

PRESIDENT  
McGLUSKY

A. G. HALL



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PRESIDENT McGLUSKY







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President McGlusky wins his princess.

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# President McGlusky

BY

A. G. HALES

Author of the McGlusky Series

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## Dedication

To E. P. H.

This book, which deals with McGlusky's life just after the British-Boer War, was written during the time the Huns were bombing the peaceful English coast towns. It may jump a bit in spots—as I did, for on twenty occasions I had to drop my pen and go out to do my work as a war correspondent. Some of it was written with shells making devils' melody round my cottage, but McGlusky managed to raise a chuckle. I gladly dedicate the work to the lad who travelled with me over the pampas of South America, acting as my interpreter and sharing my hunting bivouacs. He will not soon forget the finding of the arrow-heads in the Indian burial ground, or what befel *him* there. Good comrade and merry companion, may this remind him of our mutual affection and our travels, until at some future date we take the long trail together again, for life and the lust of travel is still strong.

THE AUTHOR.



## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I THE SPANISH TREASURE . . . . .	13
II McGLUSKY THE NATURALIST . . . . .	23
III A BATTLE OF GIANTS . . . . .	40
IV THE TRADER'S STORY . . . . .	54
V McGLUSKY TURNS HUNTER . . . . .	70
VI DERRY IS BLOODED TO THE WILDS. . . . .	86.
VII THE COMING OF THE STALLION . . . . .	102
VIII NATURE'S TREASURE HOUSE . . . . .	119
IX BLACK PEDRO MAKES TROUBLE . . . . .	137
X A GREAT HORSE AND A GREAT MAN MEET . . . . .	154
XI A HOMERIC STRUGGLE . . . . .	181
XII MERCY MIXED WI' A' THINGS . . . . .	203
XIII McGLUSKY PLANS A FORTUNE . . . . .	222
XIV THE COMING OF TROUBLE . . . . .	240
XV THE COMING OF BILL ADAMS . . . . .	265
XVI PRESIDENT McGLUSKY MAKES GOOD . . . . .	305

M. Lovejoy



## CHAPTER I

### THE SPANISH TREASURE

‘ I F we dinna find th’ Spanish treasure, A’m theenk-  
in’ we’ll maybe mak’ wages, an’ that will dae  
tae gang on wi’.’

The speaker was a man in the glory and splendour of lusty manhood. He was leaning upon his shovel in a hole he was digging in a basin formed by low sandhills. The growl of the ocean rolling shoreward a few yards away filled the air with the magical melody so dear to the souls of those who love the sea; now and again some giant wave swelling above its fellows broke against the pebble-strewn beach with a crash that fitted in wondrous well with the barbaric rhythm of nature’s world-old orchestra.

‘ Did ye hear that yin, laddie? It sounded tae ma like th’ death chant o’ some old sea rover wi’ a note o’ deefiance in th’ last gasp flung inta th’ teeth o’ destiny.’

‘ Sounded to me like an invitation to dinner, flung in the face of an empty stomach—it’s grub time, McGlusky; sun’ll soon be down.’

The man called McGlusky looked reproachfully in the direction of the speaker.

‘ Dom y’r stummick! A never mention a gran’ thocht tae ye, mannie, but ye begin tae talk about y’r innrds. Ye ha’ na soul. There’s a bit sayin’ in

yin o' th' classics fits ye like a fat lassie's leg fits a silk stockin'.'

'Did you get the fat leg and the silk stocking from the classics, Mac?'

'A did na. A made that yin masel'.'

'I think you manufacture most of your "classics" too, Old Timer. Come on, I'm too hungry to argue.'

The speaker put his hands on the side of the hole he had been sinking, and vaulted out, standing revealed nine stone six of wire and whipcord, slender, supple and strong, with a face the gods had sent to earth to plague the hearts of women, not quite a man and something more than a boy. Pushing the glossy brown hair back from his forehead, and wiping the sweat from his big brown eyes with his forearm, he stepped lightly to the hole where the veteran still stood and held out a hand.

'Take a grip, and I'll help you out, partner. You're getting old, and shovel work in the sun is hard work, eh?'

'Auld—me—auld! A'll push ye inta ma pipe an' suck ye through the stem, ye—ye pup.'

Without putting his hands on the earth, McGlusky leapt straight up in the air and landed clear of the hole he had been sinking, a feat only an athlete could have accomplished, and so lightly did he land that in spite of the high boots he wore, which reached above his knees, his feet scarce made more sound than the feet of a sea-bird when it swoops to earth.

'There, ye mannikin, get ye doon yon bit hole an' dae *that*. Leap five feet seven fra y'r ain tracks straight up as if ye were shot up fra a gun, an' then talk tae ma.'

The lad eyed him admiringly, and well he might. Six feet odd of raw-boned mighty manhood crowned with a leonine head, is not seen every day. The face that was pushed towards the youth was the strangest

thing about the big backwoodsman: all elements seemed blended in it—thinker, dreamer, inventor, visionary, fighter and man of action, all were written large on the rugged countenance. It was the face of one who might have been a modern Mahomet, only for a certain sign of weakness in one peculiar direction. Once a great nerve specialist, watching his face on shipboard, had remarked to a friend: 'There's a man who might move the world if his forbears had not left a taint in his blood that will always take him unawares, like a thief in the night, and undo in an hour the hard work of years, and rot the fruit of genius ere it ripens.' The dominant note in the face was fierce energy, yet a shrewd observer would have read between the lines a great tenderness, which would make the man gentle and pitiful to the weak and helpless, and tender with the erring. Savage as a storm he could be, but a tower of strength to those he loved, and a very rock in the wilderness to all dumb creatures dependent upon him. The youth beside him seemed to know him as a trout knows a stream. Looking from the pioneer to the hole out of which the older man had just leapt without an effort, he drawled:

'Pretty good jump, Mac; you must have been useful a quarter of a century ago.'

The tremor of fun in the young voice caught the other's ear, and the laughter leapt into his eyes, causing a score of little wrinkles to pucker at the corners of the grey-blue eyes.

'Ye randy wee beastie, ye ha' had ma by th' leg again; ye play on ma as ye play on y'r banjo; it's time Jamie McGlusky gied ye a lesson; ha' at ye!'

He made a grab at the youngster's neck with a hand like a flitch of bacon, but the youth ducked his unsmiling face, and dived under the arm as a carrier pigeon dives from a hawk, and the next instant he was off at full speed with the giant in swift pursuit. In and

out amongst the sand dunes raced the pair; the laddie was fast and light, and in the pink of condition, but McGlusky would have had him again and again had the youth not possessed the gift of doubling in his tracks like a hare. He seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, for each time McGlusky shot forth a bony hand to grasp him, he veered as a swallow veers in mid flight. At last they stopped as if by mutual consent, and eyed each other with mirth in their glances.

'Y'r sleepery as a soap bubble, Derry, there's no mony men A cud na catch in a burst o' that length.'

'If you could turn as fast as you run, Mac, you'd catch a cock ostrich on foot. Beats me how you get over the ground as you do with your weight. Gee, I'm hot! Let's have a swim; see if you can catch me in the water.'

'Otter catch salmon,' gurgled McGlusky, and the next minute they were in the sea, playing as they had played at hare and hound on land. In a straight swim the youngster would have had no chance, for McGlusky clove his way through the water like a motor-boat, but Derry dived like a fish-hawk and turned like a trout. At last, weary of their sport, they turned on their backs and floated idly, exchanging scraps of thought.

'Really believe there's any buried treasure hereabouts, Mac?'

'A dae, buckie, but we'll no' find it easy. Ye ken th' mon who hid it didn'a mean any one ta find it, but his ain sel', an' he died wi'oot haein' th' chance.'

'President Roseas, wasn't it, the chap who had all the Government buildings built rose-coloured when he was in power?'

'Ye hae th' richts o' 't, laddie.'

'Well, I wish he'd put a rose-coloured tombstone over the treasure he buried; we've sunk a few hundred

holes looking for it, and haven't found a sign. I think it's a pipe dream myself.'

'Weel, we've struck something to-day, ma son.'

'Yes, an old Indian burial-ground.'

The youth spoke with a note of contempt in his voice, as if his opinion of Indian burial grounds were not of the highest.

'Dinna scoff at wha' ye dinna ken, buckie.'

Derry ceased floating, and standing almost upright in the ocean, began to tread water. McGlusky did the same.

'What's the good of dead Indians, Mac? Didn't know there was a market for *them*.'

'When ye've been knocking roon' th' backblocks o' South America as long as A have, ye'll no' scoff at Indian burial groon's. A've been here nigh on twa an' a half years noo; A cam' here directly A'd feenished wi' th' Boer War. A focht f'r th' Breetish in that war, ye ken.'

'Where does the money come in turnin' up redskins' graves,' persisted Derry. 'Are we goin' to start a mummy emporium, eh?'

'We're no'. A'm no' a dealer in dead men, but A coont it na sin ta tak' th' arrow-heads we'll maybe find; they used ta mak' their arrow-heads oot o' flint, an' gey clever they were at it—sma' fine yins f'r fish arrows, wi' barbed edges, short thickish yins f'r game like foxes an' sic like animals, an' big yins f'r ostriches an' guanacos, an' bigger yins f'r warfare. A good collection o' these a mon can always sell. A know, f'r A've sold 'em.'

'Graveyards don't seem a likely place to *me* to find things o' that sort, Mac.'

'Weesdom is th' child o' experience, ma son, an' y'r weesdom ha' no' gotten whuskers on it yet.'

Derry turned on his back, floating like a sun fish.

'Tell me about it, Old Timer.'



McGlusky, still treading water with the ease of an old pearl-diver, remarked casually :

' Y'r a whale f'r information, Derry, but y'r no' a bad worker when th' speerit moves ye in th' direction o' industry. Ye maybe dinna ken all these Southern pampas were full o' red men yince.'

' Only seen one since we've been here, Mac.'

' Y'r richt ; th' tribes o' th' Southern pampas air gone noo, killed off or died off, an' th' yin ye saw is th' last o' all his people. Did ye ken he was watchin' us the day when we were diggin' ? '

' No.'

' A saw him keekin' at us ; he was lyin' on a sand hillock, mais' hid by th' thorn bushes. A caught th' glitter o' his beady black eyes. A'm theenkin' he was no' likin' it.'

' Small blame to him if he didn't.'

' He hasn'a got ta like it, buckie, he's only got ta put up wi' it. Those flint arrow-heads air no good ta dead men, an' they'll be mighty useful tae us, for we can sell 'em, an' eef we dinna earn some siller we'll ha' tae gie up th' search f'r Don Roseas' buried treasure, an' it's no' in nature tae let th' dead keep wha's useful tae th' livin'. There's neither sense nor relevation in it.'

' How'd *you* like some one come turnin' you over with a shovel when you're planted waitin' calm an' respectable f'r th' last trump, Mac ? '

' Eef A'm any use tae th' buckie wha' finds ma, A'll no' be mindin' it ; it's th' duty o' a mon tae be useful dead or alive. The yin that finds ma can mak' ma inta a lunch eef he feels like it.'

' Tell me about the arrow-heads.'

' It was a custom o' th' red men o' these pampas tae put arrow-heads in th' graves above th' bodies, plain yins f'r plain people but gold-tipped yins f'r chiefs.'

Derry came to an upright position on the instant ;

all his scruples vanished like mist before a gale at the mention of the magic word gold.

' I hope that grave-yard's full o' chiefs, Mac ; I could do with an acre or two of chiefs right now, couldn't you ? '

' Dinna let th' lust o' reeches get inta y'r innards, mannie, it's—it's no' wholesome. A'll be mair than satisfied if A find a dozen chiefs, a greedy mon's an abomination tae th' Lord.' They swam for a minute or two in silence, then the veteran said : ' Eef ye find a chief's grave an' A'm no' wi' ye at th' time, dinna cast awa' a single arrow-head, even if ye dinna see th' glint o' gold.'

' Why not ? '

' Because, buckie, eef it is a chief o' th' ancient line o' their kings, maybe they'll bury arrow-heads wi' him made o' precious stanes they used tae get in war or trade frae th' tribes who used tae live in th' far-awa' Andes, or from th' tribes that lived on th' banks o' th' rivers that run through the great cedar forests in th' far north up beyond Ju Juy.'

' Been smoking opium lately, McGlusky ? '

' A never smoke opium, ye son o' Belial.'

' Well, if this ain't a pipe dream, or you ain't something out of a private asylum, I'm never going back to work in the dirty engine-room of any old ocean tramp, that's all.'

McGlusky turned his face towards the shore, and began to swim homewards with long leisurely strokes. Derrick Ash, runaway engineer's apprentice, swam beside him, listening as the veteran moralized on the vanity of riches—and other things.

' Gold's a gude thing, Derry, but A'd like tae see ye grippin' a wee bit mair at higher an' nobler theengs, an' A'd love ye mair, laddie, eef ye didn'a put so much faith in yer ainsel', but leant a wee bit mair on Providence. A'm no' preachin' ye ken, buckie, but eef A had no' learned that all that happens a mon in this

life is f'r th' best A'd be a weethered bough th' noo. A've learnt tae deal gently wi' ma enemies—in reason. An' A've learnt tae bear wi' patience whatever cross is gied ma tae bear ; patience lends deegnity tae a mon, an'——'

' What's all that smoke ashore, Mac ? '

With a downward motion of his arms McGlusky heaved the upper part of his body out of the water and sent a keen glance in the direction indicated.

' It's oor things burnin' ; that dom pagan who watched us frae th' sand dunes th' day ha' burned us oot. Losh, an' A lay ma han's on him th' nicht, A'll wind him roon' a tree trunk like a thread aroond a spindle, an' tie him there till th' day o' judgment, th' dom pagan, he's tryin' ta rob us o' oor arrer-heads.'

As he ploughed his way shorewards through the glassy sea Derry could hear him grunting out threats strangely at variance with the sweet Christian philosophy he had voiced such a short time previously.

' Burn ma gear, an' drive ma awa' frae my spoils, wull ye ? . . . Lord, deliver him inta ma' han' this nicht, an' eef A dinna mak' th' heathen eat th' ashes whiles they're hot, A'll eat 'em masel'. . . . A'm no' vengefu', th' Lord kens, A'm no' vengeful, but eef he waits till A get tae him, A'll beat him tae a Seidlitz powder an' stir him till he fizzes, th' misbegotten remnant o' a pagan people !'

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Derry was chuckling as he listened, and he wondered just what McGlusky would do to an enemy to whom he did feel vengeful. Without a glance at his clothes on the beach, the big man snatched up a huge piece of driftwood and sped to his camp. A solitary red man who was feeding the flames, saw him coming and disappeared like a wraith, gliding with noiseless feet through the thorn scrub, and his rapid departure proved that he was not the most foolish of his lost



tribe, for as Derry explained at a later date, McGlusky arrayed only in his whiskers, and carrying a vast piece of some wrecked ship's timber in his right fist ready for instant action, did not look inviting enough to induce any sane man to stop and chat about the weather. Dropping his impromptu weapon, the big pioneer seized a shovel and began hurling sand on the flames, and Derry seconded his efforts to the best of his ability, and in time they got the fire under.

'A'm theenkin' we've no' salvaged much that was above groon' in th' tent, buckie, but th' things A cached unner th' soil may no' be varra much hurtit.'

'I didn't see much sense in burying things in the tent, Old Timer; thought you'd got a bee in your upper flower garden, but I see good sense in it now—did you expect a call of this kind from the red man?'

'A canna say A did, ma son, but A've been pioneer-in' an' gun-runnin' an' adventurin' a' ma days, since A was as high as a dog's knee, an' experience mak's ye canny, unless ye carry wood pulp where y'r brains ocht ta be. Weel, weel, it's bad enough, but it might ha' been waur; we've lōst all our claes except wha' we left on th' beach, an' oor blankets an' grub hae a' gone, an' oor saddles air both ruined beyon' repair, but oor rifles an' ammunition an' oor fishin' tackle an' th' wee bit siller air a' safe in th' cache. The axe han'le's burnt through, but gin A get ta a tree A'll soon put that wee matter richt. A'm theenkin', buckie, we might say a wee bit prayer.'

'Have a hymn of gladness too, Old Timer, if it will soothe you, but I don't see anything to pray over.'

McGlusky gripped the slender naked shoulders of his young comrade in a grasp that, hard as nails though he was, made Derry wince. Then he pushed his hairy leonine face close to that of the youth, and his voice came in a snarling growl.

'Ye dinna see ocht ta pray for, dinna ye? Weel, A

dae, f'r eef that pagan had dug up a rifle instead o' puttin' a fire stick into oor tent, he'd ha' bagged us baith.'

'He was in too much of a hurry, I guess.'

'Na, na, mannie, it was th' speerits that guard them that believe that put th' fire stick into his hand instead o' th' rifle.'

'Don't believe in spooks myself, Mac.'

'Neither did A when A was young an' a fool, but weesdom cometh wi' years an' travel. Ye'll maybe believe lots o' things afore ye die—if y're no' hanged—that y'r laugh at th' noo. At the beginnin' a calf theenks there's nothing in life worth havin' but milk, but gin it gets its teeth, it thinks grass is no' so bad.'

'All right, partner, you do the prayin' while I go to the beach for our clothes; the wind's nippy after sundown.'

McGlusky looked with kindly eyes at the retreating form of his mate.

'A gude laddie, but filled wi' th' scoffing materialistic speerit o' th' age—Lord, gie him grace tae see th' error o' his ways, teach him th' beauties o' th' speerit, mak' him gentle wi' th' gentleness o' a great heart, an'——'

A bow twanged amid the thorn scrub and an arrow struck McGlusky's bony collar-bone and glanced off.

'Hell!' yelled McGlusky. 'Eef A dinna splinter y'r backbane wi' ma boot f'r that, ye red de'il, ye may put a bridle on ma an' call ma Balaam.'

He was down on the earth clawing the loose dirt for his rifle, and the next minute Derry heard the old Winchester coughing out bullets and his unregenerate soul rejoiced.

'The Old Timer's not prayin' now, he's strayin' from the narrer way, but I'll bet his bullets won't stray far from anything he sees an' aims at. That redskin must badly want ter join his folks in their cemetery, or—or he don't know McGlusky.'

## CHAPTER II

### McGLUSKY THE NATURALIST

THE dawn swept gloriously over earth and sea in one great gorgeous wave of light, and the world awoke and waking laughed. So the days of summer are born on the southern coast of the Argentine, where men are few, and birds and beasts, fish and flying things, disport themselves according to their kind, as they did when the world was young. In the gloomy Western hemisphere the dawn comes slowly, as if the nights, pregnant with sorrow, were in travail, and loath to give birth to brightness, but the sunny South throws the mantle of night behind it gladly, gloriously, and behold a day is born in the twinkling of an eye, a very miracle of birth. The Eastern skies were rent asunder with shafts and broad beams of translucent light. Clouds that had been black and frowning a moment before, blazed with living fire. Crimson splashes ran into purple waves, and glittering gold met and mingled with rose-blush pink. Broad white shafts of light like burnished silver blades sheathed themselves in banks of mingled blue and bronze, and every instant every colour changed as though the master artist of the world were mixing His rainbow hues on a palette as wide as a world. Moon and stars paling into insignificance before the regal splendour of the sub-tropic dawn, vanished from the reach of human eyes, wrapping themselves in

mystery, their magic hour, the hour of night was past, and the sun god, glowing through waves of colour, rode in majesty, warming the whispering winds as wine warms an old warrior's blood. The sea that through the night had lain sullen, sad and vengeful, crooning a death song as it lapped the coast line, threw off its sadness and sparkled over the breadth of its broad blue face, every foam-crested wavelet frothing white bubbles that scintillated like numberless millions of burnished gems, each bursting bubble a rainbow in miniature, a thumbnail sketch of the inner portals of the gates of glory.

McGlusky stood on a ledge of rock that jutted seaward, just where old ocean joins a harbour that few know to-day even by repute, but which all the maritime world will some day know as one of the noblest harbours in the world of waters. The raw-boned, uncouth giant faced the sea, and all his soul was in his face; forgotten were the dreams of avarice that had filled his being as he desecrated the Indian burial-ground the previous day. Forgotten the red man's act of revenge and his own lust of vengeance. He stood with his soul naked, watching nature's glory at its greatest, and his adamant spirit was awed to humbleness. From sea to sky his stern eyes, deep set behind brows that looked as if they might have been hewn out of the rock he stood upon, roved unceasingly whilst his ears drank in the song of the sea. Suddenly he reached forth his arms that looked like boughs torn from some old oak. His hands roughened by a life of toil were poised, all unknowingly as men in the ancient East poise their hands in prayer—palms outward. The wind blew his beard aside, his mouth opened, and McGlusky prayed, the prayer of the strong man who knows his limitations: 'God, be merciful to me, a fool.' Then he filled his lungs with a great draught of pure sea air, and turning strode back to



camp. The lad Derry who had been watching him, spoke his irreverent mind.

