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ANY even numbered section of Dominion lands in Manitoba or the Northwest Provinces, excepting 8 and 26, not reserved, may be homesteaded upon by any person who is the sole head of a family, or by male over 18 years of age, to the extent of one-quarter section, of 160 acres, more or less.

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W. W. CORY,
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"ONE TOUCH OF NATURE"
(Continued from page 6.)

lives given back to them. Baxter peered beyond him and saw the bustle of arrival at the gate of the fort, and he detailed it to his companion within while he watched.
'There! I told you I thought the boss of this show had not yet come on the scene. If I am not much mistaken, he has just made his appearance. There's a sort of informal reception going on outside, and the center of it is a new face; a big fellow in an embroidered sheepskin coat with a fine assortment of cutlery in his girdle. Oh, yes, he is the chief, sure enough. I wonder whether this can possibly be the famous Hamid Khan? Yes—no—yes! He's being conducted across. Pull yourself together, my boy. We shall know something definite in a minute or two.'

He resealed himself on the protesting stool. The sentry had retreated half a dozen paces and left the trodden mud before the hut to a tall figure that swung forward with the stride of a man given to lead and to command. He was followed by a lot of bearded, heavy-browed Yaghistanis; an indifferently group lounged across the enclosure nonchalantly, as if this new idea of parley instead of sword-play were not much to its taste. Behind the dark forms as they crowded the doorway Baxter could see the free mountains, with an afternoon sky paling from blue to a cold translucent green, and the watch fires of the tribes picking out the spurs in pin-points of fire.

The leader stooped and entered, and he brought a breath of keen air into the hut. Lennard nursed his arm sulkily and did not move, but Baxter faced the intruders with his usual irrefragable good humor.
'Salaam!' said the Yaghistani, 'I am Hamid Khan.'

'Salaam, Khan sahib,' said Baxter equably, and waited.
The mountaineer looked at his prisoners with a glance that ran swiftly over them and gauged their measure as it passed. He seemed to take Baxter's attitude of spokesman for granted, and he addressed himself to him without further ceremony.
'You have come alive into my hands by my desire. My servants tell me you are men in authority — they were told not to bring in the low-born folk.'

'Yes, we are men of authority,' said Baxter, briefly.
'You are my prisoners. Mine to bind or loose, mine to slay or to keep alive. Do you understand that?'
'We are not fools,' said Baxter, 'and we accept the fortune of war. Has the Khan sahib nothing more to say to us?'

'There is something further, yes.' He looked closely at them. 'Mine to bind or—to loose. Perhaps it may be to loose. Who knows?'
Lennard broke into impatient English.
'How these fellows shilly-shally! Get him to the point, Baxter.'

'We are not good at riddles,' said Baxter, without apparent notice of the interruption. He looked imperceptibly at the chief, and brushed a speck of mud off his own sleeve. Then he waited again, and Hamid Khan's face beamed approval.
'Shabash! The kaptan is like me, a man of few words. Listen, then, and hear the riddle made plain to your ears.' He turned suddenly upon the group behind him, and the bearded faces shrank back as he wheeled.
'Go! I speak to these alone.'

The courtyard emptied itself of an audience in response, and when the last towering figure had left the fort wall and the peaks and sky to make an unrelieved background, Hamid Khan spoke again.
'So! Now I can open my mouth to you. Perhaps you have known that it is for a ransom I hold you. We of the mountain country are not fond of captives, and we fight to kill only; but this time there is a hostage required, and so it shall be for you two—one to give life for life, if needs be, and one to take my message. If he whom I desire is delivered in my hands unharmed, I swear to you that you shall return as you came. If not I will slit your throat.'

'And who is it you would ransom?' said Baxter, unmoved by the savage threat or the glance of sudden ferocity in the Khan's eyes.
Lennard forgot his wound, and strained his ears to follow the swift dialogue.
'It is my son.' The face softened and the thought of fatherhood—crown and glory of an Oriental—brought something like a quiver to the lips.
'My only son. Yes! You shall give him back to me, or I will tear out your eyes. I will hang you and rend and kill! He must be given up.'

'Your son?' Baxter was taken aback for the first time. 'Has he been captured lately then, Khan sahib? We have heard of no chief among the prisoners, and surely we should know. Perhaps you mistake?'
'I make no mistake. But I have not told you all. My son is not a fighting man, else you would have known of him as you have known of me, and enough and to spare for remembrance. He is but a little child, and it was not in battle that he fell into your power, but by the treachery of one of my own kind. He was stolen from my house by a false woman, and she fled to the south through the passes with him, because she knew there was no safety here for her. She does not concern you or

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me. It is for you to know only that my son, the little Khan, was given over in her flight to a man who holds him, no doubt, with a great price upon his head. This much my servant discovered, and then he had to return quickly to me, because there was war.'

'A child, you say? Then you can rest assured that he is safe, Khan sahib. We do not make war upon children. But it is strange that you have heard nothing of all this. A Khan's heir is not to be lightly considered, and word would certainly have come to you of him before now if he had been retained as you say. Where does this man you speak of live?'

