

## THE TURBULENTS

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He sat down and pulled off his boots, saying: "I'll shinny up an' shake him down. You watch the dogs, Dan."

Locke had been a sailor on the Great Lakes and with arm and knee he worked up the tamarack like a boy. As he approached, the much-hunted one moved from the crotch in which he had huddled and crept cautiously along a slender limb, where he hung by his long, sharp claws.

"Look out below!" Locke cried, standing in the crotch: then he struck the limb a sharp blow with the sole of his foot. The coon, dislodged, drew in a great lungful of air, till he was blown out like a football, and fell lightly to earth.

With a rush Queenie and Bruce were upon him; and then, even as they stuck their noses into his fat stomach as he lay on his back ready to battle, the two dogs sheathed their teeth and, drawing back a little, sniffed in a puzzled manner at the quarry. And through the sensitive nostrils of the collie mother vibrated the faint scent that reawakened a memory almost obliterated; it was the scent that once had stood for one of her own children. She gave a whine of delight; pleading, eager it was, and with her paw she scratched coaxingly at the coon's neck.

The foster-mother had come by the truth: it was Swampy, the escaped one.

But with him, a half-generation reclaimed from the forest life, memory was shorter; he had lapsed rapidly to the primal savagery of his race. His white teeth gleamed for an instant in the fire-light and then were buried in the paw that was the transmitter of mother affection.

With a yelp of pain, even of indignant remonstrance, the collie sprang back, and Swampy, rolling leisurely to his feet, scuttled back to the tamarack and, quite regardless of the fact that his man-enemy was up aloft, prepared to climb beyond reach of the meddlesome dogs.

The men sitting below had watched with astonishment this curious little pantomime, all but McIntyre; to him had come the thought that the coon must be the escaped Swampy: the dogs would have torn to ribbons any other.

When Swampy laid unfilial teeth upon the paw of Queenie and she shrank back, Jim McRae said, and his voice was keyed high in a sneer: "Blamed if the dogs ain't feared o' coon! Yon's a good coon-dog you've got, Dan McIntyre."

Just as Swampy reached the tree, Campbell took his hand from the collar of the McRae dog, and the latter, darting forward with a snarl, pounced upon the escaping coon.

Then Swampy's foster-mother Queenie and his foster-brother Bruce sank teeth of remonstrance into the rash McRae dog, and sought to tear him limb from limb.

With an oath, Jack McRae sprang forward and kicked Queenie in the ribs. And even as he kicked, something like the paw of a bear smote him in the neck, to the end that he went headlong over the dogs. Then the other McRae and Campbell fell upon the smiter, "Strong Dan," and sought to batter him in the way of reproof.

The din of battle came to Locke's ears, and his breeches screeched and fairly smoked with the friction of his descent as he shot down the scale-barked tamarack.

"You would—blank you!—Huh!" That was a grunt at the butt end of a blow, as Locke's fist swung inward on Campbell's chin and dropped him

to his knees. Before Locke could recoil to guard, Jim McRae's long arm flopped around like the loose end of a flail, and the Scotchman's fist, as hard as a horse's hoof from rough toil, smashed like a brick into the sailor's face.

Locke was a master in the sailor's fighting art, which is a method of fair execution; and McIntyre's strength, known throughout the county, was as hurtful as a bear's. On the other side there were three of the river boys: the McRaes, long of limb, clean of wind, like cats on their feet—proper woodsmen; while Campbell, though short of stature, had been nick-named "Fighting Archie." Hate and clan rivalry set a fast pace, and the combatants' diligent method would soon bring a verdict for one side or the other.

Meanwhile the cause of the little unpleasantness had scuttled up the tamarack once more, where he sat blinking curiously at the extraordinary animals who shattered the peace of the forest below.

The uneven ground, the big roots of the elm, and the slippery moss-covered sticks, introduced a rare element of chance into the contest. Sometimes "Strong Dan" was on his back with two men atop, until Locke, throttling one of them, would slip and all hands go rolling over one another like pups at play. It was like a football scrimmage; in the faulty, glimmering firelight a hard-knuckled fist, missing its mark, would land on the nose of a friend.

The Marquis of Queensbury and his rules had never puzzled the minds of these busy Scotchmen. It was go-as-you-please, kick, and slug, and clench in that ring, which was the whole black-ash swamp. Rough-and-tumble bars nothing but the gouge and the bite; and, so far, the combatants adhered closely to these honourable rules. It was a scrap of fervour, fast and furious; at times a little breathing-spell coming in a clench. They were almost too busy for speech. Once McIntyre grunted: "Take that, McRae, blank you!" as his Scotch knuckles, high in bone, ripped like a saw at his opponent's eyebrow. And Jack retaliated with a kick that would have opened an oak door.

Locke, less economical of speech than the Scots, encouraged his fighting comrade from time to time. "Give it—to him—Dan! I'm at your—back." And he was. But, unfortunately for his powers of succour, he was surrounded himself. Three men can deploy in battle more promiscuously than two; so there was always a spare fist ready to prod either Dan or Ben just as he was getting the better of his opponent.

Locke's face was redder than the rose, and the crimson hue had smeared his shirt-front; he peered with difficulty from beneath a beehive, or something, that hung heavily over his left eye. Three times Campbell had been knocked as many feet; but he was a wasp, a terrier that came snarling back to meddle officiously with four good men who desired to settle, in their own way, a difference of opinion.

Once the two McRaes held McIntyre in their long arms until he was like a figure of the Laocoon. Jack's left hand Dan's head in chancery, while with his right he upper-cut, only to batter his knuckles against the McIntyre skull.

"Will you take water now, blank you?" McRae panted.

For answer Strong Dan buckled his hips sidewise and with a feint of throwing his opponent backward, gave him the rolling-hip lock, and

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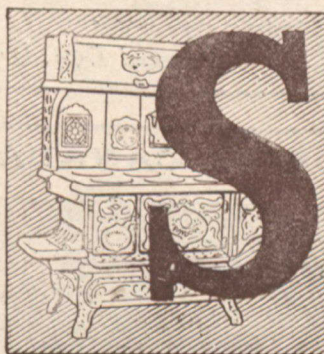
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