

The Arrest of MacTavish

A Brief Sketch of a Character that Makes the North so Interesting a Country

By "BIG MAC"

Illustration by Arthur Heming

"SO Sandie MacTavish has been shot. I thought that would be his end, but I wonder he went so long; he must be sixty-five at least."

Four men, men in the prime of life, were seated around a small table in the cosy room of a little "Pen and Pencil" club in one of the largest Canadian cities. The club was an unpretentious, somewhat bohemian affair; most of its members wielded pen, brush or pencil for a living. But he who spoke was no member, but a guest. Angus Macmillan was a born wanderer, a bachelor on this side of forty, good-looking, tall, wiry, and with evidence in his easy-going features and expressive grey eyes, which could change their glint so easily without any change of feature, of that great reserve force which so often lies hidden, though hinted at, in the bronzed face of your natural rover, hunter and adventurer.

"And who was he, Angus, this MacTavish? I've heard of him as a none too savory character, but I didn't know that you'd run up against him," said Thompson, noting the chance of a little human interest touch for his sparkling weekly journal.

"You never heard how Sandie was arrested down in that Ottawa Valley town, 'way back twenty or thirty years ago, did you? Well, if you'll order up the 'pegs' I'll spin you a little yarn of a scene which I have never forgotten, though it happened when I was but a wee laddie. I should tell you that in those days the Ottawa Valley, with its lumber camps and lumbering towns, was a pretty wild place. We had our 'bad men' of the East, as we have had our bad men of the West, but they were not the bad men of the gun or the knife. Their only weapons were their fists and their feet, as a rule, and sometimes bottles and sticks helped somewhat; but, having by these means laid out his man, your bad lumberjack proceeded to artistically tattoo the face and person of his victim with the spikes of his shoes. Deaths were not common, but many men carried with them to their graves the marks and effects of this treatment. And these men, Thompson, were the finest physical creatures imaginable, great, husky-boned, muscular, agile fellows, who lived the hard life of the shanties and the river, and grew tough and reckless as the life they lived. Lumber camps were not the comfortable places they are to-day, and a man's health and life held not the importance which is given them to-day by a benevolent government. Might, then, was right, and the man who could not maintain his right by means of his right arm, just had to give way. Still these men were honest, paid their debts, were courteous, even chivalrous, towards women, and gentle with the weans.

"WELL, enough of environment; let me now introduce to you Sandie MacTavish himself, as I saw him that morning of his arrest in the City Hotel. I had been sent with a message to O'Connor, the hotel-keeper, and was waiting in the outer lobby. A man stood in the corner of the room. He must have been six-foot-four, and built on huge proportions. He was washing himself, and I could see the glistening muscles of his neck and shoulders and arms as he splashed the water on them. Without exception he was the most perfectly developed white man I ever saw.

"I knew MacTavish, of course, by sight. He was quite a personage in our town. He could fight, he seldom if ever worked, he always wore a 'biled' shirt, a collar and a tie. Rumour said he was pretty near being a doctor before he left the old land, and certainly he was very deft in setting a fracture,



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dressing a wound or even in prescribing remedies for either man or beast.

"I stood and watched, for, of course, I had heard of what had happened the night before, how Sandie had found big Alec Forbes pounding Tommie Kirby, a much smaller man than himself. Sandie had seized the big bully and had held him till Tommie had beaten and kicked him into an insensible pulp.

"Now, a wave of reform had recently hit our town, and the people had been clamouring for the upholding of the law and the suppression of the nightly fights, and it was whispered that there would be some trouble over this affair.

"This explains why, as I stood there watching my hero or villain—of course, as a boy I admired him as either—three powerful men entered the hotel door. Douglas MacKenzie, marshal of our town, led the way, and he was closely followed by Alister and Duncan Robertson.

"Mornin', Douglas; mornin', boys," spluttered Sandie, as he washed.

"I want you to come with me to the courthouse, Sandie," said MacKenzie, thinking best to get it out and over with.

