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BOVRIL

"Love in the Wilds"

The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER I.
AFTER FORTY YEARS.

Hugh nodded, for no other reply was possible, because he did not want to interrupt the man, in whom he could not help feeling a strange and, as it seemed to him at that moment, an unaccountable interest.

"Yes, the country and I are both changed. I left it, young sir, when it was a miserable, do-nothing sort of a place; I, a penniless—well, plowboy, for I wasn't much better. I came back, forty years after, with twenty thousand pounds in my pocket and as fine an estate as any lord might wish to own, to find it a flourishing, money-getting country."

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Hugh, "and a fine estate are, indeed, a change from—"

"Plowboy," filled in the traveler, as he paused. "You're right; but it's the truth. Who's your greatest farmer about here now?" he added, turning to the smith.

"Squire Darrell, sir, at the Dale yonder; he be the largest farmer."

"How many head of cattle?"

"High upon eight score," replied the smith, with pride. "It be a sought worth the coin to watch 'em across the mead."

The traveler burst into a short laugh.

"Eight score?" he repeated. "And you call that a farm? Why, man, 'twould disgrace one of our out-stations. Eight score! What say you to a thousand head, fifty fold 'o sheep, and a run of two hundred horses?"

The smith stared, then shook his head. He knew his place too well to challenge a customer's statement.

Hugh ceased smacking his leg with his whip, and raising himself to his full height fixed his dark eyes with an almost fierce scrutiny upon the speaker's face.

The sharp little eyes, however, met his unflinchingly, and standing forward, Hugh said:

"May I ask, without offence, where your farm is situated?"

"You may ask, and I will answer you," replied the other. "My farm lies many thousand miles from here—in Antigua, near the Cape of Good Hope. I hold a cattle-run of twenty miles of pasture without stations; that would swallow up two of our

friend Darrell's whole concern. You think that a fine piece of meadow, young sir—what would you say to twenty miles of it, covered with cattle and girdled by a score of runners? Ay, twenty miles of it," he repeated, warming with his theme, "lying green as an emerald beneath a blue sky. That's what I call cattle raising. This—and he waved his hand with good-humored contempt at the great farm lying before the smithy door—"this I call playing at it."

Hugh, fascinated by the mental picture, flung himself down upon the seat and, anxious to hear more, said:

"And this you say is in Antigua? A queer name!"

"Ay, Antigua; that's the place for a man of heart and muscle." Here the sharp eyes glanced at the listener's bent, earnest brow with a piercing glance. "This old country is worn out, it is fast asleep. Antigua is awake, and all alive! You call it life to be lying down here, eating, drinking, sleeping, in one dot of land about the size of a haseinat? I call it life to be flying like the wind on a thoroughbred across the prairie, with the cattle on head and the crack of the whips, your ears. You hunt the fox; there you hunt the elephant and buffalo, and run down the hyenas and antelopes, and scour across a hundred miles of grass and forest, free as air and almost as healthy," and he swept his hands in the air with a sharp, triumphant laugh.

Hugh sprang to his feet, his eyes all aflame.

"Where—" he commenced.

"Ask for Stewart's Corner on Algon Bay, or Cape Town, and I will tell you sharp enough," replied the traveler. "My name is Stewart, and the corner is my chief station, and if you doubt my words, come over some fine day"—here he showed his white teeth in a grin and shot another glance from his sharp eyes—"and I'll show you round."

Hugh rose.

"Thanks," he said, with a short laugh, and whistling to his dogs he bid him good-night.

The Cape settler looked after him until he had disappeared in the twilight, then turned to the smith and said:

"Who's that youngster?"

"That be Master Hugh, Squire Darrell's son," replied the smith. The settler whistled.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "He's a splendid young fellow; I don't think I ever saw a better or stronger limbed."

"It ain't like you should," retorted the smith, with a glow of pride. "Master Hugh's the strongest, handsomest gentleman you'd find within the country."

