



The Redskin



THE magistrate leaned forward and surveyed the slouching figure in the dock. The black, inscrutable eyes of the Indian grew a shade more sullen, but he gave no other sign that he had heard the magistrate's words:

"Tom Three Feathers! You here again!"

"What is the charge? Vagrancy, and drunk, too, as usual, I see. Constable McGinnis, you are the witness in this case."

"Yer honour," began McGinnis, an impeccable pillar of the force with a rich brogue and an air of disinterested truth-seeking. "I was on dooty at half past eleven on Saturday night last. I seen the accused on Main Street the worse av lick. I ast him where he was goin', and he could give no satisfactory ree-ply. I turned him over to Constable Wilkins, who fetched him to the station."

"I see. Same old story. Have you anything to say, Three Feathers?" The magistrate's eyes came to rest on the prisoner.

A heavy somnolence brooded over the little Western court-room. The fetid air, poisoned by the morning's procession of "drunks," "vags," Chinese gamblers and Galician carousers, enveloped the scene like a foul blanket. Through the open windows came floating, now and then, a breath of the soft Chinook, sweet with the scent of prairie flowers.

Tom Three Feathers' nostrils quivered as the clean spring air floated past his cheek. His shapeless grey suit and flannel shirt devoid of collar were inexpressibly worn and dirty. The slouchy droop of his great, loose-jointed frame took several inches from his six-foot-two of height. His clothes were white man's clothes; his figure was the figure of a loungeur in the back alleys of a white man's civilization. Only the red-brown face with its high cheek bones and dark eyes, fringed with lank black hair, betrayed his kinship with a race of men that had once ruled the prairies.

He belonged to the little community of Indians and "breeds" at Slow Creek, on the borders of the neighbouring Reservation, whose drunken fights, illicit whisky-trading and occasional knifings kept life from growing monotonous for the Mounted and the civic police. Constable Larry McGinnis had twice before rounded him in on general principles and the all-inclusive charge of vagrancy and drunkenness. Always he persisted in an obstinate silence. As McGinnis drew himself up in the witness box in the way that constables have, his blue Irish eyes were full of a vast contempt for the filthy figure in the dock.

BUT the magistrate seemed to discover something in the aspect of the prisoner that was not apparent to Constable McGinnis. He was a kind man and a discerning one. In the early days, before the railway came, he had served with that great corps, the North-West Mounted Police.

"Now see here, Tom Three Feathers," he said, leaning forward in his chair, "if you don't leave whisky alone you'll kill yourself; why don't you straighten up and be a man? You can do it if you want to. I ought to send you to jail this time, but I'm not going to, because I have an idea you want to do better. So I'll let you off with a fine. Now you go and find work, and keep away from these fellows who sell you whisky. Do you understand?"

A just-perceptible answering gleam lit up the dark eyes of the Indian.

"All right. Two dollars and costs."

Constable Larry McGinnis looked his puzzlement as he stepped down from the box. Even the fine had been a light one.

"The dirty, lazy, good-fer-nothin' scoundrel!" he muttered under his breath as he passed the Inspector. "Lot o' good it is tryin' to do yer dooty these days. Phwat's the matter with his nibs?"

As for Tom Three Feathers, once in the open air he slouched off at a shambling, purposeless gait

ONE of the most interesting race features of the war, is the service rendered by Canadian red men in the trenches. The exploits of Three Feathers by one who met him in action, are a study in the short evolution from ancestral scalps to Hun helmets

towards the busy main street, a sodden, malodorous bit of flotsam on the currents of the town's life. He showed no interest in the shifting spectacle of the streets. His eyes wore the veil which came over them when he was brooding—a veil which few white men could penetrate. Tom was a pure-blooded Indian; his father had been a Blackfoot and his mother a Sarcee. But since his orphaned boyhood he had known no other associates than this degenerate populace of Slow Creek. He had grown up with them, lived the same squalid life, contracted the same vices, till now he was not to be distinguished from the rest.

Yet every now and then something within Tom rose in revolt against the squalor in which he lived. At nights, when he stumbled heavily out of the dirty shack at Slow Creek after a drunken debauch and the clean air smote him in the face, he would straighten himself up instinctively in the starry stillness of the prairie, his nostrils distended and his ears alert. Something called to him, he knew not what nor whither; something alien to the forces that had shaped his life; the same insistent call, had he known it, that had thrilled his forefathers on that very spot, long before the white man came.

