

Bob, Son of Battle.

Continued.

Adam M'Adam's Red Wull, became that little man's property for the following realizable assets; ninepence in cash—three coppers and a doubtful sixpence; a plug of suspicious tobacco in a well-worn pouch; and an old watch. "It's clean givin' im ye," said the stranger bitterly, at the end of the deal. "It's mair the charity than aught else mak's me sae leebal," the other

answered gently. "I wad not like to see ye pinched."

"Thank ye kindly," the big man replied with some acerbity, and plunged out into the darkness and rain. Nor was that long-limbed drover-man ever again seen in the country-side. And the puppy's previous history—whether he was honestly come by or no, whether he was, indeed, of the famous Red McCulloch strain, ever remained a mystery in the Daleland.

CHAPTER IV FIRST BLOOD

After that first encounter in the Dalesman's Daughter, Red Wull, for so M'Adam called him, resigned himself complacently to his lot; recognizing perhaps, his destiny.

Thenceforward the sour little man and the vicious puppy grew, as it were together. The two were never apart. Where M'Adam was, there was sure to be his tiny attendant, bristling defiance as he kept ludicrous guard over his master.

The little man and his dog were inseparable. M'Adam never left him even at the Grange.

"I couldna trust ma Wullie at hame alone wi' the dear lad," was his explanation. "I ken weel I'd come back to find a wee corpse on the floor, and David singin'!"

"My heart is sair, I daur na tell, My heart is sair for somebody. Ay, and he'd be sair elsewhere by the time I'd done wi' him—he! he!"

The sneer at David's expense was as characteristic as it was unjust. For though the puppy and the boy were already sworn enemies, yet the lad would have scorned to harm so small a foe. And many a tale did David tell at Kenmuir of Red Wull's viciousness, of his hatred of him (David), and his devotion to his master; how, whether immersed in the pig-bucket or chasing the fleeting rabbit, he would desist at once, and bundle, panting, up at his master's call; how he routed the tom-cat and drove him from the kitchen; and how he clambered on to David's bed and pinned him murderously by the nose.

Of late the relations between M'Adam and James Moore had been unusually strained. Though they were neighbors, communications between the two were of the rarest; and it was for the first time for many a long day that, on an afternoon shortly after Red Wull had come into his possession, M'Adam entered the yard of Kenmuir, bent on girding at the master for an alleged trespass at the Stony Bottom.

"Wi' yer permission, Mr. Moore," said the little man, "I'll wheestle ma dog," and, turning, he whistled a shrill, peculiar note like the cry of a disturbed peewit.

Straightway there came scurrying desperately up, ears back, head down, tongue out, as if the world depended on his speed, a little tawny beetle of a thing, who placed his forepaws against his master's ankles and looked up into his face; then, catching sight of the strangers, hurriedly he took up his position between them and M'Adam, assuming his natural attitude of grisly defiance. Such a laughable spectacle he made, that martial mite, standing at bay with bristles up and teeth bared, that even James Moore smiled.

"Ma word! Ha' yo' brought his muzzle, man?" cried old Tammas, the humorist; and, turning, climbed all in a heat on to an upturned bucket that stood by. Whereat the puppy, emboldened by his foe's retreat, advanced savagely to the attack, buzzing round the slippery pail like a wasp on a window-pane, in vain attempt to reach the old man.

Tammas stood on the top, hitching his trousers and looking down on his assailant, the picture of mortal fear.

"'Elp! Oh, 'elp!" he bawled. "Send for the sogers! fetch the p'lice! For lawk-a-mussv's sake call him off, man!" Even Sam'l Todd, watching the scene from the cart-shed, was tickled and burst into a loud guffaw, heartily backed by 'Enry and oor Job. While M'Adam remarked: "Ye're fitter for a stage than a stable-bucket, Mr. Thornton."

"How didst coom by him?" asked Tammas, nodding at the puppy.

"Found him," the little man replied, sucking his twig. "Found him in ma stockin' or ma birthday. A present from ma leetle David for his auld dad, I doot."

