypocritical old man, more farmer than parson. His only aim seemed to be to make as much out of his boys as possible with the least trouble. He thrashed me

cruelly on the slighest pretext, in fact he thrashed everybody in the school and on his farm; the boys, his sons and daughters, the servants, his horses and his dogs. I am not aware that he thrashed his wife, but as I have seen him beat a horse in the face with his fists, and kick it in the stomach with his long boots, it is highly probable that he laid violent hands on his wife. The Canon was a tall, lanky, rawboned individual with prominent nose and chin, and small eyes set very close together. He suffered from some skin disease that made his complexion scaly and blotchy. This affliction, no doubt, affected his temper, for I noticed that when the disfiguring blotches were fiery looking, he was particularly touchy. As he sat at his desk in class-room, he was always pawing his bald head with a large bony hand, probing his ear with a lead pencil or pen handle, or investigating his nose. His black waistcoat, which buttoned behind, was always decorated with spots, and his odour was that of a stableman. His voice was harsh and loud, except when speaking from the pulpit; then he subdued it to a monotonous sing-song drone involving four semitones in a chromatic scale; the kind of noise the bass string of a 'cello will make if it is plucked while the peg is turned up and let down again. I never saw him laugh heartily, but a joyless grin disclosing large yellow teeth sometimes wrinkled his displeasing face; and this generally occurred just before some one was beaten.

The Canon had a balky horse with a hairless tail which he really appeared to delight in belabouring. On one occasion his little daughter Mabel and several of the school boys were present while he thrashed this horse without mercy. The horse was harnessed to a

heavily ladened stone-boat so that he could not bolt. Mabel screamed a little weak " Oh! "

" Go into the house, daughter," said the Canon.

" But father," she began. She got no further when slash came the whip about her poor little legs.

" Into the house," the Canon shouted. A boy standing by with every expression of rooted horror upon his face was suddenly discovered.

" What are you gaping at, you silly little ass? " said the old man. At the same instant he struck him on the side of the head with his open hand a blow which nearly felled him. I was the stricken boy.

The rod was never spared in this school, with the result that every one lied and deceived systematically.

Sundays under the Canon were a horror. We rose at eight o'clock and went to prayers before breakfast. After breakfast we had time to dress and to go to Bible-class. Bible-class ended just in time for church, and immediately after church we dined. The Canon offered up a particularly long blessing before Sunday dinner. It always spoiled what little appetite I had. His voice at any time was not a pleasant one, but his hypocritical Sunday tone was exasperating. After dinner we sat in the schoolroom and studied the lesson and collect for the day. At three we went to Sunday School, which lasted till nearly five. From five to six we walked with a teacher—a pusillanimous wretch without a soul. We had tea at six and went to church at seven. I doubt if a more perfect programme could be elaborated for the purpose of disgusting children with religion.

The Canon's favourite hymn was " Abide with me." Perhaps he was aware that the more foolish parents there were who would send poor, helpless children to

abide with him the more satisfying would be his income.

It is not surprising that I heartily hated Church and all it implied; with a very special hatred for "Abide with me," in which I had been forced to lift up my voice hundreds of times before I was fifteen years old.

I was so unhappy in the house of Canon Barr that I decided I must leave or die; it did not matter which. To effect my release I pretended to have gone violently insane. It is not certain if I deceived the Canon, but I think I did. When the foolish idea first came to me, I did not realise what a strain acting the madman would be, or how I could make an end of the comedy. I just played my little part and trusted to luck.

I started moderately by doing foolish things, grinning at every one one minute and being cross the next; striking and slapping all who approached me. This brought the Canon down on me with his favourite implement of torture—a nice, smooth flour barrel stave with a handle whittled at one end. He thought it was a case of ordinary rebellion. But one blow from the barrel stave was enough for me; and its effect, I fancy, startled the old brute. I flew at him like a wild cat, kicked his shins, bit him on the hand and on the calf of his leg, and tore his gown to ribbons. Of course I was no match for the Canon and his barrel stave, and received unmerciful punishment; but I played the game, throwing ink bottles, rulers, books, anything that came to hand, in the old fellow's face, and overturning desks and chairs like a maniac. He called on the boys for assistance. I brandished a ruler and threatened dire vengeance in a loud hysterical voice against any one who dared approach me, and the boys

held back. I was not subdued till the hired man came to the rescue, and bundled me into my room and locked me up. There I continued to howl aloud, and destroy every breakable thing. When I had screamed myself hoarse and was tired out I lay down on my bed and cried till I fell asleep. When I awoke it was nearly dark. There were people in the room, so I remained quiet with closed eyes to discover if any conversation would give me a cue for my next move in the drama. I was rewarded for my cunning by hearing the voice of the village doctor telling the Canon to keep me very quiet and to send for my parents. In a minute they withdrew, and presently a lamp and my supper were brought me by a very nervous maid.

The next day I was in a raging fever. My mother arrived in the evening and to her I confessed. I was forgiven, taken home, and not sent to another boarding school.

Sending children to boarding schools is an admission of incapacity made by a great many parents who are too lazy or ignorant to superintend the early years of a child's up-bringing; or else it is done in vanity as the proper thing.

There are possibly good boarding schools where children are better than they would be at home, but I never knew one. The only good reason for sending the young to be cared for by strangers is when the home for some reason is not a fit place. No doubt a good boarding school is better than a bad home; but no boarding school is as good as a good home and wise parents. Girls brought up in fashionable schools are notoriously ignorant and useless.

One pleasant memory remains to me of the Canon's school. It is that of a little girl with blue eyes, golden

hair, red pouty lips and blunt nose. She was a day scholar from the village, where her father kept a general store. I never had much opportunity to speak to her, and she was very shy when I did; yet it was a pleasure just to look at her. When the Canon frightened her by shouting and pounding his desk with his large hard hand I was maddened to the fury point. She was a gentle little creature, truthful, believing and good-hearted; a thing so little understood by the Canon that he called her " Little Blockhead." When I was robbed of my meals, which frequently happened as punishment for some fault, " Little Blockhead " would bring me biscuits on the sly. Whether the Canon made me forego meals wholly as a punishment for my misdeeds, or partly in delight to torture me and save victuals, I cannot say. But for whatever cause it was, I really did not mind it, and sometimes even looked forward to it so that " Little Blockhead " could feed me from her pocket.

During the miserable days at the Canon's my little brother died suddenly without giving me a last sweet hug and kiss. He was ten years younger than me to a day, having been born on my tenth birthday. This was the first real sorrow to leave its mark upon me. I loved that brother more than anything or anybody. I had taught him his first words, mended his playthings, and been his play-horse, his cow, his dog—anything he desired me to be. When I was at home, it was to me he always came first thing in the early morning, crawling into my bed to start the day's play, and every word of his lisping, indistinct prattle stuck in my mind.

I was brought home by an old friend of my father's, who came for me with the message that my little

brother was seriously ill. On looking into the old man's face, I was not deceived, and knew at once that my little friend was dead. But I said nothing. I did not weep or wail. I could not.

When we were seated beside each other on the train, and I said to him, "Chuckie is dead!" he did not reply. He merely nodded his head, and I rode silently home without a word or a tear. I wished to weep, but could not. Even when I arrived home and my mother kissed me I remained dry-eyed, but my misery was very real. It hurt me so much my breath came short and painful.

Then we went through the ghastly meaningless mummery and pomp of the funeral. Even then I disliked our foolish display in burying our dead. Since that day I have buried my own dead; but it was always done silently, privately, quickly, without display, without pomp and without advertisement. To me death is a thing to be put behind you. When loved ones die, there is nothing to be done or said. It is over. First bury them, then get occupied with the affairs of the living, being careful in your conduct that you make as few mistakes as may be; so that when another goes away you may have no memories of actions or words to cause self-reproach.

I had no remorse for any unkindness to my baby brother; for I had always loved him much, even from the time when he had newly arrived; a helpless, unseeing, unthinking bit of life. I like to dwell on this, for it is at least one instance where humanly I did my whole duty. My duty to him was such a simple uncomplicated thing—just to love him and be kind. As I grew up I found duty rather a difficult and complicated thing to see and do.

Other deaths happened as they must in a large family. In quick succession several of our older relatives died. In those young days I never felt very keenly the loss of old people. It seemed so natural for the aged to die that I took it as a matter of course. I do not know that I have changed much in this respect even now, especially when people are both old and useless.

I lost my paternal grand parents, and my great-grandfather about this time. I felt a genuine sorrow about grandfather's death because he was a dear old chap—hale, hearty, and jovial. He was suddenly, and it may seem ruthlessly, killed by having his head crushed by a runaway horse; but sudden death is not, despite the Prayer Book, the worst kind of exit. He was a most cheerful old optimist, caring nothing for the day after to-morrow, or any other day but the one he was living; and his end was in keeping with his life. He was a third husband of my grandmother, who had been a very beautiful Quakeress, and my father was their only son.

CHAPTER III

BOTH my grandmothers were very religious, one more ostentatiously than the other. When a young child I distinguished them by calling one the grandmother who said prayers, and the other the grandmother who made cakes. I had a strong preference for the one who made cakes. Her plain fruit cake, undefiled by messy icing of chocolate or sugar, was a production worthy of remembrance.

My great-grandfather was to me just an old man, very old and blind, who sat by the fire all day long, and spoke little, and then in a harsh cold voice, with a strong Scotch accent. He lived in a large house on a dingy, but a highly respectable street, with four old daughters and one son, who I discovered did not love him very much.

Visiting my great-grandfather's house was like passing suddenly into old-fashioned long-passed times. My ancient great-aunts were very prim and very properly made-up ladies, looking as much alike and as smooth and shiny as four silk hats just out of band-boxes.

" Here's Jack," Aunt Elizabeth would say when I arrived, and I would be gently pushed towards my great-grandfather who sat in the hall in a big high-backed arm-chair, combing his long white beard with his fingers. " Weel, laddie? " the old fellow would growl, and he would reach out to feel me and pat my head with his large hand.

My great-aunts were very proud of their descent,

which they claimed from the Duke of Argyle. I never was interested enough to ask how far they had descended from the noble duke. They helped out a meagre fortune by keeping a genteel dressmaking establishment patronised by a few select people. In their house I played Blind Man's Buff, Puss in the Corner, and other dead and gone games; drank raspberry vinegar and ate plum cake.

My great-uncle was a curiosity. He did not drink, smoke nor work. He was a little wizened, dried-up fellow with a much wrinkled face the colour of a potato. He lived on his sisters, who made everything he wore but his hat and boots, and his clothes were certainly remarkable.

After his death I heard my father say to some card-playing cronies, "We planted Uncle Allan to-day." Everybody laughed, but I thought it was hard-hearted. Nothing about my great-uncle seemed, however, to matter, or to be serious, not even his death. He inspired neither dislike nor fondness. He was just one of those who do not count—a human vegetable.

A pack of cards was a thing never seen in the houses of my great-grandfather or either of my grandmothers, but in our house they were the main source of amusement. Father could not see the harm in cards that the older branches of our family saw. My earliest memories are associated with cards. Father played nearly nightly except on Sundays. Every one who came to our house was a card-player. The neighbours with whom we associated were card players. Possibly cards are a safe amusement for a certain type of character. They are like everything else—used with discretion they are good; without discretion, and in league with drink and gambling, they are bad.

Thus it came about quite naturally that while still young I learned many games of cards. If father and I were left alone together of an evening we played cribbage. If we were three—mother, he and I—we played bezique. If we were four it was whist. If others dropped in, or were invited, we played draw-poker for a small stake. Draw-poker never got disreputable or blood-thirsty in our house, as a very low stake was the rule.

Through cards I came to distrust my father's judgment. He played games of cards the way he felt, sometimes playing with rare skill, at other times madly and feverishly, without thought or judgment. He was a man of impulse. If I had wholly distrusted his wisdom, instead of allowing myself to be dominated by his high-handedness, his life and mine might have been very different. But I was brought up in the days when authority of whatever kind was worshipped. To-day authority must "show cause." I see now that my father played the game of life the same as he played cards—by impulse, by intuition. I was taught to believe that what he said was sound and wise; and if I continued in this belief for many years, it is not to be wondered at. I had better card-sense than he; but it does not follow that my sense was better in other things.

CHAPTER IV

When I left the Canon's school, my father declared that every boy ought to go to a public school. So to public school I went, where I made but little progress. Of course I was backward for my age, and, being shy, never plucked up enough courage to ask for help when I should have done so. Even the dullest boys left me behind, and the masters considered me lazy. Perhaps I was, but I do not believe it was so much that as lack of energy. One either generates energy or one does not. I was delicate and growing at a great rate, getting my full height, six feet, before I was sixteen years old. It took all the energy I had to live and grow.

What disposition to make of me, what calling to put me to, must have been a difficult problem to my parents, for I had no great inclination in any direction. I wanted to be let alone and not bothered. A book, a comfortable chair, and a fire in the winter, or a shady spot in the summer, were all I asked for. I could read books for days together, but could not study without falling asleep. At a minute's notice I could sleep anywhere.

While at public school I made a few friends of my own age, but not many. The hard playing and the big boys who were in the majority were never drawn to me. Weaklings and cripples came to me freely. Among these friends, many of whom I kept all my life, John stands out particularly. Like myself, he had a

delicate constitution to nurse, and his eyesight was so poor that he wore glasses of great thickness. He was nervous, quiet and shy. It was through him that I became interested in music. He was an inspired musician and a poet by nature. I had had lessons on the piano for some years, and liked music, but I had not been musically awakened until I met John. One of a very musical family, he played several instruments even when a young boy, and gave me my first valuable knowledge and insight into music. I had been taught by sundry ancient maiden ladies, who only aimed to make a genteel living, not to make musicians. John had been taught by his family with whom music was a religion. When I was considered worthy to play accompaniments in the mystic circle of his family I was very proud. I gave a great deal of time to music both with John and alone. Many afternoons he, his two brothers, and I, would play quartettes for hours. Generally these afternoons passed like a charm. Sometimes they were broken by discussions of time, style and interpretation, when some one of us would lose patience, but they were very mild disagreements. John and I became as brothers. His was a restful house, full of quiet peaceful people, where father, mother, brothers and sisters all united with a common interest in music and books. Their house was nearly a country house, being situated in a sparsely populated suburb; and the week-ends I often spent there gave me my happiest days.

While I was the most unsophisticated of youths when first sent to public school, John was world-wise for his age, knowing many things that were closed to me. His family took their religion like business—as a part of life only. My family took religion like a disease—

as a matter of life and death—as the whole of life. Perhaps we were not as strenuous in our devotions as the Canon, but sufficiently so to make Sunday uncomfortable for a boy. Consequently I highly appreciated Sundays at John's home, where Church once was considered full Sunday duty, the balance of the day being given over to music, books, walks or whatever one felt like doing.

Up to this time girls had not received any attention from me. I despised them, and was ill at ease in their company, while John was fond of their sex, and perfectly at home among them. From him I learned much relative to these mysterious creatures, whose influence is so far-reaching. That I did not consider girls worth while was probably to be accounted for by my lack of the usual health and strength of boys of my age. After chumming with John for a year or more girls began to interest me. But girls never liked me as a boy; nor, for that matter, have women liked me as a man. I see now one of the reasons for this. I thought there were only two kinds of girls—the entirely good and the entirely bad. If, in my opinion, a girl was an angel, I worshipped her so foolishly that I made her ill. If I thought one was bad, I took the worst for granted, thus overshooting the mark, and getting myself very seriously disliked. Consequently some girls thought I was an ass, while others thought I was an abandoned and vicious young man. In fact I was neither. Like most shy people I used badness as a bluff, and the more nervous I was about an advance, the more brazenly I went forward.

No girl or woman likes to be understood as entirely good or entirely bad, which is quite natural; for none are altogether one way or the other, but, like all

humanity, are of every shade and every colour, both good and bad.

My mistake about girls happened to be a safe mistake to make, thereby I never got a girl into trouble, and no girl ever got me into trouble. This, of course, does not include the case of my wife and me, who, God knows, have given each other no end of trouble. But in that experience was one involving good, useful, necessary trouble, whereby we really learned things, as you shall hear later.

I have noticed that when two young people get each other into trouble, they are seldom to blame. The blame attaches to the parents who kept them blind, and allowed them to get the all-important knowledge of sex by chance. The enlightment of the young on this vital subject is still a matter little understood.

During my public school days I organised a drum and fife band. My mother thought it was beautiful. As she was Scotch, and liked the bagpipes this is perhaps not remarkable. The neighbours hardly had as much admiration for my genius, although many of them had subscribed to the fund which armed my men with their instruments of torture. The boy who played the bass drum was the proudest chap in ten blocks, and could swing the sticks splendidly. The rehearsals of this band took place in our basement dining-room, and the din we made was no ordinary noise.

With my musicians I started a dramatic venture. I wished to be an actor. Another subscription list was passed amongst neighbours and friends who were always very kind and forgiving to me. I must have had a way with me that appealed to the grown-ups. I was tall and thin with a big head and big hands. My eyes

were small and deep set, my face pale but for a red spot on either cheek. Possibly I appealed to people because I looked as if I did not have long to live. Two faithful aiders and abettors in my scheme for a boys' theatre were Jews—Joey and Philly. They accompanied me and my subscription list, and their fathers were my first backers. I have always liked Jews; they are such a gentle people. "Little Blockhead" at the Canon's school was a Jewess; at least, her father was a Jew.

Boards, nails, and other things having been bought, we erected a stage in a large unused coach-house. Sundry plays were examined, and a very amusing sketch called "Bumps" was finally chosen and put into rehearsal. Very wisely, or because of the impossibility of getting girls, we chose a playlet with an entirely male caste.

The great wooden doors of the coach-house were splendidly posted with the legend:

WESBLOCK'S THEATRE.

This sign was a real work of art. In the coach-house we found a barrel of bright-coloured labels for beer that never was made, because the company which intended to make beer, for some business reason, never got much further than labels. We laboriously pasted these labels on the coach-house doors, to form the large letters, which informed the few who passed down the lane that "Wesblock's Theatre" was within.

My theatrical company embraced the "high brows" of the neighbourhood. Of course we were laughed at, and scoffed at, and sometimes one of us was walloped by some envious and strong boy, but many of the

lacrosse playing crowd would have given their eyes to be of us.

These things happened in the East End—the French end of Montreal—and fights between French school boys and English school boys were of nearly daily occurrence; but we gentlemen of the stage never took part in these brawls, unless we were forced to, or were specially called upon as reserves in a crisis by the boys of our neighbourhood. The English were the better fighters at close quarters, but at long range, with stones, the French had the best of us, being expert throwers.

A small but sympathetic crowd witnessed my first theatrical venture. The coach-house was decorated with flags and for a coach-house looked very fine. Of course it still smelled like a coach-house, except in so far as that smell was diluted by the odour of coal-oil lamps, which lighted the place. The programme was short. It consisted of the one-act play " Bumps," a flute solo by a talented sot, a clog dance by a stable-boy, and a comic song warbled by myself to banjo accompaniment. Our listeners said what a friendly audience always says. We spent the proceeds of our show in giving a complimentary supper to a young actor whom we admired and who was playing at the Theatre Royal.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE I had the fever described in the earlier pages, while still a mere baby, I was sent to a ladies' school among little girls. There was only one other boy in the school besides myself, and for him I formed an attachment. He was a French child, a delicate little chap with large dreamy eyes and a huge nose, which looked as if it did not belong to him. He enjoyed the possession of a very beautiful and euphonious name—Paul de la Croix. Paul and I knew each other as children only during a few months but we liked each other and played together. We were the only boys who enjoyed the very special privilege of attending the ladies' seminary. We nearly always spent our lunch hours among the big girls, who were very fond of us, because we were small enough to mother and protect.

My illness separated me from my little French friend and I did not see him again until we were nearly men. I met him once more when I was eighteen and was studying under a tutor for my matriculation at M'Gill University. My father had decided that I should be a civil engineer. The reasons for this decision are not very plain to me. Certainly I had very little inclination towards engineering, but as I showed little talent in any particular direction, and many spasmodic tendencies in all directions, his decision was perhaps as wise as any. Possibly he was influenced by the thought that the life of a civil engineer would give me an outdoor existence.

I worked with my tutor daily, learning things which

I have long since forgotten, with the exception of Euclid. Euclid always had a particular charm for me, not so much for the value of the information I received but for its keen and irresistible reasoning, so clear, plain and irrefragable.

The mere fact that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, and if the sides are produced the angles on the other side of the base will be equal, is nothing to me, but the being able to prove the fact is a great pleasure.

I am a born unbeliever, and facts are not facts to me because they are recorded as facts by some one else, or everybody else for that matter. Like the unbelieving Thomas I want to examine the evidence. So Euclid appealed to me.

I had, and still have, a great sympathy with many of the Bible characters who have been held up to opprobrium like Thomas, Baalam, Ananias and the Pharisee who thanked the Lord he was different from other people. If there is anything for which a man ought to be thankful it is that he is different from other people. The story of Ananias I always found a very thin tale for a greedy money-grabbing church to tell; it is so transparent.

I liked my tutor very much. He was a very human young man and handled me with great wisdom. In the winter we skated daily. It was during the winter of the year Eighteen that I met once more the friend of my childhood, Paul de la Croix. It was at the skating rink, and I knew him at once by his nose, which was a more pronounced, protuberant horn than ever. He had the looks of a hawk and the character of a goose. I was anything but a manly youth, but Paul was actually effeminate. I saw him often now for several

years, after which he dropped out of my life entirely. He left an indelible mark upon my character, both musically and otherwise. It was through him, in fact, that I met the woman who became my wife, and for this and other things he has my gratitude.

Paul was before all a musician. He sang beautifully, easily and naturally in a great baritone voice, playing his own accompaniments with ease, a certain dash, and unerring taste. Such talents as his are rare and are generally given, I have observed, to effeminate creatures like Paul. He loved the women, loved particular ones in a particular way for a short time; but generally he loved them all. He was a wholesale lover and his affairs were numerous, sometimes interesting and exciting, and always amusing as told by himself to me, his confidant. I enjoyed his confidences not so much for themselves as for the music they led up to. When he was loved by a married woman much older than himself he always sang particularly well and gave me oceans of pleasure listening to his prattle and his songs. I would spend night after night with him, and allow him to babble till he was tired.

" Oh, my dear Jack," he would say, " it was tragic, I assure you. 'I could weep. When will I see you again?' she asked me. I did not reply; but went to the piano and sang this."

Then suiting the action to the word he would go to the piano and sing Tosti's " Good-bye " so beautifully that I would nearly weep, although much inclined to laugh at his mannerisms and his vanity. Many of his love affairs ended as I have described in a song, after which he would walk sadly away to flutter about some other flame.

The Toreador song from *Carmen* always reminds me

of Paul. I have heard it often, but never I think with such soul-stirring vim and gusto behind it as when he sang it.

In the year Nineteen of my era I matriculated in a kind of way ; I passed, and that is all.

In the same year the religious incubus was lifted from my home. This had been coming for some time, and at last our house was free. It was no sudden happening, like the conversion some people seem to experience; but came about quite logically. Some people take religion like a disease, and it runs a similar course. They get sick, sicker, sickest; and then die or recover. With religion they get religious, more religious, most religious or fanatic, and then they go mad or suddenly become free-thinkers. People whose emotions are well-balanced and thoroughly under the control of intellect never go mad over a religious idea.

