

BUCK STANTON.

By H. R. A. POCCOCK, OTTAWA.*

D'ANVERS, how would this shirt fit you, old man?"

"Don't ask me, Tom. I've given up buckskin years ago."

"Come on—try it as a special favor to me—I would like to see you in a man's dress."

So for once he took off his black clerical coat as we sat smoking by the log fire, and put on the shirt of buckskin. The soft rich color was flushed in the fire-light, the fringes fell gracefully over his shoulders, and though the wavy hair was turned grey, and the bronzed skin was now pale, and the worn face looked stern, I saw the light of the prairies come back into his grey eyes, and my heart went out to the fair brave face and the priest in the man's dress.

"And what on earth made you a missionary?"

"Why the Grace of God to be sure."

"But how? Do you always lock up your heart like one of these Jesuits, d'Anvers?"

"I'll tell you how I became a parson. I hope you won't laugh at me for being sentimental."

"It is some years since I was out for a winter trapping around the foot hills of the Rockies and Selkirks; and just when the winter let up after a poor season, I struck gold, and it was so rich I kept on washing all summer; and late in the fall I took my pile of 'dust' and the peltry from the winter's work, down to Fort Calgary, which was only a Hudson's Bay Post at the time. Well it was just after the 'round up' on the ranches, and a lot of 'cow punchers' were up at the Fort painting things red. You know that the company used to have rum and old brandy that beat all creation; and I was in the store drinking with the crowd the first night until I had considerably more than was good for me. Some of the 'boys' were beginning to get pretty noisy, but nothing out of the way happened until one of the fellows, a very old hand, 'set 'em up' with extra ceremony, and to my horror one of the crowd refused to drink. I knew at once that there would be a scene, and backed round to where Buck Stanton was sitting on a tub with his arms folded, perfectly sober, and not the least bit sulky, but refusing to touch a drop of liquor because he 'wanted to give his whole pile to the 'old woman' at home, and wasn't bumming around for free drinks.' Drunk as I was at the time, there was something about that chap that made me feel ashamed of myself, he seemed such a fine fellow sitting there—and I determined to take his part. Buck was a very handsome man, with clear blue eyes, and wonderful long silky hair worn down his back, as those fellows do wear it, they say to make their sight better."

"Well, the man who wanted to treat felt insulted, and he declared it was a matter of drink or fight—and it ended as I had feared in shooting, about the

only case I ever heard of on this side of the line. The aggressor must have been too drunk to take aim, and Buck's bullet went clear through the other's brain. That sobered me, and I came to Buck's defence as the whole mob set on him; and after a few minutes I got him safely out of a side door, and we made for the river with the whole crowd after us. The sudden change to the fresh air must have made them feel the effects of the liquor more, for they were too drunk to follow very rapidly, and we gained the river bank some way ahead of them. At the point on the bank to which Buck led we found a little canoe only large enough for one.

"I remember most vividly how his blue eyes looked down into mine, and he said hurriedly, 'Stranger, I'm winged, can't paddle anyway—get in quick and take this letter to my mother—and God bless you, stranger. Shake!'

"I remember shaking hands with him, taking a heavy letter which I found afterwards in my shirt, shoving off the canoe, pushing out across the stream, dodging a shower of bullets."

"And then I stood on the other bank free—and there was Buck Stanton in the dusk daring the crowd to come on—and then he fell!

"Didn't it seem shameful for me to be standing there safe, a coward, while that brave man lay dead? Fancy a man who faced certain death rather than that his widowed mother should be without the savings of a year's hard work on the ranches. Didn't it seem beastly mean of me to be drinking my brains away when I could be the means of bringing purer and more perfect life to dozens of those fine fellows, who stained their hands with blood only because they had never had teachers to tell them of better things, and to show them by example that manliness and Christianity are one Gospel?"

"I may not have been wearing a man's clothes these last few years, old fellow; but that is the reason I became a missionary."

And as he finished and sat by the glowing pine logs that lit up the cabin of the Mission, the door from the cold winter outside opened, and a man stood in the shanty with his fur cap in his hand; and the fire-light streamed over him, and flooded with glory the wavy hair that fell, sparkling with fresh fallen snow, over his shoulders. And the fire-light shone on bold blue eyes; and the parson looked up from his reverie, and stood before his visitor silent. Then he found voice to speak, striding forward:

"Are you come from the dead? Speak—Buck, Buck Stanton—speak!"

"No lad, they ain't found out how to plug this chicken yet—Did you give my letter to the old woman? You did? Say, you're a MAN stranger—Shake!"

Of the 3,000 crimes punished by Chinese law, none is reckoned to be so great as disobedience to parents.

*From "Tales of Western Life." See our Books and Periodicals Department.