'Say, McGlusky, there's a fortune in you going to waste.'

'A'd like ta ken where an' hoo.'

'Well, I was watchin' you just now on the end of the rock makin' magic passes at the waves.'

'A was haein' a bit crack wi' th' Almichty, laddie.'

'Prayin', Mac?'

'Ye ma' ca' it that gin it please ye, buckie. A was gie'n th' Almichty ma opeenion about masel' an' askin' f'r a wee bittie help, that's a'.'

'Well, Mac, if you'd get a white sheet an' make a hole in it to put your head an' whiskers through, an' just stand by the sea an' do the magic pass act with your hands, you'd make a fortune on the picture films as Elijah the prophet, you'd——'

McGlusky's face, baked brown by sun and storm in many lands, flamed the colour of the clay the potters make red roof tiles from. His eyes that had been filled with the eerie light of the mystic and the dreamer, blazed in savage scorn. With a movement that was tigerish in its speed, he was beside the youth, and one hand like the section of a sail gripped Derry's shirt-front, close up under the chin.

'A foond ye an outcast in th' foulest slum in th' Boca in Buenos Aires, an' ye, a runaway sailor laddie, were becomin' as foul as th' foulest in yon cesspool o' th' south. A took ye as ma mate, f'r A love a' things young. A foond ye brave in time o' danger, uncomplaining in time o' hardship, a gude worker wi' no idle bone in ye, but ye've a mockin' de'il in th' marrer o' y'r bones; ye see God Almichty through th' gratin' o' a cellar in a slum. A dinna mind when ye gird at ma an' ma weaknesses, but ye shall no' gird at th' yin thing that's good in ma, an' saves ma frae bein' an unchained de'il—ma faith in Him.'

As he uttered the last word, the pioneer raised his free hand with an unconscious but majestic motion towards the skies.

'Gin ye do, Derry, we pairt, an'—A'd greet ta lose ye.'

For a moment Derry stood quietly where his mate had dropped him, then lifting his quaintly immovable face to the other, he said:

'Mac?'

'Weel?'

'Did you ever hit a fellow till his ribs met his backbone?'

'A hae.'

'Well, do it now. I'm a—a low hound.'

All the passion died from the pioneer's face. He took his mate by the two hips and held him at arm's length.

'A mon doesn'a hurt th' thing he loves,' he said simply. Turning he picked up the fishing tackle. 'Rake oop a bit fire, Derry, A'll gang an' cast a line, th' fish air sae thick on this coast, they're bumpin' yin anither tae death tryin' tae turn roon'. We maun eat fish, buckie, we've naething else tae eat; oor flour bag was burst last nicht an' th' flour all mixed wi' th' sand. A'm no' likin' ma flour that way, th' sand is no' encouragin' ta th' deegestion.'

Pipe in mouth the pioneer stood on an overhanging rock and cast his line; he had baited with cockles picked up on the sandy beach. Scarcely had his hook hit the water ere it was taken, but when he hauled his prey ashore, he expressed no pleasure, though the fish must have weighed ten pounds.

'Y'r a' richt when there's naething better, but A'm theenkin' there is.'

He cast again, and again the bait was snapped close to the surface, and a fish similar to the first was hauled ashore.

'Eef A was runnin' a boardin' hoose ye'd dae gey fine, but A'm no', he grunted. 'A maun put a heavy sinker on ma line, yin that wull carry th' bait tae th' bottom wi speed; these coarse fish swim near th' surface. A'm thinkin' fush air like men, th' coarser they air, the nearer they get tae th' top.' He made a megaphone of his hands and shouted to Derry. 'A'm wantin' a sinker, buckie; there's a couple o' three-inch bolts amang th' bag fu' o' cartridges, screw off th' nuts an' bring 'em here.'

When Derry arrived, on the run, with the nuts, he saw the two fish Mac had captured. 'What's wrong with these, partner?'

'Naething, son, only there's better at th' bottom tae be had f'r th' haulin' oop; only a fule tak's second-best o' anything when th' best can be had f'r th' grabbin'.'

He cast his line and the heavy sinker carried it swiftly to the depths below.

'These look pretty good to me, Mac. I went to sleep hungry last night—an' so did you.'

'They're no' bad, but they're better below. Losh, ma buckie, ye expect ta get th' best oot o' y'r body, workin' or playin', dinna ye?'

'I do.'

'Weel, ye canna unless ye put th' best inta y'r innards. That which a mon puts inta a theeng wull gie him th' measure o' what he ma' expect ta tak' oot o' 't. Eat th' best ye can when ye can get it, an' thank God f'r it; when ye maun eat th' worst, eat it an' dinna grumple.—Losh, A've hookit a whale!'

With the skill that comes of long experience, the pioneer played the fish he had hooked, now hauling in the slack of his line with swift, deft fingers, now giving out yard upon yard; now and again he bent all his body to the task of landing his prey, by putting a heavy, steady strain on the line.

'Got something thundering big, partner.'

'Got the gran'father o' a' th' flat fush in these pairts, A'm theenkin'. It's pullin' th' arms oot o' ma.'

'Shall I give you a spell with the line, Mac?'

'Na, na, A niver let go anything A've grippit in earnest, but—a windlass wud no' come amiss th' noo.'

The breath was whistling through the cavernous nostrils of the pioneer's big hooked nose; his teeth were clenched on the stem of his pipe, and it was well for him he had made that pipe-stem out of a piece of slender iron piping and bound the mouthpiece round with rubber, for nothing else would have stood the grip of his jaws at that moment. Derry, on hands and knees, was peering down into the water watching the fish battling for life.

'What like is he, laddie?'

'Big as a blanket an' about th' same shape.'

'Oh hey, A kenned he was no sardine.'

'We'll never land him, Mac, without a gaff an' a net. Th' hook will tear the jaw away when you try to lift him.'

'Tak' a grip o' th' line an' A'll show ye, buckie. It will tak' mair'n a fush ta beat Jamie McGlusky.'

Derry, eager for action, grasped the line; the pioneer literally tore off his clothing, then with his long sheath knife in his teeth, he slid into the sea and sank like a stone, causing scarce a ripple.

'Gosh,' gaspēd Derry, 'thought I knew something about diving an' swimming, but I couldn't do that.'

McGlusky rose right under the big white body and drove his knife into its belly well up towards the head; then he drew the knife with all his force down towards the tail, gutting the prize with one tremendous stroke. Then he rose to the surface and swam ashore with fierce energy.



'No hurry, partner, you've finished him.'

'Na hurry f'r him, but a de'il o't f'r ma,' snapped the pioneer, as he jerked his long legs clear of the water.

'See anything, Mac?'

'No' bein' a fule body A didn'a stop ta keek roon', Derry. Wherever there's fush in shoals on these coasts, there's sharks too, an' when a shark smells bluid he bites, an' he's no' particular wha' he bites. Sharks are like lawyers, th' further ye keep awa' frae them, th' healthier f'r yersel'. Noo pull in yon fush or they'll be manglin' it.'

Together they landed their prize, though not without difficulty, for even in death it was a giant of the deep.

'We'll eat wha' we can whilst it's fresh an' smoke th' rest, it's th' tenderest fush that swims th' seas an' as full o' nutriment as th' best beef. It's—it's th' poetry o' mastication ta breakfast o' a junk o' 't. The Lord wull no' let us want, laddie, eef we dinna waste.'

Derry was not listening; he was watching a couple of sharks fighting over the entrails in the water.

'You—knew—they were hereabout, an' you went in with a knife, partner?' He pointed towards the sharks.

McGlusky looked at him with childlike astonishment depicted on his cast-iron countenance.

'Went in—wud ye expect ma ta stop oot an' lose wha' was mine by th' law o' capture? Gin ye ken ma better, ye'll ken that's no' ma way. Wha' th' Lord gies ma A keep; neither mon nor beast shall tak' it frae ma wi'oot a sma' taste o' trouble.'

After breakfast, which consisted of fish alone, followed by a pipe, the rest of the morning's catch was smoked in order to provide food for a journey the pioneer said must soon be undertaken. This task accomplished, the pair took their rifles and scouted round

for traces of the red man who had burnt them out.

'We'll no' see him, A'm theenkin',' remarked Mac, 'but A think he'll see us, an' when he notices we air lookin' f'r him wi' rifles in oor han's, A'm o' th' opeenion he'll ha' th' sense ta keep awa'. A wud ha' slain him in ma wrath last nicht, gin A got hold o' him, but th' nicht brought reflection, an' maybe th' pagan was no' in th' wrong o' 't althegither. Ye see, buckie, it was th' graves o' his people we were diggin' oop, an' mayhap this yin may ha' been left in chargé o' th' dead by his chief, an' we canna richtly blame a mon f'r doin' his duty accordin' ta his lights.'

'What if he comes back and tries to fill us full of arrows, partner?'

'Gin he comes back on th' war path we maun gie him war; eef he tries ta pump arrows inta us we air mair than justified in pumpin' lead inta him. Gie him yin bullet if ye get a chance' but dinna be wastefu' o' ammunition, we'll ha' tae pay through th' nose f'r it at th' tradin' post. Noo let's gang oop ta yon burial groon' an' see what Providence may send us. A'm hopin' yin o' us wull find oot where a chief is planted.'

On the way to the Indian cemetery they talked of the business in hand.

'What made you fancy the Spanish treasure might be hidden among dead men, partner?'

'Th' buckie who sold ma th' information about the Rosas hidin' place said the gould was planted here-aboots in an Indian burial groon'.'

'You bought the information, then?'

'A did. A paid gude siller f'r it, f'r th' information an' th' map o' th' country.'

'Do you still believe it?'

'A dae—why not? All the world knows President Rosas planted a million dollars' worth o' treasure somewhere on this coast an' in th' pampas. My men said Rosas separated th' gould into three different

hidin' places ; there's only about a quarter o' a million dollars' worth hidden hereabouts—accordin' ta what he telt ma.'

' Why didn't the chap who sold you the chart come an' get the treasure himself, partner ? '

' Ye air a direct descendant o' doubtin' Thomas. Ye ha' nae faith in mon or God or de'il. Dinna ye ken it's no' every mon who has enough in his innards ta come ta a lonesome place like this ta search amang dead men f'r buried loot.'

' Why choose a cemetery for a hidin' place ? '

' Maist o' th' few people on th' pampas air half-breeds.'

' Well, partner ? '

' The half-breeds air as fu' o' superstitions as a river pilot is o' cusses ; they wouldn'a touch loot buried in a cemetery eef ye led 'em to it on a string, an' Rosas knew it.'

' Hope we'll get the chance, partner ; my bump o' superstition don't run in that direction. Well, here's our happy hunting ground.'

' Put y'r rifle close handy ta th' hole y're diggin', that red pagan ma' tak' a keek at us again ; oor rifles will be a hint ta him he's no' welcome. Noo, ma laddie, mak' th' dirt fly ; A'll try an' set ye a wee bit pace ; though ye mauna fash eef A'm no' able ta gie ye a lead.'

There was a sort of grim humour in the pioneer's face as he uttered the last words, and jumped nimbly into his excavation.

' Ger out,' snapped Derry, ' I know you when y're on the end of a shovel.'

Soon nothing was heard but the strokes of picks and the rasp of shovels, and the clatter of earth and gravel being tossed up. Every now and again the pioneer paused, swept the surrounding hillocks with a gaze that missed nothing, then bent again to his task.

Once McGlusky cast an admiring glance at the heap of debris the youth had tossed up.

'Yon's a gude laddie ta work, an' there's always hope o' salvation f'r a mon who doesn'a shirk his task; it's the lazy yins that air damned fra their mither's nipples ta th' doors o' judgment.'

'Struck anything yet, partner?'

'Naething worth putting in a book, laddie. A've come across a few broken arrow-heads, an' yin or twa misshapen yins; th' pagan who's buried unner ma feet maun ha' been a buckie o' verra sma' account, A'm theenkin'. 'Hoo's it wi' yersel'?''

'Come 'nd have a look.'

McGlusky went, and going on hands and knees carefully examined the bottom of Derry's excavation.

'What do you make of it, partner?'

'There's a layer o' limestone here, buckie.'

'Have I struck bottom, eh?'

'Na, there's no limestone hereabouts, this ha' been put in stane by stane. Gie ma th' pick, A'll niggle it a wee bittie, maybe there's something unnerneath that needs carefu' handlin'.'

He took the pick from Derry and began chipping the limestone surface carefully; soon he came to the edge of a thick slab; tapping it with his pick he discovered it was wood, which they removed with infinite care, and discovered rows of arrow-heads stuck in the soil in rude imitation of birds and fish. They examined each one as they drew it from the soil, and found in every case the point neatly chipped off.

'What do you make of it, Mac?'

'Eef y're meanin' what dae A mak' o' th' value o' what we've foon', A can tell ye tae a saxpence; th' mon at th' tradin' hoose wouln'a gie us a plug o' tobacco f'r th' lot.'

'What does it all mean, eh?'

'A've heard o' this before. It means th' pagan



who's been planted here died in deesgrace as a hunter an' feeshermon an' a mon; his frien's gie'd him broken arrer-heads ta go huntin' in hell wi'. A'm speerin' he robbed his tribe in time o' war, an' th' heathen condemned him ta everlastin' bad huntin'.'

'Don't seem much sense in that to me, partner.'

'Red men's country, red men's customs, ma son. In white men's country when a mon robs his ain folk in war time they gie him a peerage—if he robs whole-sale.'

They dug a little deeper and found the body crudely embalmed; in the throat a large war arrow-head was embedded. McGlusky's keen eyes detected a rough band of gold around its base, proving it to be an instrument of tribal vengeance.

'A'll tak' this, A'm no' theenkin' this yin wants it any mair. A'm theenkin' maybe he didn'a conseeder it a lucky omen; A wad na masel' eef A'd got it th' way he did.'

'What's it worth, Mac?'

'Mair than we'll get f'r it; these yins air rare. A'm hopin', buckie, eef we canna find a chief or twa that we may ha' foon' th' spot where th' tribe planted its criminals, eef so th' Lord ha' led us by th' han' inta pleasant pastures.'

For nine days they lived on fish and sank holes, but all they discovered were a score or so of arrow-heads fit for sale or barter, and none of them were made of anything but flint or red porphyry, nor did they see another sign of gold.

'What do you make of it, Old Timer? Don't seem to me we'll be buying a pleasure yacht out of our earnings here, eh?'

'What dae A theenk o' 't, buckie? Weel, A theenk all th' pagans in these parts died o' famine, or else yon mon in Buenos Aires who sold ma th' chart was a leear an' th' son o' th' scarlet wumman. Gin A ever get

near him, he'll cough up my twa hunner paper dollars or—or spit bluid. A'm theenkin' ma faith in human natur' ha' been meesplaced; we'll smoke some mair fush an' then start f'r the trader body's place; we've got ta foot it; th' red pagan wha' burnt oor tent got awa' wi' oor horses, an' it will be five days sair hard walkin' f'r th' country's no' easy, maistly sandy, wi' plenty o' pebbles unnerfoot.'

'Any game, Mac?'

'Oh aye, lots o' 't, but there's th' low thorn, an' th' giant thorn, an' th' ostrich grass which grows in clumps f'r th' game ta hide in an' dodge in. Na, buckie, it's no' wha' ye micht call picnic country ta travel in, especially when ye're short o' rations.'

'Well, we'd better make a start, eh? I'm tired of fish as a straight diet, even a ship's biscuit would be a godsend.'

'Varra weel, you tak' th' tackle an' get some whitin' an' smoke em, A'll tak' ma gun an' see eef A can get a change o' diet. A'd let ye do th' huntin', but ye dinna unnerstan' thorn scrub, it's gey easy ta get lost in when ye're new ta 't.'

'That's all right, partner, you're skipper on this job. Tell me what you want done and I'll do it, only room for one at the helm at any time.'

'Ye've a fine speerit, buckie, yin o' these days a real mon wull be growin' oot o' y'r boots. A hate a grouser.'

Mac took his rifle and went inland. Derry took the fishing tackle and went to the sea, whilst a red man lying in a hollow he had scooped out of the sand, until only his eyes were visible, watched them both. The pioneer made his way with noiseless speed, winding in and out amidst the thorn brake; never once did he try to make a short cut through any patch of it, for past experience told him that short cuts mostly led to tribulation. He had fixed a piece of high ground

as his objective, so that he might scan the adjacent country and perhaps see game, and to this spot he wound his devious way with the skill of a bush-bred man. He wore nothing but blue jean trousers tucked into boots that reached to his knees, a singlet and a battered Australian hat. His cartridge belt was buckled round his waist ; his rifle he carried in his hand ready for use, for he had not forgotten the red man whose arrow-point had glanced from his collar-bone.

'A'm hopin' th' pagan will no' try ta bag ma ; A'd no' care ta ha' his bluid on ma han's.'

He was communing with himself, as his way was when alone, and it was characteristic of the man that he never even took into consideration the possibility of the red man succeeding in killing him. Yet in spite of his superb self-confidence, he carried himself cannily : his feet made no perceptible sound in spite of his size and weight, and his alert eyes roved everywhere. Foxes and pampas jackals slunk away almost under his nose, so close did he get to them before they discovered his presence ; tiger-cats half as big as a collie dog, and so-called bob-tailed pampas lions sprang from his approach with low, snarling noises and vanished like shadows.

'It's no' pelts, it's food A'm wantin' th' day,' he grumbled, 'but eef yin o' those bob-tailed leons ha' th' eempudence ta show his teeth ta ma again as he quits, A'll teach him manners wi' a bit lead—they're awfu' cooards till they're cornered, then they'll mak' short work o' twa or three gude dogs. A owe 'em yin f'r th' stag-hoond bitch they killed f'r ma on ma last trip.'

He saw plenty of carnivorous animals as he walked, and armadilloes were plentiful, but though nearly all South Americans esteem the armadillo a great delicacy, McGlusky would have been hard pressed by necessity before he would eat one ; some of them scurried out

of his way, others drew themselves inside their armour and remained motionless; one of these he kicked from his path, venting his opinion of the species as he did so.

'Ye need na rin frae ma, an' ye need na sham y'r dead. A ken yer tricks richt weel. Men in cities eat ye an' say ye taste better than young pork, but A dinna theenk they ken wha' ye live on, ye dirty dung-hill scavengers—y're the foulest eaters A ken, all that is putrid is sweet ta ye, an' all that is sweet is unclean. Eef there was a parliament o' animals, ye'd be boss poleeteecians—naething's too dirty f'r ye.'

A little further on an immense butterfly the colour of old gold with one crimson mark down the edge of each wing, fluttered past and alighted upon a twig, so close that he could have struck it with his hat. His eyes became wells of wonderment, for he was a nature lover, and nothing that flew or went on four legs or crawled, escaped his attention. The beautiful thing with feet like fine-spun threads clutching a twig no thicker than a housewife's needle, stood in the burning sun, its wings from edge to edge wider than a man's palm, as motionless as though made of beaten gold. The pioneer stood riveted to the soil, watching this thing of loveliness that had its home in surroundings where all nature seemed crude, ungainly, shapeless and unattractive to the verge of ugliness. One touch of his great fingers would have crushed this thing of beauty to hideous lifelessness, but he who could deal with savage mercilessness with fierce destructive things had more than some women's gentleness with all things helpless.

'Y're gey bonny, a leevin' jewel, fresh frae th' jewel box o' th' great lapidary, one o' God Almichty's treasures loosed frae th' storehouse o' natur' ta gladden th' world. A ken ye weel, though A ha' no' gotten th' Latin name ta tack on ta ye, an' A ken eef A was ta tak' ye preesoner an' poke a pin through y'r



innards an' fix ye tae a bit cork A cud sell ye an' th' price ye'd fetch wad keep ma in terbacca f'r a week, but A'm thankin' ma Maker Jamie McGlusky's no' a murderer. A'd—A'd as soon theenk o' crushin' a wean in its bit cradle, Losh A wud.'

He walked past the jewel-like thing, viewing it from all points; towering over it, he peered down delightedly at the motionless wings, transparent in the blazing sun, and noted every minute vein and nerve.