'I do not know where he may be now. But the woman left my son to him as she passed through Fort Ismael.'

'Fort Ismael—a little child—a flying woman! O Lord! O Lord! Lennard, did you ever hear angels' wings when you talk of 'em? Great Scott! Khan Sahib Bahadur, you have come to the right source for news of your son. I—'

'Hold hard!' said Lennard. He had followed the dialogue with difficulty, and Baxter's boisterous outburst was as yet only dimly understood by him. 'What is it? Where is this blessed son and heir you have been gabbling about? You speak the lingo so fast I can hardly follow.'

Baxter looked from one face before him to the other, and laughed boyishly. The Khan's showed a fierce, impatient hunger, but he could not resist throwing words at Lennard first to let the light dawn on his bewilderment.
'My dear fellow, it's the oddest, maddest coincidence that ever jumped out of the category of impossibilities. Our good friend is holding us in hand to exchange for his son, who is a baby—the baby—the witch baby, in fact! He imagines that all the world must know the child, and he has judged by his own standards and his impatient hunger, but he could not resist throwing words at Lennard first to let the light dawn on his bewilderment.'

'You are too sure, Khan sahib, that all things evil must have befallen. Yes, I know the man who took your son—of a surety, when he came to his hands, deserted and in rags, there was no sign to show he was a Khan's heir—and I can tell you he is as safe as if he were running by your side.'

'Picture to yourself, Hamid Khan, a little child found forlorn in a strange place. The woman had fled, and no man could tell aught of it.'

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whence the boy had come or to whom he belonged. Who would suppose he was the son of a chieftain? Not I, and I was the man of whom we speak. But I cared for him, of course, because the good God entrusted him to me. There was no question of hostage or surety, and for the price upon his head—! Well, Khan, that is not our way. Now that we know to whom he belongs, the boy is yours whenever you can send to fetch him.'

The Khan's face worked. His voice was hoarse when he spoke:
'Is this thing true before God? Is my son safe? And you—had him in charge by a chance only, as you say? No, it is not to be believed.'

'Well, it is a strange thing, but it is none the less true. Why, I have had the baby in my arms a hundred times—a little, black-eyed, straight-limbed child with a scar upon his breast.' Then he added in meditative English, 'and amazing fond of blacking!'

'You befriended him?' said the hoarse voice.
'Of course,' said Baxter, indifferently. 'If you want him, you must send to Peshawar, whence I despatched him with one of my servants to keep him company when you and your people brought this trouble into the mountain country. Your son would have been nearer to you by some hundreds of miles, Khan sahib, if your fire-brands had not blazed out so madly all along the border.'

'We were perhaps a little hasty,' said the Khan, in the tone of one who sees sudden reason for making amends. 'Not that it was we who began it, but our kinsmen to the right and left were fighting, and we, too, must keep our swords unrustled. Yes, we have been over-eager, but the tribesmen could be called off. And now that they have gone—' nodding towards the peaks, 'have burned a few villages and spent much powder, they will, perhaps, be pleased to return. We shall see to all that, only I must first hear that all is well with my son.'

Baxter tore a piece of paper from his pocketbook, and sucked a pencil stump that was much the worse for wear.
'Lennard, my boy,' he said gleefully, 'you will please deliver this message to Carboys, care of the general commanding the Yaghistan field force. It'll be urgent, you know, and you can tell the general at the same time that I'm staying behind with my friend Hamid Khan, to conduct negotiations for the submission of the tribes. It will make a beautiful paragraph for you, old fellow. Cable that the great and dreaded Indian rebellion has been subdued by the diplomacy of one man! And how Baxter roared: 'Nobody will understand in the least how that blood-thirsty ruffian, the gentleman opposite—I name no names—came to terms, so meekly.'

'Tell me it all,' said Lennard, eagerly, 'the whole story.'

'I'll tell you enough to make your cable of big importance—the rest can wait,' said Baxter.
He pointed out, word for word, with the pencil stump—
'To Major Carboys, R.A. Please forward with baby under cover by return, prepaid. Owner found.'

Then he threw back his head, and the irrepressible laugh bubbled again to his lips.
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Mizpah

The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.—Gen. 31:39.

Go thou thy way, and I go mine;
Apart, yet not afar;
Only a thin veil hangs between
The pathways where we are,
And 'God keep watch 'tween thee and me.'

This is my prayer,
He looks thy way, he looketh mine,
And keeps us near.

I know not where thy road may lie,
Or which way mine will be;
If mine will lead through parching sands
And thine beside the sea;
Yet 'God keep watch 'tween thee and me.'

So never fear,
He holds thy hand, He claspeth mine
And keeps us near.

Should wealth and fame, perchance,
be thine,
And my lot lowly be;
Or you be sad and sorrowful,
And glory be for me;
Yet 'God keep watch 'tween thee and me.'