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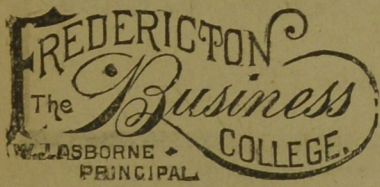
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## The LAPSE of ENOCH WENTWORTH

By ISABEL GORDON CURTIS  
Author of "The Woman from Wolvertons"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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Into a fairly decent career there  
comes occasionally a moral lesion.  
Temptation comes, and the man,  
heretofore honorable and honest,  
falls as though his backbone were  
of gossamer.

### CHAPTER I.

The Bond.  
Of course the game ended with a  
consolation pot. Merry and Went-  
worth, each with his last chip in the  
middle of the table, called for a show-  
down. All but Singleton dropped out,  
and he, the big winner of the evening,  
took the pot. Wentworth and Merry  
were losers.

The game had been played in Went-  
worth's library. Before its close the  
gray light of the morning began to  
steal past the curtains and the glow  
of each electric lamp took on a murky  
haze. Each Wentworth, acting as  
banker, cashed in the chips of the  
winners. Three of the men put on  
their hats, said "Good morning," and  
went out. Andrew Merry sat beside  
the table covered table with its litter  
of chips, pulling slowly at a cigar and  
staring into vacancy.

"Do you mind if I open this win-  
dow?" asked Wentworth. "There's a  
chill in the air outdoors that will feel  
good. I've swallowed so much smoke  
my throat feels raw."

"Open every window in the room if  
you like, old man. I'm going home."

"Hold on a minute," cried Went-

worth unexpectedly. "I'll go you just  
one more hand. Let's play one big  
stake and then swear off forever."

"I tell you, Enoch, I haven't a cent.  
Heaven knows how I can tide over  
these months until the season opens.  
It's a good thing I'm not a married  
man," Merry laughed mirthlessly.

"One last hand!" pleaded Went-

worth.

"What do you want to play for?"  
Merry turned up a coat sleeve and  
stared at his cuff buttons thoughtfully.

"I have nothing left but these. I don't  
think I'll put them up."

"We've thrown away enough money  
and collateral tonight," Wentworth re-  
plied. "Let's make this stake some-  
thing unique—sentimental, not finan-  
cial. Why not make it your future  
against mine?"

"That's a great stake! Sha'n't I  
throw in my past?"

"No, let each of us play for the  
other's future. It is a mere fancy of  
mine, but it appeals to me."

"Are you serious? What in God's  
name would you do with my future if  
you won it—what should I do with  
yours?"

"I tell you, it's a mere fancy of  
mine."

"All right. Carry out your fancy. If  
it amuses you. I ought to be willing  
to stake my life against yours on any  
hand, if you say so."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, if you want to call me."

Andrew Merry smiled and blew a  
flurry of smoke rings into the marble  
face of the Shakespeare, while he  
watched Wentworth's pen hurry across  
a sheet of paper. The newspaper man  
handed it to him with the ink still  
wet.

"There," he said, "we'll play for  
that document, the winner's name to  
be written at the top, the loser to  
write his name at the bottom."

Andrew Merry read it aloud:

To  
I hereby pledge myself until death  
—to do your every bidding—to obey  
your every demand—to the extent of  
my physical and mental ability—to  
furnish me with support.

"Will that hold good in law?"

"Just so long as the loser is a man  
of honor—no longer. Are you going  
to weaken?"

"I'll be damned if I am. I'll put this  
bit of paper in my scrapbook."

"The man who wins, keeps that bit  
of paper," Wentworth answered with  
a wretched smile.

He tossed the unsigned bond into  
the center of the table and shuffled  
the cards with grave deliberation.  
Merry lit a fresh cigar and puffed it  
meditatively. Upon each listless brain  
began to dawn the realization that this  
was a stake of greater import than the  
rolls of bills which had grown lighter  
and lighter till the last greenback van-  
ished.

"Who'll deal?" asked Wentworth.

"We'll cut," Merry spoke quietly.  
"Low deals, ace low."

Enoch Wentworth cut a tray, Merry  
a seven spot. Wentworth shuffled the  
cards again and held them out to his  
opponent.

"Does one hand decide it?"

"Yes, one hand. Each man to dis-  
card, draw, and show down."

Wentworth dealt with noticeable  
deliberation. They picked up their  
hands.

"Give me four cards," said Merry.  
"I'll take three," Wentworth's face  
was as solemn as his voice.

For a moment each man sat staring  
at his hand. Then Merry spoke.  
"There's no use in showing down,"

he said. "I haven't even one little  
pair."

