

MARTHE LESNER'S AWAKENING

By Jean Berthe

Translated by
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She was a tall young woman, with pale cheeks and dark hair. She entered the office on the ground floor, where the minor officials had their quarters, and asked if she could speak to the Colonial Service Director.

"Yes, but you will have to wait some time—half an hour, possibly three-quarters."

"I'll wait," she said.

She took a seat on a bench where some others were already waiting. There was a working woman, who had a baby on her arm; also a very old Sister of Charity and two soldiers with worn tunics. Although it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the electric lights had to be turned on in the gloomy, ill-cared-for room, and they brought out all its ugliness.

Marthe closed her eyes and asked herself once more why she had come. She was astonished at the ease with which she had decided to take a fresh start in life. A disappointment, a shattered dream! Certainly she knew well that such setbacks are common in the lives of over-sensitive people who let their hearts carry them away too quickly in the hard competition for happiness. Others take up the struggle again and buoy themselves up with eternal hope. But she, through weakness or pride, had renounced that bitter effort. What she sought now was another sky—and forgetfulness.

Plunged in her reverie, she didn't notice that her companion had left the bench and that she was sitting there alone. A door opened and an employee approached her.

The director has been called out. You will not be able to see him to-day. But his secretary will receive you."

It made little difference to her. She followed her guide through a corridor that seemed interminable. Then she found herself, without knowing how, in a clear, bright room, whose windows opened on a garden. A young man arose and bowed to her. On his desk was a bouquet of fresh red roses.

"You want some information?"

She felt embarrassed. To speak of herself and tell her story seemed utterly impossible. Nevertheless, his courteous manner inspired confidence. She answered, after a slight hesitation:

"Yes. It is for a friend of mine who thinks of expatriating herself. She is of my age—twenty-two—and consequently legally a major and free. She has diplomas, speaks several languages and doubtless could be of some service wherever you sent her."

"Doubtless," the young man repeated. "We need, in fact, all kinds of assistance, all sorts of willing workers. Let your friend make out a formal application and I will do what is necessary, I promise you, to obtain a prompt answer for her."

"Thank you!" said Marthe Lesner, with a glance that conveyed her gratitude.

"Since your friend is free," the young man continued, "she will have a good opportunity to establish herself satisfactorily, if she becomes acclimatized in her new place of residence. We encourage marriages among the French colonists. We want to see homes founded. That is the best means of assuring a prosperity which is too often lacking."

She blushed and didn't dare to look at him. She had expected to find herself in the presence of some gruff-mannered personage, perhaps an old man, and she hadn't recovered from her astonishment. The cordial voice rattled on, with a frankness in which there was perhaps a touch of irony.

"It is a good example to follow. Doesn't it tempt you?"

"Not in the least," she assured him.

"One can do one's duty anywhere," the secretary added. His voice had become grave.

She took her leave without offering him her hand. He conducted her to the end of the interminable corridor.

Now she was walking on the quais, along the Seine. It was a spring day, clear and mild. The stream flowed in a scintillating mass, reflecting the golden rays of the sun. The trees on both banks were beginning to bud. Their little green leaves opened in the light as if with hands greedy to seize it. And the old buildings, in their robe of grayish stone, seemed to be rejuvenated.

Marthe was not in a hurry to go home. A sudden change had come over her and she wasn't able to analyze its causes. She had got up that morning with her will firmly fixed and her reason in accord with her will. She had weighted everything for and against. She had ardently desired to have the matter settled as promptly as possible. But when she came into the presence of the man who could aid her she had changed her mind. She hadn't even dared to tell him the truth, to admit that she herself was the applicant. Why? Had she felt

some sudden attraction toward this unknown, who had talked so sympathetically with her and had seemed for a moment to be interested in her fate?

Not the least in the world! But, then, two youths had smiled at each other, and that was enough to rid her of her desire to go away. She would not return to that clear, bright office in which he had received her. She would probably never see him again. But out of that brief interview had come an idea of compelling force.

To go away! To exile herself and seek beyond the seas a different destiny, troubled, undoubtedly, with the same inquietudes? "One can do one's duty anywhere," the young man had said, in his calm, sure voice. She no longer saw life under the same desolate aspect. Hope had revived in her heart.

Because she had suffered, because she had shed the first tears of disillusionment, she had believed that

there was no longer either loyalty or justice on earth. Now she thought differently.

Go away! What was the use? Spring sang its cradle song—the eternal words which we listen to and only half believe. There was an immediate promise of joy in the air. She wouldn't go. She would try to meet again on her old pathway the changing visage of happiness.

The odor of the red roses was with her still.

Vaccinating Alfred.

A well-known journalist, Mr. Arthur Warren has written an entertaining book of reminiscences entitled *London Days*. Among the amusing stories in it is one about Lord Tennyson and a queer neighbor of his, a Mrs. Cameron, who photographed all the celebrities who came to visit the chief celebrity of them all.

Mrs. Cameron "were a concentric lady who wore velvet gowns a-train"

in the dusty roads," as an old countryman described her. Her photography was that of an amateur, but her skill in it was remarkable. So was her persistence. She was intimate with the Tennysons and always called the poet by his Christian name.