To-day the mysterious restlessness had complete possession of his soul. He had no eye for the show windows of the Hudson's Bay store, the gaudy "movie" posters, the glittering quick-lunches, the marvel of a newspaper press in motion, the procession of whizzing motor cars. Just now he hated the town and its unheeding faces. He hated the rotting hovel where he lived and the rags he wore. He hated his disreputable cronies. He hated the old priest who talked to him of God, and the teachers at the Government school, where they had tried to teach him to read and write and had failed. And above all, he hated Constable Larry McGinnis. Men looked down on him, despised him as an outcast. He was "only an Indian." He wanted to be a man. Yet somehow the tendrils that Slow Creek and fire-water had wound about him, body and spirit, kept him down to the level of shiftless vagrancy.

He avoided the keen glance of a passing Mounted Policeman and turned into another street. The pungent odour from a hotel bar set up a momentary craving. Around a store near the corner a crowd was gathered, listening to the exhortations of a very earnest individual in khaki.

"It's men we want and men we're going to have," challenged the recruiting sergeant. "I ain't talkin' to lazy, good-fer-nothin' loafers that ain't worth their salt. I'm speakin' to men! Men that is men and can play a man's game. That's the kind of men we want—and we want 'em quick! Believe me, they're needed. So if there's any of that kind in front of me here, just step up and show wot kind of stuff yer made of!"

The scene was not new to Tom. The recruiting office, with its pungently-persuasive orators, had become a familiar feature in the little city's life. On the prairie, close to the Reservation had sprung up a great military encampment. Tom had previously taken no interest in all this. But to-day, something in the sergeant's appeal touched a responsive chord. The very remoteness allured.

"It's the only life worth livin', boys," urged the sergeant, with diplomatic partiality. "But I ain't layin' no stress on that. It's yer dooty to them that's gone afore and to them that's comin' after."

But then, reasoned Tom, restraining an impulse,

he had said they didn't want loafers, they wanted men—the best. . . . Still, the magistrate had told him . . .

A sudden gleam of resolution came into his eyes. He elbowed his way through the crowd of men and stood suddenly before the sergeant.

"You take me?" he asked, laconically, and waited, immobile but expectant, for an answer.

The sergeant's practised eye sized him up at a glance.

"Take you?" he said, clapping Tom on the shoulder. "See here, son, you just step inside here."

And the eyes of Constable Larry McGinnis, who had paused on his way to point duty on the corner, widened to a glassy stare as he beheld the familiar back of Tom Three Feathers disappearing through the door of the recruiting office.

"If they make a sojer of that specimen," murmured Larry to himself, "my name ain't McGinnis."

ON a certain night in the second September of the Great War, a little group of soldiers crouched behind the parapet of a Canadian first-line trench in the Ypres salient. One of them, a tall private with powerful shoulders and a lithe, sinewy body, was distinguished from his fellows by evidences of a different race. But you would scarcely have recognized in this bronze Hercules the degenerate Indian whom Constable Larry McGinnis had "vagged" a few short months before.

Tom's body, cramped and stifled from childhood in the vitriating environment of Slow Creek, was now rejoicing in a glorious normality. The faculties planted in him by his forefathers were reviving. An uncanny keenness of hearing, a quickness of observation that frequently astonished his officers, and a knack of moving about in difficult places cat-like, without a sound, were qualities which had made him chief scout of his battalion.

Those voices that had called to him so mysteriously out of the prairie breeze called to him now with greater potency. And now he could answer their call; the old, futile restlessness was gone. He went about his work with taciturn zeal. He could be relied on to carry out an order swiftly, silently and with intelligence. He shuddered when he thought of the old cramped life of Slow Creek. It was unreal and remote, like a bad dream, half-envisioned. In the new life he moved on a plane with his fellows. When he first "joined up" there had been just a slight tendency to regard him as "only an Indian." It was this that had nerved him for his victory over fire-water. After one terrific "bust" in the early days of his training, he had renounced it altogether. Now his bearing had a confidence born of healthy achievement and the comradeship of strong men. He grinned often, showing his white teeth in a display of good humour that was irresistible. His mates called him affectionately "The Redskin."

"The Redskin will be doing something to distinguish himself one of these days—just you watch," his new comrades would say among themselves. To his face they would josh Tom, and ask him how many German scalps he expected to collect.

"Me hup-to-date Injun," he would reply, with a good-humoured grin. "No scalp 'im. Get hees 'elmet."

NOW, on this second night in the front-line trench, the tedium of inaction was to be broken by a reconnaissance patrol, and Tom Three Feathers had, of course, been selected as one of the party. It was a supreme moment for the Redskin. Crouching behind the parapet there, in his taciturn way, he was vibrant with eagerness.

In the dense blackness the officer and the three men, who had been conferring in whispers, moved to a low part of the parapet.

"Ready?" came the whispered word from the subaltern. "All right, boys; over we go."

Noiselessly, one by one, they crawled over the top