

Bob, Son of Battle.

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CHAPTER III.

Red Wull.

The winter came and went; the lambing season was over, and spring already shyly kissing the land. And the back of the year's work broken, and her master well started on a fresh season, M'Adam's old collie, Cuttie Sark, lay down one evening and passed quietly away.

The little black-and-tan lady, Parson Leggy used to say, had been the only thing on earth M'Adam cared for. Certainly the two had been wondrously devoted; and for many a market-day the Dalesmen missed the shrill, chuckling cry which heralded the pair's approach. "Weel done, Cuttie Sark!"

The little man felt his loss acutely, and, according to his wont, vented his ill-feeling on David and the Dalesmen. In return, Tammas, whose forte lay in invective and alliteration, called him behind his back, "A venomous one!" and "A wiralnet wiper!" to the applause of tinkling pewters.

A shepherd without his dog is like a ship without a rudder, and M'Adam felt his loss practically as well as otherwise. Especially did he experience this on a day when he had to take a batch of draft-ewes over to Grammoach-town. To help him Jim Burton had lent the services of his herring-gutted, herring-hearted, greyhound lurcher, Monkey. But before they had well topped Braithwaite Brow, which leads from the village on to the marches, M'Adam was standing in the track with a rock in his hand, a smile on his face, and the tenderest blandishments in his voice as he coaxed the dog to him. But Master Monkey knew too much for that. However, after gambolling a while longer in the middle of the flock, a boulder, better aimed than its predecessors, smote him on the hinder parts and sent him back to the Sylvester Arms, with a sore tail and a subdued heart.

For the rest, M'Adam would never have won over the sheep-infested marches alone with his convoy had it not been for the help of old Saunderson and Shep, who caught him on the way and aided him.

It was in a very wrathful mood that on his way home he turned into the Dalesman's Daughter in Silverdale.

The only occupants of the tap-room, as he entered, were Teddy Bolstock, the publican, Jim Mason, with the faithful Betsy beneath his chair and the post-bags flung into the corner, and one lurcher, drover-like man—a stranger.

"And he coom up to Mr. Moore," Teddy was saying, "and says he, 'I'll gie ye twal' pun for yun gray dog o' yourn.' 'Ah,' says Moore, 'yo' may gie me twal' hunner'd and yet you'll not get ma Bob.'—Eh, Jim?"

"And he did thot," corroborated Jim. "'Twal' hunner'd,' says he."

"James Moore and his dog agin!" snapped M'Adam. "There's ithers in the world forbye them twa."

"Ay, but none like 'em," quoth loyal Jim.

"Na, thanks be. Gin there were there'd be no room for Adam M'Adam in this 'melancholy vale.'"

There was silence a moment, and then—

"You're wantin' a tyke, bain't you, Mr. M'Adam?" Jim asked.

The little man hopped round all in a hurry.

"What!" he cried in well-affected eagerness, scanning the yellow mongrel beneath the chair. "Betsy for sale! Guid life! Where's me check-book?" Whereat Jim, most easily snubbed of men, collapsed.

M'Adam took off his dripping coat and crossed the room to hang it on a chair-back. The stranger drover followed the meagre, shirt-clad figure with shifty eyes; then he buried his face in his mug.

M'Adam reached out a hand for the chair; and as he did so, a bomb in yellow leapt out from beneath it, and, growling horribly, attacked his ankles.

"Curse ye!" cried M'Adam, starting back. "Ye devil, let me alone!" Then turning fiercely on the drover, "Yours, mister?" he asked. The man nodded. "Then call him aff, can't ye? At which Teddy Bolstock withdrew, sniggering;

and Jim Mason slung the post-bags on to his shoulder and plunged out into the rain, the faithful Betsy following, disconsolate.

The cause of the squall, having beaten off the attacking force, had withdrawn again beneath its chair. M'Adam stooped down, still cursing, his wet coat on his arm, and beheld a tiny yellow puppy, crouching defiant in the dark, and glaring out with fiery light eyes. Seeing itself remarked, it bared its little teeth, raised its little bristles, and growled a hideous menace.

