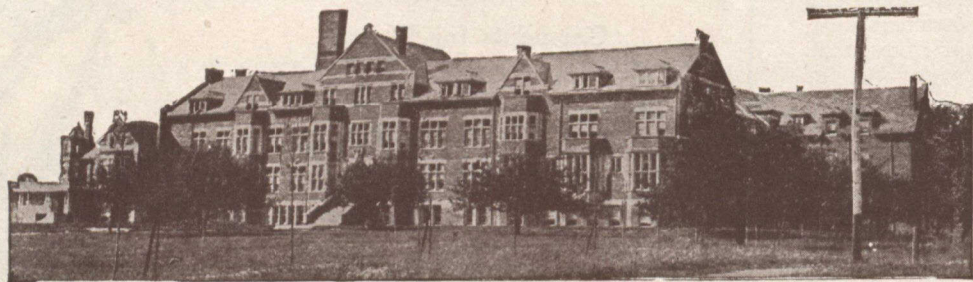


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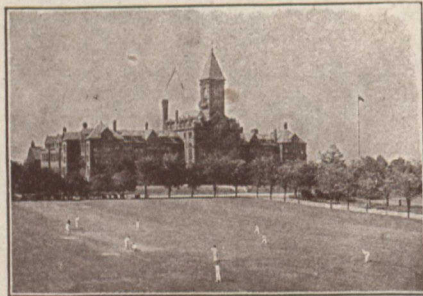
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McRae turned in the air, falling on his back heavily. That would have settled it if it had not been for the spare man. Before McIntyre could recover from the throw he was back-heeled by the brother and brought down, with a McRae atop. "

Locke, jumping back from a swing of Campbell's fist, found time for an impromptu kick at Jim McRae's ribs; and at the same minute McIntyre turned his man beneath.

Jack was up again, and, first pivoting a blow into the base of Locke's skull by way of assistance to Campbell, reached down and clutched at McIntyre's throat with his long fingers for a strangle-hold. Then he pitched forward at a blow from Locke, and the three—the two McRaes and McIntyre—rolled over in a round-tussle. Suddenly Jim McRae's hand, clutching treacherously at his enemy's face, found an opening, and two fingers slipped into his mouth, fastening upon the cheek in a gouge-hold.

Just as Locke had landed a subduing blow over Campbell's heart he heard a half-smothered cry of "Gouge!" from his comrade. The flickering firelight fell red upon the polished steel of an ax almost at Locke's feet. With an oath the sailor swung it over his head, and, springing to the struggling group, cried: "Let him up, you dogs, or I'll split your heads open! I'll smash you like a rat for gouging—you cowardly Indians!"

Locke's address was short and very much to the point; even the advantage of a gouge-hold sank into significance compared with the advantage a man held standing above them, ax in hand. With a growl Jack McRae rose to his feet, while the fingers of Jim uncurled from their vise-like grip.

With a twist Dan turned the McRae under and sprang to his feet, saying: "Get up now, you dirty dog, whatever! Stand by, Ben, to see fair play, an' I'll lick the two of them. Fightin' river boys—gougers!"

"Never mind, Dan," Locke expostulated; "we gave them more 'n they sent—they got their bellyful of fight this time. We don't scrap with old women that scratch."

McIntyre was of the patient, quiet kind usually, and, as is the manner of that tribe, when his blood was up, was hard to subdue.

"I'll tell you this whatever, Jack McRae," he said angrily, "I'll give you a thrashin' for this night's work yet. You've boasted from Rodney to the town-line that you could best any man in the Scotch Block, an' I'll make you eat your words. An' forbye you're doubtin' what I'm sayin', just step out here and fight like a man."

"You'll get your chance, McIntyre," McRae retorted, "where there'll not be cowards swingin' axes."

This exchange of compliments was good, in a way, for the respite from action allowed the heated blood to cool. And as for fighting, it would have been a greedy man who would clamoured for more than had been served out in the ash-swamp. McIntyre's face bore eloquent testimony to the excellence of the entertainment, and the McRaes were battle-scarred to a high degree.

As the two parties gathered their axes and prepared to depart, McIntyre spoke again: "I'll tell you, Jack McRae, why Queenie didn't tackle the coon, fearin' ye'll spread it from the town-line to the lake that she's no a good coon dog: yon coon is Swampy, that she raised as one of her own pups; and that's why she'd no put a tooth in him. And now, Locke, do you away up the tamarack again and bring Swampy down in your arms this time. We'll take him back to the shanty."