'Losh, but y'r a masterpiece. Men who build ships an' won'rous machinery theenk they air clever—an' they air, but na mon ever born o' wumman cud mak' a pair o' weengs like yon, weengs that spread oot an' close oop at will, weengs th' wind will na break an' yet so frail A cud na touch them wi' th' pad o' ma finger an' not bruise an' deesfeegure 'em.' He drew back as if the awe of nature's supremacy had entered his rugged soul. 'A varra great artisan nicht mak' a model o' yon wings, mak' it true to th' eye, but not yin in all th' millions cud mak' th' veins an' nerves that carry th' fluid that acts like electricity fra th' nerve centres in yon sma' body ta th' tip o' each wing, it's—it's wonderfu'. Men ma' scoff an' pick holes in a' th' reelegions fra Buddah ta th' Man o' Sorrows, but gie a body eyes ta see an' he canna peck holes in God Almichty's han'iwork.' He watched the bronze body, three shades deeper in colour than the wings, saw it palpitating with life, yet conveying no quiver to the wings. 'Hoo dae ye dae it, ye wee won'er? Eef A cud solve *that*, A'd be th' maister mechanist o' th' air, A wud, by ma whuskers A wud.' He knelt down and peered up, as if by force of will his eyes would tear the secret from the sentient creature. '—White unnerneath an' bronze on flanks an' back, that shows y're no more'n an hour old, an' ye've perhaps a month o' joyous life ta leeve, an' a' that beauty come ta ripeness in an hour—wings that wad near cover th' palm o' ma han',

burnished ta shame th' greatest goldsmith between here an' hell, an' every limb finer than a thread o' silk an' each limb jointed wi' th' perfection that leaves na flaw inside or oot. Y're a giant amang y'r species an' a queen amang y'r kind.'

The beautiful thing moved its head ever so slightly, and its long, delicate antennae waved like minute electric wires—the danger signal of its kind. McGlusky noted the motion; his knowledge of wood life taught him where to look for the danger, and his quick eyes soon detected it. On a twin branch of thorn reaching out in the direction of the living jewel, he saw the ugly form of a hunting lizard creeping with almost imperceptible movements upon the giant butterfly.

'A'm dommed if ye dae.'

As he spoke, McGlusky waved his hand abruptly: the living jewel rose as if lifted by the wind, and the hunting lizard made its quick short rush of destruction a moment too late. The pioneer pinned it just where neck and head meet, between his forefinger and thumb and held it up, writhing and hissing. He examined its rows of needle-like teeth, its wicked, cruel eyes like burnished jet, saw the pouch under the lower jaw fill and distend as the froth came from the open jaws, and his eyes had the same hard look in them that he beheld in the eyes of the destroying reptile he held. His were the same eyes that had beamed so kindly upon the living jewel a moment before, but the expression now was as different as darkness from daylight.

'A ken ye, ye sneakin', murderin' de'il. Aye, spit y'r froth, ye'll no' be harmin' ma. A ken ye use it ta slobber on bit twigs ta hold fast in its glue th' feet o' th' unwary that ye ma' devoor them at y'r leisure—blast ye. A've seen men like ye destroyin' a' that's innocent an' beautifu'—blast them too. A canna unnerstan' why God Amichty mak's y'r sort, whether

they crawl on their belly as ye dae, or whether they wear troosers—y'r jest wee bits o' hell that ha' gotten astray—noo gang awa' ta th' speerit o' blackness that spawned ye.' He dropped the vicious reptile, hissing and foaming, and put his foot upon it, then, stroking his beard: 'Weel, Jamie McGlusky, ye've done yin gude thing in y'r tangled life, an' wha kens when a gude deed ends, eef it ever ends? Ye've saved innocence fra evil. Losh, eef A were only maister o' ma own soul A micht save men an' wummin, but'—with a half pathetic, half savage gesture—'A'm no'. A'm a weaklin' an' a cooard when ma ain besettin' sin fills ma wi' a bellyfull o' de'ils, an' God kens th' world wants a strong mon th' noo, wants him dom bad.'

## CHAPTER III

### A BATTLE OF GIANTS

WHEN the pioneer reached the high ground he had been seeking when the study in nature history attracted him, he found himself facing a long, level plain that branched away on his left hand; it was nearly bare of thorn scrub, but clumps of ostrich grass were dotted freely over it. It bore a cheerless appearance, being for the most part smothered in small pebbles as if at one time not very remote it had been part of the ocean's bed. That was McGlusky's opinion, and any geologist would have borne out his view.

'If yon plain is no' th' hame o' a gude mony wild ostriches, A'll turn a han' spring an' sit on ma ain head, an' a gude cock ostrich at this time o' th' year wull carry meat enouch ta feed twa men three days.'

He stood as still as a tree trunk, searching with his eager eyes for the majestic birds he sought, but saw nothing for a time; but he did not stride forward impatiently as a novice might have done; not for nothing had he earned his meat with his rifle in many lands—caribou on the Klondyke, kangaroo in Australia, antelope in Africa, grizzly bear in the Rocky Mountains of North America, and big horned sheep in the Himalayas.

'A'd dearly love ta' tak' back th' meat o' twa cock birds; th' laddie's a gran' worker an' deserves a bit

treat, an' he doesn'a ken that th' broad steak cut fra th' lower pairt o' th' back o' a cock ostrich is th' juiciest meat mon ever put tooth in. A gran' steak a mon can get frae a good bird twal' inches wide, two foot long an' at this season o' th' year twa an' a half inches thick. Kings dinna get such victuals ta put in their innards, th' puir bodies air tied too close tae their duties ta gang wheer't can be got. Losh, A peety a king, though A wadna refuse a presidency gin it were offered ma wi' prôper humeelity by a people who micht ha' th' sense ta ken a gude president when they saw yin.'

He changed his position by dropping on all-fours and crawling carefully to a spot that gave him a fresh view-point.

'Dom th' birds, where ca' they be hidin'? It's too early f'r th' matin' season an' too late f'r th' hatchin'. A'd like a wee bit smoke, but no mon can blow tobacco on th' breeze an' hope ta get wi'in rifle range o' a bull ostrich; they may carry their heads in th' sand—in books—but A'll be dommed eef they do in th' wilds; th' mon who wrôte that sand story was an awfu' leear or a humorist pullin' th' leg o' th' public.'

All at once his soliloquy ceased as if he had bitten it off in the middle. Something a long way off had caught his eye and held it. Down he went on his stomach with his rifle pushed forward ready for lifting. A bull ostrich had crossed his line of vision. The king of birds was feeding leisurely enough, picking succulent herbs not unlike garden daisies from between the pebbles. McGlusky knew what the bird was doing; he had stalked their kind often, and was wise to the fact that that identical kind of herb grows only in sandy and stony wastes, never in well-watered spots or in the shadow of hills. He also knew that those herbs carried a juice that was absolutely essential to



the health of the ostrich. McGlusky carefully measured the distance with his steadfast eyes and adjusted the sights of his rifle.

'A'll no' reesk a miss at this deestance, onless ye start ta feed awa' frae ma, ye bull buckie, but gin ye show ma th' stump o' y'r tail A'll try a long shot, f'r A'm no' goin' ta start stalkin' ye, ye cover too much groon' wi' y'r dom long legs. A ken weel when y'r only loafin' awa' fra ma wi' no suspeecion o' danger ye'll keep ma on th' run.'

He watched steadily for two or three minutes, then squirmed into the sand to get a firm position.

'It's a' richt, ma bull, it's only a matter o' time an' patience, y'r feedin' this way.'

He was right. The bull ostrich came nearer and nearer, looming bigger every moment against the horizon, a fine male nearly full plumed. McGlusky's finger began to itch on the trigger. An inexperienced hunter would have been in a fever of excitement, for few creatures present a more lordly sight than the greatest of the feathered tribe in his own untrammelled domain. Suddenly a low snarling curse broke from the pioneer's mouth. It wasn't a selected specimen of a curse, but one that came forth full flamed and rugged. His cast-iron countenance was screwed up as if some one had got inside him and was working his facial muscles with a tourniquet.

'Ouch—ha—oh jumpin' Sarah! Am A layin' on a section o' hell wi' th' lid off? Le' go, ye ondacent wee de'il. Ye've y'r nippers in th' tenderest pairt o' a mon's anatomy. Ouch—g-r-r-r-r-oow. Eef A move th' bull ostrich'll see ma an' be awa' in th' high grass in a twinkle, an' A'll lose him; eef A dinna move th' Lord kens wha' A'll no' lose. Oh, dom th' ostrich!'

He whirled over from shoulder to shoulder, until he was a dozen yards from his former resting-place, then

he sat up and began tearing off his clothes, and for a while forgot ostriches in the slaughter of bull ants that had invaded his garments. No one listening to him just then would have taken him for a man of noble sentiments, but any one who has lain down on a bull ants' nest in midsummer would have made allowances for him. When he had finished his slaying, he drew from his breeches pocket a knotted handkerchief which contained many odds and ends, amongst other things a lump of common washing soda. Moistening this with spittle, he rubbed the lumps raised by the venomous bull ants until the pain died down. Then he mopped the big beads of sweat from his brow, and loosed a flood of profanity on ants great and small. He classified them, species and genus, and consigned them to regions where even bull ants would find it hard to carry on business. Having exhausted his breath and his vocabulary, he threw a despairing glance in the direction where all his experience told him no ostrich would be visible, and then surprise opened the floodgates of his soul.

'Jamie McGlusky, th' mair ye travel an' th' mair ye study natur' first han', th' mair ye ken there's na law in natur' that canna be broken.'

Two bull ostriches were facing each other less than two hundred yards away on the open plain right below him. One was the bull he had been watching when the vicious ants had broken in upon the monotony of his existence, the other was a year younger, less massive in frame, less finely plumed, but none the less a grand bird.

'Where th' de'il cud yon ha' come fra? He didn'a drop fra th' clouds, f'r there's na cloud ābove us.'

His eyes ranged over the ground, and became fixed upon a big clump of ostrich grass that lay just below him.

'A'm theenkin' th' beastie maun ha' been restin'

there a' th' time A was speèrin' at th' yin far awa'. A've noticet in life hoo often we miss a gude prize lyin' richt unner oor han' whiles we're keekin' at something that seems deesirable awa' in th' deestance; we overlook a gude lass leevin' nex' door an' trapes after yin at th' far en' o' th' toon. We gang ta a far country seekin' a job an' micht ha' picked up a better by stayin' hame. We climb a tree f'r th' fruit on th' top an' that on th' bottom bough is often th' juiciest. God kens mon was born ta mak' a fule o' himsel' as pigeons air made ta fly. The buk o' natur' teaches it on every page, but we will na learn till th' Lord o' life jams it doon oor throats wi' th' butt end o' th' boot o' bitter experience.'

-McGlusky was right in his surmise; the new arrival had been resting on a full stomach in a big tuft of grass when the other bird appeared on the scene, and had promptly stepped forth to warn the interloper off or give him battle. Those tufts of grass were each about sixty feet in circumference, and each patch consisted of coarse leaves growing to a height of nine feet. Interspersed with the leaves were the flowers which had stems as round and thick as a broom handle, which grew straight up to a height of twelve or fourteen feet; the stems were bare, smooth, and full of sap; sixteen or eighteen inches from the top, the flower or plumes formed, making a feathery mass of odourless bloom about four times the thickness of the stem. It was in these patches or clumps that the ostriches invariably built their nests, and it was the habit of the male to go forth long before the mating season, when he first began to feel the electric thrills of matrimony surging through his giant frame, to select a patch wherein the home of his progeny to be should be hatched and protected. They had no written laws, but plenty of well-defined unwritten ones in the ostrich code of governance, and one was that after a male bird



had selected a certain home site, he had a right of grazing ground over a goodly area of the adjacent country, but he had to make good his tenure of the soil until the first egg was laid, against any invader of his own species. When it happened that two lusty males, thrilling with the love-theme which is the dominant note running through all animate nature from man to microbes, chose the same habitation, a battle was sure to ensue, even if one was a bull in his first season and the other a lusty giant in his prime. If the disputants were evenly matched, it meant death to one and a speedy if undignified burial by the foxes and jackals, assisted as far as the entrails are concerned by the unclean armadilloes, even the smaller birds helping at the funeral rites by carrying off the feathers to line their nests, whilst the bones, blown hither and thither by the constant high winds until they are reduced to powder by storm and sun, help to enrich the soil and fatten the grass—nature wastes nothing on the pampas.

McGlusky knew of the habit of male ostriches which led them long before the season of mating to prospect the country in search of a homestead, and understood what was happening under his eyes. The coming battle of the giants thrilled him; every fibre in his being tingled with the fury of the Homeric struggle that was developing itself, and the reason that underlay the dawning strife also appealed to him. He lit his pipe, for he knew that it would take a good deal more than the taint of tobacco on the air to separate those gladiators.

'A hate a brawl, wi' yammerin' an' clawin', but A love a fair clean fecht in a gude cause, an' yon's gawn ta be a first-class bust-ooop; there's a hame at stake, an' a wumman ahint it a'—leastways a hen, an' a hen an' a wumman ha' yin thing in common, they can bring a' th' grit in a buckie or a bull-bird ta th' surface. They're

no' badly matched; th' far yin is a year, perhaps twa, older, an' ha' mair weight an' size, but th' near yin ha' richt on his side, an' he's gawn ta fecht f'r his hame—it is his hame, he prospected th' groon' first an' located th' homestead; th' ither yin's a dom claim-jumper. Ha' at it, ye de'ils, an' God defend th' richt!

The two rivals were approaching each other with all the pomp and circumstance of war, and with a kind of subtlety also, for there is nothing haphazard about their fighting when it means a duel to the death, and this pair meant business. They were still some distance apart, moving around each other in ever narrowing circles, choosing their ground with consummate care, and each seeking to get the advantage of a piece of rising ground for the final charge. Every now and again one would draw off a little and pretend to be seeking food, even going so far in this feint as to pick up a small pebble or a tuft of grass.

'Ye're a mighty long time gettin' ta grups,' growled the pioneer, 'strategy's no' bad in its place, but a bit action is th' crux o' war.'

The defender of the hearth was the first to lose patience. He uttered a short, sharp bellow; the intruder retorted with a deep, gruff roar—sounds so deep and vibrant that one might have expected from the throat and lungs of a lion, not from a bird. They faced each other now, and advanced in a straight line carrying their heads high, lifting their feet to a great height, and looking extremely ridiculous in their pompous pride.

'Ye're just like twa silly auld knights in armour, rushin' ta th' fray at four mile an hour, plumes noddin' an' a' th' rest o' th' auld time dom fulishness; eef A didn'a ken there was real business ahint it, A'd slap a couple o' bullets inta y'r innards. Losh, A'd ha' liked ta ha' had a bit fecht wi' yin o' those auld knights

in armour o' glorious memory; A'd ha' dodged his rush an' chased him wi' a sardine-tin opener; they buckies were th' biggest fakes in a' history, written oop ta th' skies as heroes by lickspittles wi' na mair guts ta 'm than a grasshopper.'

The two bull birds shot away, one to the right, one to the left, when they nearly reached each other.

'Sparrin' f'r an openin',' commented the grim watcher.

Three times they repeated this manoeuvre and at the third pass both wheeled like lightning.

'Noo f'r a real poonch,' grunted McGlusky, and he was right. The birds crouched; their long necks were pushed out like bars of steel; the short wings which in the preliminary bouts had been held far from the body in loose order, so that every feather flopped at each pompous stride, were now gripped close to the flanks; their bodies were tense and electric. They looked unutterably vicious. A low grumbling cry came from each, the cry of 'no quarter' of their kind. Then, as if the watching human being had touched an electric button and set the figures in motion, the gaints of all fathered things shot forward tearing up sand and gravel in little clouds with every stride. Their speed was as the speed of arrows shot by strong men in their wrath. Two flashes of ebon black fringed with snowy white. Each swerved a yard just before they met, and as they passed flank on flank, each kicked, each landed on the body, and each big creature staggered. The sound of the landing of those two strokes on muscular bodies was like the thudding of horse hoofs on hard ground. They went on a few yards, wheeled again, charged, met, and lashed out, and again each got as good as he sent.

'A'm theenkin',' muttered Mac, 'eef A was in their shoon, A'd deevide th' hame an' put th' wumman birrd up f'r a raffle.'

The sex madness was upon the combatants now, though no feathered dame or demoiselle was looking on to applaud or condole. They knew what they were fighting for; it was the world-old battle cause; men have fought for the same cause with clubs of stone and swords of steel; duellists have shot each other to death at ten paces, all for the same instinct. Primal nature is very much the same under feathers, fur or flesh, and will be until this planet turns up on its edge and tips the last male and female into measureless space. Call it love, call it lust, call it longing—the propagating instinct that keeps the various species from vanishing is the propelling power underlying all effort that counts. The bull birds changed their tactics. Each wanted an advantage; neither could gain it in the first line of tactics adopted, they were too equally matched. They swung round in narrow circles, gyrating so fast that it made McGlusky giddy to try and follow their motions. Feathers were strewn all over the place, feathers were flying in the breeze, feathers and blood were upon the feet of both. A big cloud of dust rose up round them. But if McGlusky could not see distinctly, he could hear. Thud—thud—thud—the sounds came like a giant hammer falling on a leather anvil.

‘A’m theenkin’ this is yin mair celustration o’ th’ truth o’ th’ scripture, verily it is mair good to gie than ta receive.’

The bull birds were both leg weary, but each disdained to yield and fly; they had sounded the ‘no quarter’ cry at the outset; death was preferable in their code to disgrace. They rushed to close quarters, and fought as stallions fight. Each made a grip at the other’s long neck with horny beaks. Each failed to get a grip; had one done so a swift twist would have snapped the neck and ended the fray. At close quarters they stabbed with their feet at each other’s



legs, seeking to break the bone, for a full-grown ostrich can snap a horse's leg with a sharp, swinging kick ; but both knew the danger, and both knew the game. With marvellous skill they foiled each other. In sudden maniac-like fury they stood nearly breast to breast, and tore tufts of feathers skin and flesh from each other, their powerful beaks acting like shears made of horn cutting the flesh like knives. Now and again they struck at each other's eyes with lightning-like stabs. Suddenly the older bird, knowing more of the strategy of war, sprang back and wheeled as if to run, but it was only a ruse, and McGlusky, who had watched many similar battles, knew it.

' Ha' a care, ha' a care, or he'll doon ye, buckie ! ' he shouted, speaking as if seconding a human being, for the fight in its barbaric splendour of action had carried him off his balance.

It would have been well for the ' Home defender ' if he could have heard the warning and understood it. Lured by the ' Invader's ' tactics, he sprang in pursuit, and like a miniature thunderbolt the near leg of the older bird flashed back, and the off leg of the pursuer snapped like a piece of glass, and the ' Home defender ' went down in a mass of tumbled feathers, never to rise again, for as he fell the ' Invader ' leapt on top of him and with one savage downward kick broke the long neck just where it joined the body. The conqueror stood with one big foot on the prostrate body of his dead rival, and spreading his wings tossed his head high and emitted the fierce, screaming cry of victory, and in that instant the pioneer's forefinger drew steadily on the trigger, and interloper and home defender lay dead side by side. The big man came slowly down and stood by the body of the bird that had fought so well for its home rights.

' Ye put oop a gran' fecht, buckie, an' ye had an even chance till yon plunderer fooled ye wi' his supe-



rior weedom. It were tactics that did it ; in a' else ye matched him. Ye were both fu' o' lusty life th' noo. A wunner where th' spark that set a' yer machinery in motion is noo ; it's no' dead, f'r life canna die.'

He stood there in the fierce blaze of the sun, smoking thoughtfully, his craggy brows knitted.

'Life's a dom strange mystery. Yon bull bird was in th' richt o' 'it, defendin' his hame, yet he was killed. A canna unnerstan' th' plan. A ken weel there is a plan, but whiles it floors ma, an' sets ma intellect buzzin' inside ma head like a bum'le bee inside a bottle. A've watched it workin' wi' man, birrd an' beast, an' maistly it works oot this way—th' wrong-doer wins—mair so wi' men than wi' th' ither beasties. Perhaps it is that hell an' earth air next-door neighbours—it's maist hot enough th' day ta theenk so, an' maybe there's anither planet where wha' we ca' "life" goes ta, where th' wrong-doer ha' ta be th' bondservant o' th' wranged until th' score is evened oop. Noo A'll just cut th' meat fra those twa bodies an' hike back ta camp ; th' feathers air no' worth collectin' maist o' them air bruk at th' stem.'

It was nearly sundown when he got back to camp. Peering through some bushes he saw Derry standing by his fire smoking the fish he'd caught. The lad had his rifle handy and every now and again he stood and peered at the scrub in the direction the pioneer had taken when he started on his hunt.

'It's a gude laddie an' he's watchin' f'r ma, but he dinna ken th' first preinciples o' woodcraft. A'm theenkin' a bit lesson wull no' dae him any harm.'