About three years prior to the year Nineteen my father had undertaken, in a burst of religious zeal, to teach a Bible-class in a church which is to-day a theatre of varieties. He was very successful in this. His teaching was both attractive and convincing and readily drew young men and women. For years he had an average attendance at this class of from fifty to sixty young people. He became so enthusiastic in this enterprise that it became his one hobby, and the only social life our family knew was bounded on the North, South, East and West by the Bible-class. As the Bible-class was made up of plumbers, gasfitters, counter-jumpers and the like, this did not elevate our social standing as social standing is gauged by the world. Father devoted all his leisure time to reading and study for the discourses he delivered to his young Band of Hope. As

a rule he was not a man to do things very thoroughly; but this work possessed a great fascination for him, and he pursued it tirelessly and faithfully, with perfect confidence in himself.

As he read he widened in view, and as he widened, his interest in the search for truth increased; but truth seemed to elude him. In his final struggle he floundered about in a bog of statement and authority that bewildered him. His fall from grace came suddenly when he began the study of religions in general and other than Christianity. He was a quick, alert, understanding reader, and he had enormous energy. He consumed in a comparatively short time a veritable library of literature on every religion known, both ancient and modern. He delved into everything—philosophy, metaphysics and natural science. I only sketch a process which took several years to complete, years of the hardest work my father ever did.

As his views widened, his discourses to his flock were, of course, coloured by the change of idea. I do not believe that he realised the road he was travelling until the parson and the pillars of the church called upon him for an explanation of certain of his teachings. He explained, but his elucidation of his position on matters that were considered vital was not found satisfactory to the narrow-minded jury which sat upon him. A few weeks later he was driven from the church, branded with the brand of the infidel—an epithet which all churches have delighted to use towards those who dare to be faithful to themselves.

Father's class followed him in a body, and for some months he lectured every Sunday afternoon at our home. Through this incident some of his young men were made uncomfortable in their families, others

even in their business. For this reason father discontinued spreading what he considered to be the true light.

Whether his faith was founded on fact or fiction, he was true to what his reason dictated; but he felt that he could not allow himself to be an injury in any way to young people who had life's fight to make in a world that was ready to persecute those who did not toe a line laid down by some church.

I have always noticed that it has ever been the system of organised religion to persecute in mean and small ways all those who disagree with it. All the willingness to go even farther and use the faggot, the stake and the rack still remains in our midst, among a very large class who are enthusiastic and ignorant, but full of faith in some fetish. They only lack the power. I have yet to learn that any man branded as an unbeliever has ever in the smallest way persecuted anybody. Nearly all religions foster fear in man's heart, and fear always fights, which explains the bloody history of Christian peoples.

CHAPTER VI

My life was now a double struggle; a struggle for health and a struggle for knowledge. I was always miserable and very often ill. The joy of being alive was a thing I never knew for many years. Naturally my progress in education was not great. Probably, on the whole, I put as much energy into my work as most boys; for I was not strong enough to take part in the athletic college life, and had no inclination toward the pleasures of the fast crowd.

My days passed in fits of tremendous energy lasting a very little while, followed by long periods of listlessness, when everything was an effort. I worked nearly to the limit of my strength, and fully expected to pass my first year examinations. I was still quite confident after having written my examination papers. The beautiful spring days between the last examination day and convocation, when the reading out of the results was given, I passed complacently wandering on country roads, afoot or on horseback. I was still satisfied that I had passed when I sat in the big hall among relations, friends and college companions. This egregious confidence made the blow all the harder. I was plucked; ignominiously plucked. I had failed in three subjects. It was too much; I could not bear it, and could not bear either to look any of my friends in the face. I felt disgraced; and ran away accordingly.

I decided to be a tramp, a free vagabond, wandering "hither and thither," living as best I might. Perhaps my health would benefit by the out-door life? If not, I would die far away somewhere in a strange land, alone and unwept, and it would perhaps be better so, for I had unfortunate elements in me which could lead to no real good.

It was early in spring, but warm; and the roads were not bad. I walked till sundown. The direction did not matter; but I liked the river, so followed it. I could not have wandered very far in the few hours between three o'clock and seven; but by that time I was tired, so stepped into a little country hotel which I found near by. I ate a little and went to bed. Although I was very unhappy, I fell asleep almost immediately. In brooding over my own affairs, I quite lost sight of the anxiety my absence might cause my parents. Self-centred people never feel for others.

After breakfast in the morning I paid my little bill. It took nearly every cent I had. So much the better; tramps never had money; they begged and stole, and I was a tramp.

Again I followed the river, sometimes on the road, and sometimes on the shore. I really got along very well. Farm houses were plentiful and people were kind. All I had to do was to present myself, and I was fed, both by French and English. The people I met were mostly French.

After roaming thus for two days and a half, my feet became very sore, particularly my right foot, which had accumulated a beautiful blister on the side of my heel as large as a half-dollar. I had no idea my feet were so tender and that a mere blister on the heel

could make itself so keenly felt. I began to be suspicious that one needed training to be a tramp.

It was the morning of the fourth day of vagrancy. I had slept in a barn on the outskirts of a small village. I rose and limped to the village, and sitting down in a tiny railroad station, took off my right boot, and nursed my poor foot in my lap. While I sat thus a kind-faced young chap came in and noticing me looked me over very deliberately. I must have looked very miserable and woe-begone. After a short scrutiny he went away, but returned in a few minutes and sat down near me. He smoked his pipe in silence for a while.

Then he said, "Sore foot?"

I nodded my head. He smoked two minutes, then turned again to me with, "Hungry?"

I was shocked. Had I really come to look hungry and like a creature in want already? Evidently I had. I admitted that I could eat. The kindly-looking young man was the station agent I learned later. He lived in the station with a young wife and one child. When he learned that I was hungry he went to that half of the building which was his home, and in a little while his child brought me nice bread and butter and a small jug of milk. This offering deeply touched me. The delicate thoughtfulness of the station agent is something I shall never forget. After I had eaten he appeared again and sat down smoking silently. He was a man of understanding, but not talkative.

"Been out on a spree?" he asked.

"Well," I replied, "I suppose you could call it one kind of a spree."

"Going home?" he asked.

"I don't know," I answered.

"Come from Montreal, I suppose," he said.

"Yes," I replied.

Whereupon he left me once more to return nearly immediately and hand me a small object. It was a first-class ticket to Montreal.

"Go on home now," he said. "Train will be along in twenty-five minutes." He would have left me again without waiting for my thanks, but I stopped him and insisted on his listening to my very simple experience and accepting my card. He was mightily amused at a tramp having a visiting-card. He certainly was an understanding young man, only a few years older than I was, but he knew the world, and understood many things that were to cost me much in the learning.

The price of my railroad ticket was eighty-five cents. I had been a tramp for nearly four days, and had only walked a distance equal to eighty-five cents in railroad travel, and thereby had acquired a foot not fit to bear my weight without excruciating pain. I concluded that I was not cut out for a tramp. I was cured, and had forgotten the pain of being plucked. My friend, the station agent, knew me quite well before my train came.

When I arrived home, lame, tired and dirty, I was surprised to discover that the anxious one had been my father. He had had detectives searching for me in every place where I was not.

"I knew you were not far off and would come back soon," said my mother.

"John, I'm afraid you are a damned fool," said my father, and he kissed me affectionately.

I understood later the full significance of this adventure—I had tried to run away from myself—the only

fellow from whom you cannot run. No word was said of my having been plucked.

The summer passed as summers will to those at an age when they do not realise how short a man's time really is. I read a good deal and studied in a half-hearted way; rode, fished, and spent some weeks in the woods. The fall soon came and I went back to M'Gill to take my first year for the second time.

I believe that second "first year" was of more real value to me than any other. I think I was the only chap who took the first year twice, except one, Bury, who was a chronic freshman. He had already been a freshman for several years and never was anything else. But he is to-day general passenger agent of one of the largest railroads in the world, while I am an automaton.

Taking a survey of all the college men I know, and have known, I cannot be sure that the addition of a college education makes much difference in the end. The man who succeeds with a college degree would have succeeded without it. It is personality that counts. Character rules the world, be it educated at college or in the gutter.

I passed into my second year in the following spring, and then in turn from sophomore to third year without distinction, without disgrace or notable incident. I learned to smoke and began to shave, and believed myself to be a thoroughly sophisticated youth.

I loved many girls during my college years; how many it is impossible to state. I always loved a girl for some special feature; because she had red hair, or for her eyes, or her nose, or her mouth. I loved one because she limped a little and I was sorry for her, and liked the brave way she pretended to be unaware of

her deformity. I loved a woman much older than myself, for several days, just because she smelled so good. In imagination I can still smell that sachet powder. I never loved a woman altogether, faults and all, just because she appealed to me in every sense, but always for some special feature or peculiarity. I was fickle, for of course one must soon weary of loving a woman because of a single detail.

My first love, after "Little Blockhead," was red haired. I met her at a masquerade during my second freshman year. She was masked, but I saw her hair; that was enough; I was gone. I was presented to her. When she unmasked, she discovered a very ordinary countenance, and she had a distinct cast in one eye. These things made no difference to me; I worshipped her hair, and loved her devotedly for at least six weeks.

In the winter of my sophomore year I was trapped for all time—caught to my undoing in one way, and to my making in a hundred ways.

Paul de la Croix talked beautifully of love in two languages—French and English. He was a past-master in the æsthetic realisation and description of love, although I do not believe he ever really loved any one but himself. He was very artistic, and uncommon looking, for which reasons the women loved him, and his family adored him. Music was his chosen career; an easy career for the pampered son of a wealthy, common, luxury-loving father. All his love affairs were confided to me. Most of them were interesting enough, but not striking, except the last one I was ever called upon to listen to.

For about the hundred and first time he was loved: this time, he declared, by the most wonderful creature, the belle of the city's *haut ton;* the beautiful,

witty and accomplished daughter of Montreal's most celebrated physician. I had seen the doctor often, but had never met the daughter. I was not one of her set. I had no taste in the direction of teas, dances, box-parties, or other social functions. Society in my youth drew the line a little more strictly than it is drawn now. Fathers like Doctor Joseph, and mothers like Mrs. Joseph, wanted to know something about every one with whom their sons and daughters associated. Professional gentlemen of the law and medicine held themselves a peg above mere business men, or brokers in a small way. In a world now gone crazy with commerce, medicine, law, even the Church, have become so commercialised that they have come down a bit socially, and "all-important" Business has moved up the social scale, and now rubs shoulders with those of the most exclusive circles. The man of business, who regards money as his sole aim, is much more one-sided and undeveloped than he whose end is knowledge of a science or art, for every science and every art is more or less connected with everything. Consequently, the business man cannot be veneered with the veneer of society, but he can be very decently varnished. There is a huge difference between veneer and varnish.

I had never been within the charmed orbit of Miss Muriel Joseph's soaring. Paul was different. He had large means, he was a singer, a dancer, a ladies' man with an irreproachable veneer bought for him by a poorly varnished father. He was loved by Muriel Joseph; and he raved to me about her hair, her cheek, her hand, the mole upon her lip, her skin, which was pale and clear, and eyes which were large, full, liquid and inquiring like those of a deer.

I listened and listened to weeks of this stuff. He did it very well. I was told the things she said and had described to me the way she said them till Paul had me half in love with her before I had seen her. Paul was eloquent and I was impressionable; but I did not disclose to him what was in my mind. In fact, I was not very clear as to what was in my mind at the time. All these things I retailed to John, who did not like Paul, and had seldom met him. It was arranged that I should meet Paul's love.

"Ah, but she will be delighted to meet my chum," said Paul; "I have talked to her so often of you. If you will call with me there on Sunday, you will be invited to her birthday dance."

I was somewhat disconcerted, for I could not dance, and I abominated ceremonious calls. Now I regretted the opportunities I had thrown away, when driven weekly to the dancing-class of the dandy Italian signor who polished the young of that time. At the dancing-class I had balked and sulked, and never learned a step. It followed that I was awkward and clumsy on a waxed floor; felt out of place in pumps; and hated taking a girl in my arms before every one. How I wished now that I could dance! I was tall, slim and graceful enough while walking, riding, skating or driving. But dancing was beyond me, although John, who was a beautiful dancer, had often urged me to learn the art. Numberless evenings I had played on the piano alone, or as accompanist for flute or violin, for others to dance, and I had enjoyed it so far without any ambition to take part in it. Lovely young things had tormented me to let them teach me; it was all of no use. Behind all the mixed feelings it excited, I really believe there lurked a strong desire to dance and

be frivolous; but some want, mental or physical, withheld me.

Anyhow, here I was to meet a woman whom I was prepared to love before seeing her. I was to meet her and be invited to her dance, and I could not dance, and would be forced to admit it as if I had been brought up on a farm. It was galling.

CHAPTER VII

Paul and I made our call one fine Sunday afternoon. The Josephs were French people, who were not entirely Anglicised, and they received every Sunday.

My first impression of Muriel was a disappointment. She was a striking, unusual type, most attractive in her way; but at first she failed to realise the mental picture I had drawn of her; and did not strike me as I had expected she would. After too keen an anticipation of pleasure, the actual realisation is often a disappointment. Muriel, as I remember her the first time we met, was a most uncommon looking girl. Although small, she would have been remarked anywhere for the wonder of her eyes and colour. They were large, round, wide-open, prominent; and of a brownness and brilliance most rare. These wonderful eyes were set wide apart, and when she looked at you a leading question was put to your very soul. Evil-minded persons were always disconcerted by a look from Muriel, a thief or a liar, I am sure, never looked her in the eye. To say that her colour was a pale, transparent white is only an attempt to describe what was a curious and amazingly beautiful phenomenon. Her skin was the whitest thing I ever saw; it was like semi-transparent light; new-fallen, downy snow; and when she smiled a deep dimple appeared in one cheek and produced a dark shadow. Nobility sat upon her brow and a most human kindness was promised by her lips. Her hair was a dark, red-brown, showing many shades. Her manner was frank and easy, but

behind it a keen observer could detect a sort of disdain for things in general, including humanity. When I say I was disappointed in her, it is hardly an adequate expression of my feelings—hopelessness—more truly expresses it than disappointment. She had a ready wit, and could make one perfectly at ease or glad to escape from her presence.

"Well, Jack, what do you think of her?" asked Paul, as we walked home after our call.

"So, so," I replied. "She is nice, she is bright, she is uncommon, but——"

"Ah, *but*, of course, *but*," exclaimed Paul. "You cannot know in a look; you cannot feel all the charm of a unique personality in a few minutes spent in a drawing-room full of people. And then she is young—only sixteen."

"She looks twenty," I said.

"Of course she does to a simpleton like you, who does not understand girls who have been about. She is the loved and spoiled child of a great man, who knows everything except how to bring up his numerous family. She has been abroad, she is out in society, and intends to stay out. She does what she likes, a woman of the world, and refuses to go back to a convent where, some may think, she should be."

"These things make a difference, I suppose," I said. "But look at her father. The doctor is an old man. She *must* be over twenty."

"I have no patience with you," said Paul. "She looks twenty because she is wonderful. You are blind. You cannot see. It is because her father is an old man that she is so spoiled and so wonderful. Doctor Joseph is twenty years older than his wife and consequently Muriel is precocious."

"Doctor Joseph is about a thousand years older than his wife in brains," I said, laughing. "I do not fancy Mrs. Joseph. She is a hard woman."

Thus we discussed people who looked upon us as the silly goslings that we certainly were—fluffy, callow birds, not half-fledged.

The eve of the dance arrived at last. I thought it never would come, and half-hoped it would not, or that I had not been invited. I wished to get it over. I hated to go, yet could not stay away.

I wore my first evening clothes that night. I had only worn them a very few times before and knew exactly how green and gawky I was. I feared that my shyness and simplicity would make her smile, which did not increase my confidence in myself.

I went to the dance in a high fever and when she greeted me I blushed. She looked at me with kind eyes—eyes that understood. How I love people who understand and can let you know without words. The understanding eye is one thing, the knowing eye is another. Muriel had the former, with no gleam of the latter.

We call the mounting of a jewel a setting, and the word "setting" seems to me the only fitting word to use regarding Muriel's dress, it so completed her. She was set in a severely plain but beautiful gown of bluish or purplish gauzy brocaded stuff which appeared to me more like an artistic drapery than a mere woman's dress. I know the tint intensified her pallor. I noticed this time, too, that a delicate pink flush flitted beneath her skin when she became animated. This colour was not a blush and could hardly be called colour; it was the shadow of a shade of pink which came and went like magic. She was entirely without ornament of any

kind except a small diamond star she wore in her hair, which was done plainly, a large artistic knot resting low down upon the nape of her neck.

I knew, after the dance, that everything Paul had said of Muriel was true. It was even far short of the truth. There were many, many things which he had not said of her, that I could have told him, for, of course, I saw everything—everything that was there, along with many attributes that were not there. I was in love with a woman, not this time with the detail of a woman, but with every dear part of her. I believe she saw it at once. I was a new experience to her. Her men friends and admirers had all been of the sophisticated world. I had the charm of freshness for her. I was frank, I blushed easily and frequently, I could not dance—really I was a most rare and uncommon boy.

My admiration must have been very apparent. Paul saw it and did not resent it. He thought it was *only* admiration. He could not imagine such audacity in me as love for the incomparable Muriel. Even if he could have imagined it, he would have laughed the idea to scorn; for did not Muriel know him, admire him, love him? Did he not dance with grace and sing to command admiration?

"Jack Wesblock? Bah! A mere gawk!" he would have said, without hesitation.

I did not confide to Paul the actual condition of my mind in regard to Muriel, in fact I was hardly ingenuous. I could not be, as I was sure he would not have understood. I confided in John, who took me seriously, and we sat several sessions late into the night on the subject.

I made my party call at the Joseph house, alone, one Sunday. I was very nervous going alone, but could not bear to go with Paul. I was received as dozens of

others, made my share of polite remarks, drank tea and retired in good order, after being asked to call again by Muriel. This invitation was not seconded by Mrs. Joseph, who had a way of looking down on a tall man which was very remarkable in a short woman.

Things happened during this, my last year at college, in such quick succession that it is nearly impossible to set them down in any kind of order. It passed as no year has passed before or since. I met Muriel frequently at the Skating Rink. She did not skate, but the rink was the regular winter rendezvous of hundreds of young people, skaters and non-skaters, who met and chatted, and flirted and had tea. Skating was a secondary thing with many, and it became so with me.

I became a regular visitor at the Joseph house, and formed a friendship with the Doctor, who liked young people. My talent for mimicry and comic songs amused the old man, and I became perfectly at home with him. He enjoyed yarns with a point, and I industriously worked to provide him with well-told whimsical and amusing tales. Also I wanted to know things, and had always many questions to put to him, which he always seemed happy to answer. Thereby I acquired many useful bits of knowledge in various directions.

My cultivation of the Doctor was not premeditated cunning, for in fact I was strongly drawn to him. Many evenings I spent most of the time with him, not with Muriel. I preferred that to being forced to take my share of her amongst a crowd of young chaps, and Paul always at her side.

Mrs. Joseph disliked me at sight, and her hawk-like eye watched me. She knew I was in love with Muriel long before any one else was aware of it. She thought

my cultivation of the Doctor was cunning, and knew I was dangerous.

The few opportunities that came to me of seeing Muriel alone, I made the most of in my own way, and she knew my mind long before I blurted out the truth, which happened one moonlight night, when we were returning from a tobogganing party. She was not coy or coquettish, but frankly admitted that her love was mine.

" But what of Paul? " I asked her.

" Paul? " she exclaimed laughing. " Why Paul, any more than one of the others? "

" Because he loves you, and you have loved him," I answered. " Did you not tell him so? "

" Love Paul! " said Muriel. " It is too ridiculous. I never loved him. Not a word of love has ever passed between us."

I was so hurt I cculd not speak. Either Paul had woefully lied, or Muriel was deceiving me or trying to. I hated to entertain either thought. I was silent.

" What is the matter, Jack? " asked Muriel. " One of the things I have admired in you is that you were not small. I knew you loved me long ago, and I loved you, and particularly admired you because you left me so free with other men. Surely I have not been mistaken? You are not jealous of Paul? "

" If you love me, Muriel, it is enough; I am satisfied; but Paul is my friend, and he has told me things that are evidently not so."

" Oh, Jack," exclaimed Muriel, " about me? What has he said? Tell me."

" That you loved him. That you slept with his picture under your pillow. That you wrote him letters daily, although you saw him so frequently, and that

for months you have bullied him and made him toe the line of your wishes."

Muriel was at first very much inclined to be angry, but changed her mind and decided to be amused.

" Paul must have been telling you his dreams," she said, and laughed. " There is not one word of truth in these things you tell me. Paul and I have only been chums. I like him and enjoy his music, but love there has never been between us, believe me! "

" I do believe you," I said, " I am glad to believe you, but can you explain why Paul should lie so tremendously? "

" You do not understand Paul," said Muriel. " He is just a poetic and shallow thing. I do not believe he ever made love to a girl in his life. He has told me of many of his conquests, which I see now could never have happened. You must allow me the pleasure of telling him how matters are between you and me."

So Paul was disposed of. He never forgave me, and said I had cruelly and treacherously robbed him of his love. As it pleased him to think so, I never enlightened him. During this year I grew in many directions. I was a man engaged to be married. My growth, in what is known as common sense, was slow. The great thing was that Muriel loved me and I loved her. That seemed to me to be everything; nothing else mattered.

My studies were neglected and a wild year passed in dances, theatre parties, musical orgies, drives, skating and every kind of pleasure which makes time of so little value to the young.

Muriel was a pleasing combination of wisdom and foolishness. She had a tremendous influence upon me, which she might have used wisely. What we both

knew together would not have covered any great area to any considerable depth. We were young, spoiled, thoughtless, shallow. She appeared far more sophisticated than I did, which was produced by her absolute confidence in herself, an element sadly wanting in me.

And now I took to herding with the wild boys at college, and thereby fell considerably in my own estimation. I did not drink, but I became familiar with those ladies of the demi-monde who lived for and by students of a type. I was shocked in my better self, but lacked control.

These days were full of failings to live up to my own standard. I fell and repented, and fell again. Periods came regularly upon me when I had to cut loose, and go back to first principles. The painted siren called me and I went. It seems nearly like a sacrilege to mention these things while telling of my love for the woman who became my wife, but it is not. My love for Muriel was at once the cause of my falling and the reason of my being able to go through a difficult period without much harm. My love was one thing, the call of my body coming late into health and strength was another thing quite apart, and I treated them as such. I was not really brutal or a *roué*, but was cutting my wisdom teeth a little later than most boys.

We foolishly and unwisely despise the demi-mondaine, and hypocritically pretend that she is altogether vile, shutting our eyes to the plain truth that she is much more a part of our system than the nun. Or we refuse to admit her existence altogether. We make her, and we are responsible for her. She is a necessary part of things sexual. The churches are responsible for the hypocritical attitude towards this unfortunate type. Religions always go to extremes. Time was

when the prostitute was a sacred person, consecrated to the gods. Now we go to the other extreme and make her an outcast, and consecrate her to the devil.

Jess was a celebrity among college students of my time. She was young, beautiful and witty. She was well-educated and talented, and a woman of a high type in some respects. If the word can be used towards a woman of her profession, she was even modest. I admired Jess while I loved Muriel. I was much ashamed of this affair at the time, but see it with very different eyes now. I was of a very pliant character, and my life, like most lives, followed the path of least resistance. It was easier to make Jess part of my life than to resist her.

How Jess came to be what she was need be no part of this tale. Hers was a free life. Although still a young woman, her experience of the world had been wide, and had made her very wise. She was four years older than I, and she looked upon me nearly as a naughty child, and was sorry for me. While our intimacy may not perhaps be considered nice, it was an eminently useful one to me. She was a tower of strength to me, saved me from much harm, and enlightened me on many vital things of which I was wholly ignorant. She was one of the curious anomalies of human society in this country, a refined and cultured demi-mondaine.