One day during a smallpox scare she rushed with a stranger in tow to Tennyson's house and into the room where Tennyson was sitting. "Alfred," she cried, "I have brought a doctor to vaccinate you! You must be vaccinated!"

Tennyson, horrified, fled to an adjoining room and bolted the door.

"Alfred! Alfred!" Mrs. Cameron called. "I've brought a doctor to vaccinate you. You must be vaccinated; you really must!"

There was no reply. "O Alfred, you're a coward!" cried the undaunted and resourceful lady. "Come and be vaccinated!"

And at that the reluctant poet came forth and surrendered.

What's the Difference?

"We have filmed your book, professor," said the moving picture director, "and a check for \$5,000 is waiting for you."

"But I hardly feel that I should take it," replied the college professor. "I saw the photoplay and it doesn't resemble the book at all. You see there has been a mistake—"

"Oh don't let that trouble you. Our scenario writer can turn anything into a photoplay, no matter what it is. By the way, what was the name of your novel?"

"That's what I want to explain," answered the professor. "I made a mistake; instead of sending you my novel I sent you my text-book on algebra."

Goods Not Received.

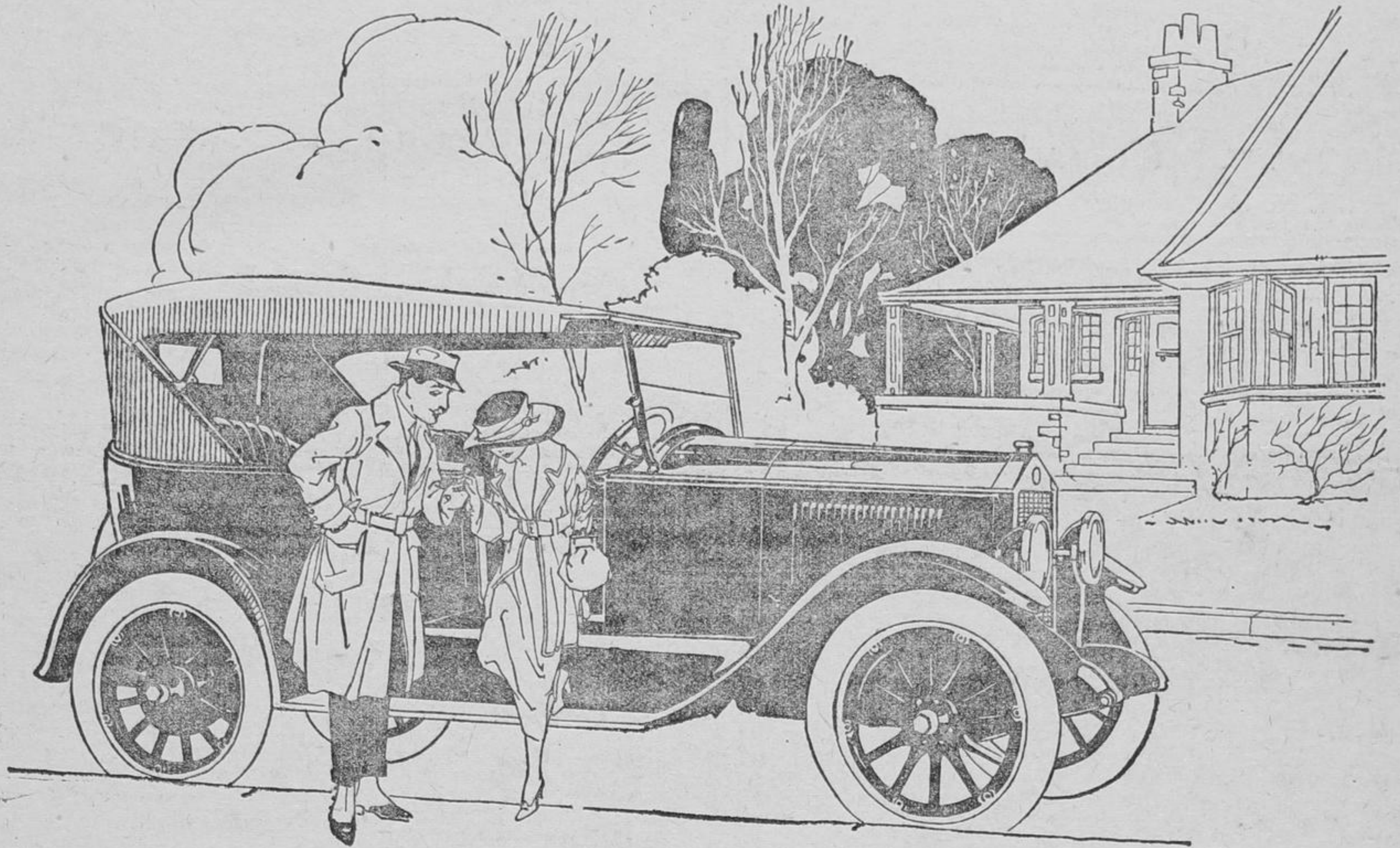
MacPherson (at the box office)—"Will ye kindly return me the amount I paid for amusement tax?"

Clerk—"Why, sir?"

MacPherson—"We wasna amused."

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