He crept through the scrub and his feet were shod in silence ; not a dry twig cracked, not a thorn bough rustled ; a python could scarce have trailed its length more noiselessly ; working round behind his young comrade, he advanced from the scrub, ascended the slope and stood right behind the youngster within

a yard of him. Then he chuckled. Derry snatched up his rifle and wheeled round.

'A nice evenin' f'r dreamin' dreams, Derry.'

The lad's eyes twinkled, for he saw how completely he had been caught napping.

'Say, partner, you got wings, eh?'

'Na, Derry, just twa feet.'

'How'd you get here then? I was listenin' f'r your step in th' thorn scrub.'

'Eef that red pagan who found oor camp had been stalkin' ye th' noo, Derry, he'd ha' got ye.'

'Don't believe he could ha' come as silently as you did, partner.'

'Oh, aye, an' he cud; in th' wilds, buckie, ye've got ta cultivate th' sense o' anticipation.'

'What's that?'

'When ye've been on watch at sea, did ye never "sense" that a' was no' richt, even when ye cud na see or hear anything wrang?'

'Yes, often—at sea.'

'Weel, th' wilderness is like th' sea, th' sense o' things is in th' air, an' wha's mair, every mon is made oop o' twa pairts: there's a thing th' mystic ca' th' astral body which moves beside th' flesh an' bone body, or behind it. Gin ye cultivate proper communion wi' that second body, ye'll be gettin' warnin's when ye need 'em. Men who herd in cities lose th' sense, they dinna leeve in communion wi' nature, they're oot o' touch ye ken.'

'You must ha' mislaid your astral half, partner, when we were bathing an' the redshank burned our camp.'

'A did, ma son, an' A paid th' price. A had warnin's a' that day he was roon' lookin' f'r mischief, but A was too dom set on robbin' graves ta tak' notice. Gin a body gies ye notice y're walkin' inta trouble an' ye dinna tak' th' warnin', ye mauna squeal when

y'r nose is rubbed in th' dirt. A had ma warnin' richt enough. A burnt ma porridge an' A maun lick th' pot.'

'How many ostriches did you bag, partner?'

'Twa. A'll tell ye a' about it th' nicht. A'm gey hungry noo.'

The pioneer and the novice in woodcraft made no bad meal off the fish the lad had caught, and shell-fish he had gathered from the clefts in the rocks.

'Tired, partner?'

'A'm no.' Wha' for should A be tired wi' a wee bit stroll through th' scrub? We'll smöke the birrd meat, an' at dawn we'll break camp an' march ta th' trader body's place. It'll be a case o' the last leg foremost fra sun oop till sundown. Ye'll be feelin' no so fresh, A'm theenkin', by th' time we pitch camp; eef ye need rockin' ta sleep th' morn's nicht, ye ma' ca' ma a leear, an' A'll no' deespute it.'

'I'm a good walker, partner.'

'Is that sae? Weel, A'm glad ta hear it; A was masel' when A was y'r age. Gin ye mak' th' pace too much o' a cracker f'r ma, A'll let ye carry ma gun as weel as y'r ain. A'm no' prood, A ken weel A'm a weethered leaf, but A'll jonk along as best A can.'

His eyes were twinkling as he spoke, and Derry would have [undertsood the twinkle had he known that in all Australia from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Southern Sea, the pioneer was famed even amongst the hardest prospectors as a devourer of interminable distances under blazing suns, nor would it have added to his youthful serenity and cocksurenness had some one whispered to him that his mate McGlusky was known from Dawson City to the inner reaches of the Klondyke as the man who could outwalk dog teams with the thermometer below freezing point.

'Been a good 'un in his day,' murmured the youth to his own soul as he watched the towering figure of

his mate carrying green wood to replenish the fire where the bird meat was smoking. 'Yes, he's been a good 'un, but I'll set him a pace to-morrow, and see who wants rocking to sleep at sundown.'

Perhaps McGlusky guessed what was passing through the youth's brain, for every now and again he looked at him, and his whimsical chuckle stirred his whiskers.

Derry noticed the chuckling.

'Going to start a poultry farm, partner?'

'Ma?—no—why?'

'Well, what're you cacklin' like a hen that's laid away from home for, eh?'

'A was theenkin' o' an auld wife's story, buckie.'

'What was it?'

'A meenister's sister who was an auld maid body an' therefore had never had a wean, was lecturin' th' auld wife who was nursin' her fifteenth bairn, tallin' th' auld wife she didn'a know her business as a mither. "Ye dinna unnerstan' th' first preenciples o' 't, ma wumman," sez th' spinster body. "A dae," says th' auld wife in a de'il o' a temper; "th' first preenciple is ta get a mon o' y'r ain, th' second preenciple is ta get y'r ain bairn, an' th' third preenciple is no' ta go blatherin' about it ta yin who ha' done it a' afore ye.'"

'Well, Mac, I don't see anything to laugh at in that.'

'Neither did th' spinster body,' chuckled McGlusky. 'It's by way o' bein' a parable, ma son. Noo let's sleep; we maun be marchin' before dawn ta get th' best o' th' sun, f'r th' moon tells ma it's goin' ta be hot enough to-morrow ta roast locusts on th' wing.'

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRADER'S STORY

**I**T was not full dawn when the pair set out upon their tramp. They had made 'swags' of their belongings: picks, shovels, cooking utensils and the hunting gear, added to which was the small store of clothing left in the cache when the red man had burnt them out. McGlusky took most of the heavy things, and when Derry demurred, he remarked:

'Weel, eef A knock oop on th' way, ye can tak' ma swag, an' A'll tak' yours. A'll sing oot gin A get weary.'

The pioneer walked in the lead, because he knew the bearings, and could steer the course, and the spaces between the thorn bushes were mostly too narrow for the comrades to march abreast. The pioneer did not seem to hurry, but his long legs had a swinging stride that made gaps in distance. At first Derry was inclined to jeer because the pace Mac set was not furious.

'We won't tumble over the edge of the world before sundown at this gait, partner.'

Mac, puffing placidly at his pipe, threw a soft answer back over his shoulder.

'A'm no' breakin' records, A'll admit, ma son, but bide a wee, bide a wee, we'll be strikin' open country later on, then A'll gie ye y'r course an' ye can tak' th'



lead an' set th' pace, an' A'll dae ma puir best ta keep in sicht o' ye.'

'Oh, make the gait to suit yourself, partner; only from hints you've dropped from time to time, I thought you were a bit of a terror on y'r feet.'

'Man canna last for ever. A'm a weethered bough noo, but A'll dae ma best, na mon can dae mair than his best, buckie.'

For the first two hours, whilst it was cool, Derry whistled a good deal as he tramped; he was as he had boasted, a splendid walker, but as hour after hour went by and the sun climbed overhead and made the scorched air dance and quiver, and the pioneer's long legs kept up their tireless swing, Derry ceased to whistle, and lean as he was, the sweat began to rain off him. He shifted his swag many times to ease his shoulders, whilst the pioneer did not seem conscious that *he* was carrying a swag at all. Vast swarms of locusts sailed just overhead, so dense in their array that they at times shut out the sun like flying clouds. McGlusky, without slackening pace, discoursed on locusts for the benefit of his young friend, as only a man familiar with the 'winged lice' of the air could.

'Natur's a gey wonnerful' thing, Derry.'

'Why?'

'See yon winged hosts?'

Just then the lad caught his foot in a bramble and blundered into a thorn bush.

'Wish nature had given me wings, partner.'

McGlusky suppressed a chuckle.

'Ye're no' tired, buckie?'

'Tired? No, I'm just beginning to like it.'

'A wee bit jaunt like this is gran'; it tak's th' kinks oot o' a body's legs.'

Derry swore fiercely inside himself, for it seemed to him as if the 'wee bit jaunt' put kinks in instead of taking them out, but he bit on the bullet and strode on.

But he began to wish fervently something big in the shape of game would crop up and cause the big man to pause if only for half an hour.

'I think the old warlock winds himself up like an eight-day clock, and goes on till the spring busts,' he muttered.

Mac's thoughts were still running on locusts.

'A said natur' were wonnerfu', laddie. See yon clouds o' locusts, far as ye an me can see on a' sides, th' air's fu' o' them, packed sae close thegither they can only just fly. There must be feefy meellion ta the acre, an' every yin o' them kens where it's gaun, an' what it's gaun f'r, yet not yin o' them ever travelled th' journey before.'

'How do you do know, Mac?'

'Because A've eyes an' sense, an' A study nature. They don't settle on this thorn scrub because there's na green thing f'r them ta eat; they're pushin' on in their countless myriads ta th' grass lan's nearer Buenos Aires. There'll be weepin' an' wailin' an' gnashin' o' teeth an' a power o' bad language in th' fertile plains beyon' th' thorn country when this army enters; they'll eat th' lan' as bare as th' shank bone o' a beef beast that's been through th' stew-pot.'

'Nice for the farmers an' ranchers.'

'It's no' nice f'r them nor f'r th' fruit-growers either.'

'Will they eat fruit?'

'They wull, an' they'll eat th' leaves off th' trees an' th' bark off th' boughs. A've seen 'em settle on fields o' alfalfa wi' th' rich crop three feet high, an' sae thick it wad tak' a mon wi' a strong arm tae drive a scythe inta it, an' clear it a' oop in a few hoors, till it lookit as bare as ony road in y'r native Leeverpool, ma son.'

'How do the ranchers and fruit-growers manage to live then, eh?'

'Yon pest don't come every year, an' then ye see,

mony dae no' get tae th' grass lan's, maybe th' breeze that they're flyin' on ma' change its course; it verra often does; a half gale blowin' oot ta sea wad carry maist o' 'em oot on the watter an' mak' fush fodder o' them. Did ye notice th' fush were swimmin' close in-shore in shoals millions strong?'

'Yes.'

'That's natur' again, buckie. Th' fush ken th' wind ma' bring them victuals fra off shore, an' they coom close in an' wait f'r it; an' fush air not th' only things that profit by th' locust swarms—watch th' birrds dartin' in an' oot amang them; it's a gey gude time f'r fush an' feathers when th' locusts swarm. The Indians in th' far North net 'em an' dry 'em, an' th' squaws beat th' dried yins inta pulp between twa flat stanes, an' gey fine eatin' it mak's, A've tried it.'

'You seem to find something mighty interesting in most things, partner.'

'A'm no' a Solomon, an' A'm no' a fule. Noo, ma son, wad ye believe that every yin o' those myriads flyin' above us is carryin' his ain death wi' him, even if th' bit beastie escapes th' winds o' heaven, th' fush in th' sea an' th' birrds o' th' air.'

'How?'

'Weel, afore th' locust ha' th' use o' its wings it's just a hopper in th' grass, an' when it's like that, a fly lays an egg just where th' horny helmet meets th' neck. Th' "hopper" can't reach that egg wi' any o' th' tools natur' ha' gied him; th' egg turns into a wee grub that eats unner th' helmet inta th' brain o' th' locust. Every yin ye see above ye is carryin' his ain murderer wi' him, an' givin' him free board an' lodgin' an'—an' transport as weel. Th' grub ha' tae gnaw through bone an' gristle, an' that tak's time. Before th' grub reaches th' brain th' locust ha' had time ta fill its wee bit life; it lays its great batch o' eggs ta carry on its

species, an' by that time th' grub is through the partition an' at th' brain an' it's a' oop wi' th' locust. That's natur's law, buckie.'

' It's a damn cruel law, partner.'

' Between sky an' earth, aye, an' in th' watters unner th' earth, there's nothing that leeves that is na subject ta th' law. Th' mair ye keek inta it, th' crueller it seems, but everything ha' a purpose fra th' leeon ta th' lice in th' leeon's mane ; man an' wumman air no' exempt fra th' rule.'

' Is that God's plan ? '

' It is th' plan o' th' Almichty, else it cud no' be.'

' What the devil is the good of such a scheme o' things, Mac ? '

' Solomon, Mahomet, Napoleon didn'a ken ; can Jamie McGlusky tell ye ? A' A ken, laddie, is we ha' tae play oor pairt in life like men, wi'oot greetin' when we get yin in th' lug, wi'oot boastin' when th' world gangs well wi' us, helpin' th' weak yins, skelpin' hell oot o' th' bad yins, playin' th' game wi' ither men an' soilin' na honest wumman, an' trustin' ta th' Almichty ta f'rgie us oor weaknesses whin oor turn comes ta face th' squarin' o' a' accounts. That's th' Gospel accordin' ta McGlusky.'

They walked on in silence for a space, Derry casting his eyes about in all directions in the hope of seeing something in the shape of natural history that would give him an excuse for asking the veteran to halt, but the hotter it got, the faster McGlusky's legs seemed to move. Straight as a pine his figure towered, and the ease of his stride was machine-like in its unbroken regularity. Derry had to strain every nerve to keep close to him. At last the lad thought he saw what would suit his purpose : a bull ants' nest over which a crowd of workers crawled busily.

' Hullo, partner, here's some of your old friends ; have they any special part in your mysterious plan ? '



Mac did not halt; he just spat contemptuously on the nest as he passed.

'What are they? Anything special?' coaxed the weary youth.

'Oh, naething in particular, just ants—except when they're bitin', then they're just de'ils. Come on, buckie, swing a leg, it's th' hind foot foremost th' day. We maun reach watter th' nicht.'

Derry said things under his breath that would have shamed a pirate, and trudged on. After a goodish space he espied the nest of a jackal bird hanging suspended from a thorn branch. The hen was sitting on the nest, her big fierce eyes watching the wayfarers; she did not attempt to move. The cock-bird, half as big as a pigeon, deep bronze in colour, with something of the hawk in the shape of its head, fluttered on to an adjacent bush.

'What's that, partner? Let's have a look at that nest; I never saw one like it before.'

Into the eyes of the pioneer, who was looking straight ahead of him, came the dancing twinkle which all who knew him well were familiar with. He did not even glance round.

'That? Oh, nesties o' that sort air no' common, but they're no' so rare; ye need no' stop; swing a leg an' A'll tell ye all about them as we gang. A'm real glad y'r so interestet in nature history, ma son; A didn'a ken ye were so keen on it.'

Derry groaned inwardly, and mopped his reeking forehead with his shirt-sleeve.

'Th' natives ca' yon bird th' jackal, because it seldom does its ain huntin, but grabbles oop th' odds an' ends that ither birds leave fra their kills, but it's a thievin' body an' wull rob th' nesties o' sma' birds o' their young. It's worth while watchin' a pair o' them when a spiked huntin' lizard ha' killed a bush mouse. Yin bird wull fly over th' spiked murderer an' gie him



a bit biff wi' its wing, an' turn an' threaten him again; an' whiles he's watchin' that yin, th' ither will mak' a dab at th' mouse; they'll keep it oop f'r an hoor, takin' turn an' turn about—it's verra disturbin' ta th' lizzard, A'm theenkin', f'r he canna mak' a meal wi' them ding-in' at his lug a' th' time wi' their wings.'

He spoke placidly, but his whiskers were shaking with the mirth within him; it was his way of teaching youth to respect the power of man in the glory of his manhood. They came at last to a wide open plain.

'Thank th' Lord, laddie, noo we'll be able ta put on a bit pace. Dae ye want ta tak' th' lead? A'm no' proud; A'll foller a better mon.'

He turned as he spoke, and almost for the first time looked at his young companion. Derry was shaking in every limb with exhaustion, and his lips had a nasty bluish tinge; he would have gone on until he dropped rather than cry for quarter, but he was even then drawing on his last ounce or two of strength. Mac was by his side in an instant.

'Ye game wee de'il! Losh, but ye've mair pluck an' spunk than sense. Gie ma y'r swag.'

He took the load from the shaking shoulders with one hand, as if it were a bundle of feathers, and with the other sat Derry gently on the hot ground, then slipping off his own swag, he put his canvas water bottle to the parched mouth.

'Drink a wee drappie, no mooch. There—stretch yersel' oot whiles A pull off y'r boots. We'll camp till th' sun tak's a bit stoop t'wards th' west, an' march again in th' cool o' th' even. A'm dead beat masel.'

'Ye're lyin', partner; you could go on till sundown, and never turn a hair—an' I had th' cheek to think I could walk you to a standstill.'

'Dinna fash, lots o' men ha' thocht th' same.'

Derry did not want to eat, but the pioneer made him,

and when he had finished he filled the youth's pipe, saying :

'Smoke a wee bittie, buckie; tobacco when it's no' abused is yin o' God's gran' gifts ta men.'

So Derry smoked until his eyelids fluttered down, and he dropped asleep.

'A thocht he wudn'a' want cradlin'. A mind th' time when auld Angus Cameron, th' cattle mon, gied ma just sic a lesson, when A was aboot his age in Australia. It were a hard lesson, but it tocht ma mair sense than a hunner' lectures wud ha' done.'

He put his hands inside his partner's boots, and frowned as he felt the roughness on the inner soles. Going to his swag, he unearthed a piece of shark's skin, sundried and ready for use; with this he smoothed away all roughness, then taking his Bible, he read it carefully, making many marginal notes with a stub of lead pencil. After a while, he lay back, his eyes fixed on the skies, his big brows in thought, his hands clasped under his head.

'Gie ma weesdom.' He peered sternly upwards, no fear in his hard eyes, and no irreverence. 'Beat ma like iron between th' hammer an' th' anvil, but beat weesdom inta ma.'

He seemed to be straining his ears, or some inner sense of hearing, for an answer to his stern demand. Then he spoke again almost in a whisper.

'Th' buik puzzles ma; A wan'er off th' track an' get bushed; it may ha' been a'richt f'r th' world when it were written, but th' world ha' moved on since then. A hear a sma' wee voice cryin' here in th' weelderness, "Jamie McGlusky, cut yerself' off fra cæties, an' sit ye doon an' write a new bible, yin that wull be richt up ta date: na bluidy wars o' th' Jews, na so mooch hell fire an' brimstone, na snakes talkin' ta wummin an' na skunk like Adam tellin' lees aboot th' wumman ta cover his ain coardice.'" He lapsed into silence,

staring upwards as if seeking for inspiration. 'A'm theenkin' Mahomet was an honest mon: he wrote a new buik an' ca'ed it th' Koran, but A'm theenkin' he lent yin ear ta th' angels an' yin ta th' de'il when he was writin'; he put too mooch bluidy sword an' too mooch wumman in his buik. He were holdin' a can'le ta th' de'il when he gied his disciples a free han' ta ha' a score o' wives; yin wife—at a time—is enough f'r any mon, saint or sinner. No mon *can* be a saint wi'oot yin wumman, it's agin natur'. Mahomet was no' richt when he gied his followers th' preevelege o' sloshin' roon' th' world sword in han'; a sword is f'r justice, an' f'r justice only; but Mahomet were richt, richt ta th' bone, when he put a ban on strong drink; it's yin o' th' curses that help ta mak' earth hell's footstool—dom th' drink.'

Again he communed in silence, seeking by the sheer force of his indomitable will to force the wilderness to find a voice that would bring him knowledge from the chambers of wisdom. He broke the spell.

'Eef th' camel drivin' buckie Mahomet cud write a buik that knitted th' Eastern world thegither, so can Jamie McGlusky. Why no'? A mon wi' gude Scots bluid in him is as gude as any ither on th' planet. Y'r sins will na bar ye, Jamie, f'r eef ye had no' wallowed in th' mire, hoo th' de'il would ye ken th' virtues o' purity? Th' mon who breaks his fast in the morn on premeditated sin sups on sorrow. Ye ought ta know, Jamie, ye've had some o' baith, but oot o' sorrow grows repentance, an' oot o' repentance compensation. A owe th' world something big, an' A'll pay 't. A'll write th' buik that mankin' is cravin' for. A'll write th' new bible: na heaven in 'it, like a pawnbroker's dream—gold, jewels an' siller; na hell like th' furnace o' a smeltin' works. A ha' had a glimpse o' ma heaven in a vision: ma heaven's a garden in th' valley o' a' delights, an' goodness is God; so each yin may mak'

his ain God wi' th' measure o' his ain goodness.'

He turned upon his elbow, noted the position of the sun, then rose and noiselessly took everything of any weight from his sleeping comrade's swag and added it to his own. Then he woke the lad.

'Feel a wee bittie better th' noo after y'r snooze, buckie?'

Derry stretched himself. 'I feel good now, Mac.' Then with a sheepish grin, 'Say, partner, if you notice me takin' more'n usual interest in nature history when we're trampin', just take it as a hint that I give you best and would like a halt for a bit.'

'Verra weel, ma son, A'll no' forgit it; you begin ta talk about ants when y're tired, an' A'll stop.'

