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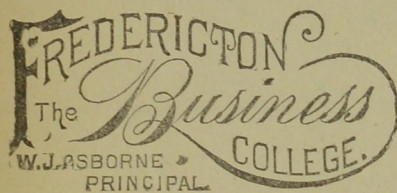
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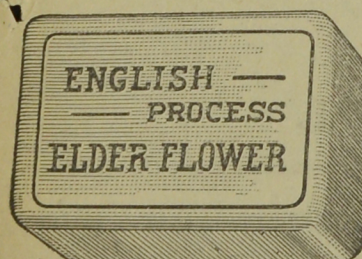
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CHAPTER II.

In my uncle's large front room there was a safe that he had picked up somewhere in the dark ages of his youth, doubtless upon some foreclosure; and it was one of the simplicities of his complex mind that he should cling to it with the faith which a child reposes in the toy savings bank in which he had deposited his treasure. It was a dogged enough looking contraption, and around it revolved the principal characters and

events of this history as a moth circles a flame. Behind the portly doors were kept the integrals of his fortunes; the mortgages, leases, deeds and notes that were the material evidences of his possessions. While it was nearly always practically empty of cash, at remote intervals, and for a few days at a time only, it contained considerable sums in specie. This last happened when he would collect the money on a mortgage or other security, and because of not feeling well would receive payment at the house instead of the bank. Once in a long while this would chance to occur after banking hours, or on a Sunday or holiday, and in that event, after the payee had departed, he would give himself over to a revel with the currency with all the delight of a child fondling a new toy. He did not seem to care for gold as the stereotyped miser always has, but would nose around among the bundles of greenbacks with the seeming fascination of a feline for catnip. It was during one of these scenes that our quarrel occurred.

I happened to meet Bruce one day at our noon luncheon. It was Saturday afternoon and my work was finished for the week. He came into the place where I sat and dropped heavily into a seat beside me. His appearance caused me to whirl upon him. His face was drawn tense as the skin of a drum, his eyes were heavy as though with a great weariness, and his hands aspen in their shakiness. He had the haunted look of a man who has been crushed, soul and body, by some appalling disaster. Marvelling at the evil transformation which had come over him, I let my hand fall upon his shaking fingers.

"What is it, Bruce?" I cried, sharply. He blotted the perspiration from his face and answered me, hoarse as a crow.

"It is all up. They have wiped me out clean as a whistle. Had everything I could rake and scrape on 'System' stock, and she has gone straight to the bottomest pit of inferno. And I was forty thousand to the good and was going to quit at fifty thousand and marry Clare." He burst into tears. "And now I can't marry her, for I am ruined, busted, blown up, shot to pieces. If any one should give me an automobile I couldn't raise the wind to fill its tires." His head dropped forward, and wiping his eyes dry, he sat with chest heaving. I stared at him.

"How much did it sink?" I asked slowly after a moment. He waved his hands helplessly.

"It didn't sink; it didn't take time to do that. It just plunged, dived, sounded—dropped like a ton of lead in a vacuum. I was wiped out before I could yell 'keno' and crook a finger. Oh, the miserable shame of it! Ass unspeakable! Fool unmentionable! Idiot unutterable! Ass! Idiot! Fool!"

Shocked but helpless, I surveyed him in silence. Presently his voice arose again, this time angrily.

"But that stock is only temporarily knocked down, and is bound to come up smiling long before the count. It was that damnable published lie that started the panic, and the scare will be over in 2 hours when the truth is known. If I only had \$10,000 more I could get back in good shape in a time. But I can't beg, borrow or steal one-tenth of that sum. I'm an aley infesting, free-lunch, rasper who can't even sell his soul because Old Nick figures he'll get it anyway free gratis. And there is our dear Uncle Abner sitting up there in his den this very minute plying his fingers and nose through \$40,000 that he has just collected in currency. I was up to see him in a dying effort to get him to stake me, but he only grinned at me like a totem pole and kept on counting the bales of yellow backs until I wanted to yell and had to run away to get shut of it." He got upon his feet, and in his anger banged the table with a metal object which he had tightly clenched in his fist.

"But I've simply got to get ten thousand for a month or two, I tell you, and I'm going to do it." Then suddenly subsiding, he turned to me in helpless importunity. "You couldn't spare me anything in the shape of an advance, could you, old man?"