A sense of humor is many a man's salvation, and was M'Adam's one redeeming feature. The laughableness of the thing—this ferocious atomy defying him—struck home to the little man. Delighted at such a display of vice in so tender a plant, he fell to chuckling.

"Ye leetle devil!" he laughed. "He! he! ye leetle devil!" and flipped together finger and thumb in vain endeavor to coax the puppy to him.

But it growled, and blared more terribly.

"Stop it, ye little snake, or I'll flatten you!" cried the big drover, and shuffled his feet threateningly. Whereat the puppy, gurgling like hot water in a kettle, made a feint as though to advance and wipe them out, these two bad men.

M'Adam laughed again, and smote his leg.

"Keep a ceevil tongue and yer distance," says he, "or I'll e'en ha' to mak' ye. Though he is but as big as a man's thumb, a dog's a dog for a' that—he! he! the leetle devil." And he fell to flipping finger and thumb afresh.

"Ye're maybe wantin' a dog?" inquired the stranger. "Yer friend said as much."

"Ma friend lied; it's his way," M'Adam replied.

"I'm willin' to part wi' him," the other pursued.

The little man yawned. "Weel, I'll tak' him to oblige ye," he said, indifferently.

The drover rose to his feet.

"It's givin' 'im ye, fair givin' 'im ye, mind! But I'll do it!"—he smacked a great fist into a hollow palm. "Ye may have the dog for a pun—I'll only ask you a pun," and he walked away to the window.

M'Adam drew back, the better to scan his would-be benefactor; his lower jaw dropped, and he eyed the stranger with a drolly sarcastic air.

"A poun', man! A poun'—for yon noble dorg!" he pointed a crooked forefinger at the little creature, whose scowling mosk peered from beneath the chair. "Man, I couldna do it. Na, na; ma conscience wadna permit me. 'Twad be fair robbin' ye. Ah, ye Englishmen!" he spoke half to himself, and sadly, as if deploring the unhappy accident of his nationality; "it's yer grand, open-haired generosity that grips a puir Scotsman by the throat. A poun'! and for yon!" He wagged his head mournfully, coking it sideways the better to scan his subject.

"Take him or leave him," ordered the drover, truculently, still gazing out of the window.

"Wi' yer permission I'll leave him," M'Adam answered, meekly.

"I'm short o' the ready," the big man pursued, "or I wouldna part with him. Could I bide me time there's many'd be glad to give me a tanner for one o' that bree—" he caught himself up hastily—"for a dog sic as that."

"And yet ye offer him me for a poun'! Noble, indeed!"

Nevertheless the little man had pricked his ears at the other's slip and quick correction. Again he approached the puppy, dangling his coat before him to protect his ankles; and again that wee wild beast sprang out, seized the coat in its small jaw, and worried it savagely.

M'Adam stooped quickly and picked up his tiny assailant; and the puppy, suspended by its neck, gurgled and slobbered; then, wriggling desperately round, made its teeth meet in its adversary's shirt. At which M'Adam shook it gently and laughed. Then he set to examining it.

Apparently some six weeks old; a tawny coat, fiery eyes, a square head with small, cropped ears, and a comparatively immense jaw; the whole giving promise of great strength, if little beauty. And this effect was enhanced by the manner of its docking. For the

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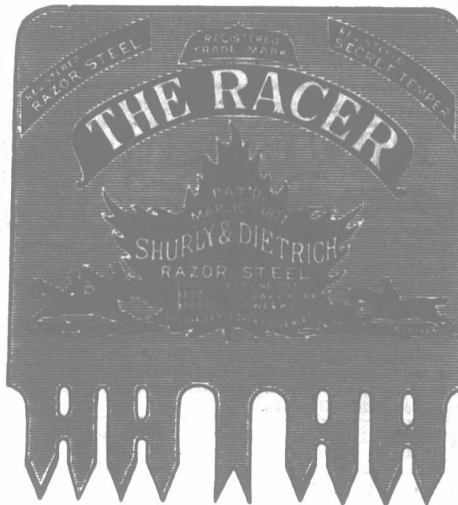
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