Then putting one big hand on his companion's shoulder, he said with strange gentleness: 'Dinna fash ower th' doin's o' this day; youth is a gran' thing, but it is no' all th' law an' th' gospels. A'm a mon beaten hard in the school o' adversity; a life o' toil ha' made ma strong as triple steel; sun an' snaw ha' hardened ma as a wild steer is hardened on th' ranges o' Texas. It was no' in reason that a laddie like yersel', half formed an' as unbroken ta th' trail as a raw colt ta th' bit, should wear ma doon. No' mony men in their prime cud ha' coom th' gait ye did th' day an' be ready ta gang on noo. Leeverpool need no' be shamed o' ye. Noo peek oop y'r swag, th' sun's declinin'; we maun reach yon watter hole A spoke o' afore we camp.'

He slung the heavy swag that was his portion on to his mighty shoulders, blew out a cloud of good tobacco smoke, and moved off in the lead, Derry, stiff and sore, limping behind him. Soon the stiffness wore off, and Derry noticed how light his swag was, and a glimmering of the real nature of his mate dawned upon him, and the runaway engineer apprentice who had small respect for men of any degree, felt his heart



stir within him as it had never stirred before. He was learning the unwritten law of the long trail, the law of true mateship, and the knowledge lifted him to a higher plane of manhood, though he rose all unconsciously; McGlusky's sledgehammer methods were fashioning a blade that would in due season play a worthy part in the battle of life, though the big fellow did not even dream of it.

For five days and the better part of five nights the tramp continued, and at last the trader's adobe storehouse and dwelling met their eyes. Derry, to use one of his own slang expressions, was 'nearly all in,' when he let his swag slide from his shoulders in front of the store. He had been thin when he started, and that journey with little water on a smoked meat diet, in blistering heat, had worn him so fine that, in his own graphic phrase, he 'only wanted another week of it and Mac could have threaded him through the eye of a needle.'

'Ye've done gey fine, buckie; A'm no' shamed o' ma mate.'

That was all the big man said, but Derry's weary backbone stiffened, and he felt it was good to be alive.

A little old man with a hump between his shoulders, and a grey beard reaching to his belt, welcomed them, speaking in English.

'Hullo, McGlusky, back again? Where have you sprung from, and who's your mate?'

'Gie us a dreenk, trader, we're dry; ma tongue hits th' roof o' ma mooth as iron hits iron; A wunner ye don't hear it ring.'

The trader smiled, and turning reached down a bottle and pushed it towards the pioneer. For an instant a greedy light leapt into the pioneer's eyes, and his familiar devil pushed his right arm forward until his saddleflap of a hand closed round the whisky bottle; with his left hand he picked up a tin pannikin.



He paused, pushed the bottle back, and said quietly :  
' No' that, Trader ; ha' ye ony cold tea ? '

The trader shot a keen glance at him ; this was not the McGlusky he knew ; but without comment he produced a ' billy can ' half full of the brew asked for. McGlusky filled a pannikin and handed it to Derry.

' Drink, ma son ; its th' best thirst-killer A ken.'

Twice Derry emptied the big pannikin ; then McGlusky lifted the ' billy can ' to his lips, and drained it to the dregs. As he set the can down, a guttural voice growled from a shady corner of the store :

' Woman's drink for women ; Trader, give me the whisky bottle.'

Both Derry and McGlusky turned in the direction of the voice, and saw a man rising from some blankets spread on the floor, the biggest man Derry had ever set eyes upon. When he stood upright he made McGlusky look like a stripling, and to add to his towering height, he wore a high coarse cap of jackal skin. He was so dark that he might have passed for a negro, and his heavy, sullen features, thick lips and sloe-black eyes, bluish where the whites ought to have been, heralded unmistakably that negro blood was in his veins. His shirt, open all the way down the front, exposed a chest of such mighty proportions that it looked scarcely human, and his shoulders matched his chest. Around his loins he wore the gaudy, many-coloured sash so much beloved of the peon class of South America. From the folds of the sash protruded the handle of a knife. A more savage, uncouth, sullen-looking specimen of humanity it would have puzzled Dante to picture in his vivid portraiture of the inhabitants of Hades. This personage came to the counter, helped himself unstintingly to the whisky, then pushed the bottle towards the pioneer.

' Drink !'

Something in the deep, guttural voice, in the studied

insolence of the tone, in the ungracious, domineering manner of the man, woke the pioneer's resentment. Instinctively his figure grew taut, his fine leonine head went up and back. In front of that brutal figure lounging against the rude counter which consisted of unplanned boards placed on the top of upturned barrels, he looked what he was, the descendant of a long line of Highland chieftains, though his birth-place had been in a country far from the land of his fathers. His eyes met the bloodshot eyes fixed upon him squarely and sternly, then bending his head ever so slightly in a gesture of fine courtesy, he said in his dignified way :

'A'm beholden ta ye f'r y'r courtesy, but A ha' drunken ma fill.'

The thick lips on the dark face curled.

'Women's drink! *Men* drink this in these parts.'

He touched the whisky bottle with the edge of his hand.

'Maybe sae, A'm no' disputin' 't.'

The big brute looked the pioneer from head to boots and back again, and then laughed, and there was insult in every note of his throaty laughter. Two red splashes of colour appeared under the tan on the points of McGlusky's cheek-bones, and his eyes grew very hard. The ruffian gave his shoulders a shrug, helped himself again to the whisky, tossed the raw posion down his throat, gave a hitch to his many-coloured cummerbund, and with a sneer on his lips and a scowl on his brow, lounged to the door and out into the air.

'Who's yon?'

The trader removed the cigarette from his lips, blew a cloud of smoke through his nostrils, looked at the pioneer and answered the curt query almost as curtly.

'The best hunter and the worst man I've ever had round.'

'Half nigger, half Indian, eh?'

'No; half nigger, half German: black mother, white father.'

Th' nigger's th' best part o' him then.'

'Hasn't got any best part—he's all bad.'

'A'm theenkin' A'm no' gawn ta like him.'

'If you did, you'd be the first man between th' coast and th' Rio Negro that ever did.'

'He'll keep.' McGlusky waved his hand as if dismissing a subject that had little interest.

'What are you doing here, McGlusky?'

'Y're a straight mon, every yin gies ye that name, Trader.'

The trader swallowed more smoke and let it creep out of his nostrils very slowly.

'When ye dae that,' said Mac irritably, 'ye luk like a wee Vesuvius in troosers.'

The face of the other never moved a muscle.

'A'll unwind ma parable. A've been seekin' th' treasure hadden awa' mony years ago by President Rosas, an' A'm oot o' stores, an' A've no' much siller ta buy mair.'

The trader rolled a fresh cigarette in the Spanish American fashion.

'Air ye gaun ta talk wi' y'r tongue, or mak' smoke signals? A'm na gude at decipherin' smoke language.'

'You make thirty-nine, McGlusky.'

'A'm no' a problem in areethmetic, A'm a treasure seeker oot o' luck.'

'You're a fool who has wasted time and mony.'

'Ceeveelity's no' y'r strong point, Trader.'

'Perhaps not; you can do with a little incivility if it's flavoured with truth. Now tell me, didn't Antonio Loretto of the Calle Maipu, Buenos Aires, tell you of Rosas' buried treasure? Didn't he sell you a map and a plan of the country where the spoil was buried? Didn't the map deal with the coast

district near Aquintal, and wasn't the treasure supposed to be hidden in an old Indian burial-ground?'

Mac's eyes bulged when he heard this minute description of what he had considered his own secret.

'Mon, hoo did ye guess it? Are ye a—a mind reader? Tell ma, hoo did ye ken what Antonio Loretto o' th' Calle Maipu sold ma?'

'Because I bought the same secret off his rascal of a father nearly twenty years ago, McGlusky. It was that brought me into these parts. The Loretos, father and son, have made a good thing out of selling that information to fools.'

'He swore ta th' truth o' 't on a wee crucifix he carried roon' his neck tied wi' a ribbon.'

'If he's like his father, he'd swear on th' crucifix he could find Pharaoh's bones in the Red Sea.'

'Wha' manner o' mon is he then?'

'He's a fool catcher, Mac; that's his trade; when he isn't selling the kind of thing he sold you, he's selling a wonderful gold mine in the Andes, a gold mine that never existed, or else it's the site of an ancient Aztec city, lost to the world since the days of Cortez. How much did he charge you for your plans?'

'Twa hunner dollar—a' hard-earned siller.'

The trader grinned. 'The game must be getting a bit worn out, McGlusky; he charged me a thousand.'

'Dae ye mean there never was a treasure buried there?'

'No, I don't. The late lamented President Rosas buried a big pile there right enough, but his lieutenant, Don Alfredo Michaelas, went back a month later and looted the lot. You've been bitten, Mac.'

The big veins swelled on the neck of the pioneer; his teeth grated together like stone rubbing on stone.

'Twa hunner' dollars all gone bang, an' months o' hard work an' some dan'er forby. Trader, every dollar were coined oot o' th' sweat o' ma body; A

earned it after th' locusts had eaten ma crop o' alfalfa an' ruined ma—an' th' spawn o' Judas swore on th' crucifix. A'll mak' a crucifix masel' oot o' iron, an' A'll wear it ower ma heart till A meet Antonio Loretto ; gin A dae, A'll brand him wi' 't like a steer ; A'll burn it into his forehead till it bites th' bone, that a' men ma' ken him f'r a leear an' a thief. Losh,' he groaned, 'twa hunner' dollars, all gone like th' dew in th' grass in th' mornin' when th' sun keeks oot! Men ha' been killed f'r less.'



## CHAPTER V

### MCGLUSKY TURNS HUNTER

THE day following the revelation of the trader, the pioneer held earnest converse with Derry.

'A'm a fu' fledged mon, buckie, an' A let yon beastie in Buenos Aires lead ma as he wud lead a calf ta watter; th' knowledge is no' addin' ta ma self-respec'.'

'He's a smooth duck, eh, partner?'

'He is. But he'll no' be sae smooth gin A've done wi' him; eef A get him in a room in th' ceety, A'll beat him sae flat ye'll be able ta spread him again th' wall an' no' feel him by rubbin' y'r han' ower th' plaister.'

Derry smiled happily; this was the McGlusky he loved.

'A canna shape oot a plan f'r us twa th' noo, laddie, A'm no' collectit in ma thochts; A feel like a storm in troosers. A' that siller gone in yin wild avalanche o' stupeedity; it's an awesome lot ta lose; twa hunner' dollars maist mak' twenty poonds English money, an' a' hurled awa' f'r a lee.'

'Treat it as a loan, partner; you'll collect it when you meet him.'

'Thank ye, buckie, f'r th' hint, there's weesdom in 't. Oh aye, A ken fine A'll collect it, gin A meet him, but hoo about th' present? We're hunner's o' miles frae Buenos Aires, an' na horses or proveesions, an' ma pooch near as empty o' siller as th' belly o' a bear in winter.'

'Isn't the trader employing that big stiff who wa' askin' f'r trouble last night?'

'He is.'

'Well, why won't he employ us?'

McGlusky leaned forward and wagged his thumb in in his comrade's face.

'Forgive me, Derry, eef at times A thoct y'r head were jest somethin' th' Lord had made tae hang a hat on; there's meat f'r reflection in yon idea. A'll soond th' trader body, an' see eef we can earn grub an' save a wee bittie on th' huntin' an' trappin.' Ye ken it's no' a verra gude payin' game; th' skins o' the beasties hereabouts air no' mooch value.'

'What about ostrich feathers, Mac?'

'They're no' mooch gude; ye see they're uncultivated; yin African ostrich wud be worth twenty o' them. A'm no' sayin' eef a mon were to mak' a beesiness o' breedin' these South American ostriches he cudn'a get as gude plumage in time, f'r they're th' same species, but it wad tak' years an' a pile o' money ta dae it.'

'Tak 'em as they are, they're worth something, eh?'

'Oh aye, they're worth something, an' there's guanaco by th' thoosan'; a guanaco is near half as big as a twa-year-old steer.'

'Good hides, eh, partner?'

'Ye're richt, but it's th' transport that kills th' profit; th' hides ha' ta be lugged sae far ta a market. Foxes, too, air as plentifu' as spring poets in Lonnon, an' darn near as unchancy ta mak' a leevin' oot o'.'

'Anything else, old sportsman?'

'Th' thorn scrub is fu' o' vermin—tiger-cats an' such-like, but th' pelts bring waesome sma' prices, an' seein' a' but th' ostriches an' guanacos air carnivorous, there's little i' th' way o' meat on any that's fair game.'

'Anything rovin' about that's not what you call "fair game"?''

'There's cattle, an' horses, an' sheep that ha' strayed frae th' ranches in the gude country an' bred in th' scrub.'

'You mean they're not branded?'

'Aye, that's ma meanin'.'

'Well, unbranded cattle, horses an' sheep belong to no man; they're ours if we can get 'em, eh? Well, we'll bag 'em.'

'A dinna like anything that ha' a suspecion o' dishonesty, buckie.'

'You make me tired, partner; we can shoot the full-grown ones f'r th' hides, an' eat what meat we want; we can't keep them alive, they'd always be breaking away, but we can brand the calves an' foals an' keep *them*.'

'A'll put a case ta ye, buckie: eef a calf is runnin' wi' a branded coo, ha' we a richt ta th' calf, even in this no man's land?'

'Drive the calf away from the cow.'

'Ye cudn'a dae it; th' coo wud come at ye wi' horns an' hoofs.'

Derry made a gesture of impatience.

'Wait a wee, ma buckie, y're idea opens oop a wide field; it's a verra delicate point o' jurisprudence. A'm no' sure we wudn'a be wi'in oor richts eef th' coo tried unlawfu' violence, eef—eef we shot her in self-defence an'—an' took care o' th' calf. A'm no' sure A cudn'a reconcile ma conscience ta sic an act—it might pass, Derry, providin' na interferin' minion o' th' law blundered on ta us in th' act.'

'That's all right, then; you go an' fix up with th' trader. I don't think his conscience will keep him awake o' nights.'

So McGlusky made a bargain, and found the trader less of a skinflint than most of his kind.

'Glad to have you round, Mac, you and the kid too; I'm most tired of that big hunter o' mine. Pedro Schwartz has got it into his thick head that he's going to run this business of mine; all the rest who come here to trade are half-breeds—peon fathers, Indian mothers—and they all follow his lead.'

'A thocht ye said he was no' liked.'

'He's not, but he's feared.'

'A sae naething awesome about him masel.'

'I know you don't; I watched your eyes when he was tryin' to pick a quarrel last night; he thinks you're afraid of him, though.'

'Th' Lord didn'a gie him verra gude material tae dae his theenkin' wi' then.'

'I like the kid who's with you, Mac; he hasn't too much tongue.'

'He's no' sae bad; he's got a tongue a'richt, Trader, but it's like th' tongue o' a boot, ye've got ta unlace it afore it wags.'

The trader fixed up game-traps, ammunition and provisions for the pair, and they went out in search of game, but before they went there was another little passage of arms between the pioneer and black Pedro.

'You goin' to start huntin' here f'r the boss?'

Pedro fired the abrupt query at the pair without preamble of any kind.

'A'm mindin' theengs preencipally,' answered Mac smoothly.

'What things?'

'Ma ain beesiness ta begin wi'.'

The vast figure of the half negro fairly quivered with passion.

'If you shoot or trap over my country you'll find it's my business too.'

'Where is y'r country? Gie us y'r location an' A'll no' trespass—ye're the first comer an' ye ha' y'r richts.'

Pedro swung his arm in a semi-circle. - 'That's my country.'

'Is that a'?'

The pioneer spoke as softly as if soothing a sick child. Pedro glared.

'Is that a'?' Ye claim th' earth; A thocht maybe ye'd be claimin' th' air too, an' th' heavens above th' air.'

Without another word Mac swung off with his heavy pack on his back, Derry striding beside him.

'You could beat that big stiff in a row, partner.'

'A dinna want ta, boy, there's neither profit nor siller in it. A mon who's too eager ta fecht because a fule wants him ta is na mair use in the world than a fush wi' feathers on 't.'

'The more you let him bully you, the more he'll think you're afraid.'

'A wee bit surprise is no' hurtfu' ta any mon; yon big loon ma' open a wee bit surprise packet yin o' these fine days, an'—an' fin' th' toe o' Jamie McGlusky's boot inside o' 't. A keek at his countenance that hoor wud no' be worth missin'.'

'How do you hold yourself in, partner? When I feel like a scrap, I see red and wade right in.'

'A scrap, buckie,' said Mac meditatively, 'is no' a theeng ta tak' on in th' height o' passion; a scrap's a theeng ta be enjoyed, an' ye canna absorb a' th' fine points o' 't when y're seein' red. A like ta tak' ma fechtin' as A tak' ma meals, an' enjoy every morsel o' 't. Wha's th' gude o' scrappin' unless ye get a divine thrill oot o' 't? But ta dae that, ye maun always be in th' richt o' a quarrel.'

'Well, you'll be in the right when it comes to layin' this big beast out; he's a trouble maker.'

'A'm theenkin' sae masel', but A'll no' be queeck ta tak' offence; maybe he'll theenk better o' 't an'



decide ta be fren's ; if he doesn'a then, by ma whuskers, A'll gie him th' law an' th' prophets, an' eef he is na th' meekest mon in th' Southern hemisphere when A ha' done wi' him, ye ma' singe ma beard an' gie me a rag doll ta play wi'.'

' He's as strong as a steer, partner.'

' He is, an' he's a dom sicht mair clumsy on they big feet o' his.'

' Didn't notice his feet much myself.'

' Did ye no' ? Ye shud, laddie ; eef a mon's no' canny on his feet, he's no' dangerous. Yin o' yon mon's feet turns east at th' toe an' yin turns near west ; eef ye stood richt in front o' him he'd hit ye, but eef ye slippit o' yin side ye cud hit him three times whiles he were collectin' his feet ; he's no' built f'r a fechter. Beware o' th' mon who points his toes straight, or turns 'em a wee bit in, an' niver fear a rusher, eef he's as big as a battleship. A saw a stallion yince in Africa beat a fu' grown leon.'

' How did he do it, Mac ? '

' He waited f'r th' leon's rush an' spring, then let go both hind hoofs, an' ivery time th' leon met those hoofs he stopped in mid-air as eef th' Lord had said ta him : " Thus far an' no further shalt thou go, Leo." An' after each kick th' stallion cantered awa' a dozen lengths, an' made th' leon bring th' fecht ta him, till at last th' leon decided he didn'a want horseflesh f'r lunch, an' put his tail between his legs an' slunk awa' lukin' ower his shoulder as he went, an' th' expression on th' leon's face said plain as a prented buik, " A like horse, but no' y'r kind o' horse."'

' Why didn't you shoot him, partner ? '

' A was oop a tree, an' ma rifle was in th' waggon twa hunner' yards awa', an' A was no' ambee-tious ta see wha' th' eenside o' a leon is lined wi'. There air times ta study nature heestory close oop wi' a magnifying glass in y'r fist, that's a richt wi'

grubs an' beetles, but it's dom bad practice when y're studyin' leons, laddie.'

As the pair tramped the scrub, the youth drew copiously on his partner's store of knowledge by adroitly dropping questions, for all unconsciously the big fellow fell into the traps so cunningly baited for him. Only once did he grow restive, then he asked :

'Sonny, is there any yin by th' name o' Jonah in y'r family?'

'Jonah?—no, why?'

'A thocht there might be, y're sic a whale f'r information.'

Derry took this as a hint that his partner wanted to meditate as he tramped, so wisely held his peace, knowing that McGlusky would thaw out and talk when they camped for the night.

The third evening after leaving the trader's store, they reached a goodish-sized rock at the base of which they found a small pool of not over-nice water.

'This is th' spot th' trader body told ma ta look f'r, Derry.'

'Is this the spring?'

'Aye, is it, an' no' sa bad conseederin'.'

'Looks like a puddle after rain to me, old sportsman.'

'Eef ye tak' a keek at th' groon' roon' th' watter, ye'll see why, ma son. Guanaco ha' been here, an'—see yon prent in th' soft mud? That's a tree tiger, an' there—an' there, air fox tracks, an' there yon'er is th' spoor o' ostriches. This maun be a sort o' way-side inn f'r a' th' game in these pairts. A'll jest keek roon'.'

He moved away a few yards, then cried: 'By th' cocked hat o' Napoleon, we're in luck, mannie!'

'What is it? Not—not th' Rosas treasure, eh?'

There was an impish chuckle in Derry's voice as he put his query.

'Dom th' Rosas treasure, it's horse tracks—wild horses.'

'How do you know they're wild horses?'

'Because they're no' shod, an' niver ha' been; th' hoof prents air all cracked. A horse that ha' been shod wud ha' all the auld hoof pared awa'. Natur' doesn't dae that; in hard or stony country th' hoofs wear doon an' keep in order, but there's no rocks here-aboot, so natur' splits bits off th' hoofs or cracks 'em till they fa' off. We'll ha' horses ta ride soon, or my name's no' Jamie McGlusky.'