"I dare say, I dare say," returned the settler, thoughtfully. "He's wasted in this hole—wasted, wasted."

"That he be, sir; that he be," said the smith, warmly. "I've said it a score of times, and I'm thinking it won't be long, maybe, 'fore Master Hugh will be a-flyin' from the old nest; for the squire is enough to drive a cow skinned."

"What! Rather short, eh?" said the settler, stopping the tune he was whistling and halting in his walk to and fro in front of the forge.

"Short!" echoed the smith, with a grin. "That bein' the word. If you do come across the squire when he be out o' temper you'll say he be short, indeed."

"Ah! He and Master Hugh don't agree, eh?"

The smith shook his head.

"Lolke cat and dawgs."

The settler thrust his hand in his pockets, with a queer smile, and went on with his tune.

The smith, taking the hint, punched the shoe and led the horse into the road.

"All right now?" asked the traveler.

"Here's half a sovereign for you—never mind the change. Good-night!"

Too astonished to return the salutation, the smith stared after him as he rode off at a sharp trot, and then turned into the smithy again.

Before he had reached the forge, however, the strange customer had returned, and, pulling up his steed at the door, said, with a hearty laugh:

"So the squire and the son don't hit it off very well?"

And before the smith could reply he turned, and rode off once more, this time for good, his sharp laugh ringing out behind him.

CHAPTER II.
AN OUTBURST OF WRATH.

The little good we do in all the years of life will scarce outweigh the follies of an hour.—HARDIS.

The morning after the conversation at the smithy with the Cape settler, Hugh Darrell awoke from a dream of a new and wonderful land—awoke with something like a sigh, for the Dale farm and domain lying beneath his bedroom window looked common-place and poor, and he turned from the thought of the unpleasant tete-a-tete with repugnance.

Was there not a great deal of truth in the stranger's taunt, that existence in such a hole as the Dale—eating, sleeping, and drinking, day after day, night after night—was but living a sluggish sort of life unworthy a man with youth, strength, and vigor in his grasp?

Antigua! The word had a double ring in it that made him enter the breakfast-room with a thoughtful face.

The squire was not down yet, and Hugh seated himself with his face toward the window from which he could see the golden fields and glittering meadows of the Dale stretching miles away.

Presently the squire came in. He was a short, spare man, with all his irritability and bad temper written on his face, which was puckered and drawn with a perpetual frown of ill-humor.

"Good-morning, sir," said Hugh. The squire nodded and rang the bell.

"Coffee, or tea, sir?" asked Hugh, who always officiated at the breakfast table.

"Tea," said the squire. "I've a headache—always have after that old port, confound it!"

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"But I wish you'd gone, all the same. I know that hay isn't going on all right."

"Yes, that's all right," said Hugh. "I went to look at it last night."

"Then why couldn't you say so?" retorted the squire.

"I—poor my word, I didn't see any occasion. I intended going this morning to see it turned out."

"Oh!" growled the squire. Then the post came in, and he set down his cup to read the letters.

In the midst of them he started up with an exclamation and rushed to the window.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Hugh.

"The matter!" roared the squire. "Look at that thief rushing through the paddock! Does the rascal know he's trespassing? By Heaven, I'll teach him if he doesn't!"

He sprang at the bell-rope and commenced to ring furiously.

Hugh strode to the window and saw the man he had been speaking to at the forge trotting the brown cob across a paddock at the back of the house.

He was either unaware of the trespass or was a very cool hand, indeed, for he seemed perfectly unconcerned, holding the reins loosely and looking round with a careless air.

"Go round and tell that impudent rascal of a bagman I'll break his neck if he doesn't leave that paddock!" roared the squire, as a servant entered in answer to the furious bell.

"Stop a moment, sir," said Hugh, hesitatingly. "I don't think—"

"Well, sir, what the deuce don't you think?" said his father.

"I don't think he knows he is trespassing," said Hugh. "I will go and ask him to ride off."

(To be Continued.)

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