Considering the debit and credit between good and evil, of my few months' experience with Jess, I see the balance was on the side of good.

I do not pretend that such things are defensible or ever have been, but say what you will and do what you may, young men will give way to animal spirits till the millenium. Woman in some respects presents

an exceedingly serious problem in connection with college life. The matter cannot be met with " thou shalt not " or the ordinary moral punishments. All that can be safely done is to warn the young in a fatherly and kindly manner of the real dangers of the way; after that, the issue rests with the individual. Some come through the fires refined and sublimated, better fitted for larger usefulness in every way, others are scorched and warped; the weak are utterly destroyed. As for myself, I came to no particular harm. This was due, no doubt, to my natural disposition.

A professional man of strong opinions and with the courage of his convictions married Jess, and very nearly succeeded in forcing her on his social set, but she died nine months after her marriage day while the fight was still going on. Had she lived she would probably have been stoned. To me she is a very pleasant memory; a very unfortunate woman with a great character.

It seems to me that a great deal of our boasted virtue is nothing but very dangerous ignorance. Many marriages turn out very unhappily for no cause but the want of necessary knowledge of the affairs of sex. If men entered the state of marriage in the condition of blind ignorance in which most women enter, there would be a far greater percentage of unhappy marriages than there are.

I was cast for one of the end men in a large amateur minstrel show this winter. Muriel was greatly pleased, and was sure my comic songs would make a great hit. I bought a beautiful tambourine and thumped it diligently in the cellar daily. But alas! After three rehearsals I was asked to resign my chair to a fellow who had the nerve I lacked. I was quite confident

that I could do it, and have done it many times since, but at the time I still blushed like a girl, although I was nearly twenty, and a chap who blushes is hardly fit for an end man in a minstrel show.

It took years of struggle before I conquered the characteristic something in my mental make-up which caused me to lack confidence in myself, and made me shy, shrinking and fearful.

If you take the doings of this very eventful year into consideration you will not think it surprising that at the Christmas examinations I was handicapped with three supplementaries, or that in the following spring I was plucked once more. This time I expected it, and was not cast down. I realised that getting an education in the college way was not for me. Father and mother were, of course, somewhat discouraged, but they had seen it coming.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER had become the owner, through one of his numerous business deals, of what would be considered to-day a one-horse saw mill. It was situated about ninety miles from Montreal, near a little village of one thousand souls. I had been there for short visits on several occasions, and liked the roughness and freedom of the place. The manager of this mill (one Mason) and I liked each other. I amused him and he interested me. He was a huge man with a face smothered in black whiskers. He looked like a hairy Mephisto, but had the tender nature of a dove.

After my second fiasco at M'Gill, my father said to me:

" Well, Jack, what do you propose to do now? "

He said other things also which it is not necessary to detail, except that they were to the point, more than to my credit or his.

" Send me to the mill," I replied, "and let me learn the business. I like the place and will do well there if I get a chance. I will marry soon and settle down."

He was too wise to discuss a thing like my marriage, which seemed so far in the future.

" Humph! " said he, " we will see about it."

Seeing about it was never a very lengthy process with him. Generally when he said that, his mind was already made up.

Letters passed between him and Mason, and in a few days the matter was arranged. I was to assist

Mason and learn what I could from him, at the rate of five dollars per week during good behaviour. These things were, of course, made known to Muriel, who loved to mother and advise me.

If Mrs. Joseph had shown the wisdom of my father and taken for granted that the affair between her daughter and one Wesblock was a boy and girl love of no consequence, I might not have been married yet. But she disliked me particularly. She saw no future for her daughter with me. In her anxiety to oppose me she just overshot the mark, as so many over-anxious mothers do. She gave our affair an importance it never would have had unopposed and unobtrusively watched.

My start in life, as my going to the saw-mill was considered to be, was highly satisfactory to every one concerned. To Muriel and me, the prospect of our being able presently to live in a nice little house in the woods, to live there together till we became rich, when we would come back to Montreal and show our relatives and friends what we had become — seemed like a beautiful dream. It turned out almost exactly that way, with several minor differences to be presently set forth. To Mrs. Joseph my taking off to the wilderness, ninety miles from the city, was a distinct relief. The Doctor wished me well with smiles. He had not much faith in me, but liked me well enough to hope. Father and mother were also hopeful, with misgivings.

The parting from Muriel came as partings will. How much she suffered I do not know, but it made me ill—seriously ill—I could neither sleep nor eat, and for days after my arrival at the mill I was in a half-dazed condition. Muriel wrote splendid letters daily, and I lived on these until I came to myself and started what

I considered the simple task of learning the lumber business.

It had been stipulated by my father that I should remain at my post six months, entirely under the hand of Mason, without trips to Montreal oftener than once in thirty days. I was lodged and fed like all the mill hands, and once every two weeks received my pay envelope.

Mason was kind to me and allowed me great liberty, but I had to work, and work hard, at every kind of labour, from keeping tally to loading slabs. I was a joke to the little community; but I did not know it. For weeks I was abed at eight o'clock, sometimes before sundown, I was so tired out.

The first thirty days being completed, I made my first week-end visit to Montreal. An hour's drive to the railroad station and three hours on a slow mixed train left little of my short holiday, but I was to know worse things than that. Calling at the home of my beloved, I found that my arrival was expected and strangely prepared for. Miss Joseph, I was told, was out of town!

While not entirely taken aback, I was hurt and humiliated, and felt very foolish under the knowing gaze of the maid who opened the door to me. If I was not altogether unprepared for this cold reception, it was because Mrs. Joseph had, on every available occasion, made it unmistakably plain to me that I was not to her taste. Muriel's letters also had been quite frank relative to her mother's estimate of me mentally, physically, socially and financially. I had been referred to, by Mrs Joseph, as "that person Wesblock." This could hardly be considered very dreadful in itself, but when accompanied by a tilting of the chin, with an expression about the nose sugges-

tive of an objectionable odour, with Mrs. Joseph's thin, hard lips closed in a straight determined line, it meant volumes. Muriel was incapable of duplicating this expression of her mother. Her lips were full, red and generous, like those of her dear father.

It must be admitted that Mrs. Joseph was quite right in her attempt to protect her child from a man whom she considered undesirable. I only objected to her high-handed methods.

Muriel had a cousin named Lizette, an orphan, who had been brought up by Doctor Joseph. She was the same age as Muriel, but different to her in every respect, being thin, sharp and vixenish. As this girl honoured me with a dislike, quite as sincere as that of Mrs. Joseph, she was glad to do service in meanly spying and reporting her own version of whatever she could discover. Had Mrs. Joseph taken the pains to argue kindly with me, she could have forced me to admit after ten minutes discussion that there was no great promise in me. For I believe I was a reasonable youth, had no great faith in myself, and no desire to injure Muriel by ill-considered and rash haste. But her very rude and plain opposition to me added just that zest to my love affair which made it great in my eyes, and myself a romantic hero. I have often wondered what element in my make-up gave me success with the one woman who proved worth while to me.

I left the door of the Joseph house dejected and thoughtful. I strongly suspected Lizette of peeping at me from a window above, but I did not look back. Naturally I was angry, and very much disappointed, and as I walked home with hanging, thoughtful head, I matured my schemes to outwit Mrs. Joseph and her lieutenant Lizette.

I thought of Mrs. Joseph as a wicked old girl. She was wicked and old to me, although she was only forty at the time. I think of her to-day as an old girl, but see her with very different eyes and call her Grandma. To outwit her was really not a very difficult proposition. Bribes to servants soon re-established my line of communication, without fear of letters being intercepted, or returned unopened by the watchful mother or the wily Lizette. The coachman, for a modest sum, arranged that Muriel and I might drive together, when I came to Montreal again. Friends of Muriel's were kind too and connived at our seeing each other. It is a very cold-hearted person who will not assist young lovers to meet. I confided the condition of my love affair to my mother, who smilingly gave me her sympathy, for she did not take me very seriously.

I returned at once to the mill, and from there wrote letters daily to my dear, sending them in a roundabout and mysterious way.

My days there were most simple; hard work from seven in the morning till six in the evening; letter-writing, a little reading, a little music, and bed. I had naturally useful hands, and learned the pleasure and utility of being able to do things with them. I took naturally to woodwork, and spent nearly all my Sundays in the carpenter shop, where I cut and bruised my hands, and butchered wood into clumsy, ill-fitting and rickety benches, stools and boxes, which amused our mechanic greatly. But with perseverence, patience and time my skill improved, so that before I left the mill I had become something of an artist in wood, and could really do a very nice and creditable job in joining and fitting. Thereby I much improved my standing and influence with the mill hands. In

after days I took much satisfaction out of a well-equipped workshop. Examples of my skill exist in every house into which our family is divided. To make some useful thing for your own house, with your own hands, to fashion some present for friend or relative, or to save ingeniously some decrepit piece of furniture and renew its life of usefulness, is indeed a a splendid pleasure, good for body and soul. To turn out a nice, clean, well-fitting joint, which satisfies the eye, while you think and dream and plan, amidst the smell of sawdust, shavings and clean things, is more than mere bodily and mental satisfaction. There is something spiritual in it.

In thirty long days I was again entitled to go to Montreal. This time I did not go to the Joseph house. I was thoroughly posted and so was Muriel. I found her at the home of a kindly aunt, and we saw much of each other during two whole days. Great days they were, as I remember well, when we dreamed dreams of the great and happy future before us, when we would be different from everybody else, more happy, more generous, more broad-minded and forgiving. Then back to the mill again; this time boiling over with energy and enthusiasm, to do, to work and progress in health and knowledge of things in general, and for an immediate end, to forward the lumber business first and foremost.

Before I could go to Montreal again the Josephs had left for their summer residence at Riviere du Loup, where they summered yearly. Starting immediately after the schools closed, the Joseph " army," as it was called, moved to the seaside. Eleven children, maids, butler, horses, carriages, generally one or two hangers-on, and Mrs. Joseph, constituted the " army." Muriel

never liked this exodus very much. She said it was like travelling with a circus, moving an orphan asylum or a warlike tribe. Circus it certainly was as far as the younger children could make it, for a wilder or more obstreperous lot of imps of mischief never existed, and a more placid demeanour than that of Mrs. Joseph, in the midst of her unruly brood, was never exhibited by woman under similar circumstances. Occasionally she might arouse herself to the exertion of pinching a particularly annoying cherub, but that would be all, and she would proceed to read, peaceful and unruffled. Many a time I was put out of countenance when one of these juvenile fiends escaped from a keeper and invaded my privacy; for their candour was appalling.

" Hello, Blockhead ! " one of the big boys would greet me. " Still hanging around Muriel? She makes *us* sick."

I am naturally fond of children, but they need not have the manners of a playful bear.

I went to Riviere du Loup for a short holiday towards the end of the summer, with Mason's consent, but without the knowledge of my father. My reception by Muriel was all that I dreamed it would be; but that of Mrs. Joseph was frosty and forbidding. She had, however, to make the best of my presence, and did so with a bad grace. In the freedom of country life, without the backing of the Doctor's countenance, Muriel and I had her rather at a disadvantage. We were young and selfish, and neither generous nor thoughtful for her feelings. Morning, noon and night we were together, which, of course, caused talk among busybodies. That any one would dare even to whisper about the conduct of her daughter was gall and wormwood to Mrs. Joseph. Lizette was

careful to keep her informed of all the disagreeable and mean remarks made about Wesblock, and was not too particular how she repeated such things. Consequently, a more or less painful scene took place between Muriel and her mother at nearly every meal and with great regularity every night.

" Where have you been, miss, till this hour of night, nearly twelve o'clock? " Mrs. Joseph would ask when Muriel appeared at about half-past ten at night.

" Why, mother, it's only half-past ten," Muriel would reply.

" Don't dare to discuss the matter of time, Muriel. Answer my question. Where have you been? I need hardly ask with whom."

" I've only been in the orchard with Mr. Wesblock."

" Oh! *only* in the orchard till after midnight with a perfect stranger."

" Now, don't be foolish, mother."

" Foolish! You dare to call your mother a fool. I'll write to your father and have you sent to the convent at once."

" Now listen, mother——"

" I'll not listen; go to bed at once, I am made absolutely miserable by your behaviour."

As the orchard was about the extent of a pocket handkerchief and comprised four trees; and the bench we sat upon was against the side of the house and immediately under Mrs. Joseph's window, Muriel and I could not see the dreadfulness of our behaviour, and these scenes annoyed us and made us feel like children who had been treated with injustice.

One day we decided to put an end to the uncomfortable condition of things by running away and getting married.

How we expected to escape, I certainly cannot explain, for we took an express train in broad day at about three o'clock in the afternoon. A score of people must have seen us depart, but we counted somewhat, I think, on the very audacity of the performance and believed all that was necessary was to get away on the train. It was a childish escapade, conceived in ignorance of everything in the world except the infatuation for each other which made it necessary for us to be together at all costs. Our elders drove us to it by ill-advised chatter, badgering and baiting. All we desired was a little trust, some kindness and liberty; failing these, we decided to make our own life.

CHAPTER IX

My brilliant scheme, born of want of foresight and knowledge of the world, was to go to Boston, where I had some friends, and start life humbly as a music teacher. Muriel was quite ready to face the future with me, which was much to the credit of her courage and to my credit as a lover. We were quite unaware of how watchful mother Joseph and her ready tool, Lizette, had been, and that Doctor Joseph had been telegraphed to before we started. Being ignorant of these things, we set off with but scanty preparation in the way of personal effects, and but little money.

We travelled second class, which we thought was very cunning, when of course it was mere stupidity; for we were far more noticeable in a second class coach than we ever should have been in first class. It really did not matter much, as it happened, because a detective was on our trail very soon after our train was out of sight of Riviere du Loup.

We were happy and confident for a matter of perhaps four hours, when a male person came and sat immediately opposite us. He was an ordinary-looking individual, with a face like a mask; but it was quite evident that we were objects of interest to him. After a short time he opened conversation with me by asking me if I was Mr. Wesblock. I replied that my name was Wesblock, and knew at once what was coming.

" Well, I presume," said this stranger, " that the lady with you is Miss Joseph. I am Detective Pfhal.

I just happened fortunately to be on this line. I have a telegram in my pocket from Doctor Joseph instructing me to conduct the lady home, which I will do, if you have no objections." And he smiled at the idea of any objection I might make.

To say that I was exceedingly uncomfortable is hardly to express my sensations; but I kept my head and said:

"In the first place, Mr. Pfhal, I presume I may examine your credentials. If they prove correct I will ask you to retire a few minutes while I discuss the situation with Miss Joseph, whom I will ask to decide what our action will be. We cannot hinder you from following us, but you cannot take us anywhere we are unwilling to go."

The sense of Muriel's being at my side gave me the courage to make this speech. Mr. Pfhal smiled again, exhibited a silver badge, which he wore on his suspenders, and produced Doctor Joseph's telegram, after which he retired to the end of the car, keeping all the while his mask-like face towards us.

Muriel and I turned and looked at each other, and smiled as well as we could. We came down from the clouds and discussed things as they were, and made such plans for the future as our forethought told us would be necessary. We concluded that there was nothing to do but to go to our respective homes and pretend to be good for a while. We swore the oaths of lovers to each other, and presently Mr. Pfhal came and sat down opposite to us once more; we informed him of our decision which he declared to be the only possible one, for the present, at any rate.

At the next station Pfhal carried my love away. I kissed her good-bye and continued my journey

alone. It is useless to attempt to explain my feelings. I was simply dazed, like a man passing slowly out of the condition of anæsthesia. I could not think in a straight line in any one direction. I knew I had made an awful mistake; that I would be laughed at by many, blamed by some; that I had now angered Muriel's father and had put Muriel in a very bad light. I even fancied that she might turn from me herself and hate me for having made her look so foolish; but she was of a character not easily moved from a purpose. Mrs. Joseph, I knew, would make things very unpleasant as far as was in her power, and I hated to think of the grinning, cynical face of Lizette.

I decided to go to my mother, the only one who thoroughly understood me. She was at Kennebunk, on the coast of Maine, for the summer. It is a long, tiresome trip from Riviere du Loup to Kennebunk. It was particularly so for me. I neither ate nor slept, and could only think and worry and wonder. When I arrived at Kennebunk I was a mental and physical wreck. I was dirty, unkempt, tired, worried, angry, humiliated, and in a manner heart-broken as well.

My mother was never much surprised at any action of mine; so when I appeared before her, although she supposed me to be at the mill, her astonishment was not great. She saw by my looks that something important had happened. She took me to her room, and there I tearfully unfolded the tale of my latest exploit. She listened to me silently and unquestioningly, and when I had finished, kissed me as if I had been still a young repentant child.

"Never mind, son," she said; "don't fret and fume. Things will come out all right. Now lie down and have a good sleep. You are fagged out. The whole

business will look very much better to you when you are rested and have eaten a good meal."

I felt better after dividing my troubles with mother, went to bed and slept soundly for eleven hours. I remained one day with mother and returned to the mill, where I remained for two months and kept busy, which is a great cure for everything. I had daily letters from Muriel, who was full of hope for our future, and continued to believe in me.

Mrs. Joseph made Muriel's life very unhappy during these days; but, of course, accomplished nothing in her attempt to force a break with me. She was that kind of woman, known as a "nagger," who never achieves anything but aggravation.

After making a mess of an elopement, I could hardly expect much sympathy from my father; his letters were all very cold, business-like, short, sharp, and to the point. I believe he was more annoyed at my failure than he would have been if I had successfully carried Muriel off. To him I wrote long and carefully thought-out explanations of my hopes and desires, which, together with my successful efforts to be a useful person at the mill, softened him to a great extent. Things were thus beginning to come to a peaceful level, when one day I received from my father a peremptory command to be in Montreal, at a certain hour of a certain day

The unusual tone of his letter was disquieting and set me wondering what could be in store for me. I strongly suspected that the fact of the daily correspondence between Muriel and me had been discovered and that Mrs. Joseph was behind some move to give me trouble. My suspicion proved correct. When I arrived at the house, it was early evening and the

drawing-room was lighted up. I found mother, father, and Doctor Joseph awaiting me. As I walked in I observed that all three looked anything but good-natured.

Even mother looked very much put out. Doctor Joseph was a very plain-spoken man, and I judged that he had been making remarks which were more to the point than exactly pleasing. I never heard what had occurred before my entrance on the scene, and never had enough curiosity to ask what it was.

"Well, sir," said the Doctor, addressing me, and taking me in from top to toe, with a very unfriendly eye; "a nice young reprobate you are. What have you to say for yourself?"

I sat down without replying.

"I want you to discontinue annoying my daughter," he continued.

He was a large, masterful man. I was young, and he put me very ill at ease. I stammered and blushed and remained dumb.

"Well, well!" he said, stamping his heavy cane on the floor impatiently, "what have you to say? Do you intend to stop annoying us?"

"What do you want me to do?" I asked tremblingly.

"I want you to write to my daughter, now, before us three, that all this silly love business is ended. Write what you like, give what reasons you please, but make it plain to her that all is over between you and her," and he laughed a mirthless, cynical laugh.

"Well, I won't," I blurted out.

"Oh, you won't?" he asked.

"No, I won't, unless Muriel tells me she wishes it, with her own lips," I replied, gradually getting my

mental feet. " I won't take her written word which has been bullied out of her."

I was on the verge of getting stormy, and at such times my voice invariably goes down into deep chest notes, and becomes very loud. These symptoms showed the Doctor I was unduly excited, and he turned to my father saying; " Mr. Wesblock, I think you should send your son away. Send him far away, to Scotland, where there is a very fine university, and I will pay half the expense."

"Damn your impertinence," said my father; " send your daughter away, or allow the young people to see each other under reasonable restrictions.

" That is impossible," said the Doctor. " I should not be forced to send my daughter away; your son is the aggressor. He cannot be allowed to come to my house. I have other intentions for my daughter. She is too young to marry yet, as is your son, who is moreover, I take it, without means and dependent upon you. It is useless to discuss the matter further; but I will take steps to protect myself and my family."

" You are making a sensation of a youthful affair which has no real importance," said my father. " Protect yourself as you see fit. I can see no reason for interfering with my son's love affairs. I will bid you good-evening."

Whereupon he left the room, and the wrathful Doctor could do no less than bow stiffly to my mother and take his departure.

Extremes meet. My father went to one extreme in considering my love affair of no consequence whatever, while Muriel's father went to the other. Amongst them all—Muriel's parents, Lizette, and my parents—they succeeded in driving Muriel and me into a hasty

and ill-considered marriage, which might have turned out very disastrously for one or both of us.

After long talks with my mother and father, I returned to the mill and wrote Muriel a long, true and explicit report of the events. I had the sincere sympathy of my mother in this matter. As for my father, he was inclined to be amused by my entanglement in a love affair. He entered thoroughly into my feelings regarding Mrs. Joseph, although he had never met her. Later, when these two came to know each other, Mrs. Joseph amused my father and he horrified her. So profound was her horror of him that she actually liked me in comparison.

During one of our ensuing talks, my father said to me: "Son, you talk of marriage as if it was an end; it is not an end, it is only a means towards an end. You have no idea of the responsibilities you propose to undertake; you are a mere child in worldly things. Where would you be without me?"

"But I have you, father," I replied. "And why shouldn't my marriage turn out as well as other people's marriages? We all have to start. You married young."

"My poor innocent," said my father. "Yes, I married young, but I had brains and health, no social position and no education."

"Have I no brains, governor?" I asked.

"You have, son, but not the kind that makes a living easily, and you have no health to fall back on." My face fell.

"Cheer up, boy," he added thereupon, by way of consolation. "You may be lucky—ay, and happy, yet never marry!"

"But I am engaged to Muriel Joseph," said I.

This made him laugh, and he walked away. Here in truth he made a mistake. He should have taken me off into the woods and talked to me for four days. Heart-to-heart talks in the wide privacy of the woods, when there is no hurry, are very enlightening. Every effort was now made to separate Muriel and me, to stop our correspondence and prevent our meetings; but we had too many friends and supporters, and really suffered but little inconvenience from the watchfulness of Mrs. Joseph, Lizette and others. The obstacles put in our way only added zest to the game and a touch of stubbornness to our determination. Muriel's home became very much divided against itself, and after a very miserable six months she was goaded into open rebellion, packed her trunks and took refuge with a friendly aunt.

Dear, sweet, long-suffering, beautiful Aunt Molly. She seems now to have been nearer to me than any aunt of my own. Although she was the sister of Mrs. Joseph, she is entitled to all the adjectives with which I have introduced her. In exterior she was prim and proper, but she had an old-fashioned romantic heart. She was old and nearly bald, and wore lace caps, but her face was young and sweet and her smile winning. She was a widow who had seen a most miserable married life, but this had not soured her, and she was an inveterate matchmaker. So it was a great joy to her to take poor persecuted Muriel in.

The Doctor was a forceful and masterful man in every department of his life except that of his home, where the female element predominated. He followed Muriel, and used every endeavour to bring her to what he called her senses, but she demanded terms to which he knew Mrs. Joseph would not listen.

"Send for your lover," he said to her finally while in a rage, "send for him; marry him if you will. I give my consent. Tell him this and you will see him withdraw, or I will be very much surprised. If he marries you, you will rue it to the end of your days. I am through with you."

These things being duly reported to me, I went back forthwith to Montreal with fire in my eye and determination in my soul. What else could I do? Could I allow an old man, dominated by a foolish, headstrong woman, to dare me to marry his daughter whom I dearly loved?