The pathos of the appeal touched me, but I shook my head. "No, Bruce. I can give you nothing to speculate with," I replied quietly. He got up with a despairing shrug of his shoulders, nodded a hurried goodbye, and was off on what was doubtless some last despairing quest. I saw no good in attempting to detain him, and therefore made no effort to call him back.

Thoughts of what he had told me filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. It was bad news, very bad news, indeed, and I knew that Clare would feel it keenly. Loving Bruce as I now knew she did, she would take his troubles deep into her own heart. And it was a miserable shame, too. Forty thousand dollars was a magnificent start along the road to fortune for a man only twenty-eight years old, and it would probably be many years before he could climb that high again. The suddenness of the catastrophe was a distinct shock to me. For an hour I pondered over it deeply, then, arising, I took my own departure

Uncle Abner was still nosing around among his stacks of currency as I entered. He glanced up at me quickly as I opened the door, then, ignoring me—picked up a thousand dollar bill and began talking to it.

"Look at me, you beauty. Of course you don't know how I got you, but I'm going to tell you. I schemed for you days and laid awake for you nights. I sweated for you and set traps for you and denied myself for you, and finally I got you. You led me a pretty chase, but in the end I captured you because I had my soul set upon you. And why did I want you? Because you are the concentration of stored energy. All I have to do is to turn you loose in the world and sit back in my chair and watch. In a minute a hundred men will jump forth and hammer and saw and toil from morning until night. And the results of all their labor will be mine, because while they work for you, you belong to me. I could buy men, women or souls with you—but I won't. I am just going to breed you. I am going to breed you until you get me another like yourself, and then I am going to do it all over again. And you will never get away from me on this earth, either." He turned to me with that disgusting leer of his.

"Tom, how many of these beauties have you saved up?"

"Not any. And it doesn't look as though I ever would at the price I pay you for second-class board and lodgings." He leaped to his feet in a quivering rage, for the moment made speechless by my unprecedented insolence in daring to resent his insults. But his voice came to him so enough. Grimacing like a chimpanzee he fairly squealed in his anger.

"Second-class lodgings! You never had enough money in your life to buy a quarter of it. And you never will have, either, you spendthrift. If I didn't charge you for your living, you would have just that much more to go to the dogs with. You ought to thank me for it. Second-class board! You will be glad to get a bone to gnaw yet, you puppy." Suddenly he subsided to a sneer and began smoothing my coat over like a prospective buyer of old clothes.

"This suit, how much did it cost you, huh?"

"Fifty dollars."

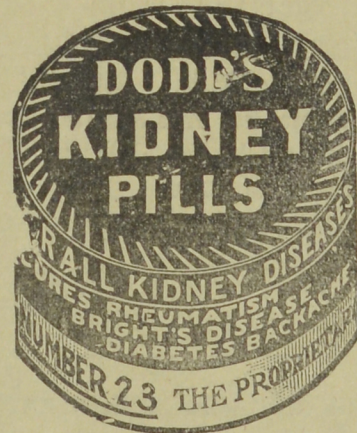
"And the rest of that trousseau that you wear around in the mud, including the overcoat?"

"I don't know. I never figured it up. Probably seventy-five more."

He sat down with a thump and sat glaring at me as his voice gradually rose again.

"A hundred and twenty-five dollars' worth of dry goods on your back as you strut around the streets! And on your salary!" He popped up like a jack-in-the-box and stood before me, scarecrow-like, with arms outstretched and his clothes hanging in shapeless pouches from his slat-like frame.

(To Be Continued.)



Canadian Grape Fruit

A fine specimen of grape fruit and weighing 29 ounces was produced at the Experimental Farm, Ottawa, and the horticultural department there proved that this article of diet can be successfully produced here in green houses. While an occasional specimen has been grown by private people, it was not generally known that it could be grown here. This fruit equaled the flavor of that grown in southern latitudes. The plant from which this fruit was grown was bought in the nurseries in New Jersey ten years ago but went nine years with out bearing.

Glorious War

M. Philouze, a French statistician, calculates that the war in the Balkans cost the belligerent countries \$500,000,000. The money went for ammunition that was fired away, arms that were largely lost or broken, for soldiers' clothing that was worn out, food, etc. There is nothing material to show for it. The situation is as if a fire had swept over the land and destroyed so much property. The countries as a whole and the people individually are poorer than they were when the war began. Their case illustrates what the waste of war means.—Montreal Gazette.

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