'What if they happen to be branded, Mac?'

There was sly humour in Derry's query.

'Eef they air, we'll ride 'em f'r th' owner ta keep 'em fra gettin' veecious. Noo stop girdin' at ma, an' get y'r spade fra th' swag; A'm gawn ta clean oot this watter hole an' enlarge it; th' spring's near chokit oop, th' mair watter, th' mair wild things there'll be ta catch.'

'All right, I'll light a fire an' get grub.'

'Ye'll no'; we mauna licht a fire wi'in a mile o' here; th' wild things fear man an' a' his works, an' sma' blame tae them.'

McGlusky set to work with the spade and toiled with all the energy pent up within him, and when he grew weary Derry took a turn, but the moon was riding high before the big man was satisfied. When the water hole was to his liking, he scattered all the fresh earth over their tracks, remarking:

'It wull deaden th' scent o' us a wee bittie, but it wull tak' wind an' sun three days ta remove th' taint o' humanity althegither, an' th' shy yins won't come near. That's no' all bad, it wull gie th' spring time ta fill th' hole an' we ha' plenty ta dae makin' a camp an' fixin' oorsilves comfortable an' spyin' oot th' lan'.'

'What if Black Pedro comes on the scene, an' claims this spring?'

'A'll debate th' matter wi' him; eef it was his stampin' groon' for why did he no' keep th' spring clean?'

The pair pitched camp considerably more than a mile from the water. As they rolled themselves in their blankets Derry said :

'Say, partner, some one told me once a trapper's life was a lazy life; it's my opinion he was a liar.'

'A lazy mon can mak' a lazy job oot o' anything unner heaven, ma son, an' a mon o' eendustry cud mak' himsel' sweat lyin' on his back countin' th' stars. It a' depen's on th' mon, not on th' job.'

A minute later Derry remarked :

'It's damned hard sleeping on the ground in a single blanket an' no pillow, old pilgrim.'

'Tie th' pick an' spade an' th' axe thegither, ma son, they'll mak' a nice saft pillow; wriggle a hole in th' groon' wi' y'r shoulder, an' ye'll be in th' lap o' luxury.'

Soon the deep breathing of the youth told that the fatigues of the long day had given him a passport to dreamland, but the strong man lay awake looking into the heart of the stars; this was the hour of all hours that he loved; he did not let the thoughts of the day that had passed trouble him, nor the possible cares of the morrow. It was the period when he bared his half barbaric soul to his Maker and held reverent communion with the watchers of the night. To him the whispering winds were full of meaning: he said they had voices and brought him messages. The night was peopled with folk who had passed out of the body and his circle of acquaintances would have startled the compiler of a court circular. Many of the names that are called 'great' in history dropped from his tongue in weirdly familiar fashion. He did not merely ask these shadow visitants questions, he talked and argued with them, it being his belief that man after death went neither to heaven nor hell, but



passed on to complete the full round of existence, keeping ever in touch with earth and its inhabitants until they reached a stage of improvement that gave them the right of entry to a higher and better sphere of action; even then he believed that their interest in earthly things did not cease, though their visits might be fewer and farther between. Great crises in human history could and would draw them back to this planet. His talk, broken and disconnected as he lay in his hunter's outfit under the stars, sounded like the chatter of a Bedlamite.

'Hey, Cæsar, an' hoo air ye th' nicht? Ha' ye ony message f'r ma? Wha's that? Ma hoor ha' no' yet coom? Weel, weel, A'll possess ma soul in patience—eef A can—ma greatness is a waesome time comin'. Gude nicht, an' thank ye kindly f'r giein ma a call; a bit crack wi' yin wha' did no' dae sae badly in his day an' generation puts new heart into a mon.'

A pause and a few long, delicious pulls at his pipe, and again his voice mingled with the night wind, addressing a fresh visitor.

'A'm no' wantin' ye ta-nicht, nor ony ither nicht; A ken ye fine, a lure ta men an' a snare ta their feet ye were when ye were on earth, Mrs. Cleopatra; beautifu' ye were above a' wimmin, like yin o' Solomon's songs fashioned in th' flesh: y'r mooth is like th' roses o' Sharon; sweeter y'r lips than wild honey droppin' fra th' comb. Woe ta th' mon that touched them wi' his ain, he'd be as a bum'le bee in th' honey-pot. Like alabaster air y'r breasts, but unnerneath th' fires o' evil desires air ragin'. Dinna invite ma wi' y'r eyes, they air like th' stars that look doon on th' pool o' Shiloh at midnicht. Gang awa' tae y'r ain place ye temptress o' men, or there'll be na a wink o' sleep f'r Jamie McGlusky th' nicht. As ye were leevin', so ye air noo; ye ha' no' repentit. Eef A harboured y'r eemage in ma heart, A'd be runnin' after



th' hussies a' ma days. Hoot an' awa'! Ye've tried ma sair these mony times, an' ye've helped ma ta sup sorer—thank th' saints she's gone fra ma, but A'm theenkin' some ither puir body's gawn ta be temptit th' nicht. Aye, but she were bonny, she were bonny, every limb as natural as life, an' every limb a poem.'

Peace abode with him for a little while, though now and again his quick ears caught the sounds of wild beasts on the prowl amid the palpitating silence; then he began to converse with some old-time prospecting pal who had passed onward.

'Weel, weel, sae ye've come ta ha' a crack, Geordie? Hoo is it wi' ye th' nicht? A'm theenkin' this bit country A'm in is no' unlike th' bit in West Australia oot beyon' th' Hawk's Nest, where ye handed in y'r checks. Ye had awesome pains in y'r wame afore ye gied oop th' ghaist. A mind it weel; it were deesentry ye died o', caused by bad watter on top o' a week's debauch an' worse whusky ye got at Kurnalpi.'

He paused as if to let this reminiscence sink into his ghostly pal, then went on as if talking to some one round the camp fire.

'Hoo is it wi' ye on that side, Geordie? Ye ken, A'm no' speerin' f'r idle curiosity; A've got ta coom ower masel' some day—we a' ha' ta tak' that journey sooner or later. Ha' ye seen any sign o' hell in yon country yet?'

Evidently Geordie's reply was in the negative, for McGlusky gave a big sigh of relief, and said:

'That's gude hearin', old frien', A'm no' weeshin' ta hurtit y'r feelin's, but eef there had been any hell ye'd ha' surely struck it an' had y'r share o' 't, ye were sic a cantankerous limmer when ye were here; mony's th' time A had ta belt th' grace o' God inta ye when ye'd been suppin' th' de'il's brew in th' whusky bottle; but ye were a gran' mon ta tramp, an' na better worker ever leaved; fearless ye were too, ye

Engleesh tyke, on th' long trail when th' watter ran oot, an' death grinned at us a' th' way. . . . A gran' prospector ye were ; knew th' game frae soup ta nuts. . . . Wha's that y're sayin', Geordie? . . . A'll fin' na gold, siller, copper or coal here? . . . Man, A ken' that masel', it's no' a meeneral country. A'm on a pelt huntin' trip ta mak' a bit siller ; ye'd be na manner o' use ta ma in this game : ye cudn'a hit th' side o' a hoose wi' a rifle in y'r best day. . . . Weel, eef ye maun be jonkin', A'll be weeshin' ye a pleasant journey hame. Good nicht, Geordie.'

He lay ruminating after the departure of his shadow pal, then he remarked

'Geordie said he had na struck th' auld-time hell we used ta debate aboot before he went yon, but A'm no' sure he isn'a carryin' his hell roon' wi' him, f'r each yin mak's his ain. By Jings, that's hell! Frae th' luk' o' Geordie, he's carryin' roon' an awfu' thirst ; he lookit wae some droughty ; poor de'il, he wudn'a try ta put a check on his thirst on this side ; a' th' siller he made prospectin', he spent on th' liquor, an' his wee wumman an' childer had ta fend f'r their ainsel's, yet when awa' fra th' toons an' camps, he were a gran' mon, game ta th' marrow. He'd ha' deed any day f'r his wumman or th' weans, when he cudn'a smell th' hell's broth.'

McGlusky turned on his elbow to take a look at his sleeping comrade, for he would watch like a mother over any boy or young man to whom he felt drawn. Perhaps it was no bad thing for Derry that something had impressed the pioneer and made him turn on his elbow at that moment. Derry, with a bit of his blanket thrown from him, was lying close to a clump of thorn and in the midst of the clump gleamed two big, brilliant green eyes. Swiftly McGlusky's right hand slid out and fastened upon his revolver that was always handy when he camped for the night. Without

a tremor, his big forefinger tightened steadily on the trigger. A sharp crack—a spurt of flame, and the two green lights in the clump of thorns went out.

Derry started from his slumber.

‘What’s up, Mac?’

‘Weel, buckie, A’m no’ sure, but A’m theenkin’ a scrub leon’s doon. A saw twa eyes feexed on y’r face, an’ A fired atween ’em. Ye should na-sleep sae close ta bushes; yin stroke o’ a big paw wud lay open y’r jugular.’

‘Sure you killed him?’

‘A’m nivver sure o’ anything. A only ken A saw twa lights an’ put a bit lead between ’em, an’ they went oot. It’s prima facie evidencè, as th’ lawyers say, that th’ beastie’s no’ interestet in ye th’ noo as a supper problem.’

He went to the bushes and dragged forth a grey body with short thick legs and extraordinary large padded forefeet, armed with curving claws like chilled steel.

‘Yon’s a cooard in daylight, an’ even in th’ nicht wull no’ attack a movin’ mon, but a sleepin’ yin seems ta ha’ a fascination f’r th’ beastie. A ought ta ha’ warned ye; eef he’d struck an’ missed y’r jugular, he’d ha’ tore a gude pairt o’ yin side o’ y’r face awa’. Ye’ll maybe see a gude many half-breeds in these pairts wi’ unchancy big white scars a’ doon yin cheek an’ yin eye gone; when ye dae, ye needn’a ask wha’ did it; ye’ll ken it were yin o’ these creepin’ Judases. Noo haud his legs whiles A skin him afore his body gets cold; niver let y’r game get cold, ma son, afore ye tak’ its pelt eef ye can help it; when they’re cold they’re rigid, an’ th’ pelt is harder ta tak’ an’ doesn’a gie near sic gude results when ye peg it oot ta dry, so always tak’ y’r pelt whiles it’s warm an’ peg it oot there an’ then; th’ sun an’ a wee bittie o’ alum an’ saut wull dae th’ rest. We want ta stan’ weel wi’ oor

trader an' ta dae that we maun tak' oor pelts in in better condeetion than any o' th' ither hunters tak' theirs. He's verra frien'ly disposed ta us, ma son, but in beesiness a wise mon niver coonts on th' workin' o' frien'ship, f'r nothing strains th' bonds o' frien'ship like th' earnin' an' payin' o' siller. A'm theenkin' yon buckie black Pedro is a sloven ower his work, an' maist half-breed Indians air too; they a' hunt weel, but th' work that follows th' huntin' is no' congenial ta them. It's at th' workin' end o' th' game we maun beat 'em; we'll tak' oor pelts in a' supple an' free fra fat, dry an' sweet. Yon trader wull get a better price f'r oor pelts than he wull f'r black Pedro's an' the springs o' frien'ship wull no' grow rusty. Ye ken that sayin' in th' bible, "Wha'soever y'r han' findeth ta dae, dae it wi' a' y'r micht." Th' mon that wrote that were inspired, an' weesdom had its abidin' place unner his hat; naething unner th' sun gies sic sure an' certain results as gude honest work done wi' a' y'r micht; it's no' brains, it's th' capacity ta work, that mak's th' men o' oor breed masters o' th' watters an' monarchs o' maist o' the waste places o' th' earth. Nail that ta th' four corners o' y'r soul, an' yin o' these days ye'll dress in purple an' fine linen an' ha' a flunkey ta drive ye oot when ither yins air sluggin' along on fut in th' muck.'

'Hard work don't always pay, partner.'

'Aye, but it does.'

'It didn't find us the Rosas treasure, and we did plenty of it,' grinned Derry, who loved to poke his finger into McGlusky's sore spot.

The pioneer looked very hard at his chuckling mate, and even in the moonlight the youth could see the hard steel-blue eyes twinkling.

'Were ye raised in a decent hame, ma son, or did some yin steal ye oot o' a cage in the Lunnon Zoo?'

'I was raised all right, partner.'

'Shouldn't ha' thocht sae; should ha' fancied ye spent y'r babyhood swingin' fra a bar by y'r tail, by th' way ye reason. Hard work got th' Rosas treasure a'richt; his lieutenant did th' hard work, an' did it first, that's a'.'

The next day Derry was all agog to have a look at their water hole to see if the game came thickly.

'Ye needn'a fash; watter's th' best bait in hot countries; th' beasties'll come in gude time; th' maist important thing in huntin' is knowin' hoo ta wait. A'm no' sure it's no' th' backbone o' success—real success in a' walks o' life—eef twa men start oot ta climb a moontain, th' yin that waits an' watches th' weather, an' chooses his time ta start wull reach th' top when th' ither gommerill wha' rushed off th' moment he arrived wi'oot consultin' condeetions is settin' on his head in a snawdrift ha'f way oop.'

'Everybody don't want to climb mountains, partner.'

'Everyyin worth while does, laddie; it may be a moontain o' rocks or a moontain o' ambeetion, an' th' moontain o' ambeetion is a dom sicht th' hardest ta scale, no matter whether it be in politics, or beesiness, or soldierin' or in writin' or paintin', th' yin wha' kens best hoo ta wait an' work gets on th' highest ridge an' stays there; th' rest faint by th' way.'

'Ever have any ambitions yourself, Mac?'

'Ma buckie—na, no' sa great. A'd like ta be president o' this or some ither country where a mon o' genius an' granite wull were needed. It's no' sic a great matter, but A'd like it.'

'Do you think you could run this country, partner?'

McGlusky's eyes opened in childlike astonishment at the query.

'Ma?—run it? Eef A cudn'a dae better than any yin A've heard o' North or South since Abe Lincoln, A'd chew ma blanket fra corner ta corner an' ca' it Welsh mutton an' mint sauce.'



'That what you're waitin' for, Mac—the presidency?'

'Jest that, buckie. A'm waitin' f'r th' ca' an' when th' ca' comes, A'll no' be backward. A dinna believe in hidin' ma licht unner a bushel when th' still sma' voice says, "Noo's th' hoor, Jamie McGlusky, butt in an' beat hell oot o' any yin that trys ta stop ye."'

'I wouldn't like to be that one when you get your call, partner.'

'Na, buckie, ye wudn'a, f'r A'll no' be gentle wi' him. Did ye ever see an auld wife squeezin' watter oot o' a cabbage in a cullen'er?'

'Yes.'

'Weel A'll mak' watter o' ma enemy when ma hoor comes. Ye see,' he added with childlike conviction, 'A'll ha' th' Lord fechtin' on ma side, an' none can prevail agin ma. A'll rub th' nose o' him that tries agin a stane. A mon who's appointit ta rule can na mair be stoppit than a storm. Naething stoppit Napoleon till he got the mad bug o' personal ambeetion in his bonnet, an' wanted ta be emperor, then he grew smaller in min' every day as he grew greater in poower, till th' angel o' th' Lord gied him cancer in th' wame an' ended his days in exile. Aye, he grew sae sma' when he pulled th' imperial purple ower his decent claes, that he ootraged his lawfu' wife Josephine an' put her awa' f'r th' Austrian wumman, because he wanted a wean ta wear his croon after him, an' it wasn' a Josephine's fau't—th' wumman had a wean afore she married him. A'll no' be like Napoleon, ye ken, laddie—A'll copy his virtues, an' they were many, an' A'll dodge his fau'ts; that's pairtly wha' great men's lives air for, ta teach ithers.'

## CHAPTER VI

### DERRY IS BLOODED TO THE WILDS

**B**EFORE McGlusky would start hunting he had a vow to fulfil, and he fulfilled it. He prospected round amongst the scrub until he found a big, solid, flat stone, and this took some time, for stones of any kind were scarce in the locality.

'What's that for, partner?'

'A want it f'r an anvil; A've a wee bit o' black-smithing ta dae.'

Having found his backblock anvil, the pioneer produced from his kit a three-inch iron bolt, which he heated red hot and beat flat, Derry watching him and saying nothing—he was getting familiar with his partner's queer moods. With deft skill McGlusky welded the iron into a cross about two inches long, then he punched a hole in its upper end and threw it in a tin of water to cool whilst he cut a thin strip of hide. Having done this, he threaded the hide through the hole in the cross and hung it round his sinewy neck, tucking the cross inside his shirt and letting it lie against his heart.

'Didn't know you were a Holy Roman, partner.'

'A'm no'. A'm wha' ye ma' ca' a salt watter Baptist f'r want o' a better name.'

'What's the cross for, then?'

'It's for Antonio Loretto, th' mon that sold ma a pup, him that took twa hunner' hard-earned dollars frae ma.

an' gied ma a worthless chart an' twa ears fu' o' lees in exchange. A'm no' veendeective, but gin A lay han's on Antonio A'll brand him as A wad brand a steer, so's th' worl ma' ken him f'r a rogue.'

'What do men do to their enemies in your country, partner, when they happen to be vindictive?'

'It depen's on th' mon: th' Australians air th' bes haters on th' planet; A'm feared A've a wee droppie too much o' th' milk o' human kindness in ma nature; some o' my brither Australians wad be real cold cruel ta Antonio gin he served them as he served ma, but A'm Scots Australian, ye ken, an' th' Scots air no' harsh.'

'Partner?'

'Weel, buckie?'

'I—I don't think I'll go to Australia when I'm tired o' South America; your people seem too damn tender-hearted f'r me; I believe if Antonio had taken a thousand dollars off you, you'd have eaten him.'

'A wad no', but A'd ha' left him f'r something else ta eat; he'd ha' no' been worth buryin'.

Having fulfilled his promise to himself, McGlusky went contentedly about his work; he did not go near the water hole, but set his traps above, below and all round it, wherever he saw a trail running through the thorns, and Derry, who had never been trapping before, was delighted with the cunning skill of the older man.

'A'm theenkin' we'll no' ha' ta wait ower lang f'r results, mannie; this pair o' th' countey has na been worked f'r years, eef at a', an' th' game's no' scairt an' shy; eef we work warily, we'll dae weel here.'

The pair had started out with as many traps as they could carry. It was a treat to watch the pioneer, he was so swift, and careful.

'Niver walk on a beastie's trail, ma son, eef ye mean ta trap him, f'r th' moment a wild thing smells mon a' its instincts air alert, an' th' art o' trappin' is ta tak'

y'r prey wi'oot roosin' its suspecions. A'm theenkin' we'll get a gey fine lot o' foxes ta begin wi', but after a wee while they'll suspecion trouble, then they'll be as cute as auld Nickie himsel', an' we'll ha' tae shoot 'em, an' cartridges cost siller—trappin' costs naething. When ye see a reg'lar beaten pad o' any beastie, stan' weel on yin side o' 't, an' lean ower an' put y'r trap in possetion, bein' carefu' no' ta touch th' groon' wi' y'r fingers, an' always rub a wee bit rancid fat ower y'r trap, it deadens th' smell o' y'r han's on th' iron; th' beasties'll come sniffin' tae see wha' it is, an' th' trap'll dae th' rest.'

He explained the lore of the trapper to the novice as he went his rounds, and in this way Derry learnt in a few hours things which it would have taken him a season of hard work to find out for himself. By and by the lad, like all beginners, felt the itch grow upon him to set traps for himself.

'A'richt, gae canny an' peek a beaten trail an' set y'r traps as ye've seen ma dae, but feex weel in y'r mind where ye set 'em, or ye'll ha' a dom hard job ta fin' 'em again in th' scrub.'

'I think it's easy enough to set traps after you've seen it done, partner.'

'Aye, is it, y're richt there, but maybe ye'll no' fin' it sae easy tae get a beastie tae walk inta yin.'

'Looks simple as fallin' off a log to me, Mac.'

'Sae it did ta ma, till A tried it, but gang y'r ways; th' sooner ye begin, th' sooner ye'll learn.'

Full of his new ambition, Derry glided quickly away amid the thorns, doing his best to imitate the pioneer's noiselessness of movement. He was quite satisfied that he was progressing like a ghost, for wood-lore was new to him; but if he had heard McGlusky's muttered remarks for some little time after he had started, he would not have been quite so self-satisfied.