Supported by my old chum, John, I bearded the Doctor in his office. When he saw me he frowned and greeted me with one word: "Well?" I suspect that he had more confidence in me and more kind feelings towards me than he dared show, for he had to do what he was told.

"Well," I replied, "I have come to ask for the written consent to your daughter's marriage with me. You have declared that you will consent; are you prepared to do it? If you do, we will be married this evening at her aunt's house."

The old man scowled and grunted; but said nothing. He sat down at his desk, wrote his consent and handed it to me.

"Let me tell you, young man," he said, "you are doing me a great injury; you are doing my daughter an injustice, and you are ruining yourself. But I will not stop you, for I must put an end to the intolerable condition of things in my house; surprises, explosions, plots and counter-plots; it is impossible. Take my daughter. She will lead you by the nose for the rest of your life."

I might have argued the case with him, but I knew it would be useless. I offered him my hand as a tacit hand of good faith, but he was pleased to ignore it, and John and I withdrew, two very much shaken young men.

Muriel and I were married the same evening at the house of Muriel's aunt; and John was my best man. Doctor Joseph was present, silent, stern and unrelenting. It was a very informal affair, a marriage in haste, which has been repented several times since. But when it is looked back upon, at this date, by the elderly Mr. and Mrs. Wesblock, it is seen to have been on the whole good and not to be regretted. Doctor Joseph took his gloomy presence away immediately after the ceremony, and we made a bold attempt at being merry.

Aunt Molly was radiant, in her glory; it was one of the happiest events of her life. She produced plum cake and her very best wine, which was a sacred thing never even to be thought of except on momentous occasions. "Oh, you naughty young things," she said, "you will be very, very happy and the Doctor will forgive you, I know." The Doctor sat silent. If he had spoken, he would have wept. I was really sorry for him. Aunt Molly did her best to cheer him up by talking at him. She did not dare to address him directly. But he neither moved nor spoke.

Two young, foolish things we were, Muriel and I, thinking that our troubles were all over, whereas they had not yet begun. My wife was not eighteen and I was twenty-one.

CHAPTER X

We at once went to my home to break the news of our marriage in person to my parents. Father and mother were somewhat appalled at the serious turn things had taken. Mother wept, and father, I think, used his whole vocabulary of swear words. But neither had any blame for us personally. They showed their good judgment in taking the thing philosophically and kindly. Perhaps they remembered the day when they married, bride and bridegroom one year younger than Muriel and I; and they treated us as if we were human, foolish, and headstrong. They gave us, moreover, many things of immediate need wherewith to start our housekeeping; and so sent us away to the mill happy.

I have made many grave mistakes in my life which have had far-reaching consequences. My marriage has sometimes appeared to be the gravest of all, but as far as I can yet discover, the outcome on the whole, has been good. The consequences, of course, will reach on for ever; but I cannot see how I could have made more out of my life if I had avoided this rash act. Muriel must think the same thing, for our lives have become so identified with each other that they are as one life. It is nearly impossible for me to look back to the early days of my marriage and see them as they were. Looking back to childhood is much easier. Many things are plain now that were dark then. That

Muriel, a comparative child, was willing and ready to give up her home luxuries and her social opportunities, to forego a brilliant wedding, with all the show and splendour that women worship, and to face the great unknown future with me, seemed a miracle worked for my special benefit—although the same kind of thing happens almost daily. It never occurred to her to think or care that she had lost some hundreds of wedding presents, which she would have received had she married in the usual way. And I, all self-complacence, took this sacrifice, and all it meant, as a matter of course.

Indeed at this time I felt no lack of confidence in either Muriel or myself. I could see no breakers ahead, and did not realise that we were taking chances which few are able to take and survive.

From my father's house we went immediately to the mill, or rather to the village, which was a few miles from the mill. We spent a short honeymoon at the one-horse country hotel, while I made hurried arrangements to have a house of our own, by arranging with our sawyer to divide his house in two, that he might rent one half of it to us. Everything was novel to Muriel, everything new and worthy of notice; for her inexperience was comical. She did not know a chicken from a turkey.

These first days were a huge joke to everybody. The villagers laughed and we laughed. We gave parties and made merry, and enjoyed being alive. The whole village and countryside—yes, farmers for miles around, enjoyed us very much; and we enjoyed everybody and everything. It was a great world, we thought.

Considering the sudden and informal character of

our wedding, our relatives and friends were very thoughtful. They sent us letters of congratulation, and wedding-presents in the shape of cheques and other useful or useless and ornamental things. We were regarded by all our connections as a very rash and foolish couple. Doctor Joseph, who could not act against the prompting of his kind heart for very long, sent us some handsome silver tea things, which served for years as a luxurious possession, very much out of place in our simple household.

Soon after our marriage, I may as well recall here, my enemy Lizette married an American, went to live in the United States, and so passed out of our lives and out of the pages of this book.

It seems that a certain degree of blind ignorance is necessary to the enjoyment of some kinds of happiness. Undoubtedly our happiness was the greater because we were unable to appreciate our position or the immensity of the task we had undertaken. Before we were married a week we began to settle down.

Presently the chairs, tables, bureaus, washstands and sundries began to arrive, which had been given me by my mother. In a few days our house was ready; it was carpeted throughout with the rag carpet of the French-Canadian farmer. Twenty cents per yard we paid for this carpet in those days and with plenty of newspapers underneath, it made a very good carpet. We made our first move now from the village hotel to our house at the mill, six miles away. Our furniture was in the house when we arrived there; for it had gone direct through the village by rail to the mill siding, and the thoughtful hands of Mason had put it in, and done many things we had forgotten to do for ourselves. We had a maid, too, a small husky thing,

some fourteen years of age, for whose valuable services we paid one dollar a week. She suited us very well, although she spent many days with her finger in her mouth, and her eyes wide open watching us.

Our mill was surrounded with vast dumps of sawdust rising into huge hills and dunes. Our house was built on one of these dunes and commanded a view of a little creek, a stretch of railroad track through woods, and apparently endless piles of lumber, hundreds of thousands of saw logs and a long vista of sawdust. I can smell the odour of the lumber as I write, and even to this day, when Muriel and I come across lumber piles we put our noses in the air like dogs searching a scent, inhale big sniffs of the sweet, clean smell, turn and look at each other and smile foolishly.

The life at the mill was to Muriel like a most wonderful, gorgeously illustrated new book of fairy tales to a child. She had known, as every one knows more or less, that the kind of people amongst whom our lot was cast, existed. The mere fact of their existence was the beginning and end of her knowledge. She knew them as she knew a cow. She had driven through villages of one street such as ours, with a general store, an hotel, and a railroad station as a business centre; but hitherto she had looked at them with unseeing eyes. A small fundamental settlement like that at the mill, so insignificant that it was not to be found on any map, was an entirely new experience to her. The mill was an unknown place except to a few conductors and brakesmen on freight trains who called it Chagnon's Siding for convenience. She learned now that these people of another unconsidered world, so different from her own, were worth knowing and knowing intimately. They could teach her, as it

proved, many things about life of which she was entirely ignorant.

At first, the frankness of French-Canadian conversation about the intimate things of domestic life shocked her dreadfully; but she had all the adaptability of youth, and soon such plain talk made her laugh the while she learned. These crude country people were primitive to her, and in many ways she was primitive to them. There was not a lady or gentleman within miles of us, taking the words "lady" and "gentleman" as they are understood technically, or let us say Socially with a capital S. But Muriel learned from the kindness, willing helpfulness, thoughtfulness and even delicacy of these simple people, what was meant by "nature's gentlefolk." Uncultured and ignorant people may be low in a sense, but they are hardly ever vulgar. Pretension and the conceit of a few dollars are the only true vulgarity. Low people may be worth while; vulgar, never.

It seems to be characteristic of the French-Canadian to love to bow and do homage to persons and things which he thinks are superior to him. We were from a world nearly unknown except by hearsay to our little village, so we were marked people, and wherever we went, women courtesied and men touched their hats, except the keeper of the hotel, who was an Irishman. When we came to the post office for our mail, bowing even was not considered sufficient; I have seen half a dozen men come out of the little place and await our entry. I was what was known as "un vrai monsieur." Such true politeness and deference we have never known since.

It must not be supposed that Muriel alone gained anything from our mill life; I also learnt many things.

Our house being in order, we set about the business of life. The settling of that house was an important matter. Muriel, like most women, had the nest-building instinct highly developed, and enjoyed placing and shifting furniture and trying positions for things many times till they were set exactly right to her mind. A six-inch move of a picture, or the angle at which a sofa was placed across a corner, were matters of serious importance to her.

The period of adjustment to our environment, to the world in general, and to each other in particular, had commenced.

The process of harmonising two unformed characters in the state of marriage is one full of doubts, irritations, and dangers. Usually this period is passed through by young married couples in dense ignorance of what is taking place. If the process is successful the result is due more to good luck than to good management. In a new home, the man and the woman usually have separate notions of what that home should be. These notions are seldom formulated, or very definite; but they are there. The man, for example, has an idea that the new home should be exactly like his father's, with a few minor differences. The woman has her idea, which is entirely different. Generally these views do not coincide in any one detail, although they may agree at large. When one character is much stronger than the other adjustment takes place more easily perhaps; but at a cost. The weaker character never gets an opportunity to develop. When two characters of nearly equal strength come together friction is nearly inevitable. The two act and react on each other for years until the final adjustment comes or utterly fails to come—the failure, of course, bringing misery. The

knowledge that this period has to be passed through would make it comparatively easy, but most people enter into the marriage state in complete ignorance of what lies before them.

Patience and adaptability, with much love to aid the deliverence, may in the end work wonders, and the coming of babies works miracles. But if boys and girls only learned from fathers and mothers the essential things it is necessary to know about marriage, wonders and miracles would not be so necessary, and many a heartache would be saved.

The foregoing suggests, perhaps, that Muriel and I were not at first as happy as we expected to be, nor were we. We were more or less a disappointment to each other. Traits of character we had hidden unconsciously, or designedly, during courtship, were now discovered and we became frank with each other—much too frank. But we loved, and through love believed in each other, we persevered in working out our destiny. Such as I am, my wife made me, and in making me she made herself. Such as she is I made her, and in making her I made myself. Forming a character in another is much like teaching music. You cannot teach without learning much yourself, and many things are brought home to you while looking at the instrument in the learner's hands that you could not have discovered by having the instrument in your own.

Our period of adjustment lasted many years, during which time we often lost patience exactly at the wrong instant, often doubted when we should have trusted each other, and often thought our hasty marriage a dreadful failure. Many flyings apart in fierce warlike heat, followed by shamefaced but peaceful and wise

reunions, we went through, all to a good end. We could not help these things, for we knew no better.

We had been married several weeks, and I had become what I considered a serious man of affairs, when a dove of peace came unexpectedly to us. It arrived in the shape of a fat brother of Muriel's, who, until then, had hardly counted in our selfish scheme of things. We received him with gladness. After he had spent a day taking in our house with its surroundings, he was pleased to declare our position in the economy of things, " bully." The fat brother, Eugene by name (commonly known as " Gene "), inspected with a keen eye the mill, the house, the pig, the cow, and everything we labelled with that beloved pronoun *our;* and all was " bully " to him. He stayed three days with us, and then returned to Montreal to tell his people there what he had seen.

These days at the mill were downright solid full days, out of which we sucked much happiness, and much practical sense that was to prove useful to us. I see now what a great thing it was to have been far away from relatives determined to do good, but who do as a rule nothing but harm at such a time. Young men and young women are fond of saying to each other, " You are all the world to me," or something equally romantic and unmeaning; and in this there is little harm. But when such superlatives are taken for truth, or an attempt is made to make them come true, it is found impossible; for no one person can be all the world to another. When you find the exception which proves the rule, you find a poor one-sided life, without breadth or depth.

As between Muriel and me, I was the first one to

discover this truth. Muriel found it much later. It was long before either of us was willing to allow the other full freedom, to enjoy things and people in his or her own way. The necessary adjustment proceeded in our case with more or less worry; but our love for each other was a real thing, and the days flew by with more than ordinary happiness in them.

It was my nature, when annoyed or disappointed, to fly up to fever heat, explode and come down as quickly as I went up, and then forget the incident which brought about my excitement. But I soon learned to modify this and to hold myself in check. Muriel's nature was to sulk and balk for days at a time when thwarted. Giving way to our natures and tempers was quite frequent in the first year of our marriage; but we learned the folly of it, and practised more and more control. When Muriel was in a sulky mood, I found it wise to be kept busy at the mill, making good use of my carpenter's tools, with which I was fast becoming an adept. Muriel was not one of your self-enervating women, and by no means a clinger. She was indolent and luxury-loving, it is true, but she demanded energy and action in me. She did not herself desire to lead, but she wanted to be led vigorously in the direction she thought best.

Learning things gradually became a passion with me, and made of me something of a student. I gave much time to books which were often bought up to the very limit of our scanty purse. I became also a chess-player, a musician, and I must add, a scribbler; but it will be seen, I never became a business-man. My craving for knowledge was so great that I spread myself over too much ground. I wanted to know so many things. Nothing was too abstruse for me to

attempt to learn, and I even spent some months over the curious pseudo-science of astrology.

I most sincerely recommend hobbies to young married men as a healthy diversion. A newly-married woman may think she needs her husband every instant of his leisure; but really she does not; and he is a very foolish man who attempts to satisfy any such desire. People are just like foods, if you have too much of them they pall upon you. The gratification of my thirst for knowledge gave Muriel a wholesome relief from my constant presence.

I learned chess from a book, and played on my home-made chess-board for years before I ever met an opponent. I tried to teach Muriel, but she had not the patience for it, and preferred a book, music, or letter writing. She wrote charming letters when she felt in the humour. When we arrived at the stage when we could ask each other "What are *you* going to do this evening?" instead of "What shall *we* do?" we were at the beginning of marriage wisdom. I was often hasty with the poor little girl, blaming her for things for which I love her to-day.

There is only one way to love a woman, and that is to love her faults and all; meanwhile you must learn to rid yourself of such faults as are objectionable to her. I was blind in those days, I did not see that fate had given me a great gift . . . one who had in her the makings of a broad-minded woman. I did not realise that it was no ordinary girl who had come to me out of the lap of luxury, but a woman who would make a good human comrade. I have a natural reticence which prevents my putting into cold print for unsympathetic eyes, details of the early developments of our married life.

You must understand that I am not out to write a full and complete chronicle, or give a vivid and exhaustive word-picture of those days. I am only jotting down their salient impressions, and the thoughts they provoke, leaving much between the lines for those who can read there.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW months after our marriage Mason was withdrawn from the mill and placed elsewhere; an event which increased my importance, my opinion of myself, and my salary. We were now nearly rich, we thought, and bought a piano with a payment on account and a "slow note,"[1] the first note I ever signed but by no means the last. Nearly nightly I lifted up my voice in song to Muriel's accompaniment.

One night I was in the midst of a mighty effort to hold the longest and highest note in "When the Flowing Tide Comes In," when Doctor Joseph unexpectedly walked in.

"God bless! what a noise," he exclaimed; and thereupon we turned to hand-shaking, kissing and embracing.

Muriel busied herself at once in preparing supper, and the table was soon set, at which the old doctor laughed heartily; for he had never seen Muriel put her hand to a useful thing. No word of past unpleasantness or present forgiveness was spoken. The presence of the doctor was sufficient. In a little while supper was over, a tour of inspection of our domicile had been made, and the old gentleman was sitting in a home-made arm-chair, smoking a large cigar, while he cross-examined us. We talked late into the night.

"So far," said the Doctor, "it appears that all is well. You are married hardly six months. I must say, a boy of your age who can command love in a girl

[1] A promissory note.

like Muriel that will stand the test of living in a place like this must have something in him. But there are breakers ahead. You have a hard way to make, and you have characters to form."

In this edifying strain did my father-in-law lecture us. It was right, of course; but his words fell on deaf ears. We smiled at him, as self-satisfied youth always smiles at the wisdom of age. We could not realise that we were blind, and the idea of our characters being unformed seemed ridiculous.

The Doctor stayed with us for two nights and a day, and left us in high spirits. I had a good store of comica yarns and stories, and the Doctor dearly loved a joke. I kept him laughing during the whole time of our drive to the village to catch his train, when I should have been in serious consultation with him, relative to the management of my affairs and my heavy domestic responsibilities. He must have judged me to be a thoughtless, shallow youth.

" Remember," he said as he left me, " she will lead you by the nose for the rest of your life." He was undoubtedly a judge of such things, or should have been, for if ever man was led by the nose by a woman, he was that man. Mrs. Joseph managed her house, including the Doctor, with a high hand and no favours. Everything was sacrificed to her wishes. To use the word " managed " is perhaps hardly exact. In this regard it would be nearer the truth to say that she rode roughshod over everybody and everything, without regard to expense or consequence. How she accomplished her ends I do not know; for she was not loudly insistent or apparently overbearing.

One of the difficulties which Dr. Joseph had possibly reckoned with arose from the very simple fact that

Muriel was a true daughter of the city. When we had been at the mill some eighteen months, the novelty of things began to wear off, and our simple life became monotonous to her.

But now occurred a vital new development, not unexpected. We were about to pay a visit to Montreal, when our First Beloved arrived. We two played croquet one fine June evening, and early the next morning there were three of us. It was a girl—a little pink lump of humanity, with large dark blue eyes, and a great quantity of straight black hair. I was very proud and elated over this commonplace occurrence. If I had had forty cannon I would have fired them all, while ammunition lasted; but I had no cannon, so I fired telegrams right and left, to every relative whom I thought ought to be interested in the event. I took a long pole and stuck it in the chimney, and hoisted a flag on it, which action was nearly the cause of my being left a widower, for a breeze sprung up next day and brought down my chimney, flag-pole and all with such a racket that poor little Muriel was nearly frightened to death.

Before the baby was two days old Mrs. Joseph was with us, accompanied by her sister, the kind and friendly aunt at whose house we were married. I was still a beardless youth when our First Beloved arrived. Persistent shaving had failed to raise any manly growth of hair upon my face. I have learned since that a hairless face is really a blessing. Mrs. Joseph did not thaw to me very much, but she was condescendingly kind, and took more interest in the baby and our affairs than might have been expected. She was always a kill-joy to me in those days. She seemed to carry more dignity than was necessary for a mere

woman. In her presence even the new baby seemed but a poor achievement. She did not use a lorgnette, which is much to her credit. She was just the kind of person who might daintily and grandly gaze on a baby through a lorgnette, and exclaim, "How perfectly ridiculous." Her departure was a distinct relief to us. Muriel's aunt remained with us, a welcome guest, for several weeks.

At this time Muriel and I weighed jointly very little over two hundred pounds. We both grew after marriage, in weight and in stature. Even the shapes of our heads altered. My health improved steadily, until I was nearly robust. I still succumbed easily to fatigue, and suffered from a weak digestion, but nevertheless enjoyed fair health. I was fortunate in having a proud stomach which resented ill-usage; for it helped to teach me my physical limitations. If these matters are alluded to, and I note a detail like perfect hearing in my left ear, while the right one remained a typical scarlet fever ear—source of anxiety and trouble—it is because they serve to show how seriously handicapped I was for the work I had before me.

My affairs were by this time prosperous in a modest way, but I did not realise it. Over and above my salary, which covered our actual needs, I enjoyed an income from a small general store from which the mill hands were provided with the rough necessaries of life. It was a cash business, and brought me in a small profit. My men were my only customers.

I can hardly say that I was quite happy during this period of my life. The numerous small things to which I had to attend worried me. I was gaining valuable experience, but at a high price in nervous

waste. I was careless and extravagant in money matters, and Muriel was not the one to correct these failings. I was impatient, and expected results when other men would be content to plod and wait. When our baby was several weeks old, and Muriel was up and well, I saw that the novelty of our life had worn off for her. She craved for the city, and she wanted, a very natural desire, to show her baby. We were in our busy season, the mill running night and day; it was hard for me to leave my post, while I did not wish Muriel to go to Montreal alone. This led to many discussions between us. We were young, and had not learned that matters of disagreement between two people could be easily settled without heat. We were not patient with each other, so that Muriel went to Montreal with her baby, leaving me in a sulky mood. This was not a serious breach; it was only a tiff, but I felt very much ill-used.

It is very pleasant no doubt to hear married couples tell of the many years they have passed together without a single cross word being spoken; and in a few cases the fond reminiscence may be true. But our married life, particularly the early part of it, was stormy. Most of the storms were necessary, inevitable, and led to better understanding between Muriel and me. For the most part we were generous with each other, and ever ready when a storm was over to take our fair share of blame and admit evident error. I regret no part of these experiences except when through whim, jealousy, or crustiness born of bad health, I did my wife an injustice. The monotony of a long married life, without one quarrel or disagreement, is something I do not pretend to understand, unless among a wooden humanity unknown to my experience. People who do

not quarrel do not know the exquisite pleasure of making up, and coming thereby to a better understanding; they do not acquire the art of giving way gracefully and gallantly, or taste the gratification of making it plain that you were right after all.

During the six months following the birth of our First Beloved, Muriel spent a good deal of her time in Montreal, running away on the slightest provocation, and being followed by me and brought back again. This did not reduce our expenses, which were beginning to press heavily upon our income. She was tired of the mill, and persevered in her complaints against it, until she persuaded me to believe that it was not a fit place in which to live; that it offered no outlook for the future, and that I could do much better in the city. Whether she was right or wrong in this it is impossible to state. Having taken one course in life, who can tell where another would have led?

My father was at all times decidedly promiscuous in his business ventures. As he grew older he became still more adventurous, taking chances on all kinds of things. He was always involved in several business undertakings outside his legitimate line, making much money in some ventures, losing much in others. In my sketch of his character I have, perhaps, been hardly fair to him, not from any deliberate unfairness, but from a lack of understanding of his peculiar, erratic temperament. I must say of him that he lived according to his light, and was always ready to be of use to me in the years of my apprenticeship to life, always showing a great and deep love, more by deeds than words. His hand was always ready to pull me out of the many financial holes into which I had a happy

faculty of getting, and I believe he understood me better than I understood myself.

Approaching him relative to the question of my leaving the mill, I was surprised but glad to find that he was not opposed to the idea; in fact he was quite willing that I should come to Montreal. This was, no doubt, accounted for by his having a new sphere for my usefulness in sight. He was largely involved at the time in a cartage business, to which he could give no personal attention. Arrangements were soon made, and we moved our home from the mill to Montreal. I left the mill with deep regret.

I now took up the duty of watching my father's interests in the cartage business, and I found it no easy task. I was tied to drivers, horses and waggons hand and foot, by night and day. This business failed at the end of about a year and a half, for reasons which need not be discussed. While I was busy with the work of moving freight and sundries of every kind, from a five cent parcel to a piano, our Second Beloved arrived, and the good and great Doctor passed out. He had been fighting a cirrhotic liver for over a year, but had undertaken its cure too late. Hard mental work, want of outdoor exercise plus high living wore him out before his time; so that he died at the early age of sixty. I had seen a good deal of him latterly, and his death was a great blow to me in every way. He had been a tower of strength to his own family, to a large circle beyond the family, and even to the country at large. It appears that families grow up and multiply till they attain their fullest development in the person of one great man, who dominates or largely influences his time and holds things together by the strength of his personality. He dies and the family

dissolves and disperses into various commonplace paths. In altered spheres the family units lose distinction.

After the failure of the cartage business, I found that I owed more money than I could pay, and in this condition I remained on and off for a number of years. Any fool can get into debt; it takes a wise man to get out of it.

Our second baby, who was born shortly before the death of Doctor Joseph, was a boy, and differed greatly from our First Beloved, who was dark, quiet, and sorrowful looking. The boy was fair, boisterous and gay.