"So do I," said Tammas, and was seized with a sudden spasm of seemingly causeless merriment. For looking up as M'Adam was speaking, he had caught a glimpse of a boy's fair head, peering cautiously round the cowshed, and, behind, the flutter of short petticoats. They disappeared as silently as they had come; and two small figures, just returned from school, glided away and sought shelter in the friendly darkness of a coal-hole.

"Coom awa', Maggie, coom awa' 'Tis th' owd un, 'issel', whispered a disrespectful voice.

M'Adam looked round suspiciously. "What's that?" he asked sharply.

At the moment, however, Mrs. Moore put her head out of the kitchen window. "Coom thy ways in, Master M'Adam, and tak' a soop o' tea," she called hospitably.

"Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Moore, I will," he answered, politely for him. And this one good thing must be allowed for Adam M'Adam: that, if there was only one woman of whom he was ever known to speak well, there was also one, in the whole course of his life, against whom he ever insinuated evil—and that was years afterward, when men said his brain was sapped. Flouts and jeers he had for every man, but a woman, good or bad, was sacred to him. For the sex that had given him his mother and his wife he had that sentiment of tender reverence which, if a man still preserve, he cannot be altogether bad. As he turned into the house he looked back at Red Wull.

"Ay, we may leave him," he said. "That is, gin ye're no afraid, Mr. Thornton?"

Of what happened while the men were within doors, it is enough to tell two things. First, that Owd Bob was no bully. Second, this: In the code of sheep-dog honor there is written a word in stark black letters; and opposite it another word, writ large in the color of blood. The first is "Sheep-murder"; the second, "Death." It is the one crime only to be wiped away in blood; and to accuse of the crime is to offer the one unpardonable insult. Every sheep-dog knows it, and every shepherd.

That afternoon, as the men still talked, the quiet echoes of the farm rang with a furious animal cry, twice repeated. "Shot for sheep-murder"—"Shot for sheep-murder"; followed by a glimmer of stillness.

(To be continued.)

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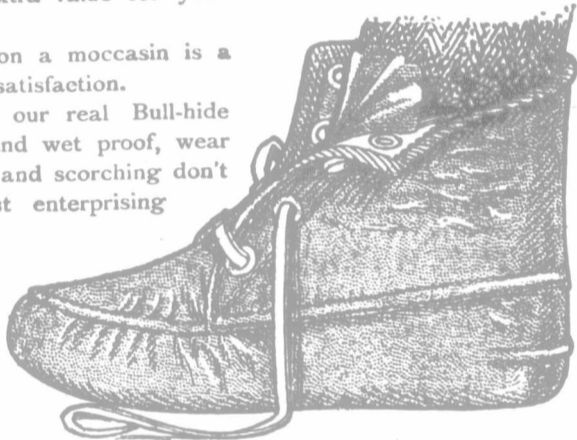
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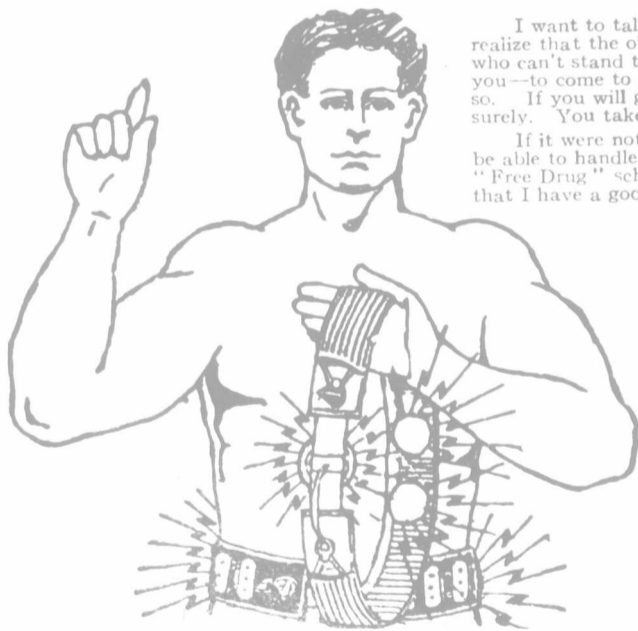
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