'Dom th' cub,' muttered the veteran, cocking an

ear in the direction Derry had taken, ' he'll scare everything that ha' ears wi'in a mile. It's wunnerfu' hoo yin sae sma' can mak' sic a de'il o' a splurge gaein' through a bit thorn—he's like a steam roller on stilts. Noo he's stubbed his toe agin a root—noo he's let his troosers catch in a hooky thorn, an' th' back swing o' th' bough ha' made na end o' a clash—he'll ha' ta learn ta gang through th' wilderness as silent as a fush through watter. A'll ha' ta break him ta th' job like breakin' a hoond ta th' gun.'

A little later on, as he was setting another trap, he frowned angrily.

' Lord ha' mercy, th' pup maun theenk he's in a deaf an' dumb asylum, an' settin' traps f'r yin o' th' eenmates. A heard his fut snap a dry twig as theeck as a pipe stem; he cud no' be heavier on th' hoof eef he's been in th' police force. A'll ha' ta be a bit sharp wi' him.'

But when an hour or two later he met his protégé, he had not the heart to scold; the lad looked so supremely happy and so brimful of mystery, that the veteran, remembering his own early enthusiasm at the dawn of his career, could do nothing but smile over Derry's ill-suppressed swagger.

' Had gude huntin', buckie? '

' I set ten traps on fox runs.'

' Gude f'r ye.'

' Then I struck something else, partner.'

' Aye, wha' was it? No' an elephan'? A thocht A heard yin broosin' roon'.'

Derry-got hot in the collar at this banter.

' You wait a bit an' you'll know. I bet I'll surprise you.'

' Whatever ye catch wull surprise me, unless it's a skunk. A skunk is sic a fule body, it'll walk oop ta a trap an' ask ta be taken in.'

' I'm not lookin' f'r skunks, Mac.'



' Y're wrong then, skunks air gude payin' game, gin ye ken hoo ta cure th' pelt ta tak' th' smell frae them. Ha' ye seen ony sign o' them ? '

' I wouldn't know a skunk if I saw one, partner.'

' Ye wull eef ye smell one. Let's camp in this bittie shade ; we'll wait till sundoon, then ha' a keek at th' traps an' set them that's sprung again f'r th' nicht ; we maun gae roon' again at dawn.'

Derry sat down gladly, and pulled out his pipe.

' Put y'r pipe awa', a trapper canna smoke except in his ain main camp. A'm gaun ta chew masel'.'

Derry did as he was bidden ; he knew the real note of command in McGlusky's voice. The veteran tossed him his plug.

' Ye've been long enough at sea ta ken hoo ta get comfort wi' y'r teeth.'

Derry bit off a corner—a pretty big corner.

' A didn'a mean ye ta mak' a lunch o' 't, buckie.' Then : ' Noo, tell ma wha' did ye fin' oot o' th' common when ye were settin' y'r traps ? '

' No ; you'll get the surprise of y'r life by an' by, Mac. Tell me about skunks ; are they valuable, and how big are they, an' what are they like ? '

' In some pairts they're foon' in hunner's, reg'lar colonies, though each pair gangs on its ain ; eef we hit on a colony we'll mak' a cheque, f'r A ken hoo ta cure th' pelts.'

' What size do they grow ? '

' Ye ken a ferret ? '

' Yes.'

' Weel, a full-grown skunk is three times th' size o' a ferret, dark brown on top, white unnerneath, an' he carries his big bushy tail arched ower his back ; he's no fule, an' he's no' feared o' anything that walks, runs or flies in th' air, or crawls on th' earth.'

' Not snakes ? '

' Na, a skunk is no' feared o' snakes. When a skunk

starts ta gang anywhere, coortin' or huntin', or jest travellin' ta tak' th' air, he just gangs there an' turns aside f'r naething. There's no' mooch o' him ; he can't bite, or claw worth talkin' aboot, but ivery bird, beast or creepin' thing gies him th' pavement when he asks f'r it, an' he always does. He's got th' pluck an' spunk an' cheek o' a brigade o' bulldogs fed on raw beef an' gun-powder. He'll no' gie th' trail tae a mon.'

' You say he's slow on his feet ? '

' Slow's no' th' word f'r it, he comes waddlin' along like a Lord Mayor returnin' frae a beanfeast full o' ceevic vanity, an' free drinks. He's th' maist pompous wee upstart in a' th' weelderness.'

' I'll grab the first one I see, partner.'

' An ye dae, ye'll no' sleep wi'in a mile o' ma f'r a month, buckie.'

' Why not ? '

' Weel, th' skunk'd jest wait f'r ye ta mak' y'r grab, then he'd whip roon' like lightnin' an' show ye his stèrn, an' squirt ye a' ower frae head ta fut wi' juice fra his glan's, an' eef ye didn'a run, it'd be because ye cud na.'

' Does it sting ? '

' It doesn'a need ta ; th' stink wud stop a battleship.'

' What's it like, Mac ? '

' Laddie, th' stink o' a skunk fresh fra th' glan's is a thing na ordinary human cud describe ; neither Horace nor Homer nor Omar Khayyam cud dae justice ta it in a poem. Eef ye mixed oop th' perfume o' a soap factory, an' a city sewer, that had been oot o' repair f'r a whole summer, an' a fish factory, an' stirred th' lot oop wi' th' leg o' a deevorce court lawyer, it wud be violets an' th' breath o' a beauty waitin' ta be kissed in comparison ta skunk aroma—ma word it wud. A've had some.'

' Is the stuff from its glands its only real weapon ? '

' It is, an' wi' it it wull stampede a jaguar as easily as you'll shoo off an' auld coo. Only yince did A see any beastie face a skunk.'

' Tell me about that.'

Mac bit meditatively on his tobacco.

' A've warned ye aboot th' black bush snake, th' yin six fut long an' theeck as ma wrist, flat-headed it is wi' a horseshoe mark between its eyes, wi' sure death ta mon or beast in yin touch o' its fangs? '

' Yes, you gave me the creeps about that one.'

' A meant ta, mannie, f'r gin yin bit ye, ye'd no' creep far. A'd blow th' head off yin eef A saw it, gin it were th' last cartridge A had between ma an' starvation. Every beastie is afeared o' them, bar only th' skunk. A was rappin' rock yin day, f'r A was a prospector then, when A saw on a bit cattle trail yin o' th' creepin' Judases windin' its way hame. It had froth on each side o' its jaws. so A kenned it had been fechtin' wi' yin o' its ain kind, f'r it was th' matin' season f'r snakes. A stoopit ta pick oop a rock ta heave at it, when A saw a buck skunk wi' his plume high ower his back come doon th' trail richt in front o' th' snake. It was th' marriage season f'r skunks too, an' this yin looked th' biggest fule that iver went woin', sae pompous an' fu' o' conceit. A wud ha' laughed, only th' sicht o' th' snake had made ma see red. Th' crawlin' Judas lefted his flat head an' hissed sharp an' savage; a wild bull or a jaguar wud ha leapt clear o' that track, an' sae wud Jamie' McGlusky. There was death in th' raspin', piercin', soond, an' ma bowels yearned f'r th' skunk wha' kep' comin' on like an eediot asylum on four short legs. Th' black snake stopped an' quicker'n ma eye cud follow, threw itself in th' coil an' poised its head ta strike, an' A tell ye, buckie, it lookit like naething but a quiverin', shinin', hissin' section o' hell that had slippit through th' bars ta work destruction. Th'

buck skunk didn'a deesplay th' least anger ; he kenned richt enouch wha' lay in his path ; he kenned eef he made yin mistak' or were a millionth pairt o' a second too late, he's hear th' harp o' Gabriel welcomin' hame a skunk. He just gied his tail a lofty kin' o' a twitch, as mooch as ta say " A'm gawn ta meet ma bonny an' ha' na time ta waste on trash—hop it." '

' What happened, Mac ? '

' Yon snake wi' his mad bad eyes watched th' skunk hop an' hobble ta wi'in three inches o' th' deestance he cud reach when he struck ta kill, then th' king fule on four legs turned his stern quicker'n you cud mak' a circle in th' dust wi' y'r finger eef y'r life dependit upon it, an' gied th' creepin' Judas a' th' juice in his glan's. A was ten gude feet awa' an' th' perfume cam' verra nigh stranglin' ma. A dinna theenk a parliament fu' o' decayed poleeteecians cud smell mooch waur, no' eef they died wi' a' their broken promises fu' upon them. Bum'le bees wi' their mooths fu' o' stolen honey, got a whiff o' skunk's delight, an' went soarin' oop ta heaven ta mak' complaint at th' judgment bar o' a' creatures. A'm no' sure th' grass didn'a wither, but A'll tak' ma deathbed oath yon snake did ; he shot oop half his length fra th' coil, no' towards th' skunk—he'd had a' th' skunk he wanted—then he twisted hissel' inta knots, an' in a tangle o' squirmin' meesery got into the grass ta try an' cough oot th' smell. An' th' skunk jest hoppit an' ambled past, takin' no mair notice o' th' snake than a rich widder tak's o' a suitor who has no money an' a red head an' a backbone she cud bend wi' her thumb. When A'd run a mile ta get ta windward o' th' smell A sat doon an' lauched till ma belt bruk, an' A niver see a sma' mon who ha' won his way ta high deegnity by dirty means but A theenk o' that skunk ; he's won th' pathway ta his ambeetions, but he left a waesome smell ahint him, an' didn'a seem a ta ken it. Some men an' skunks air

verra mooch alike, buckie, they're sae used ta their ain dirtiness they theenk na yin else notices it.'

Derry, who loved McGlusky in his philosophical vein, was chuckling over the pioneer's latter remarks, when the sound of an awful clatter came to the ears of the pair. The pioneer leapt to his feet.

'Sakes alive, wha's that? Has a' th' bush gone crazy?'

He raced to a little knoll that gave him an outlook over the flat country, and stood peering in all directions.

'What do you make of it, partner?'

'Dommed if A ken, onless a' th' watter in oor spring ha' turned ta whusky an' a' th' wild beasties air mad drunk. A never heard sic a clatter in th' wilds afore; it'll scare a' th' game awa' f'r a month o' Sundays.'

'Perhaps it's foxes fighting, partner.'

'Aye, an' perhaps it's y'r gran'mother cuttin' her weesdom teeth. God send she gets through wi' th' operation soon, or it's gude-day ta oor hope o' gettin' any pelts in these pairts. Wha's that?'

He pointed his hand in the direction of an open space and his eyes were full of amazement.

'Ostriches,' gasped Derry, 'ostriches.'

'A ken it, but wha' in th' name o' jumpin' Sarah's th' matter wi' 'em?'

A band of about thirty big birds formed a sort of ring on the little flat, and in the centre were two cock-birds leaping, kicking, plunging, like things demented; the birds forming the circle had their bodies pointed to the bush, so that they could burst away in the instant; they had screwed their long necks round so that they could watch the two in the ring, and it was these two that were making all the clatter that had disturbed the quiet of the bush. They never stood still for a moment, kicking, bucking, biting at their legs, and screaming like things demented all the time.



'Weel, A'll be kicked fra here ta Africa eef A ivver saw th' like. A've seen 'em fechtin', an' A've seen 'em makin' love; A've seen 'em at bay wi' wild beasties a' roon' 'em, but A nivver seen th' like o' yon. Dinna speak above y'r breath, mannie, it maun be a sort o' reelegious ceremony, a—a kin' o' Mad Mullah ecstasy—wonnerfu' things happen in th' wild places o' th' earth. A'm glad A've got ye f'r a weetness, buckie; eef A'd been on ma lonesome, th' ceety men nicht ca' ma a leear whin A prent yon circus in a buik o' travels, as they did when A first wrote aboot th' stately reelegious dance o' th' Australian lyre bird wha' goes through th' "Lancers" feegure by feegure better than men an' wummin dae in a Lunnon ball-room. A ken, f'r A've seen baith. A went ta a Covent Garden ball yince on purpose ta watch, an' A got into a fecht because A told yin wumman A'd seen a hen that cud dance better.'

He looked long at the frantic creatures bounding and bumping, heads down, tails up, wings extended.

'A'm theenkin' it's no' a reelegious ceremony after a', mannie; it's—it's no' deegnified enouch, an' th' language o' their voices is no' t' language o' prayer. It maun be a sacrifice o' some sort; wild animals ha' their laws as weel as menfolk, but A nivver heard o' this yin. Perhaps they twa air coowards an' yon watchers air the doomsmen. It's a gran' experience f'r ye, laddie, an' ye sae young.'

A big slow grin illuminated Derry's face.

'Wha's wrang wi' ye? Ha' it gone t' y'r brain?'

Derry lay flat on his stomach, dug his toes in the soil and yelled with laughter. Mac regarded him with amazement.

'Ma certie, th' bush is bewitched, it's got yon ostriches an' it's got th' puir laddie noo; eef it gets ma, A hope it'll no' mak' ma dae anything indecent-like.'

Derry raised his face, wet with laughter-driven tears.

'Is there any pain wi' it, sonny?'

That set Derry off again.

'Mac, you fool, Mac, it's not a religious ceremony, or—  
or a sacrifice you're watchin'.'

'Wha' is it then?'

'I found the trail those ostriches made going to water, and I put down two spring traps, two of our biggest, and—and they've found 'em.'

A quick kick in the ribs checked Derry's mirth.

'Ye inside linin' o' a padded cell! Why did ye no' tell ma? We've na traps that cud hold yon f'r a meenute; they'd pu' 'em oop an' carry 'em awa', an' oor traps cost siller, an' ye've spoilt oor huntin'.'

He tossed the barrel of his rifle into his left palm, sighted with the speed of a hawk, two sharp reports snapped out, and Mac had made sure of his traps. He strode sullenly to where his quarry lay, glowered down on them for a long time, whilst Derry gurgled with merriment beside him.

'They're no' worth skinnin', they've bucked an' torn a' th' plumes oot o' themse'ls, but we've got oor traps. Tak' 'em fra their legs, an' mannie—'

'Yes, partner?'

'Gin A ever hear ye say one word aboot releigious ceremony or—or sacrifice o' ostriches, A'll jam th' toe o' ma boot sae hard inta y'r hunkers A'll tak' a' th' curl oot o' y'r hair wi' th' shock. Noo ye feckless son o' a third-class de'il, gang back ta camp an' dae th' cookin', it's a' y're fit f'r, an' A'm no' sure y're fit f'r that. A'll attend ta th' huntin'.'

Mac went the round of his traps, and found things were not so bad as he had expected, for the game was plentiful and his cunningly-laid traps had done deadly work before Derry's masadventure had made all the clatter. By the time he had skinned his catch and reset the traps, his good humour had come back, and he smiled over the lad's exploit.

'He had th' lauch ower ma concernin' ma high-falutin', but gin A dae no' put th' lauch on him afore A'm verra mooch older, A'll let him dae ma hair in a bun on top an' tie it wi' a pink reebon.'

Shouldering his pelts, he went campwards. About twenty yards from camp his quick eyes detected a skunk hole. With great circumspection he got down on hands and knees, and inserting a twig, made sure the skunk was at home. Then with a grim chuckle he picked up his pelts and went to camp. When Derry saw the haul he was full of delight.

'Good, eh, old sportsman?'

'No' sae bad.'

'When we've had grub I'll help you scrape 'em an' salt 'em down an' peg 'em out, eh?'

'Na,' said the pioneer gruffly, 'ye've done harm enough f'r yin day.'

Derry looked crestfallen, and Mac, as if taking pity on him said casually :

'There was naething in any o' th' traps ye set, but——'

'But what, partner?'

'A'm no' likin' ta see ye empty-handed on y'r first day, it's no' lucky. Eef ye care tae ha' another try afore th' dusk fades, ye can foller ma tracks back aboot five an' twenty paces, an' on th' left han' side as ye gang ye'll see th' hole o' a beastie ; maybe it's a quebracho or a musk-rat—it's fur o' some sort, f'r A saw hair by th' side o' th' hole. A was gaun ta tak' a keek at it masel' i' th' morn.'

'How'll I get it out?'

'Whustle tae it, perhaps it'll come ta ye ; but A'd tak' a spade an' a stick masel'.'

'He's sore over his religious ceremony racket,' chuckled Derry, as he went on the pioneer's tracks, spade on shoulder. He located the burrow in a few minutes, and began to dig. He had only thrown out a

few spadefuls when he thought he heard a chuckle, but he could not see the pioneer who had followed him with Indian craft, and lay a few paces off in some bushes gurgling in anticipation of joys to come, and he didn't guess just how much joy was in store for him. Derry dug briskly, and in his excitement put one of his feet on the far side of the hole, and his weight crushed in the soft earth. He saw something struggling amid the fallen dirt, and fearful of losing his first pelt, he thrust the shovel in and tossed dirt and game far out. The animal fell at the feet of McGlusky, who, big game man that he was, turned tail and fled; but he was too late; the vicious eyes of the skunk had seen him; there was a quick depression of a bushy tail which tightened on the aromatic glands, and from the belt to his heels McGlusky was splashed till he reeked like a pest-house, and Derry could hear him pouring forth weird Scotch curses as he fled through the scrub, heedless of thorns that lacerated arms and legs,

'God A'michty! Th' yin that mistak's yon beastie f'r a lady's powder puff is no' a gude judge—A wūd no' let him buy perfumes f'r ma bridal morn.'

He stopped and began tearing off his clothing, and then he yelled:

'Come awa'—run ye gommerill, A've gotten enough f'r twa.'

Derry did not run; he stood fondling his spade and watching a quaint little figure hobbling towards him in the dusk. The air all round him was filled with a stench like a charnel-house; it got in his nostrils, and filled him with yearnings for a long, deep dive into sea water; it made his eyes smart as though some one had dusted his face with red pepper. Yet he had had no direct contact; all he was getting was what the tainted air brought him. McGlusky had got the real thing. Still Derry, who was mule-like in his



stubbornness at times, wanted that pelt ; it was his first real experience as a hunter, and he did not mean to be beaten ; besides, in his utter inexperience, he thought it would be cowardly to run from that grotesque wee thing that came hopping towards him so phlegmatically, displaying no sign of anger, only an unconquerable determination. Derry gave ground a few paces. The rodent came on, never varying its speed. The lad, very nimble on his feet, worked so as to get the grotesque wee thing where the light was good. The skunk counted it all in the day's work, and pursued this big thing that had turned it out of house and home. Derry grew angry. 'Damn your cheek'—he whirled the spade round his head and threw it. The animal, which is perhaps the most brainless of all four-footed things, saw the spade coming, and did not attempt to avoid it. Animals don't reason, they act on the instincts handed down from a million of generations—anyway, skunks do. In their psychology danger must be met and vanquished by squirting foulness full in its face ; no skunk since creation had ever known this method to fail, but you can't stop a shovel with a smell, which was something right outside skunk knowledge of things. The dauntless little beast whirled round and sent jets of stench-charged liquid all over the shovel and over Derry's hands and arms. The shovel, aimed unerringly, did the rest. Derry did not pause to look at the little dead body. Holding his arms away from him, as if he were trying to learn to fly, he fled to camp. Mac, naked as he was born, was digging a hole with frantic speed. He paused as Derry rushed on the scene.

'Ye've no' got it in th' face, buckie, eh ?'

'Got it on my hands and arms. Give me water to wash for the love o' Mary, partner.'

'A' th' watter in th' sea won't wash it oot. A was



gaun ta bury ma claes in th' earth, it's th' only way ta remove th' smell.'

'Bury me instead, Mac, bury me quick, partner, or I'll go cranky—the smell's awful.'

'Lay ye doon on y'r back then, an' A'll cover ye ta y'r face.'

Derry scrambled into the shallow hole, and the pioneer knelt and clawed the soft earth over him.

'By Jingo, ma mannie, y're no posy: Eef A were diggin' ye oop after ye'd been buried f'r a year, A'd expect' ye ta be fresher.'

'You're not a bed of mignonette yerself, old sportsman.'

'It's ma claes ye can smell; A'll bury them noo.'

He dug the second hole dressed in nothing but his whiskers, and when he had finished he said soberly:

'Laddie, A'm gey weel pleased na yin can see ma th' nicht, they'd maybe tak' ma f'r a pixie.'

Then he surveyed the surroundings for quite a while with the cast-iron placidity of a man who has learned to take the bitter with the sweet.

'Smell anything noo, mannie?'

'Yes, I can smell skunk.'

'Aye, an' ye wull till new skin grows on y'r han's an' arms. It's gey wonnerfu' hoo th' Lord works oot his plans; it were a wonnerfu' intelligence that gied so sma' an' insigneeficant a creature pooer ta hum'le th' pride o' th' mighty. A'd no' ha' thocht o' it masel' eef A'd been makin' creation.'

'I wish the Lord hadn't either,' grumbled Derry.

'Air ye hungry, ma mannie?'

'No, partner, I'm too full of smells to have any room for food.'

'A'll bide a wee ma ainsel' till th' nicht breeze clears things awa'; th' perfume is mighty strong still. A'm wonnerin' wha' became o' th' beastie.'