Through the influence of the Doctor's name I immediately secured another position. I became English clerk in the Criminal Investigation Office, and remained in this post for over a year, learning many things about human nature in general and the seamy side of life in particular. My salary was not princely, and as our Third Beloved arrived during this year, my expenses were out of proportion to my income. Nearly any one can marry, raise a family and provide for it in one way or another, if nothing matters but that its members be fed, clothed and sheltered in simple form. But when one must provide up to a certain standard, and do it in a certain way set by family and social conditions, it is not quite so easy. You cannot do this or that because it would humiliate the family. You cannot do another thing because it would horrify the neighbours. The children must have such and such things, and a certain scale of appearances must be kept up at any cost.

There is only one sensible, safe and sane point from which to start anything, and that is at the beginning.

It is not to be wondered at that men rise to eminence from nothing. They rise because they start from the beginning, free and without handicap. They are so far below that particularly nice line called "respectability" that no one knows or cares what they do to gain their ends, and they are not noticed until they arrive. Whereas the man who starts from where his parents left off—from the middle, or a little above or below the middle—must find his way without the valuable experience he would gain by making his own start, and all his actions must be adjusted to the social position of his family. Every one, no matter what his calling, can be a gentleman in his heart; but every one cannot afford to be outwardly a gentleman and a man of the world, fully equipped.

Doctor Joseph's affairs were found in very indifferent shape. His estate wound up to a sum very inadequate for continuing the style of living his family had been enjoying. His big house, horses, library and nearly everything had to be sold, and a modest form of living adopted by Mrs. Joseph. This was a great blow to her, but she bore it well, without complaint or any doubt as to the judgment of her dead husband. Two of her sons, still in their teens, went to work in positions found for them by good friends. As far as the sons were concerned, this turned out to be the best thing that could have happened; but Mrs. Joseph, of course, suffered in social prestige. The sons being too young to take charge of their mother's affairs, these were put into the hands of one male relative, then of another. Thanks to their muddling and incompetence, in a few years she was reduced presently to little more than the salaries of her boys, who managed to support her and the younger children in a modest way.

CHAPTER XII

In the midst of the disorganisation caused by the death of the Doctor, I took the Western fever, which was prevalent at the time. Every one saw the promised land in the West. I packed my furniture, gathered my wife and children under my wing, and rode away to Minnesota, where one of Muriel's cousins, according to his own account, was doing great things. Minnesota was inflated at this time to bursting point, and produced more liars than any State in the Union. I did not find a gold mine in the West, or make a fortune out of the real estate boom then at its height. For fifteen months I held a position as general utility man in an architect's office, made tracings of drawings, kept books, wrote letters and even took my employer's wife out driving. I found that in the West an employee was expected to make himself useful in any capacity in which his employer saw fit to use him, and I adapted myself to the conditions, but I did not like Minnesota, and found it a hard place to live in, and by no means richer in opportunities than the East. Perhaps I did not know an opportunity when I saw one.

When the bottom fell out of the real estate boom, I felt it was time to return to my native city. Muriel would have had me return much sooner, but a move of a thousand miles was a thing too serious to do in a hurry. We had some pretty decent belongings in the

matter of jewellery when we went West. We were willing and glad to part with these baubles to procure our return to Montreal. Home looked better than gold and precious stones. In fact we were both heartily home-sick.

Although I acted in numerous capacities for my Western employer, and apparently satisfied him with my efforts, my salary was small. In order to live I gave my evenings to gathering the improvident into the fold of the Western Insurance Company. Sometimes I did very well at this, and what I learned of insurance was afterwards useful. When the boom broke the insurance harvest disappeared. This was one of the reasons for my return home. I was not cut out for an insurance man. I hated opening up my pack and displaying my wares to people. Yet I made some little success in insurance, as long as my list of friends and acquaintances lasted. Approaching strangers was very distasteful to me.

I persevered in the insurance business after I returned home, and for three years lived upon the precarious commissions made upon the street, with my office in my hat, mainly; sometimes a friend would lend me desk-room in one corner of his place of business. A year after our coming home our Fourth Beloved was added to us.

What course in life I was suited to follow I could not see. I was like a ship without compass or instruments, with no set course, but drifting this way and that, according to wind and weather. If I had thoroughly understood what my calling was in life, I might not have found it possible to follow it, for I had to go after the immediate dollar. Certainly I was quite unsuited for those activities ordinarily referred to as " business,"

and I have yet to learn that I have any special aptitude in any particular direction.

I had always flattered myself that want of mental balance was not one of my failings. I had made the common every-day mistakes of youth and inexperience, but had an exalted idea of my wisdom, until I had a streak of luck. I wrote one of Montreal's wealthy men for a policy of fifty thousand dollars, and as a consequence went completely off my head. Commissions on life insurance were very high when I was young; in fact, the insurance company received very little of the first year's premium. The agent got the better part of it.

To be a gambler within reason is nothing very uncommon or very dreadful. In one form or another the gambling spirit is nearly universal. Business is permeated with it. It looks as if it were a normal instinct. The gambling fever overcame me like a disease. It ran in my blood and dominated my mind. I dreamed schemes and systems and planned coups. That I ever returned to my natural self is a marvel for which I am exceedingly thankful.

My initiation came through the slim and insidious ten-dollar chance in a bucket shop. The possession of what to me was a large amount of money—my commission on a fifty thousand dollar life policy—must have gone to my head. I did not become a gambler in one day or one week, but gradually became more feverish and daring, until I graduated as a plunger and a better in every form of chance. I tried them all—horse-racing, athletic events, roulette, faro, poker and even craps. As often happens with tyros, I was fortunate to begin with. But I became useless as a citizen, as a father and husband, made Muriel

thoroughly miserable, and did not increase my own happiness or satisfaction with life. But, strange to say, I made money. The more we love, and are loved, the more power we have to aggravate those who love us.

In seventeen months my commission of twelve hundred dollars had grown to the wonderful sum of twenty-one thousand dollars. During that time I had many nerve-racking ups and downs, but blind chance favoured me, and I prospered financially. I lost in nearly every other direction. I became known as a gambler, but not as what is understood as a sport, for I never drank, or mixed with fast society. Unless you have been a gambler and a regular frequenter of gambling places, you have no idea of the extraordinary-looking people who seem to have money to risk on the turn of a card or a wheel. Men who appear to be gentlemen are rare in the gambling crowd. It is not the people who dress well and keep up appearances who have the bulk of the money floating about in such company; but the shabby people who care more for money than appearances. I have seen thousands of dollars change hands amidst a shabby unkempt crowd, who looked as if one could buy them and their belongings for five or ten dollars a head; and all in quietness and calm without a murmur. Nothing is despised so much among the gambling fraternity as one who bawls, weeps or babbles.

The families interested in my life now besieged me with importunities to be good. Not that they were so truly interested in my soul, but they wished to see something saved out of the large sum of money I had accumulated. They did not know exactly how much I was worth, but they knew, by some means or other

that is was a large amount, and implored me to be wise, and tie up at least half of it in such a way that I could not lay careless hands upon it. Their prayers were useless. I could not be moved. I thought I knew exactly what I was about, and advice only annoyed me. I fully intended and expected to win a million, if not more. My fall came soon and suddenly. The "Pyramid," like nearly all inventions of the Devil, is very successful when not a failure and very disastrous when not a success. It was the main cause of my financial crash. This scheme is as old as perdition, but many have no knowledge of its pecularities, and only a gambler knows the power of its fascination. I attempted a pyramid in wheat, buying a modest ten thousand bushels on margin. The market went down and I remargined my original ten thousand bushels and bought twenty thousand bushels more. Again the market dropped, I remargined my holdings and bought forty thousand bushels more and so on while the market continued to fall, until I held over a million bushels. If the market had recovered even a few cents, my average price was so low that I would have been able to get out with a small loss or a small profit; but the market was against me and I was wiped out. Not only did I lose my all, but I was involved deeply beyond.

When I look back at the gambling period of my life it seems impossible that I went through such an experience and regained my equilibrium. For over a year my days were spent in bucket shops and brokers' offices, and my nights, often till dawn, at the poker or roulette table, with faro as a relaxation. How I stood the nervous waste is a mystery, for during the whole of that period my perceptive faculties were on the alert

day and night, an honest night's sleep was a thing unknown to me. A loss which to-day would put me in a sick bed for a week was in those days a laughable incident. One day I took Muriel to the race track at Belair. We lunched in the city and I bought her a pair of gloves. I had four hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket. On my return, Muriel's gloves were all there was to show for my money, and we laughed at the joke of it. Many of the bookmakers were my friends, but they separated me from my money with the best heart in the world.

In my earlier pages I have said things uncomplimentary to parsons, but there are parsons and parsons. For the sake of the help and sympathy I received from one dear soul, I offer prayers for all parsons, pastors and masters.

One of the day-schools I went to for a brief while as a youngster was that of the Reverend Edmund— "Daddy" we called him. Dear old Daddy he was to every boy who ever knew him. To say that Daddy was good is to say nothing of him. He was good in a wise, broad way, which is very uncommon. So many people become inhuman and small when they become good. Daddy was both good and human. There is no use in being good, virtuous and honourable, if you have no heart and lack the sympathetic understanding of badness. Daddy understood all things both good and bad. He knew humanity as it really is; only himself he did not know; for he underestimated his own goodness and greatness. He was a curious mixture of childlike generosity and worldly knowingness, with a whimsical wit and a convincing smile.

After I grew up I used to visit him at very irregular intervals, to confess and give him news of myself.

Years would sometimes pass between these visits, but I was always received as if I were still a boy, and expected. When ruin, mental, moral and financial, stared me in the face, I quite naturally turned to Daddy, knowing that he would understand, and show me the right way, if there was a way, out of my difficulties.

After a horrible night spent staring into darkness, cursing myself as a blind fool, and turning my position over and over in my mind, I rose early and made a morning call upon the dear old man. He saw me at once, although it was Sunday. I told him all the tale of my folly and recklessness, and where I had landed myself. I was absolutely frank with him, as I had always been. I felt relieved and hopeful, although my affairs were desperate, and I had no idea where I was to secure the money I required by Monday morning's bank hour. While I told my tale the dear old man sat silent, in a big high-backed chair, his hands in his lap, his eyes half-closed, and his mouth tight shut. In his long shabby cassock buttoned down the front with numerous small black buttons, he was the picture of one of the old ascetics. When I had finished, his looks were stern, but I knew his soft heart, and could feel his sympathy, although he did not speak for over a minute.

"Ah, my son," at last he said, "you should have known that you could not play that game, and I am really glad you have failed; there is nothing in that game but ashes in the mouth. Your failure is a greater gain than your success would have been. Now listen to me. How long is it since you have seen Sir John?"

"Sir John?" I asked in astonishment. (Sir John was my godfather.) When I was christened in old

Trinity Church, he had stood for me, as the saying is. He was plain John at the time, and comparatively poor. While I was growing up from babyhood to childhood he was making money. As I grew from childhood to manhood he was making more money. While I was marrying and learning to be a father and a husband, he was still making money and being honoured by the Queen for his many philanthropies, which represented millions given to educational and public-spirited enterprises. I knew him as a peculiarly hard old bachelor, with a stony face which had a very chilling effect upon me. He was not of my kind in any way, shape or form. I was a fool. He was a wise man; and when Daddy asked me, "When did you last see Sir John?" the question seemed utterly inapropos.

"Why do you mention him?" I asked. "I could never go to him."

"Yes, you could," said Daddy, "and you must. He will help you if I say so."

"You know him, Daddy?" I asked, surprised. "How do you come to know him?"

"Know him, my son, of course I know him. He is one of my best friends," replied Daddy.

"That is most amazing, Daddy. How can it be? Sir John a friend of yours! He is so different from you, I cannot think of you together. He is a business man, a millionaire, and moreover an unbeliever. What can you and he be to each other?"

"Strange it may be," said Daddy, "but it is even so. We are different, very different, but we understand each other, and there is much in common between us. He understands the things that make up my life, and I understand the things that constitute life for him."

What common ground there could possibly be between these two I did not understand. Daddy I admired and loved, while for Sir John I had no feelings of any kind. I never felt that I even knew him. He and I lived on different planes and spoke different languages. The few times that I had met him after I had grown up had shown me that. It seems most strange that this man had played with me in my babyhood, danced me on his knee, and made card houses on the floor with me. It was much against the grain for me to go to his house on Sunday morning, and present him with a letter from Daddy; but I had to go, if only to show Daddy that I appreciated his attempt to help me. I felt sure I was going on a hopeless errand.

After my talk with Daddy I went to Sir John's house, which was not far from the one in which I had been married. I sent up my card and Daddy's letter, and waited some minutes in a severely chaste and cheerless drawing-room, until Sir John appeared.

" Well, John," he said, as he entered noiselessly, " I hear you are in trouble." And he sat down on one of the stiff-backed chairs near the door without approaching me, offering his hand or asking me to be seated.

" Yes, Sir John, I am in deep trouble," I said, and remained standing.

" Humph," said the old chap. All his words fell from his lips in cold, sharp, even tones. " Well, boy, tell me about it briefly," he continued, and his mouth closed like a steel trap.

I tried to tell him my position, and how I had come to be placed as I was. He listened, and his attitude was that of an old, tired judge, who hears for the thousandth time the tale of a man self-accused by his

own weak self-exculpations. When I had finished he spoke.

"How much will it take to put you on an even keel once more?" he asked.

"About three thousand five hundred dollars, Sir John," I replied.

"About?" he said. "About, about?" repeating the objectionable word. "Is that the way you do business? Can you not tell me to a cent how you stand?"

"Yes, I can," I was glad to say; "I can make it up to a cent from my books."

"Oh, you keep books? That looks better."

"Yes, Sir John. I have always kept books," I said, and my inward thought was, "Thank God."

"They must be interesting," he said, and the shadow of a smile hovered for an instant about the corners of his mouth, and showed in his keen eye. "Bring your books to me to-morrow morning at 8.30, at my office. Good morning!" And he coolly turned and walked upstairs, leaving me to find my way out alone.

CHAPTER XIII

It may seem strange that a man of my character should keep books of account. But the habit of keeping a financial memoranda had been formed when I was very young; in my first pocket-money days, in fact. Father gave me money at irregular intervals, and allowed me to earn small sums, but he never made me a regular allowance of pocket-money at any time. When I asked him for money, he always asked me what had become of the last money I had owned, and failure to give a satisfactory account would cut off supply for a few days. Then again, even as a small boy, I had always spent several weeks of my summer holidays in father's office, where I passed my time with the head book-keeper, who, when not too busy, was a kindly man, willing to satisfy my curiosity about the huge books he kept; so that before I went to college, I had a working idea of the art of keeping accounts. After Mason left the mill, the simple book-keeping devolved on me, and I kept separate books for my little general store. In this way, I formed a habit of keeping track of where money went.

Leaving Sir John's house I went home and prepared a simple and straightforward statement of my affairs. It was not much of a task, for I had systematically kept a record of everything, including house expenses and all transactions in detail. My accounts could have stood an audit. By them I knew how very unpromising was the outlook. The statement was not much to

my credit. It wrote me down a fool in capital letters, but I could not afford to humbug myself, and much less could I dare keep back any facts from Sir John.

After the work on my statement of affairs was done, I passed a most miserable and anxious afternoon and evening. I could not talk to Muriel, for I knew I could only speak of one subject, which I could not hope to make her understand. She had been very much of a help and comfort to me in a hundred ways, in fact in every way except on the financial side of our common affairs. She was not born with a mathematical mind. Figures only annoyed her and were never understood. She was one of those women who count their change from a purchase by the crude assistance of ten fingers. I had made one or two very expensive experiments in attempts to make her a business woman, by giving her a limited credit with a dry goods store. Nothing can be done in this direction with a woman who believes that the difference between one hundred dollars and two hundred dollars is a small affair. In this she was Mrs. Joseph's counterpart. Mrs. Joseph put disagreeable financial facts away from her, with a wave of her well-shaped hand, saying, "Don't bother me about them; what do I know about such things?" Muriel, consequently, was of little or no help to me in my financial crisis. Some men habitually tell their money matters to their wives, and get sound advice and much comfort. I never did. Muriel knew, of course, that I was in difficulties, but she was not much disturbed. She believed in luck and felt that everything would come out all right in the end. She was a fatalist where money was concerned, and had implicit faith in my destiny.

Sir John's office was like himself—cold, cheerless,

austere and old-fashioned. It was in a very old building which had once been a private house in St. James Street, now given up entirely to business. The street was narrow, dirty, ill-paved and noisy. A narrow door opening upon a narrow, steep, and dark staircase led to the offices which were above a tobacconist's shop. On a little skylight over the door were two words in plain black letters, JOHN DUFF, without explanation or embellishment; no word to say that he was a manufacturer, or what he manufactured. How such a man as John Duff ever came to accept the decoration of " Sir " is one of the mysteries of human nature.

At the top of the stairway you found yourself in what had once been a highly respectable house. The rooms were low, the windows small, and the floors well worn. Evidently no attempt had been made to make the place attractive or to disguise its bareness. Everything said as plainly as could be that the man who spent days in such a place had never dreamed that everyday things could or should be made beautiful.

Walking up the stairs, I found myself in the front room, where a long gaunt spectre stood at an old-fashioned desk, looking as if he had stood there for at least one hundred years. The spectre was the guardian of Sir John's privacy. He is now dead and is no doubt a ghost, which can make but little difference to him. He spoke in a low voice, as if in fear of waking a very sick woman. He glided towards me as I stood at the rail between him and me, and whispered, " Good-morning, Mr. Wesblock. You have an engagement with Sir John."

I bade the spectre " Good-morning," and said that I was expected by Sir John.

Thereupon, with a murmured acquiescence, he disappeared into an adjoining room. Presently he returned as he had gone, walking as if he had tender feet; and I was shown into Sir John's presence.

Sir John sat like a graven image at his pre-Victorian desk.

"Good-morning, Sir John," I said, making a failure of an attempt to be cheerful and hopeful in my tone.

"John," he said, without returning my greeting, "I have decided to help you."

"Thank you, Sir John," I said, and would have said more, but he interrupted me.

"You have your books with you. Allow me to see them."

I put my books, two in number, before him, brought my statement to his notice and sat down without being asked. Sir John perused my documents for a long time; it seemed about ten minutes. While he studied he tapped the desk with his fingers and emitted from his inwardness several short grunts, full of meaning.

"I cannot make an empty sack stand up," he said at last.

"No, Sir John, you cannot," I replied, "but you can fill an empty sack, and allow it to stand up itself."

"Umph," said Sir John, rising; "you will excuse me, John, for a few minutes," and he left the room closing the door behind him.

I sat alone in patience for the best part of fifteen minutes, at the end of which period the old gentleman returned with some money in his hand. He sat down at his desk and counted it, then pushing the bundle towards me, said: "There is the amount you require. Try and be more wise hereafter. I bid you good-morning." I took the money, which was the exact

amount showing on the wrong side of my statement, and rose to go.

"Thank you, Sir John," I said, "to-day you have saved a man," and I offered him my hand. He took it and held it while he spoke, and I was surprised to feel a kindly pressure. "Don't thank me," he said, "thank Parson Edmund. I do not know that we are wise in helping you. It were perhaps better to have let you save yourself, as every man must who will be saved. We shall see. Good-bye." And he sat down at his desk and prepared to write. I stammered something and stumbled awkwardly out of his office, after having had the longest interview I ever had with my millionaire godfather.

I am convinced that the Sir John I saw with what appeared to me cold, hard and precise ways, was not the real Sir John. The real one had a soft heart and emotions easily moved, and had merely adopted the air of coldness to protect himself. He had done it for so long that it had become at last a part of him. But he must be sorry at times for himself and for others, when he pauses to look round. He has lived the typical life of an old bachelor of large means, bullied and protected by his housekeeper, who has been with him for many years. Possibly he is in the main contented with what he has done with his life. The point of view makes all the difference; yet, considering our two human predicaments, I, John H. Wesblock, would not be Sir John Duff if I could. This brings me to say that Sir John would not have assisted me, I feel certain, had not Daddy Edmund intervened. The world points to people with money as successful men, and money becomes boastful, and arrogates to itself powers of judgment it does not possess. I have known several

millionaires and many wealthy men who were not quite millionaires, and with few exceptions, they were crudities. Not one of them had one attribute I would have been glad to possess, except perhaps perseverence and acquisitiveness. Their outlook was narrow, their mental powers were quite ordinary, and they were without charm of personality. Sir John was a common type; he lived a cold, cheerless life without the warmth of friendship or love. Hundreds of people have kind thoughts of Daddy Edmund, and when his name comes up in conversation he is mentioned with affection. I have often heard people say, "Dear old Daddy!" but I never heard a dead millionaire thus spoken of. I would rather have ten people remember me as "dear old Wesblock" than have a million remember me by the amount of money I left behind me.

I paid all my creditors, even those who would have been willing to wait; for Sir John had to scrutinise my vouchers. In consequence I was left high and dry without a cent with which to bless myself after my affairs were settled, and I was on what Sir John termed "an even keel!" A living had to be made, and as my father was no longer in a position to make situations to order for me, I was forced to do all sorts of things as they came to my hand. I became a kind of broker or financial guttersnipe, selling anything that would pay a commission, assisting in audits and filling temporary positions in various capacities. It was a hard and very precarious life, but I was free, and called no man "master." This I considered as no small advantage, for as yet I was only partly broken and had not learned to serve. As to life insurance, I would not touch it. Even when successful, I had always disliked it. I found, of course, that my gambling exploits did

not help me in securing a permanent position. I was not considered a safe man.

People whom the good world considers disreputable have a wonderfully human way of hanging together and helping each other. I noticed this phenomenon more and more in following the wrong road; and it is to be met with further down, right into the under-world. Even those who are not frankly disreputable, but wear a mask of respectability, behind which they enjoy some loved vice, like gambling, consider themselves under obligations to the hapless fraternity, and are ready with a helping hand. I had a large acquaintance among this class. Lawyers, bankers, merchants, railroad men and politicians were among them, and they were very useful to me.

There are many kinds of poverty, and several roads lead to its diminishing degrees. Some roads are short: a quick, sharp slide on a slippery surface and there you are, suddenly destitute, without means or friends. There is no fight; you simply take the toboggan slide, and are almost instantly at the bottom among the unlucky, the shiftless and the degenerate. On other roads the grade is so gentle you hardly recognise your downward progress. The road I took was one of the slow ones, where you fight every inch of the way, the struggle being so strenuous sometimes that you believe you are making progress forward, while you are in effect slipping gradually backward, down, down, into the bog, which clogs your every energy, until you don't care, and the final collapse is welcome. One day you awaken to some painful little fact, which enlightens you as to the direction you have been travelling. The weather may be cold and wet, there are several inches of slush on the sidewalks, and damp

snow is falling. You find you have only one pair of boots fit to wear, and they are very thin in the sole, and you have no rubbers. You have much walking to do to secure some paltry sum to satisfy urgent necessities. It seems to you that only a little while ago you had several pairs of boots. Now you have but one pair. There is food in the pantry and coal in the cellar. Things are not exactly desperate ; but you have only one pair of boots, no rubbers, and no money to buy them. That sets you thinking over your whole predicament, and you discover that you have gone to seed and are shabby. Your wardrobe is but the shadow of its former self; those things which are still good in it are too good, and would look ridiculous if you wore them.