"All right; you'll let me put on my shirt first, won't you?"

"Sure, take all the time you want, Sandie. There's no hurry," was the reply.

"Carefully Sandie adjusted his collar and tie, brushed his hair, even combed his moustache, feeling his chin the while to see that his razor had made a good job; and then, with a 'Have a dram, boys?' he crossed the room, went behind the bar and helped them and himself to whiskey, for Sandie was *persona grata* at the hotel, and always helped himself. 'Health, boys!' he said, quietly, and then, raising his voice slightly, and pointing at Douglas, he went on, 'Douglas MacKenzie, marshal o' this town, ye cam here to arrest me! Why didna ye come alone? If ye had I wad hae gang wi' ye like a lamb, but nae ye bring twa mair wi' ye, which means ye think the three o' ye can tak me whether I will or no.'

"Without giving MacKenzie a moment's chance to answer him, he vaulted the bar and walked over to the other side of the room, and in passing the stove in the centre took a shovelful of ashes, strewing them in a straight line across the room. He then stood with his back to the wall and dared them.

"The first man who crosses that line will get hurt!" was the warning he uttered. But these men were no cowards. They had a duty to perform. They hesitated but a moment, and then rushed in on him. He met them with terrific swings of his right and left. His great ham of a fist struck the marshal fairly under the jaw and he went down like a felled ox, but Alister got a grip on him, in spite of the blow he received on the side of the head. But, lifting him bodily, Sandie banged him against Duncan so forcibly that he, too, sank to the floor, and then I thought the partition wall would have broken, as the body of Duncan hit it and he also lay limp.

"WITHOUT a glance at his fallen foes, Sandie, carefully straightening his collar and tie as he went, left the hotel and walked briskly down the street. At a small house he stopped and went inside. An old, white-haired man sat in an arm-chair smoking feebly at a cutty pipe. "James McManus, I want ye to arrest me and tak me tae the courthouse," said Sandie.

"But I'm nae langer marshal, Sandie, I canna," said the old man.

"But ye must, or there'll be murder done," said Sandie, and he went on to tell the old

man of the attempted arrest.

"The old man rose, Sandie helping the frail old body onto his shaky legs, and bringing his old oak stick. Then slowly they proceeded, arm in arm, down the main street to the courthouse.

"It was, I think, the strangest arrest ever made, this great, powerful giant and his aged, palsied captor.

"All was excitement when the courthouse was reached, and Sandie was a trifle pale, as proceeding down to the dock he announced, 'James McManus has brought ye the accused, yer worship.'

"The magistrate did not blink. It was not really a humorous scene to those who saw it. There was, indeed, more a kind of parable effect in it for all present.

"The magistrate read the charge, and asked, 'Are ye guilty or not guilty, MacTavish?'

"Guilty," replied Sandie.

"I fine ye five dollars, MacTavish."

"It was then that Sandie blanched, for Sandie had money but once a month, and it only lasted a few days.

"IT was Douglas MacKenzie, the marshal, whose head still swam with the effects of that terrific clip on the jaw, who solved the problem.

"They may be brutal, these men of the Valley, but their generosity is not limited, and as MacKenzie's hat passed from hand to hand the difficulty of Sandie's fine was soon overcome. And well do I remember the joy with which I was able to contribute the dime which I had just earned by my message to the hotel. Ten cents in those days to a laddie in the Ottawa Valley was a great deal, but I gave it with a glad heart.

"There are many stories told of MacTavish, but I like to think of him as, his eyes sparkling, almost in tears, he raised his head and said the simple words, 'I thank you, friends.' And then, with bowed head and unsteady tread, he led out his aged friend.

"No doubt he was a sadder and a wiser man, but, oh, the seed of such lessons does not take root in men of the type of MacTavish.

"For MacTavish is the kind of man that is a good bit of a law unto himself, and he belongs to a country where once in a while the bigness in a man's blood is a little bigger than the law.

"Have another peg, and I must be off, boys."