"Hold on," expostulated Wentworth,  
scarcely concealing the relief which his  
friend's admission gave him. "I'm only  
ace high. Does that beat you?"

Merry's face also told its story of  
reaction. "Same here," he said, laying  
the card on the table face up, "and a  
jolly king to follow it."

"King for me, too," Wentworth's  
face flushed and his voice grew im-  
patient. "What's your next card?"

"A ten," Merry replied tranquilly,  
too tense to wonder why Enoch  
awaited his declaration.

"Ten here. My God! are they all  
alike?"

"Seven next."

"And mine's a seven!"  
Both men paused, each with his  
eyes on the other's card.

"And a four," cried Wentworth  
irritably. He passed his hand across  
his forehead; it was moist and cold.

"You win." When Merry tossed  
down his hand a tray turned over—it  
was the same tray which gave Went-  
worth the deal.

Wentworth had drawn to an ace and  
ten. Merry held up a king. The  
younger man lifted a pen, dipped it  
in the ink, and scrawled Enoch Went-  
worth across the slip of paper. At  
the bottom, he wrote with grave delib-  
eration, Andrew Merry.

The newspaper man stared at it for a moment,  
then dropped it on the table. Enoch  
checked on the palm of his hand, and,  
looking straight in the face of the  
actor, asked: "Merry, do you realize  
what this means?"

"Not yet, perhaps; still I wish you  
more luck of my line than I've had.  
Now, since I'm to look to you for sup-  
port, could you spare up a nickel?"

I've got to go home now, you know."

Before Wentworth could reply, the  
curtains parted, and a girl's figure  
showed itself for a brief moment.

"I beg your pardon, Enoch, I thought  
you were alone," she said, and the fig-  
ure vanished as suddenly as it had ap-  
peared.

"What's that?" Merry demanded.

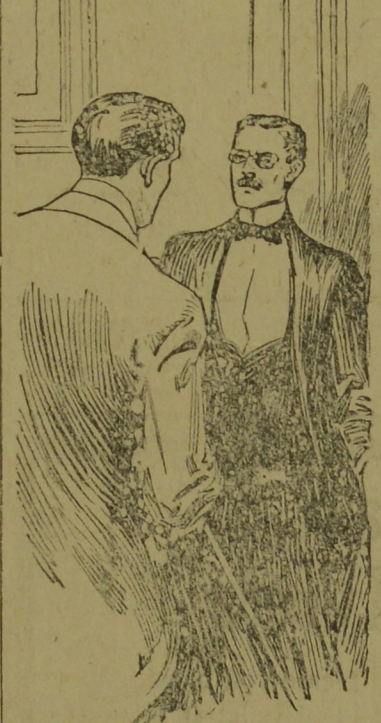
Wentworth's only answer was to  
pull out the lining of his pocket.

From one he produced a quarter and  
handed it to the actor. Merry pocketed  
it without further questioning, and  
pulled on his gloves.

"Good night," he said, "or good  
morning, whichever you choose."

"Say, old man," Wentworth held  
the door for a moment half closed  
while he spoke. "Say, if you don't  
mind, let's keep this transaction to  
ourselves."

"I'm willing," Merry paused to  
strike a light for his last cigar, then



"Let's keep this transaction to our-  
selves."

he laid his hands solemnly across his  
breast. "Cross my heart," he added  
in a sepulchral tone.

Wentworth started at the sound of  
an opening door. A girl entered.

"For heaven's sake, Dorry! What  
are you doing up at this unearthly  
hour?"

"I've had my sleep, you haven't,"  
she answered with a laugh.

"Dorcas, sit down," said her brother.  
"Do you see that fellow on the bench  
under a tree?"

"The girl leaned a hand on Went-  
worth's shoulder while she turned her  
eyes in the direction his finger pointed.

"Yes! What's the matter with him?  
Is he anybody you know? Is he in  
trouble?"

"He's an old friend of mine. It's  
Andrew Merry, the comedian."

Wentworth sat for a moment gazing  
into his sister's beautiful face. She  
was a child in spite of her eighteen  
years. He felt like an ancient, sin-  
battered, soiled, city-worn hulk of  
humanity as he returned the straight-  
forward gaze of her gray eyes.

"Tell me about him, Enoch."

(To Be Continued.)

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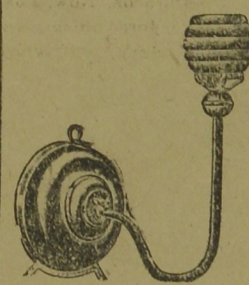
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