Perhaps on the very day following the one on which you have had these thoughts, some well-meaning relative, who is better off than you are, sends your wife a kind note and a bundle of cast-off clothes for the children. Your patient and long-suffering wife is glad, and reads you the note, and says, "Oh, John, is that not kind of Aunt Mary?" This makes you jump; something seems to have given way inside; you feel a falling sensation in your bowels; you are touched on the raw, and as you look at your wife your eyebrows go up in the centre and your jaw falls like that of a dead man. Look out for the man who goes on the war-path after having suffered these things. He is dangerous.

CHAPTER XIV

Now comes one of the most unsavoury of all my experiences during the days that kept me struggling in the bog of poverty. I was informed one day by letter that the London Fur Dressing Company of Prince Street required the services of an accountant to prepare a statement of their affairs. I rejoiced exceedingly until I visited its place of business. The name of the company looked like big things, when printed as the heading of a good letter-sheet. " Prince Street " sounded like important business, but when I visited it I found it dirty and disreputable-looking, although business was done therein. The number given on the letter paper of the London Fur Dressing Company led me to the most ancient, dilapidated and frowsy-looking building in the street. Its side walls protruded into a dirty lane and were shored up with beams black with age and grime. No sign decorated the front of the building, and the windows were so small and dirty that one could not see within. Weird, rumbling noises showed that men were working in this place. I opened a small greasy door, which evidently rang a bell, and my nostrils were at once assailed by a most peculiar and horrible stench. A wide and filthy staircase was before me, and a gentle voice from above invited me to " come right up."

Mounting the stairs, which were slimy with ancient accumulations of dirt, I found a strange scene. A tremendous room, with a very low wooden ceiling

supported by huge rafters, was before me. The floor was littered with fur skins piled up in great heaps and lying about in apparent disorder. Some were soaking wet, others dry, hard and stiff, and each individual skin evidently gave off its own particular odour, with a result that cannot be described in words, except as an orchestra of bad smells. Some twenty men, dirty and ragged, worked at this mess in a steamy atmosphere. Some stood in large barrels and appeared to be kneeding something with their feet, stamping noiselessly and perspiring very freely; others sat at low work benches, and scraped fat and meat from the inner sides of fur skins with a large instrument that looked like a kind of plane or spokeshave. Final detail of the picture: some rough, dirty boards formed a little cupboard in a corner of the large room.

In this retreat, which was near the top of the stairs, sat a rather pleasant-looking bearded man, with large bright blue eyes. The cupboard was, in fact, the office of the London Fur Dressing Company, which required the services of an accountant. The outlook was not very promising for the accountant; but beggars cannot be choosers, and the enormous quantity of fur skins in sight, worth thousands of dollars, showed clearly that notwithstanding the vile appearance of the place, business was being done.

Having a stomach not easily turned by trifles, I stayed and entered the cupboard, and explained the reason of my presence to the blue-eyed man. He proved to be the proprietor of the concern. The books of the London Fur Dressing Company were the only clean things about the place. They had been well kept as far as writing things down was concerned, and were quite understandable, although a little involved

and irregular. A bargain was soon struck between Mr. Cramer, the blue-eyed man, and myself. That I could be bought for small money was a recommendation in the first place.

I worked for the London Fur Dressing Company for many weeks, and got so accustomed to the filth and the stench that I hardly noticed them. A statement of the affairs of the company showed a curious record of events, typical of the small businesses which are continually making vain attempts to live in the days of big things. Some poor devil is always losing his all, in some little one-horse effort to do business. The greater number of such venturers, conceived in ignorance, born in wooden stupidity, and badly nourished with money, are of few days and full of sorrow. They are not, therefore, guileless, but just as greedy, voracious and inclined to dishonesty as Big Businesses. They only lack strength and brains.

Cramer, a German, had come to Montreal, where he boarded with an Irish woman whose hardy son had accumulated a few dollars, after years of toil, by selling coal oil from door to door. He cried his wares in a fine voice, singing, "Cool ile! Cool ile!" all day long. Michael by name he was, and under the influence of the smooth tongue and the blue eyes of his mother's German boarder, he had invested one thousand dollars in starting the London Fur Dressing Company. These things had happened nearly two years before I was called in, and my services were now required by Michael, to show him how his money was doing, and why he had never drawn any profits from his investment. He still cried "Cool ile!" He was one of the "be jasus" Irish, of a locality called "The Pint," but he was a fine fellow in spite of his toughness.

The statement of affairs when complete showed small progress, not enough to tempt Michael to further investment of his hard-earned dollars. Michael did not know that he only stood towards Cramer as an ordinary creditor, and was not in law a part-owner of the London Fur Dressing Company. His indignation, when he learned this was such that if Mr. Cramer had not been more of a diplomat than he was a fist-fighter, he would have received serious injuries. The whole incident seems amusing enough now, but at the time it was stern business, and as earnest and important as if it had been carried on around the mahogany table in the carpeted and curtained board-room of a gigantic company.

The outcome was that I became a partner in the London Fur Dressing Company. I secured this valuable partnership because both Michael and Cramer wished to retain my services, and as a reward for my aiding to secure a temporary loan of three hundred dollars. On this sum it was proposed that Cramer should return to Germany and obtain from his father the necessary addition to the capital of the company. Let me close this painful experience. Cramer, no doubt, went to Germany, for I bought his passage myself, but "alas and alack, he never came back." Weeks ran into months, and when Michael and I could no longer hope for his return, we decided to wind up the Fur Dressing business. "Cool ile" Michael could depend on, and of the dressing of furs I was entirely ignorant and desired to remain so.

While in the process of getting out of the Fur Dressing business, as well as I could, my last financial adventure fell upon me. I had one more dream of wealth. It was such a vivid and beautiful dream

too; it fairly equalled some of those that had visited me in my gambling days. One day while at work in my little office, the bell over the street door rang announcing the arrival of some one. Two men soon appeared at the top of the stairway, one tall and dark, the other short and fair. I could see by the tilt of their noses that they were experiencing a new sensation in the way of odours, so concluded that they were not in the fur business. The tall one addressed me, inquiring if I were Mr. Cramer. I explained that I represented Mr. Cramer, without going into the details of his being in parts unknown, with no very certain prospect of returning.

" What can I do for you? " I asked, before inviting them to be seated on the two boxes reserved for visitors.

" Vy, you are, I guess, Mr. Vesblock, vot? " said the tall man, speaking with a German accent.

" That is my name," I replied. I did not recognise the man; but his accent was familiar.

" Yess, yess, you are Mr. Vesblock. You remember, you have some chess blayed viss me, aboudt a year ago, berhaps? "

I remembered the foreigner with whom I had played chess, at a tea room where chess fiends gathered.

" My name is Leidman," he continued. " I bring viss me Mr. Skillmore, who vould Mr. Cramer see a little aboudt a quite large idea vich he hass gott."

I asked my visitors to be seated, and explained that Mr. Cramer's return was very uncertain. I learned from them that they owned a patent, a very brilliant idea for a fire extinguisher which they desired to exchange for cash. Their scheme was a very simple and every-day one. To form a provisional company,

into which a few men put very little money, then with the aid of good names, and a convincing prospectus, float a very large company, wherein the original promotors would get a great deal of stock for very little money, the small investing public taking all the risk of the venture. In these things the original promotors always make money, whether the subsequent stock-holders do or do not. The affair looked promising to me, but I had to admit that I had no money. This information was enough for Skillmore and Leidman, and they went on their way, while I turned again to my fur skins.

Among my friends was one Walter, the dearest, softest, best-natured and most believing chap I ever knew. He was nearly as big a fool as I was in the way of having an unbounded faith in humanity and the future. He was honest and straightforward himself, and of a sympathetic nature, and gave everybody credit for having the feelings he had, and for being governed by the same motives that moved him. He was quite as incapable of making money as I was, but, being wealthy, he could afford to be foolish, while I could not. He was one of several sons who had inherited very comfortable fortunes from a diligent and business-like father. He was in business, but only as a pastime. His partners restrained him from following his natural inclination to run an eleemosynary institution under the guise of business.

I dreamed much about the Skillmore patent, and at length mentioned the matter to Walter, who was immediately interested, not so much for himself, or what money he might make in the business, as for me. A few days after I had seen Leidman and Skillmore, they reappeared for the second time. They were

evidently desperately hard up, and had not met with success in their search for money. After looking further into the matter I agreed to lay it before Walter, and when they left me I had a model of the patent, and am armful of sundry documents relative thereto.

My intentions towards my friends, acquaintances and other creditors have always been of the best and most honourable; but somehow or other I have never been able to give them anything but trouble.

Walter looked upon the patent and it seemed good to him. He was then presented to the German and Skillmore, which, of course, was the end of him. We started a factory in a small way, and the thing still seemed good to us all. Then the German began to see things large, and proposed to take out patents in every civilised country, and go to London and promote a gigantic company, to handle our idea the world over. If at this time I had listened to a still small voice I sometimes hear, I would have kept out of this thing, and held Walter back; but it looked very tempting. The fact that I had nothing to lose and everything to gain befogged my judgment, and besides, I could not know (and did not) that the matter would not turn out well for all. I only felt it, without any apparent cause.

Walter agreed to furnish the money for preliminary expenses, and after many meetings I found myself booked for London. I went in the capacity of purse-holder, accompanied by Skillmore, and a skilled mechanic, who was our demonstrator. Mr. Leidman, like the little pig in the nursery rhyme, "stayed at home."

This event happened nearly as quickly as I have written it. So sudden was it that I woke up one

morning fully expecting to partake of a meagre breakfast, and walk to my odoriferous hole of an office; but found myself in the close, but comfortable surroundings of a berth on one of the small ocean liners. It was quite true. I had jumped suddenly from poverty to comfort, for Walter had given me a most generous allowance, and a small share in the enterprise.

This was in the year Thirty-Four. Muriel and I had lived thirteen years together without having been separated. We were now part of each other, and of our little family. She was very happy about the promised change in our fortunes, but she wept at our parting. We both saw things in the future that never came true. I thought that the world was mine for several months; then I came down.

CHAPTER XV

I WOULD not describe London if I could. It has been done too often already, well and ill; and, truth to tell, I was still very young, and for the greater part of the time spent there, lived too much in a dream to be able to deal with the realities that surged around me.

My first trip across the ocean was quite uneventful. Never seasick for a single minute, I enjoyed excellent health; but this did not give me immunity from the symptoms of others. That any one fails to be seasick is to be wondered at, indeed, considering that seasickness is the first subject of conversation between passengers when they become acquainted. They speak so knowingly of the feelings, the symptoms, the effects and the causes. The clever ones prophesy who among the passenger list will be sick, and when they will be sick. Those who have been seasick talk feelingly of their experience, and go into such details that it is surprising that any one can maintain a gastric balance. A fair example of this was a conversation I overheard.

"Ever been across before?"

"No."

"Then you do not know whether you will be seasick or not?"

"No, I don't know. I am afraid I will."

"I'm always sick. It does me good."

"Does you good? Great Heavens!"

"Oh, yes, I always feel better after it is over, and I am really beastly sick."

"Really!"

"Yes, the first day we have a big swell on just watch me."

"Thanks."

"But I never miss one meal, so I always have something to come and go on."

"That's nice; you keep a kind of debit and credit account with your stomach, and the swell strikes the balance."

"Ah, ah! Very good. I think I'll go below a bit; beginning to feel queer now. Good-bye."

Such conversations are the regular stock-in-trade of some people for the first few hours on an ocean liner. If such observations are not inflicted upon you personally, you overhear them, and they do not help matters.

Our trip to Liverpool was very enjoyable, but flat and uneventful. Chess in the morning and shuffle-board in the afternoon; a nap, a book, and perhaps whist in the evening made the time pass pleasantly enough. There was no one on board who was really worth while to me, and I did not find Skillmore to my taste at close quarters. After a few weeks in London my feelings towards him reached the point of absolute dislike and suspicion. These feelings were more instinctive than founded on any important detail of his actions. I felt that he was not to be depended on. Skillmore was an Americanised Canadian, of that smart, flashy type, called clever and pushing. I cannot state that he was deliberately dishonest; but certainly the tangle into which he managed to get our business indicated carelessness, incompetence or intentional

trickery, with an end in view which was never plain to me. A thing that made me lose confidence in him was that he drank too much. He was not a drunkard, but a steady tippler, who was good for nothing unless he was more or less in drink. Wonderful things have been done by men under the influence of alcohol, but I have always had a dread of it, and am to-day afraid of drunkards.

I spent several months in London. For a few weeks we stayed at the Old Tavistock Hotel in Covent Garden, then as our stay seemed likely to run into months, we rented a furnished house. The renting of the house in Bayswater was brought about by a chap for whom I formed a great liking on first sight. I met him through Skillmore, who had been his schoolmate in Toronto. His name was Jarman, and he was to me a new and charming type. He lived on his wits by doing apparently what he liked, when he liked, writing magazine articles, plays, theatrical news and criticisms, acting sometimes for a few weeks, and doing various other things in a free " devil-may-care " and brilliant manner which seemed to me a wonderful feat for a young man to perform in hard and tough old London town. He lived a precarious Bohemian existence amongst the most fascinating people I had ever met—singers, actors, writers, painters and newspaper men who had not yet arrived but were in the making. Jarman was a drinker, but of a type different from Skillmore, who never went under the table. I was always sorry to see Jarman drunk, but in him it did not seem so very horrible. He could get drunk in such distinguished style, and was always witty and cheerful, and when it was over that was the end of it. With Skillmore it was different. He was surly, morose, and heavy. He seemed to be

always brooding or scheming; I never could feel that I knew the man.

The renting of the furnished house in Kildare Gardens, Bayswater, near Whiteley's stores, was Jarman's brilliant suggestion, and we four—Skillmore, the mechanic, Jarman and myself—lived in great comfort for very little money, as compared with expenses at an hotel. This American quartette, I am afraid, gave one house in London a reputation which may yet hang as a cloud about the highly respectable neighbourhood of Kildare Gardens. Our house was referred to as "where the Indians live." What Jarman considered entertaining in a quiet way was not looked upon by the neighbours as quiet, and some even went so far as to doubt our sanity and respectability. Jarman was on all such occasions master of ceremonies, and without him my stay in London would have been a dull affair. He knew London thoroughly —bad, good, and indifferent. His list of acquaintances, who called him Bill, included every class of society from the aristocrat to the costermonger. Poor, merry, care-free, generous and loving, Bill Jarman died of pneumonia a year after I returned home.

While things were going pleasantly enough as to our housekeeping and our entertainment, our business did not seem to me to make such progress as it should. Skillmore was very non-committal and uncommunicative. I could never draw any details from him, and he never explained the steps he was taking in the business that brought us to London. Big people in whose hands he pretended to be were by his account always on the Continent or ill, and my cross-examinations of him were met with general statements and obvious evasions. This made me uneasy, and after

some weeks of worry I wrote Walter disclosing my feelings in the matter, advising him to put a limit on his expenditure, and to call upon Skillmore to make a specific statement of the condition of our affairs. My letter alarmed Walter, and he immediately took my advice and put a stop order on funds. I was perhaps hasty in conclusions, and, not being a man of business but simply an accountant, should not have been so readily alarmed at the spending of time and money. But I felt that we could not remain indefinitely in London spending Walter's money without being able to show good cause. Cause I could not show, unless Skillmore could produce some evidence of progress in the promotion of our patent. As Skillmore failed to satisfy me, I booked my return passage, giving him a week's notice of my intention and demanding all correspondence and documents, which would show what had so far been done. The stand I took enraged Skillmore, who possibly was quite honest in his intentions. He handed me a large folio of papers, and declared his responsibility in the matter at an end. As he refused to go with me to a solicitor and explain his position, I went alone, placing the portfolio in the hands of an eminent lawyer, who shortly gave me a written opinion of the condition of our business. This report showed a rather uncertain condition of affairs. Skillmore had, through carelessness or design, so tied us up with patents pending and options that we could do nothing but sit in patience and await developments. We were in the hands of a promoter who later became very well-known indeed, to the cost of a great many, Walter among the rest.

Returning to Montreal with the best face I could put upon the matter, I made a brave pretence of seeing

bright things in the future. In my heart I knew, however, that I was mixed up with another failure; and so it turned out. I resolved never again to introduce friends to financial adventures.

My return home discovered the fact that the German, Leidman, had practically lived on Walter during the whole five months of my absence, and had every intention of continuing to live on him till our company matured and bore fruit. This last, however, I was able to prevent. Walter took his loss like a philosopher; he did not swear, weep, or blame me or fortune. He had plenty of money, and the loss of a few thousand dollars put him to no real inconvenience; but I felt the burden of my responsibility keenly, especially as through me and Leidman he became known as a man with money, easily exploited.

CHAPTER XVI

My trip abroad had a very widening influence upon me, and I saw many things in a different light from that in which they had appeared to me before my visit to London. Muriel and our children looked different to me, and my duty to render a strict account of my life to them came home to me. I realised that I did not belong to myself. Hitherto I had been living by my feelings and instincts, as most people do, like a chip upon a stream, driven hither and thither by current, counter-current, and by every breeze. I perceived that I was not a chip, but a ship, my brains in control of the rudder. These ideas came late to me, and I made but poor use of them; but I tried.

I was now in as much need of the immediate dollar as I had ever been, and I returned to my regular beat on St. James Street, to do such work as offered, from a deal in real estate, down to gathering in an insignificant commission on a small fire policy. I loathed the life; but I had to provide. I discovered that I could scribble things that newspapers and magazines would pay for. The first five-dollar bill I received for this work, I felt to be the biggest and cleanest money I had ever earned. While struggling thus once more with necessity, I gave much thought to the future. A new light on things, as it seemed, had come to me; had I been religiously inclined, it would have led me to believe I was experiencing a change of heart, being born again, or undergoing some such mysterious

process, as that through which certain kinds of people go. But this was not so. I was learning to think; and to take myself more seriously. I had children growing up, to whom I owed more than I could ever pay. I had accomplished nothing and arrived nowhere. In this condition of mind I bethought me of Muriel's cousin Rex. Rex was a lawyer and a politician high up in the councils of a political party. He was the cunning and wise counsellor, and the "right bower" of a Minister of the Crown. Rex's father had been a plain, hard-working man. In a little unpretentious place he had lived by making shirts to order. An artist in shirts, he knew his work and loved it, and he made good shirts. He raised Rex, his first-born, and educated him and several other children on shirts, and died poor.

Rex was different. He was ambitious. He cared nothing for using his hands, and he despised shirt-making. He never made anything but peace or trouble, whichever paid the better, for he was a lawyer and a schemer. He became a clever politician, able and resourceful, and some day he will be a millionaire, as he deserves—for having had the perspicacity to observe that it does not pay to make useful things with one's hands.

Withal, I doubt if he has had the satisfaction out of life that his father got out of making shirts.

Through Rex I became a political worker for the Minister to whom he was adviser. As it will be necessary to speak of several Ministers of the Crown, who must be nameless, I will call this Minister " One." An election was about to fall upon the country with all the disorganising influences of a great storm. The wind of political excitement was just beginning to blow

in fitful gusts, now from one direction, now from another, and the powers of the two great parties were beginning to line up and count heads. Workers of all kinds were wanted—writers, good liars, common touts, organisers, poseurs, talkers, walkers and mockers. For Minister One I checked lists of people, made calls at offices, talked to working men at noon hour, and even made my way into private houses in the evenings, and did many other things as I was bid, and learned all the mysteries of what is known as " the dirty work " of an election. I was well paid; but I did not work for pay alone. I was serving my apprenticeship in the way Rex thought necessary, before I could be made a Civil servant.

During the weeks I spent at this work I had beautiful dreams of a near future, when I would assume the cowl and retire from the world into the seclusion of the Civil Service, where I would enjoy peace and leisure, with time to think, study, and write for magazines, teach music and follow my bent. I had very hazy ideas regarding the Civil Service. I thought, as many think, that it was a collection of highly fortunate and cultivated gentlemen, who enjoyed ridiculous salaries for services of a very light kind; that being a Civil servant gave one a social standing of some importance, next, at least, to that of gentlemen of the black robe and collar buttoned behind. I was to live and discover how exceedingly foolish were these ideas.

The election being over, to the satisfaction of one party and the discomfiture of another, Minister One being re-established in his position of Minister of Ways and Means, where he had been before the election, I called upon him; my movements, of course, being advised by Rex. Calling on a Minister is by no means

a simple process. Minister One had several offices in several cities, two of them being in Montreal—one in the post office, the other in the offices of a newspaper. He was never anywhere for a long time, and was always busy and surrounded by watchful bodyguards and lieutenants, who protected him from the protesting, begging and demanding mob. However, I camped upon his trail and finally tracked him to his lair.

Minister One was a little nervous man of wonderful energy, with unbounded faith in himself and his destiny. He was very amusing in some of his aspects, but the comical side of his character was a side he never recognised in himself. He received me as kindly and condescendingly as he could—he being only five foot seven and a Minister of the Crown; and I being six foot and one of his jackals, who knew that his election had not been made with prayers. Compliments being exchanged, I came at once to the point.

" Mr. Minister," I said, " I would exceedingly like a Government position."

" What? " exclaimed One, pretending to be surprised. " Government position at your age? In the name of high Heaven, why? " And he took a turn about the room with his head thrown forward on his chest, and his hands clasped behind his back.

" Because," I replied, " I have had enough; I want peace and a reliable source of income."

" Peace! ha, ha! " said One laughing. " You want peace while still young and able to fight? What is the use of peace? Give *me* war."

" Every one to his taste," I said; " war for you, peace for me. War I know something about. I have fought a bitter fight, and am tired. War I give you, but peace is a thing I have yet to experience. I

would like to taste it, and so I want a Government position."

" Oh, very well," said One, and he waved his arms in disgust. He waved his arms about his head in everything. " To go into the Civil Service is not to achieve peace, it is to die. Go to Rex and tell him I say you are to be placed."

" I come from Rex to ask you to place me," I said.

" Well, go back to him and say that it is all right, and I will see him about it. Good-morning, good-bye, and good luck," he said, in a tone which indicated that he would have been delighted to add, " go to hell," or something like it.

I went immediately to Rex, who pitied me as one of the many kinds of jackasses who fail to take advantage of the great opportunities offering to ride on the other fellow's back. I gave him Minister One's message, and said things to him relative to my wishes, hopes, desires and condition. He looked at me sorrowfully.

I was a large, bare-faced man with long hair; neither ordinary or commonplace to look upon. To wear my hair a little long is my taste and Muriel's. Rex wore his hair cropped like a pork butcher and the beard upon his face trimmed to a pattern. "Chacun à son gout." He was like a great many other people in thinking that matters of taste are matters of fact, and that style and gait not of this or that type must necessarily be bad taste.

" John," he said, " get your hair cut, and you shall have the position you desire."

" Consider it cut," I said. " If thy hair offend thy protector, cut if off; it will grow again." And we both laughed.

We were both mere boys under forty. It flattered

him to be referred to as my protector. Not only in the matter of hair did we disagree. We looked with different eyes on all subjects; yet we were friends, and I had his sympathy and help, which he gave me as if I were his brother.

I had what used to be considered as claims upon a position in the Civil Service, to wit:

Item: I had worked for the Minister of Ways and Means.

Item: I was the only Red in a Blue family, the little leaven, which might in time leaven the whole.

Item: My wife was related to a man who had arrived politically.

Item: My father-in-law had been a big gun, and an intimate friend of Sir ——, who had been a Prime Minister.

These were considered good and sufficient claims, and counted very high in the game. We do still count them, but not so highly as in the year Thirty-Six.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN I came into the Service, one got in on a Minister's " say so." That was all that was necessary. If your Minister intended you to get in, you got in quickly, without heart-breaking waiting or examinations that did not examine. A Minister's " say so " was secured if you could get close enough to him to enable you to point your gun at his head and whisper in his ear in a threatening, stagey voice that the gun was loaded with a great charge of influence, family connections, friends, contractors, manufacturers, etc. It really mattered very little whether the gun was actually loaded or not, for all politicians are most notoriously nervous, and take for granted that every gun they see is loaded. It is a safe way. Politicians forget easily, so sometimes the gun had to be produced several times to bring about fulfilment of the promise; but with a gun, or something that looked like a gun, a determined air, and nerve, you could do a great deal.

During these manœuvres I had not mentioned the matter of a Civil Service position to Muriel or my family. When it was as good as settled, I told my father. He said " What? " so loudly that the windows rattled. He said other things not necessary to mention. My mother's father had been a Civil servant, and my decision to follow the same life seemed to my father a horrible case of reversion. Muriel was not enthusiastic about the prospective change; but she was resigned to her fate. " I suppose it is the

best thing," she said and shrugged her shoulders. She had no great confidence in my judgment, but she had great faith in my luck.

Not many weeks elapsed between my interview with Minister One and my instalment in the service of the Queen. This, of course, was due to Rex, who was keeper of the Minister's memory. One day Rex sent for me, and I was presented to Mr. Gobble, the Deputy Minister of Ways and Means, and received the very pleasing information that I was to report for duty at Ottawa immediately. Details were discussed. I was a little disappointed to learn that the promise of my Minister, of a position of fifteen hundred dollars per annum, had to be modified. As I was over thirty-five, I could not enter on the permanent staff or Civil Service List, but had to enter as an extra clerk, at the regular rate in such cases, namely, three dollars per day. I was assured, however, by Minister One, his Deputy and Rex, that very soon after I was placed they would see to it that I was raised to the promised sum. I believed every word they said.

Fifteen hundred a year, coming in regularly and systematically, whether business was good or bad, looked bigger than a house to me at the time, and was magnified many times in my eyes before I really got it. I had often lived on more money, but more often had lived on less, and I saw myself writing for magazines and papers, teaching music, living in peace and comfort, and bringing up my children. It was a very modest ambition.

On Monday, the fourteenth day of January, in the year Thirty-Seven, I arrived in Ottawa. When I walked into the Government building the policeman on the door touched his hat to my English clothes,

which were still good. I presented myself at the green baize door of Mr. Gobble's office, and was presently shown in by a messenger, who had first taken in my card. Mr. Gobble had already forgotten me, so shook hands heartily as if he were pleased to see me again and invited me to sit down. " Well, Mr. Wesblock, what now? " he said, waiting for the cue which would show him who the deuce I was.

" I am Three-Dollar-a-Day-Wesblock," I said; " told to report here to-day, and here I am."

Light broke upon Mr. Gobble and he laughed loudly at a point I did not see, but I joined his laugh.

" You will go into the office of Mercenary Dispensations," said Gobble. " You will like the Chief Dispenser, Mr. Kingdom. I will present you to him now, if you will come with me." He rose and I followed him to Mr. Kingdom's office. It was a small place which had not been thoroughly cleaned for a long time. Everything in the room was old-fashioned and dingy. A litter of papers was strewn in every direction; papers were piled on a little counter that stood before the door, on the chairs in bundles, on the floor in a corner, and in huge heterogeneous stacks upon an ancient desk. Before this object sat a sad-eyed, prematurely decayed and old-fashioned man, who rose as we entered. " Mr. Kingdom," said the Deputy, " this is Mr. Wesblock, your newly appointed clerk."

" Ah! " sighed Mr. Kingdom, and he busied himself clearing a chair for me to sit upon. " Sit down, Mr. Wesblock," and he smiled upon me sadly.

" I will leave Mr. Wesblock with you," said the Deputy to Mr. Kingdom, and to me, " Good-morning, Mr. Wesblock," and he left the room.

Mr. Kingdom mildly and tentatively cross-examined

me, and I gave a short account of myself. His manner said nearly as plainly as words, "God knows what I am going to do with you."

I have excellent sight, and while we talked I noted a piece of paper before Mr. Kingdom upon which was type-written a long column of figures. Some one had evidently just added this column and the total was written in blue pencil on a pad before me. These little things were of no particular interest to me, but I idly noted them for want of better occupation.

"Just add this column for me, Mr. Wesblock," said Mr. Kingdom, and he pushed towards me the paper I had noticed. Whether he thought I looked as if I could not do simple addition, or not, I do not know. Carefully noting the total I had already observed in blue pencil, which was still nearly under my nose, I gave him an exhibition of lightning addition, which seemed to enthuse him to mild satisfaction. We were each satisfied with ourselves; he, that he had a clerk who could read, write, and add; I, that I had a chief with whom any one could get along without half trying, and I intended to try.

"I will now take you to Father Steve," said Mr. Kingdom, "whom you will assist." We went into the adjoining room, which was very much like Mr. Kingdom's, with the exception that it was inhabited by two ancients instead of one.

I was presented to Father Steve and Mr. Ernest, the two ancients. Father Steve was a little old man with white whiskers. He wore spectacles far down on his nose, and glared at me with two fiery eyes, as if he were indignant at some affront I had put upon him. Ernest was a younger man, handsome, intelligent looking, but seedy. I judged by the expectant smile

on Ernest's face that Father Steve was in some way amusing him at my expense. Mr. Kingdom left the room, and Father Steve walked coolly over to me, where I stood in the middle of the room near a high desk. He walked around me very much as one dog walks around another before the fight begins. Then he posted himself before me, and looking into my face most impertinently said, "What the devil are you going to do here?" I saw now that the old buffer was a little bit of all right, and that he was acting for his pal Ernest. "I am going to assist you, Mr. Steve," I said.

"Assist me?" he growled. "Oh hell! Assist me! Now look here, Blockhead, I do not intend to be assisted, and I'll be damned if I'll be assisted. I am only a young chap of seventy years of age. I've been here for thirty years at three dollars a day, and I don't need assistance." I believe the old chap would have worked himself into an actual rage in a minute.

"Now look here, Pa," I said, placing my hand on his shoulder, much to his surprise, "I am going to assist you or not, just as you say, but first of all let us be friends, and I fancy we can have a bit of fun together."

"What did you call me, sir?" he asked, pretending indignation.

"I called you 'Pa,'" I said.

"Damned familiarity," he exclaimed.

Ernest was now laughing heartily and the old man joined him with me.

"What did you call me?" I asked in pretended anger.

"'Blockhead,'" said the old man, "and good enough for you, damn you." And from that day till his death we were "Pa" and "Blockhead" to each other, and

many were the pranks we played on others. The merry old soul died at seventy-six.

I enjoyed Pa very much, but my first glimpse of the Civil Service at close quarters did not arouse any particular enthusiasm within me. I looked upon a shabby world. I was rather a smart and well-kept looking person, and I felt out of place among the dingy, old, shabby-looking offices, which were badly ventilated and badly lighted, inhabited by a dingy, slipshod looking lot of nondescript humanity, not the kind of men I expected to be associated with at all. I found all sorts and conditions of men of just the same average of decency, intelligence and sobriety as are to be met with outside the service, no better and no worse. I did not find the pampered, well-fed, well-groomed and cultured lot of semi-idle gentlemen who are popularly supposed to exist on Civil Service salaries.

I had arrived in the Kingdom of the Automaton. It was at the end of the Political Era, when some pretence was being made to eliminate that kind of Pull which enabled a Minister, or any one who was politically strong, to dump any kind of humanity into the Civil Service, just because it served his personal ends. We had a clerk in the Department of Ways and Means who had been a waiter in an hotel, and was appointed in reward for services rendered a Minister during his numerous sprees. We had other persons just as objectionable, brought in for reasons just as edifying.

CHAPTER XVIII

For a few days after my introduction to the Service, I felt like a new boy in school. I was not welcome, it was clear, and Mr. Kingdom seemed to consider me rather an addition to his burdens than a useful member of his staff. I smiled upon every one who came within smiling distance. It is a safe and non-committal act, and one I did well, and sometimes with happy results. My smile was not the stereotyped smile of the *première danseuse*, which means nothing, but a wide, genial, ingratiating article, which looked as if it reached down my back and pervaded my whole body. Some dogs wag their tails with such hearty enthusiasm that they appear to wag their whole body. Of such kind was my smile, and I made friends thereby.

I made my first requisition after a few days, Pa assisting. It covered quite a list of things, a desk, ink, bottles, pads, pens, and paper; a whisk, a brush and comb, and various other sundries, which are not procurable now. "A hair brush!" said the Deputy to Mr. Kingdom, when my requisition was put before him, "Wesblock has no hair." "Pardon," said Mr. Kingdom, "he has nearly all the hair in the office." So the hair brush was not struck off.

The Political Era was followed by the Soap-and-Candles Era, the Era of small things and small men, when men who should have been large, and wide-minded were busy fussing over such trivial details as

soap, lead pencils, rubber bands, sealing-wax, hours of attendance and book signing. These things, and the want of power to deal with the broad and vital questions concerned, help to prevent the Civil Service from taking its proper place in the esteem and respect of the country. But I preach, which is not a function of an Automaton.

I soon discovered, in various holes and corners of the service, many of my old college chums and acquaintances, who had evidently come to the same pass as myself. I picked them up in every Department and every class, and asked myself the question: " Why does M'Gill turn out so many Civil servants? " Pa answered the question at once. " Don't you see," he said, " that the percentage of fools is pretty much the same in all paths of life, and that passing a Jackass through a certain process in a university, and tagging him with a degree, does not make him less a Jackass. In truth an educated Jackass is a more hopeless fool than the common or garden variety, because he believes that his degree makes him of the aristocracy of intellect. The only advantage a Jackass gets by having a college degree is that he can enter the Civil Service and no questions asked. His degree would not pass him unquestioned into any other employment."

I very soon concluded that the Civil Service involved, if you took it seriously, a form of disease which saps your self-esteem and kills out your originality.

After I had been some months with Mr. Kingdom and a friendly feeling had been established between us, he said to me one day, " Wesblock, I rather like you personally, but you will never make a good Civil servant."

" Why not? " I asked.

" Because you are not hum-drum enough," he replied.

" Thank God for that! " said I, and Kingdom smiled.

He was certainly the most hum-drum person I had ever met. I really believe he loved the Service. Mild spoken, good tempered, patient, just, and honest—such was the character of the man—usually he was solemn as a funeral, but one thing saved him happily from being quite wooden and monotonous. He could see a joke and grin.

During my first three months in the office of Mercenary Dispensations, I had to perform the very pretty financial feat of keeping a family in Montreal and myself in Ottawa, on nothing at all. This because I had to pass the Treasury Board, or the Treasury Board had to pass me, or some equally important formality had to be gone through. Such were the conditions to be satisfied before I could be listed, classified and qualified to receive those large, pleasant pieces of paper, which ask the Bank of Montreal to please pay to the order of John H. Wesblock, etc., etc. Thus a great deal of the time of the Service is taken up in waiting for something to happen which has actually taken place. I was to learn later that a piece of work, which might take two hours in actual performance, would have its intended effect in only five or even ten days or a month. After three months spent in patience and a boarding-house, I received my first Government cheque, for services at the rate of three dollars per day, Sundays included. I could have laid bricks or made coffins and been paid better. Fortunately for my little three dollars per day, the cost of living had not then reached the serious point it attained later. Gambling with real estate lots as counters had

not brought house rent to its present abnormal figure. A house fit to live in was then procurable at twenty dollars per month. Still, with four children and a wife to feed, clothe, and shelter, my way was not easy.

Minister One's secretary was Mr. Jellyman, a good fellow and a clever one, whom I had known in Montreal as a clerk to the most notorious crook amongst the city's lawyers. Being private secretary to One was a heart-breaking position, and it finished poor Jellyman, both morally and physically. One had also a kind of under or second secretary, a very splendid young widow, who did not make things any easier for Jellyman. When I found Jellyman in Ottawa he had lost his easy laugh and his keen appreciation of a jest; he was now generally solemn and sour.

Nearly everybody feared One. He was a martinet, and considered himself a power in the land. Being a non-smoker himself, he hated smoking, and gave forth his dictum that there should be no smoking in any office in his Department. He succeeded in stopping smoking about as well as he succeeded in larger things, which is saying little. This fussy, little, self-important man of the hour appeared one morning in an office of one of the rented public buildings, and found a rough-looking person smoking a pipe in the hall.

"Put out that pipe," screamed the excitable Minister.

The smoking person took a couple of extra strong draws and looked Mr. Minister over. "What for?" he quietly inquired.

"Because I say so," bawled the Minister stamping his foot in rage.

"Then I will not," said the person.

" Oh, ho! you will not? Do you know who I am?" said One.

" I do not," said the smoker, coolly smoking.

" I am the Minister of Ways and Means, and you are discharged."

" Is that so?" said the smoker, evidently not much impressed. " Do you know who I am?"

" No, I do not know," said the Minister.

" Well, I'll tell ye," said the person, amidst clouds of smoke, " I am the janitor of this buildin'; an' I'm not discharged, for I am not in yer Department, do ye mind me?"

This closed the debate, and One made a quick exit in high dudgeon. One was, to say the least, peculiar, erratic, and high strung. It was nothing uncommon for him to gallop into his den, with coat-tails flying, and talk volubly about three subjects at once, expecting Jellyman to fully comprehend all his intentions before he galloped out again, after a stay of about a minute and a half.

" You will meet me in Montreal. We leave for Quebec to-night," he said to Jellyman on one occasion, as he flew out of his office on his tempestuous way. He always appeared and disappeared in a cloud of dust, arms waving and silk hat bobbing at a furious rate.

Jellyman followed instructions; went to Montreal and booked passage for himself and the Minister on the Quebec boat, which left at seven in the evening. The hour for departure arrived, but not the busy Minister. Jellyman could not locate him. A Minister of the Crown being a large and very important person in the eyes of the navigation company, the boat was held for nearly ten minutes. The captain decided

that he could wait no longer, and the boat was just about to pull out, when a cab appeared driven at a hand-gallop. Within the cab the silk hat of One could be seen gleaming brightly, so the gang plank was again put out, and the little jumping-jack joined Jellyman on the lower deck. Again the boat started and was gently moving off, when with a wild shriek the Minister jumped upon the wharf, and drove off again as quickly as he had come, leaving his secretary to proceed to Quebec. Jellyman, on this occasion, wasted nearly two days hunting the little man, without finding him, and on his return to Ottawa found his desk littered with piles of telegrams, telephone calls and various miscellaneous documents.

When I received my first cheque I went immediately to Rex, who was now a senator and frequently in Ottawa. I explained to him that as there was no appearance of my appointment being made at fifteen hundred per annum as promised, it hardly appeared worth while to move my wife, family and household gods from Montreal to Ottawa, for a matter of three dollars per day, when I could easily make as much upon the street. In spite of his money, his senatorship, his whiskers and his dislike of long hair, Rex was good enough to sympathise with me, and we went at once to the office of Minister One. We were lucky that day and caught him first try. Rex brought to his notice his promise of a position at fifteen hundred for Mr. Wesblock.

"Wesblock must move now," said he; "but he can only do so on the assurance that the fifteen hundred is in sight."

The Minister was in his shirt sleeves, and was pacing the floor like a caged wolf.

" Let him move," he said, " certainly move. I said I would do it, and of course it will be done."

Once more I believed.

Rex was kindness itself. He financed me to the extent of several hundred dollars to enable me to move. Moving was a heartbreaking job, and it was many weeks before we were settled, but I bore the trial and worry of it cheerfully, for I was full of hope and faith. I mended furniture, laid carpets, put up curtains, and did all the many things a moving implies, working nightly with a glad heart.

One never carried out his promise to me. In justice to him it must be said that he could not. He had always been unpopular with certain members of the Cabinet, and as time went on his unpopularity steadily increased, mostly through his own fault. The consequence was he was checked or mated in every move he attempted; and my little affair, it need hardly be said, was of no great account to the baited Minister. He found his enemies in the Opposition comparatively harmless, but his enemies in his own party were deadly.

One was a brilliant little man, of wonderful energy and resource, but he carried too much sail for his beam. A remark he once made, about a clever but erratic friend, very well applied to himself. He said: " C'est un fou intelligent."

CHAPTER XIX

A LITTLE while after we had moved and were settled, and I had seen enough of the Civil Service to make me thoughtful and doubtful as to the wisdom of my move, a little lady came in to my office and was presented to me by Pa Steve as Miss Vay. Miss Vay was one of the clerks in our branch, and was noticeable for her diminutive size, and also as being an exception to the majority of women clerks, who were not worth their salt as office assistants, however charming some of them might appear in other capacities. The request she came to make of me was novel and unexpected. " Mr. Wesblock," she said, " I have been asked to call upon you by the ladies of the Historical Society."

" I am flattered," I said; " do the ladies desire me to deliver a lecture, or are you assisting Pa to play some prank upon me? "

" Neither," she replied; " we are producing an evening of historical tableaux, among which will be pictures of several of the incidents of the life of Christopher Columbus."

" Quite so," I said, " and you want me to pull up the curtain, or be an Indian or something."

" Yes," she answered, " we want you to pose as Columbus."

" Great Scott! " I exclaimed, " I am more than flattered, but I hardly think I am suited for Columbus, who, my memory tells me, was a highly dignified-

looking party. If there is one thing I am quite short of it is dignity."

" It is your face and figure we want, not your other attributes," said little Miss Vay.

This would never have happened if I had been cropped like a bar-tender. My hair did it.

" This is very sudden, Miss Vay," I said laughingly. " I am yours, with the proviso that the matter passes headquarters—Mrs. Wesblock—if she says I may, I am your Columbus, your Christopher, your Discoverer, your adventurer. "

Pa and Ernest laughed, which drove little Miss Vay away. The idea pleased Muriel very much, especially as the show was to be given before His Excellency, Her Excellency, and the ladies and gentlemen of Government House. This event cracked the Ottawa ice. A few days after Miss Vay's visit, two lady officers of the Historical Society called upon Muriel, and through Columbus we made many good, kind friends, who wore well for years.

Rehearsals were commenced at once, ancient pictures looked up and costumes made, which kept us busy for several weeks. The tableaux were perhaps instructive, and were certainly very amusing. A certain long-winded gentleman, who had been chosen to act as showman, not being advised that the holding of a pose for more than a minute is a very difficult feat, held forth at such length that the characters wobbled. Christopher Columbus asked to have the gentleman's facial orifice closed, and the audience tittered. Except for this episode the performance was a grave, dignified, and solemn social event, and a great success. Columbus was shown as he appeared before the Queen of Spain and her court, and in the act

of giving thanks for his safe arrival on the continent of America. During the latter scene he had to draw the curtains together with his sword. Amateur effort has moved to a higher plane since those days.

I very easily procured all the music pupils I could handle during my leisure, and this, with an occasional odd job at posting some firm's books at night, or auditing, materially assisted my modest salary.

Minister One was forced to resign during my second year as a Civil servant. His downfall caused no great regret in his Department, which was quite accustomed to the sudden appearance and disappearance of Ministers. He called us all to his office before he retired, and made us a neat little speech, bidding us farewell, after which we passed before him and shook hands with him. One item of his speech is, perhaps, worthy of note. "I warn you, my friends," he said, "against jealousy and envy. These are the besetting sins of my countrymen." He was a Frenchman, and there were many in his audience who resented this remark.

My second Minister, whom I will call "Two," was one of the curious specimens who get thrown up on top in the political turmoil. No one, except politicians, had ever heard of him before he became Minister of Ways and Means; yet he had represented his constituency for many years, and had never been beaten. He was not brilliant, he was not brainy, but he had a dogged patience and persistence, and every one for miles surrounding his home could drink with him and call him Bill. He had a highly-developed capacity for strong drink, and enjoyed having Tom, Dick, and Harry slap him familiarly upon the back and call him Bill. He was a large, heavy, slow person, of few words

and no action to speak of. Our Department was neither better or worse off for his reign, which was a short one. His internal economy, which had long resisted the whisky process, gave out shortly after he became a Cabinet Minister. Consequently we saw very little of him, as he was laid up with a burnt-out constitution during nearly the whole time he held office. His must have been the oft-referred-to " iron constitution," for he had used whisky as a daily beverage for over thirty years before he succumbed. He died, and hundreds of men said, " Poor Bill." He was not married, and was not mourned by women.

During Two's time, Deputy Gobble resigned without public statement of cause, and was replaced by Mr. Fisher, a very energetic person, who gave the Department a brilliant imitation of a new broom. I have very kindly feelings towards Fisher, for the reason that he was the one man who recognised the justice of my claim to have One's promise to me carried out. Two could not be bullied or coaxed even into considering the merits of the matter. When it was brought to his notice, he simply grunted and put it away from him. When a certain titled lady, wife of a Governor-General, complained to him that his Department had not attended to some extensive repairs she had asked to have made at Rideau Hall, he grunted and said to her, " *My good woman*, I really cannot do what you ask." So what could I expect. Intimate friends of Her Excellency afterwards called her " my good woman," which was considered a perfectly ripping joke in those days

CHAPTER XX

WHEN I left Montreal for Ottawa and the Civil Service, I was forced to leave a few unpaid bills behind me. I owed no serious amount of money, but some of my creditors immediately attacked me like hungry wolves, as soon as they discovered that I was a Government clerk. This did not add to my comfort, nor assist me in a vain effort to make the two short ends of three dollars per day meet. If it had not been that I taught music, did various odd jobs of auditing, accounting and scribbling for newspapers, I would have gone to jail several times; but as it was, I went only once, but I made frequent trips to the Court House, where I stood before a judge to give evidence against myself, and where I was examined as to my private affairs, the number of my family and so on, which was a novel experience for me. I thought I had suffered all things of this nature, but learned that I had not. The Court House, or that particular section of it to which the impecunious are summoned, had its amusing side. I was never there alone, and if I was forced to lay bare my private and financial affairs, I had the satisfaction of hearing similar serio-comic particulars, pertaining to the lives of other Civil servants.

Our civilisation is peculiar, in that it worships morality without being moral, praises honesty and practices dishonesty, honours justice and tolerates injustice, and makes a pretence of believing a great many things that it finds impracticable, inexpedient

and inconvenient to follow. Appearance is the only thing that counts, and the most successful hypocrite is the greatest man among us. It is the opinions you express that mark you, not the actions of your life, provided you care for appearances. We are worshippers of form. Good form is everything; the substance is nothing. This is well exemplified in the matter of imprisonment for debt. Civilisation boasts that imprisonment for debt has been abolished long ago, and most of us really believe it, whereas the number of people who suffer imprisonment for this cause is enormous. It is quite true that it is not called imprisonment for debt. The silly farce of sending you to jail for "contempt of court" is gone through, but if you pay your debt, you are liberated at once, and if not, down you go to the common jail, where you are treated very much as if you had stolen chickens or killed a parson.

The tale of my jail experience is very amusing and instructive. It is not generally known that you may go to jail for debt, for the very plain reason that but few men who have had practical experience are willing to admit it. John H. Wesblock is different; he will admit it, and tell you here in cold print that he went to jail for debt in the City of Ottawa, in the year of his time, Forty. It happened that I was worried and excited, and got stubborn and wicked, under the persistent importunities of one particular creditor. He, as ill luck would have it, had an especially exasperating lawyer, who roused such fight as remained in me. The amount involved in the matter was small, and all I was called upon to do to keep out of trouble was to pay into court three dollars a month. I had many calls upon my small means, all paltry

sums, but together they made me poor indeed. In a fit of ugliness I balked and decided to let my over-anxious creditor do his worst. The consequence was that as I walked officeward one rainy morning in the Fall, accompanied by my son, I was accosted by a seedy-looking individual, whc demanded to be informed if I were John H. Wesblock. I admitted my name. "Well then," said the party of the first part, "you must come along o' me. I have a warrant here for your arrest. You are committed to jail for ten days."

"What for?" I asked.

"Contempt o' court," said the party, producing with dirty hands a dirty paper from a dirty pocket. "In the case of Block *versus* Wesblock."

"My feelings suddenly became a curious mixture of merriment, anger, shame and other emotions. I took the paper from the dirty man and examined it. It was a warrant or commitment or both. I laughed, but I was sick. I wanted to kill the seedy party, in the very worst way, but I just grinned a sickly yellow grin, and told him I was ready to go with him. There was nothing else to do. My little son stood by with wide-open eyes.

"What's the matter, Dad?" he asked.

"Jail, my son," I replied. "Jail for your Dad for ten days because he owes money."

"Oh, Dad, can they do that?" he asked.

"Yes, son, they can," I said.

He was a gritty kid and said nothing more, but put his hand in mine. I think he had tears in his eyes. The seedy bailiff would allow me no consideration whatever. He would not allow me to call at my office or my home, or do anything but accept his pressing invitation to the coop. We had but a short walk to

make to the jail, and my son, who was of a merry and cheerful disposition, was able to laugh at my jokes on the predicament before we arrived. At the jail I bade him good-bye, and told him to run home and break the news to his mother.

In the jail I was carefully and most thoroughly searched, and relieved of all sundries carried in my pockets, except a pocket handkerchief. I learned that if you owe money you cannot smoke. My pipe and tobacco were taken from me. After being as carefully registered and numbered as any crook, I was escorted by two guards to my cell. *Cell* is the word. It was not a room, but a cell, with heavy iron bars and lock, not different in any respect from the cell I would have been condemned to for a high crime. At my request I was permitted to have paper and lead pencil, and I wrote several necessary notes. To my chief, Mr. Kingdom, I wrote the plain facts. I said to him:

> "DEAR MR. KINGDOM,—If you have no objection, I will take some of my holidays now. I am in jail, where communications will find me for the next ten days. I would not thus suddenly deprive you of my services willingly, but the Crown cannot possibly have me in two places at the same time, and as it has acceded to the request of one of my creditors that I be incarcerated, my duties as a Civil servant must wait."

Ten days is a very long time under some circumstances. It is particularly long when spent in jail, without a bath or any of the necessities of decent life. To call what I was offered to eat "meals" would be extravagant. I never got anything fit to eat, except

what was sent me from home. I was not allowed to smoke or walk out of doors, or have company, bad, good, or indifferent. I might have walked in the jail yard, in company with the regular boarders, pick-pockets, drunks, fighters, burglars and other rips, but I declined the kind permission to take the air at the price. For ten days I had no one to speak to; even the guard would not give me more than a few words. Conversation between guards and prisoners is against the regulations, which applies to all who come to jail, innocent and guilty, criminal and debtor.

The hardness of my stinking straw mattress and pillow, and the look of the mess of morning "skilly," are impressions of which I shall never be able to rid my mind. I can easily understand that a man, who once suffers a long imprisonment, becomes distorted beyond cure for the rest of his life. For weeks after my liberation the odour of the damned place was in my nostrils.

It was many weeks before I recovered my standing of decency and respectability, even in the eyes of my wife. Mr. Kingdom never referred to my holidays till months had passed.

An equally amusing but more pleasant episode of my days of debt, and one which illustrates the law in another light, was a judgment given by a good and upright judge, who is now no more. This happened in the same Court that condemned me to ten days in jail. A certain voracious creditor pursued me and piled up costs against me, till I came on summons before Judge Good to admit the debt and the bill of costs, which was now more than the debt. Mr. Judge was very kind. He questioned me minutely relative to my affairs, but in a pleasant and courteous manner.

Finally he asked me: "How long have you been in the Civil Service?"

"Four years," I answered.

"Do you owe any money in Ottawa?" he asked.

"No, sir," I replied.

Then a wonderful thing happened. The Judge delivered himself of judgment in the case in the following words:

> "The Court is of the opinion that a man who has succeeded in keeping a wife and family in Ottawa, for four years, on three dollars a day, and made no new debts in that time, should not be harassed by old debts. Discharged!"

If the kind judge had been less hasty he would have had an offer from me of two dollars per month, in settlement of the case, but the word "Discharged!" cancelled the whole thing, debt and costs. On hearing the judgment, the lawyer who was putting me through gaped in astonishment and sat down suddenly, while the other lawyers present laughed at his discomfiture. I gave him a smile myself, thanked the kind judge and withdrew, richer, without robbery, by about forty-five dollars.

CHAPTER XXI

MINISTER TWO passed on, and Minister "Three" reigned in his stead. He had been acting Minister for nearly a year before the death of Two. Three was a successful business man, alert, brisk, far-seeing and active. Why he bothered with the game of politics I never could understand. He was a man of large means and did not need politics, except as an amusement. In the days of Ping-Pong, Three rose to be the Minister of Ways and Means, became a power of the first magnitude, made his blunder, which cost him his political head, and went back to the ways of peace and privacy.

In Ottawa, as elsewhere, there is Society and Society. Political Society is not necessarily Society with the capital letter. Any Society is apt to be mixed, but the mixture in political circles is particularly amusing, one full of surprises and odd contrasts. A politician from a small town attired in his first evening dress, making a courageous attempt to appear perfectly at ease at levee or reception, is an amusing spectacle to the sophisticated. If you have ever seen a young pup, before he has found his legs, attempting to jump upon a chair which is twice as high as himself, you have some idea of how a rough-necked politician looks amongst people accustomed to a drawing-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Wesblock were in the political swim. We could not afford to be in it, but we could not afford to keep out of it. A Minister's or Deputy's invitation to an extra clerk is a compliment he must accept;

it is nearly a command. Many an evening I have suffered agony for fear I should lose one or two of my very scarce and precious dollars in a game of ten cent draw poker in which I had to play whether I would or no. With Muriel's assistance I managed to keep a bold front. Her pose of ease and contempt for small things, under difficult circumstances, is most convincing.

I must now return to the affairs of my wife's family, and to my mother-in-law, who had become at length reconciled to me as a member of the family, and almost looked upon me as a son. It appears to be a kind of law in nature or society, that one individual of a family must be sacrificed, in one way or another, for the benefit of the rest. At least if it is not a law it is something which frequently happens, and the one offered up is often the best in the family. It happened so in the Joseph family. Of Mrs. Joseph's three sons, the two elder ones went out into the world and made their own way, more or less successfully. The eldest son materially assisted his mother, up to the time of his marriage, after which the whole burden of Mrs. Joseph and her daughters fell upon the youngest son. He took up his load cheerfully and without complaint, bearing a grown man's burden before he was much out of his teens.

My observation of the mother-in-law is that she enjoys a serio-comic reputation which she does not deserve. This is partly due to comic papers, but is mostly brought about by thankless, thoughtless and selfish youth, who magnifies the officiousness born of desire to help, and overlooks the many real and substantial benefits which flow from the mother-in-law. It would be a poor look-out indeed for many young

families if it were not for the defending hand of the mother-in-law. It is a very human trait in the young to hate the hand that gives, and fawn upon the strong and masterful hand that smites or governs.

Mrs. Joseph overcame her strong dislike for me, and took me into her heart, for the sake of her great love for Muriel and Muriel's children. Her desire to be near Muriel and the grand-children led her to take the very important step of influencing her youngest son, Duke, to become a Civil servant, so that she might live in Ottawa. Duke had a good position, so was in no way forced, as I was, to become a Civil servant, but he gave way to the desires of his mother. As the family still retained some of the social and political influence it had enjoyed during the life-time of Doctor Joseph, a good position was easily secured for Duke, and the Joseph family joined the Wesblock family in Ottawa. These things happened just prior to the coming of Minister Three.

Young Joseph at once showed a marked talent for steering the difficult course of a high official in the service of the King; and the Joseph home became a small, but by no means insignificant, centre of social life and unofficial political activity. Mrs. Joseph had lost the material means of keeping up the position she enjoyed during the Doctor's lifetime, but she had never entirely lost social prestige. She was one of the few people who can do that kind of thing.

Young Joseph was brought into close contact with Minister Three through his position. Events happened easily, when they once began to happen. Minister Three became a warm personal friend of the Joseph family, and had great confidence and liking for Duke. The rest was simple. My case was soon told, and

Minister Three acted promptly. I am prejudiced in his favour; but apart from personal feelings, I may truly state that when his turn came to pass on, many members of the staff, high and low, who had seen other Ministers leave the Department of Ways and Means without a word of regret, said they were sorry when we lost him.

So after a long wait of five years, and many battles, I received an official name, and the fifteen hundred per annum so long withheld. I did not find it a fortune when I got it, but I was an Inspector of Pot Holes by Order-in-Council, and moved into a personal office, which separated me from the herd. Things brightened up immediately. " To him that hath shall be given." I had been scribbling for years without finding much outlet for my literary product; but upon my being made Inspector of Pot Holes, I had an important article accepted by a paper, others by a magazine. In this way, together with music teaching, I began to make again quite a respectable income. Again the world seemed to be mine, and all things lay at my feet. I would inspect pot holes as they had never been inspected. I would rise from pot holes in the basement to the first floor, and so on to the roof. My ambitious dreams were short. The first pot hole I put my nose into I found a gentleman, who I discovered was Assistant - Superintendent of Pot Holes.

The Assistant-Superintendent addressed me. He said: " Who the blankety-blank are you? " Although his hands were dirty, he needed a shave, and his breath was unmistakably rummy, I was polite and smiling, and informed him of my title and name, referring him to my Order-in-Council. " Get to blazes out of this,"

he said. "Go back to your cage; when I need a dude like you, I will send for you."

Downright rude as he was, I smiled in reply, knowing that he would keep. The next pot hole disclosed another type—a very old but hearty person, who informed me that he was the General Superintendent of Pot Holes. This was very discouraging to a man who wished to revolutionise pot holes. I was Inspector of Pot Holes by law, and I was going to inspect pot holes, and make them give up their secrets or die. The Assistant-Superintendent did not want me, and the General Superintendent did not want me; but that made no difference. I went to the Deputy Minister.

"Who is your superior officer?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "it rather appears that I have several. I have only looked into two pot holes, but I found a superior officer in each one. The least superior, who drinks rum, invited me to go to Gehenna. Must I go?"

"Your place," said the Deputy, "is to do what you are told by your superior officers, and keep cool."

I have been trying to keep cool ever since. It is a difficult feat for some people. Some time afterwards I ventured to suggest promotion for myself, to the same deputy. He said, "Wesblock, I expected things from you, and have been disappointed. You have not made good."

"Really, Mr. Deputy," I said, "you surprise me. I never even suspected that I was to make good. At every pot hole into which I put my head, I receive blows, if I am not thrown out bodily. Superior officers infest every pot hole I can find. You have told me to go when I am told, and to come when I am called, and to keep cool. I have done these things; as you say

that I have not made good, I will bid you good-morning." And I left him to think about my position.

My thinking was fruitful in that I changed my tactics. I inspected pot holes without consideration for any one but myself. I inspected them as it seemed to me they should be inspected, and reported only to the highest pot hole officer within reach, without going through Chief Inspector, Assistant-Superintendent, or Superintendent. These tactics gave me much trouble at first, but they worked out well in the end. In trying to serve four or five superior officers, I had failed to give satisfaction to any one. In fact they seemed to have conspired to belittle me with the Deputy, possibly in the fear that I might get preferment. Over all my superior officers was the High Chief Pot Hole Expert; a small, hook-nosed individual, who, although of an unpleasant and hard disposition, was honest, just and far-seeing. He did not take to me very kindly at first, but by a smiling and ever-ready willingness on my part, and with much patience and peseverence, I forced him at last to take consideration of me and my work.

My Third Minister, having been indiscreet in several directions, was forced to retire to private life. Exactly what was his indiscretion no one seemed to know. Of course, all kinds of tales, most of them quite untrue, were told about the matter. The fact remains that he retired suddenly and my Fourth Minister took his place.

The Fourth Minister was full of guile; smooth and wily in all his ways. A quiet man of few words, biding his time like a fat spider, with a good retentive web in which he had perfect confidence. You have no doubt observed such spiders. They are never in a wild rush

when a fly gets into their meshes. They know that any fly that falls into their web is surely caught, so they proceed very quietly and leisurely, without excitement, towards the business of tying up Mr. Fly, and extracting his vital fluid.

My Fourth Minister was the instrument of Providence in my release from pot holes.

He and I had never met, but of course I knew him by sight. One Government holiday, when the buildings were deserted, I came to my office for one purpose or another. Mr. " The Fourth " was by Fate moved similarly. We met in the hall.

" Good morning, Mr. Minister," I said, touching my hat respectfully.

" Oh, good morning, Mr. Ah——, Mr. Ah——" He stumbled over my name, of which he had no idea. " Coming to see me, I suppose? Well, I'm sorry, but I'm very busy this morning. If you will write me a letter in your matter, I will give it my attention."

I appreciated in a second the mistake he had made. Never dreaming that I was only one of his employees, he had jumped to the conclusion that I was some one wanting something, who had lain in wait for him. I thanked him profusely, shook his hand once more, and left him promising to write the letter about the matter, which was unknown to both of us.

Four congratulated himself that he had put off some one, who was about to ask for something. I thought little of the incident at the time, but it turned out important, as will be seen. Several weeks passed by, and I had nearly forgotten the occurrence when Mr. Clay of Montreal walked into my office. Mr. Clay had been one of my old acquaintances. He had been in many business ventures, and had made much

money. He really did not need any more money than he had, but he liked the business game for itself. It was the only game he could play. After we had greeted each other, and he was seated by my desk, he explained the reason of his call.

" I am here," he said, " to see you in the first place."

" Indeed."

" Yes. I believe you can be of some use to me. As you know, I am in many things. One of the most important is our Blank factory. Now for reasons which I need not explain just now, I need your Minister. I am going to see him this morning, but before going to him I thought it might be wise to call on you and discover what manner of man he is. I want you to warn me against any peculiarities he may have; tell me when and how to see him; and how best to approach him."

At once I saw an opportunity for a little mild amusement. " You have come to the right man," I assured him. " I know my Minister like a book. Now listen to me. He is not difficult to see. Any one can see him, but to get anything out of him is quite another matter. He is smooth, very smooth. He will listen to you with patience; he will smile knowingly and be deeply interested in your affairs. When you are run down, he will turn quietly and blandly to you and say, 'Well, Mr. Clay, I quite understand you. *Write me a letter in the matter, and it will have my earnest attention.* I am busy this morning, so will bid you good-bye.' If you leave him then you are done. You will never see him again, and your letters will all be filed. I give you this information in confidence, for what it is worth; govern yourself accordingly."

" That," said Mr. Clay, " is just the kind of informa-

tion I want. I assure you I am very glad to get it. Now I know what to do." And he left me to visit the Minister.

Three days afterwards I met Clay on Sparks Street. When he caught sight of me his face was wreathed in smiles. He grasped me warmly by the hand and said, "Wesblock, you are certainly a prophet."

"How?" I asked.

"Why, my boy, it was really funny. I was coming to see you this morning to tell you all about it. I saw your Minister and everything happened just as you said it would. When he said, '*Write me a letter in the matter*,' I nearly laughed in his face; but being forewarned I was ready for him. I said, 'No, Mr. Minister, I will not write any letter. I will come again as often as you like, but I want this matter settled, and your decision to act or not to act given to me personally.' Well, sir, he was taken back. He hummed and hawed, and I followed him up and landed him just like a fish. I leave for Montreal to-day. You will hear something from me soon."

I had lunch with Clay that day, and told him how I had come to be informed of the Minister's method. Clay left for Montreal in the afternoon. Within thirty days he once more sat in my office. He had momentous things to say to me. He was so pleased with himself, with my Minister, with his business, and with me, that he offered me a very good position in one of his large manufacturing companies, which I refused on the spot without much consideration.

"What!" said Clay in astonishment, when he heard my decision, "you refuse to come out of the rut? I fully expected you to fall upon my neck and shed tears of joy."

"Yes," I replied, "I have to refuse. In fifteen years my roots have gone down too far. Your offer comes too late. There was a time when I would have fallen upon your neck and wept tears of gratitude. Now, I can only refuse with thanks. If you desire to be of assistance to me you may do so while leaving me to my Civil Service fate."

"Tell me how," said Clay, "and I will be very happy to do anything I can do."

"Well," I said, "I believe I am above pot holes. You are a powerful person in the business world. You move among people of influence. Bring me into the favourable notice of my Minister."

"My dear Wesblock," said Clay, "it is a sad sight to see a man of your type with ambition dead."

"My ambition is not dead," I said, "it is only subdued and is more modest than formerly. I have ambition still, but my desires are towards things that I believe are best for a man of my kind."

"You always were an odd fish," he said. "I cannot understand you. Are you the same Wesblock whom I remember? The gambler and sport who began with a shoe string, and ended with a hundred thousand dollars?"

The sum he mentioned made me smile. "Not as much as that, Clay," I said, "that is more than four times as much as I ever was worth."

"Well, anyhow," he said, "you made a great deal of money in a very short time, and then threw up the game."

"Yes, I did," said I, "but I am happier now than I was then."

"Happy!" he exclaimed, "happy? Are you really happy?"

"Comparatively, yes," I answered. "I am as close to happiness as any one I know."

"Then you are indeed to be congratulated," said Clay. "I will see what can be done towards making you more so, for I like you. You have always amused me, and sometimes instructed me, and you have been useful to me once at least."

This closed the argument, and he left me with smiles, promises and compliments; he was a genial soul for a mere business man with one idea.

I was sorry in many ways to refuse Clay's offer, but I had four young Wesblocks to be thought of who were no longer children. I believed that it would have been very unwise to transplant them when they had so benefited by the Ottawa soil. The social and mental atmosphere of Ottawa is a very different thing from that of modern Montreal, who, as she grows in size and wealth becomes contaminated with all the social diseases of the great American cities.

CHAPTER XXII

TIME passed, and I had nearly forgotten Clay and his promises, when one day a messenger came to me to inform me that my presence was desired in the Minister's office. Although this was an unusual occurrence, I was not much surprised. I had been called by ministers before for causes of the slightest. A minister is a little tin god who calls whom he likes, when he likes. Even men of Great Business hasten to appear when he says "Come." I was not prepared, therefore, for any new move, nor did I expect to be reprimanded by such a mighty personage. I thought I might be asked to answer some simple questions or be instructed to attend to some petty office such as replacing some favoured one who had been given leave of absence. Ministers condescend to interest themselves in small things sometimes. Judge, then, of my astonishment on entering the minister's office, when he received me in his very smoothest manner. I was positively frightened.

"Ah! good morning, Mr. Wesblock," he said, rising and offering me his plump but firm hand. "Sit down."

I sat. My face, no doubt, showed my astonishment, for he laughed softly.

"Mr. Wesblock," said my Minister, still smiling, "we have met before, I think, eh?"

"We have, sir," I said, "but I hardly think you remember it."

"I remember it very well," he said. "You see our meeting was an incident too good to be kept, so your friend Mr. Clay has told it to several of my friends, through whom it comes to me." And he again laughed softly at my evident embarrassment. I was thunderstruck.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Minister," I stammered; "Mr. Clay has been very unkind in repeating what I told him. I assure you there was no malicious intention on my part."

"Tut, tut," said the Minister, "don't apologise. You acted wisely, and Clay was not unkind. The mistake was mine."

"I am very sorry;" I began again lamely.

"No necessity to be sorry," said he. "I have a sense of humour, and quite understand how the whole thing came about. Clay has told me everything."

"I am obliged to Mr. Clay," I said, rising from my chair with as much dignity as I could command. I was very uncomfortable, and hoped the roasting was over.

"Pray sit down," said the Minister. "I wish to talk to you."

Again I sat.

"I understand," he said. "that you do not like pot holes."

"Not particularly," I replied, wondering what was coming next.

"You consider yourself above pot holes?" he asked.

"I admit the charge," I said.

"Very good," said the Minister. "You do not desire to leave the Service, Mr. Clay tells me."

"Mr. Clay has also told you why, I suppose," I replied, beginning to have a hazy idea that all was well.

"Yes," replied he, "and I have looked into your case. You have a good record for fifteen years."

"Thank you," I said.

"I will not prolong your discomfort," said he. "I propose to increase your responsibilities and your salary. You may thank our accidental meeting and Mr. Clay for this.

I expressed my gratefulness as well as I could and left the minister's office the most dazed Civil servant that ever existed. My exit amused the Minister greatly. He shook me by the hand once more and wished me well, and as the door closed behind me I could hear his soft laugh. His promise was promptly carried out, and I left pot holes for ever shortly after my memorable visit to his office. It was well for me that he was prompt in this, for before many months had passed a measure which seemed good to the Government seemed bad to the people, and my Minister went down in the overthrow.

Here I close my tale; my further doings would be an entirely different story. I was anchored for life with a future before me of comparative comfort as well assured as can be expected in the affairs of humanity. I close my memoirs at the age of fifty, because I was a boy till then, but no longer. I matured so late in life that my boyhood lingered beyond its time. I have said comparatively little about the Civil Service. I would have said more had I been able to use names and recent incidents bringing my history up to date. But being forced to generalise and use fictitious names, I have had to be content with giving a mere sketch of my experience.

No one can understand the Civil Service unless he

has lived in it for a long period of years and can look backward. I see it now as a clumsy, powerful machine guided by unskilled hands; or a great foolish, good-natured, long-suffering giant allowing himself to be bullied by pygmies—short-sighted, self-seeking, ignorant and stubborn pygmies; or, let us say, little strutting bantams whose lives are only a few days long. But in that brief tenure, they never tire of harrying and baiting the great giant who will surely walk on all their little graves.

The Civil Service suffers and will suffer, for many years to come, from the dead weight of the human culls and misfits dumped into it by the official and professional politician. It is really a great deal better than might be expected, considering the handicap under which it does a great work. To say that it is corrupt or inefficient, as if it were the actual cause of its own failings and shortcomings, is foolish. It is exactly what politicians have made it, and the politician in his turn is the exact logical product of his time. A virtuous and honest people produces virtuous and upright politicians; upright politicians make a clean and efficient Civil Service. The failings of the Civil Service are the failings of the people for whom it works. In short, a country has the government it deserves to have, and what the government is the Civil Service is.

Now, to end the chronicle, if I have any readers, I am quite aware that the large majority of them will declare my tale to be the story of a failure. But it is not so. What is success? I reply that I do not know. It is one thing to one man and another to another. And even if the world consider me as a failure, it must recognise that I failed in more things than most men because I tried more things. And if the output

of energy is the measure of a man, these failures were only episodes of a struggle toward a more human ideal of life.

I had a many-sided character to satisfy. I desired all things which seemed good to me: a happy home, love, beautiful children, music, literature, and the stage. I have been great in nothing; yet have I tasted all things and partly satisfied all my cravings. This book is one of my failures, but one, I persist, that makes for human experience.

Since the days of which I tell dire things have happened to me. I have seen my poor old father, who loved me well, fall into premature senile decay and die leaving my dear mother to make the short end of the road alone. I have seen beguiling, attractive depravity take away from me the little girl who was born at the mill, marry her, break her heart, and kill her. On the other hand, I have seen my son grow up and make a man of himself, marry the right woman (who is so rarely found), and prosper. I have seen my Third Beloved grow in beauty and character and mate with a man of heart and mind. All these things have I seen; and my grandchildren and I have kept One Beloved at our side; and last, but by no means least, life has spared me Muriel; and the world seems good. Therefore, write me not down a failure.

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