'He's lying where I found him; I killed him with

the spade. Say, Mac, if you're short of clothes, you can have that pelt; it's my first kill, and I'll make you a present of it.'

'A'll gae an' bury th' beastie; it's pelt's na gude noo; ye maun kill a skunk unawares eef ye want his fur; eef ye kill th' beastie in action he taints hissel' beyond redemption. A'll bury him; even when dead he's leakin' abomination a' th' time.'

'Mac?'

'Weel?'

'I forgot to thank you for sending me for that bit o' fur.' There was a gurgle of merriment in Derry's voice.

'Dinna greet; A've got mair than ma share o' thanks, lil' man, mair than enouch by a nosefu'.'

When he had done his sexton's work, he returned, and began examining the fox skins he had taken that day, and by his pleasant whistling Derry knew all his old philosophy had returned.

'Seem happy, partner.'

'An' why no', buckie? Hasn'a th' tender shepherd been unco' guid ta ma th' day? Here's masel' been makin' a fule's ploy spoilin' ma claes, but A'm na condemned like Adam ta cavoort roon' in a bit fig leaf till ma theengs air fit ta wear again; here ready ta ma han' air th' spoils o' th' chase; A'll sune mak' masel' decent. Where did ye put ma packin' needle an' th' yank o' twine?'

'Goin' to turn tailor, partner?'

'Aye, an' it's no' th' first time. A'll clip th' legs off th' fox skins wi' ma knife, an' stitch 'em thegither, they'll dae fine, though A'm feared they'll smell a wee bit nutty f'r a day or twa, seein' A ha' no' had time ta dry an' prepare 'em. Buckie, we humans ha' a wonnerfu' lot tae be thankfu' f'r; th' Lord's always feedin' us wi' a spoon fra th' cradle ta th' grave.'

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COMING OF THE STALLION

**M**cGLUSKY'S prophecy that Derry's escapade with the ostriches would scare the game was proven true. Days passed and the traps were always empty. The youth was very penitent, but Mac hushed him.

'For why wud A be ragin' at ye? Eef A were breakin' in a puppy ta th' huntin' game, A'd expec' th' pup ta mak' a fule o' itsel', it's th' natur' o' a' young things. Ye'll learn in th' fulness o' time. Th' sense God A'michty did na gie ye A'll teach ye. A ha' na patience wi' fu' grown men or wummin either who expec' weesdom fra bits o' half grown cubs. A young thing that nivver gangs wrong is too almichty gude f'r this world, an' ought ta die young. Dinna fash, Derry, A like a fule masel'—when he's no' old.'

The lad grinned at this backhanded comfort, and appreciated the rugged sense of his partner's deductions.

'A'm o' th' opeenion we may as well cache oor outfit an' gang f'r a keek at th' country a few miles further south; we'll tak' oor rifles an' a week's grub an' watter. Ye maun learn ta dae on twa drappies o' watter a day, ma son, yin in th' morn an' yin at nicht, until we drop across anither spring.'

'I'll do what you do, partner.'

'That's bonny. A like y'r spunk. When A ha' a

pup that whimpers ower sore feet. A ken A'm no' gawn ta raise a good dog; th' yin that licks his sores in silence is th' yin that wins oot an' mak's gude. Ye'll dae, Derry.'

They packed a week's supplies and started, and every hour and every mile of the way the lad learnt something that was worth learning.

'What makes you so sure there is more water not so very far away, old sportsman?'

'Th' birds fly low, an' they fly south; eef they had far ta fly they'd fly high.'

'That's worth knowing.'

'A' things prented in th' buik o' natur' air worth knowin'.'

'What's th' best cure f'r snake-bite, Mac?'

'Keepin' awa' frae snakes—A ken na ither.'

So they beguiled the way, one greedy to learn, the other eager to teach.

'Mac?'

'Oot wi' 't.'

'Did you ever tell traveller's tales?'

A flash of merriment like a sun streak on a door knob swept the pioneer's weatherbeaten face.

'When A'm in ceeties an' congenital eediots ask ma questions tha' a blin' baby pullin' at its mither's dugs wud ha' shame ta ask, A dae, buckie, an' th' wonner o' 't is that th' bigger th' lee ye tell sic folk, th' easier they swallow it, an' gape f'r mair. Tell 'em a wee yin, an' they doot ye. Sae when A dae start, A fill 'em ta th' brim till they bubble ower. There's naething on earth sae credulous as men, providin' ye feed 'em wi' fistfuls at a time. A' th' successfu' financiers ken this; that's why they always put up big schemes, an' talk hunner's o' thoosan's o' pounds, then the folk tum'le ower each ither ta be pluckd, but eef a wee mon puts oop a sma' scheme, th' public sniff it, walk roon' an' roon' it an' see th' trap.'

'Have animals the same kind o' sense as man, partner?'

'Na; animals in their wild state dinna think; they work by instinct ainly. Put a beaver in condeetions na beaver was ivver in before, an' th' beaver dies. Why? Because th' eenstinct is th' ootcome o' generations o' action unner a given set o' circumstances. Change th' condeetions, an' th' beaver is as helpless as a kitten in a tub o' watter. Sit richt here noo, an' A'll expoond ma meanin'; there's illustrations richt ta oor han'. See yon wasp buzzin' ower th' locusts that air chewin' th' bark off th' young thorn?'

'Yes.'

'That yin's a locust-eatin' wasp, a tiger on th' wing. These few locusts air wind-blown, th' wind ha' beat them doon. Watch yon wasp, he's pickin' a fat yin.'

The striped assassin selected a big, fat locust, and tackled it with indescribable fury; the victim put up but a very feeble fight.

'He's a bally coward; he's big enough to kick holes in that wasp, Mac.'

'He's a preordained late supper f'r th' grubs o' yon wasp, ma son, an' he knows it. Noo watch th' murderer.'

The winged fury clasped the locust by the shoulders, then arched its hind part where its venomous sting lay right in under the locust's chest, and struck again and again like a murderer gone mad, sending its venom each time into the soft flesh just behind the locust's horny breastplate, and the locust fell to the ground and lay still.

'Dead as mutton,' growled Derry, picking it up.

'Dinna joomp at conclusions, buckie; men who believe their ain eyes wi'oot usin' th' brain behind 'em dae a waesome lot o' harm in th' world. Mony a gude wumman's reputation ha' been smirched, an' mony a brave hert been broken by weetnesses who judged



on eye judgment. Yon locust is no' dead; eef he were he'd be na gude ta th' wasp; the life's in him an' wull be f'r twa weeks or a wee bittie mair. See yon bony shield on th' locust's chest? Weel, natur' put it there ta protect th' nerve centres which move th' legs an' wings. Th' wasp stabbed below th' shield, an' he stabbed oopwards unner it. Did ye notice hoo his back end curved like a bow when he was stabbin'? He paralysed th' nerves but didn'a kill; th' grubs wull dae th' killin'.

'Don't the wasp eat the locust?'

'Na, it lays eggs in th' leevin' body an' th' eggs turn ta grubs, an' they dae th' banqueting.'

'Thought you said animals and things had no sense, only instinct. That murderin' little devil's got lots o' sense, else how'd he know how to find the nerves an' not kill?'

'He had na sense o' reasonin'; gum a thin layer o' anything ower a locust's belly ta protect th' nerve centre, put th' beastie in a glass wi' a wasp an' th' wasp wull keep on stabbin' at it till he dies o' his ain rage. All he kens is that a hunner million o' wasps before him paralysed locusts that way, an' he hasn't sense ta ken th' reason why he can't dae th' same. He has na initiative o' his ain, he works by memory on given lines. A've seen soldiers like that, laddie, men born wi'oot initiative, an' initiative is brains in motion. When ye get a soldier leader wi' na initiative, then God A'michty help his men. A' ye ha' ta dae when ye're oop against a leader who kens only hoo ta fecht by rule, is ta throw rules ta hell an' gie him something o' y'r ain invention, an' whiles he's combin' th' wool oot o' his brains, ye ha' him. A hope A've made it plain why A wasted an hoor watchin' a wasp biffin' blazes oot o' a big cooardly locust. A wanted ye ta unnerstan' that natur's as fu' o' lessons o' weesdom f'r them that ha' eyes ta see as a young widow in pink

reebons an' a lace-edged han'kerchief is o' matrimonial designs an' desires. Noo swing y'r leg.'

Derry swung his leg to such good purpose that by mid-afternoon of that day McGlusky averred that they must be in the vicinity of a spring.

'How do you get at that, partner?'

'A've eyes, an' sense ta use 'em. See th' big bees wi' th' pale yellow markin's? They nivver gang far fra watter. Tak' a keek at th' mosquitoes, they're no' th' dry bush sort: these yins ha' verra long legs an' they dinna bite; they're clean watter mosquitoes; that's yin reason A ken it's a spring an' no' a pool; eef it were stagnant pool th' air'd be fu' o' th' venomous kind, wee in size, but giants in weekedness. A'm o' th' opeenion it's a bigger drappie o' watter than th' yin we left ahint us. Min' hoo ye put y'r feet doon; y're no' a war-horse prancin' ta battle, but a hunter lookin' f'r game; step ower a dry stick—no' *on* it. A've heard a coo mak' mair noise walkin' than yersel', but it's th' only dommed animal that cud.'

A minute later when Derry stubbed his toe into a projecting root, Mac remarked softly:

'Tha's richt, ma son, kick a' th' tim'er oop by th' roots, it'll come in gey han'y f'r firewood eef we're campin' here f'r long. A nivver axed ye concernin' y'r pedigree afore; y're no' related by marriage ta a traction engine, air ye? A've a——' He held up a warning hand. 'Wheest, buckie!' He peered over the top of a low patch of giant thorn. 'Doon on y'r wame; th' watter's richt yon'er in an open bit groon'; we'll ha' ta crawl th' rest o' th' way till we get ta th' edge o' th' bushes, then we'll lay there an' watch awhile. A'm theenkin' we're in luck, f'r eef A canna smell th' reek o' wild cattle, ye can ha' th' skin off ma nose f'r a terbacca pooch.'

'Can you see them, Mac?'

'Na, nor hear 'em; they're no' here noo, but they

ha' been an' wull be again. Noo crawl, mannie, an' eef ye run a thorn inta yersel', dae y'r cussin' inside, even eef it chokes ye.'

They crawled to the appointed place and lay silent as wooden men, watching the little oasis in the desert of thorns. It was rife with insect life: butterflies, beetles, gnats of all hues and sizes. One specimen seemed to enthral the pioneer; its light greenish-grey body two inches long, with silver gauze wings like finest gossamer, seemed to fill him with a kind of ecstasy; his eyes followed them as they darted like flashes of light, now high, now low, but never far from the water.

'Watch yon—watch yon.'

'The tremor in the big fellow's voice could not be mistaken, and it puzzled Derry.

'Nothing to start th' band playing about them, partner. What are they?'

'They're the horse-stinger fly, an' where ye fin' them ye find horses. They suck bluid fra horses, an' fra cattle too, but A've nivver seen yin near watter that horses did na coom ta drink at. Gin we get twa horses ta ride an' twa f'r pack animals, we'll be gentlemen, Derry. A dinna min' footin' it when A ha' ta, but ye canna feel a gentleman wi' a swag on y'r back an' you hoofin' it. Buckie, ye lie as close ta th' earth as a cloth ta a puddin', an' no matter wha' happens, dinna let as much as yin eyelash click agin anither.'

'Are you going to shoot, Mac?'

'A'll feel like it, gin ye speak again. Lie low, an' lie still.'

The hours passed, the sun went down and the swift twilight came, and still the pair lay watching, and not one word had passed between them after the pioneer's stern admonition. A chill wind came up as the night set in, a wind the Vaqueros call the blade of death, because coming after the fierce heat of the day it

catches the pores of the skin gaping open, and the blood hot, and very often leaves pneumonia or inflammation of the lungs behind it ; it is never rough and boisterous, that deadly chilly wind ; it comes like a whisper in a dream, and the mischief is done before a man realizes the danger. Mac felt Derry shiver beside him ; without a word he slipped off the uncouth mantle he had made of fox furs, and passed it over the lad ; then he pushed his tobacco plug into the youngster's hand and whispered :

' Bite on that, an' dinna spare it ; let a drappie rin doon y'r gullet, it's a gran' steemulant ; but dinna cough. We're gawn ta see gran' things th' nicht ; A feel it in ma bones.'

Twilight faded into night ; not a star appeared in the roof of the world ; it was just blackness without one relieving ray from any planet. The wind grew a trifle stronger, and every dry twig on millions of thorns vibrated and rustled until a ghostly orchestra was humming all around the hunters. All the animal life known to the wilds awoke : soft padded feet moved stealthily ; now a tree-cat ' yowled ' dismally, or a grey tree-lion snarled viciously ; the half-bark, half-yelp of the foxes came more frequently than any other sound. Night birds hooted and luminous moths flickered from spot to spot, like specks of pale phosphorous. Once a wild cow bellowed, and a calf that had strayed from her answered. A bull bellowed voluminously with a note of anger in its tones, and was answered near by so promptly that the second sound might almost have been an echo.

' An auld bull an' a young yin ; there'll be a fecht,' whispered the pioneer in Derry's ear, then, still whispering : ' Laddie, eef they happen ta fecht in this deerection, dinna stay ta be horned or trampled on in th' darkness. Twa fechtin' bulls are no' nice.'

' I won't,' was the emphatic reply.



There was a rush in the darkness as two heavy bodies charged, then the clash of horns meeting and the fierce wrestle as the bulls strained with locked horns for mastery; then the trampling of hoofs as one beast pushed forward and the other was thrust back; a clod of turf flung violently by a stamping hoof took McGlusky in the face. He swore fiercely.

'A'm verra fon' o' God A'michty's earth, but A dinna like it in junks.'

'I wish we could see, partner.'

'We wull soon; ye'll see th' heavens open an' a' th' glory o' th' firmament. A ken this kin' o' nicht. Losh, buckie, we'll ha' an experience worth travellin' ten thoosan' miles ta ha'; th' wonner an' glory o' 't; we'll fill y'r heart wi' joy an' mak' y'r young bluid sing th' praises o' th' Lord; ye'll——'

He never finished his rhapsody. The weaker bull having had enough of the fray, turned and fled; it came in their direction; all they could see was a pair of great red eyes. Derry didn't want to see any more; he rose to his knees to fly. Mac's hand pinned him by the neck, and forced him to the ground.

'Doon, ye fule body, doon—it's oor only chance.'

He was down beside Derry as he spoke; two great bulks thundered over them, smashing through the tough bushes as if they had been made of straw. Derry, who seemed to have all a sailor's luck, was unhurt, but the pioneer, who had been so full of the glories of nature a moment before, was now using language coined in the pit.

'Hurt, partner?'

'Weel, A'll no' say A'm hurtit, but A ha' had a wee shock. Yin bull kickit ma wi' his fore hoofs as he went past, an' liftit ma fra th' groon'; th' ither yin kickit ma back again. Gin A see either o' them in daylight, A'll gie 'em mair lead than they'll mak' a



meal o'. Dom th' bulls! It were th' call o' th' coo that did it a'.'

He sat where he had fallen, feeling himself all over gingerly, and Derry could not let him alone.

'What was it you were saying about the glory o' the everlastin' stars, partner?'

'A said,' growled McGlusky, 'that eef th' winders o' heaven were as easy ta open as y'r mooth, ma buckie, we'd ha' licht enouch ta thread beads by.'

They heard the victorious bull come tramping back to the cows, heard the beast pawing up the turf as he told the bovine ladies of the utter rout of his rival, and Derry, wishing to appease his comrade's wrath by seeking information, whispered:

'What's he doing that for, Mac?'

'He's daein' it—no' me. Since y're sae thirsty f'r firsthan' eenformation, crawl oop ta yon beastie an' ask him.'

So Derry, being wise in some things, snuggled down and waited, and like all men who know how to wait, he had his reward. The darkness lifted, and he saw one of the wonders that men only witness in sub-tropical climes. The black roof of heaven was not rent asunder, it was not flushed with light. Like a great black pall the curtain of condensed atmosphere dropped nearer and nearer the earth, like a lid coming down upon a bowl, and then dissolved in fine moisture, leaving the sky one mass of scintillating stars, silvery white and steel blue. So intense was the beauty above that even Derry's unregenerate soul was awed.

'A telt ye—A telt ye,' murmured McGlusky. 'Laddie, yon's heaven wi' th' crust off; th' gate's ajar, an' we're keekin' inside. Is there a mon amang a' th' writers wha' cud dae justice ta sic a sicht as yon? Na, no' yin, buckie; A'll ha' ta dae it ma ainsel'. See yon sma' cluster—a' th' lights o' Lunnon boiled into yin wud look like th' glow o' a cheap cigar compared

wi' it, an' there's ten million clusters in yon heaven.'

He lay gloating upon the ineffable beauty of the great mystery above him, then murmured solemnly :

' An' th' fule in his heart ha' said There is na God.'

The currents of the good brown wholesome earth charged with electricity were running through Derry's young frame ; the night air with a tang of the distant sea in it filled his lungs and flushed his veins ; the majesty of the star-encrusted world above grappled with his soul, and the unspoiled humanity of the raw giant by his side made him feel and know that he and the things he saw and felt were all linked together by an invisible chain, all part of a system, and no part perfect without the others. Suddenly in the twinkling of an eye, without warning and without sound, or sound that they could hear, a vast blood-red streamer shot across the sky, a mighty band of burnished crimson.

' What is it, partner ? '

' Men wad ca' it a comet, mannie ; ta ma it looks as eef a' th' bluid o' men shed by men since th' dawn o' time had been poured fra a great chalice across th' sky. Maybe it's a sign o' comin' war—God kens.'

The comet had passed, but its trail still lit the heavens.

' Keek at yon, buckie, it looks like a sacked ceety givin' ta th' flames. A canna thole it ; it means a message o' woe ta th' world, A'm theenkin'.'

Suddenly on the night air there rang a high, clear trumpet-call, rich and full, yet piercing in its pride and defiance. Seasoned as he was, McGlusky almost leapt to his feet, but old instinct held him. He grasped Derry as the lad was springing upright and bore him down.

' What is it, Mac ? '

The big left hand of the pioneer closed over the young mouth.

' Dinna stir, an' eef ye maun breathe, dae it through y'r ears.'

He rose inch by inch, his gaunt body coming up as a concertina opens. He just permitted his eyes to top the scrub, so that he could see the little oasis beyond. Cattle were at the water hole; he saw a big black bull and a dozen cows and heifers, but scarce gave them a glance. Twenty yards away stood a groups of mares and foals, and in the open, standing alone with head held high, mane blowing in the breeze, tail extended, hoofs firmly planted on the turf, stood a red bay stallion, fit for Attila to have ridden when he started out to conquer the world. McGlusky reached down with one long arm and lifted Derry like a kitten, clapping his other hand over the lad's mouth. Then, glueing his lips to the youth's ear, he whispered:

' Eef ye mak' a soond ta scare ma stallion A'll string ye oop by th' gills like a fush.'

For a few minutes he feasted his eager eyes on the mighty monarch of the wilds, whispering disjointed sentences through his whiskers and holding Derry as if he were a doll.

' Ma stallion—th' yon A've dreamed about iver since A were a boy. Seventeen han's high, an' strong enough ta carry a knight in fu' armour an' no' ken it wasn'a a postage stamp in th' saddle. Red bay wi' black points—a lean head an' mighty loins—a chest like a bull an' shoulders like a steeple-chaser—a tower o' strength an' a promise o' speed—Ma stallion.'

A mare in the bunch snickered; she was thirsty. The stallion moved forward a couple of paces, tossed his head and again his clarion call rang out, the richest call in nature, a champion defying the lists on behalf of his mate. The bull uttered a low, savage, rumbling bellow and moved away from his cows, who were not yet surfeited with the water. McGlusky saw the bull's movement and understood. He dropped Derry

as if that young man had been of no more account than a quart of cockles, then he swooped on his rifle. The light cast by the blood-red streamer in the sky fell full upon the stallion and by its alchemy turned the lordly beast from reddish-brown to crimson.

'A war horse, ma certie, a war horse! Noo A ken why ma stallion an' yon meteor were sent th' nicht; it's a token ta ye, Jamie McGlusky; y'r hoor o' greatness is no' afar off.'

The bull levelled its horns, hunched its hind quarters preparatory to the spring.

'Ye wull, wull ye? A'll learn ye ta meddle wi' ma stallion.'

The next moment a bullet struck the bull just where neck and spine conjoin. In an instant the oasis was empty of all but the dead beast: stallion, mares, cows—all had disappeared as if wafted away by the genii of the night.

'Got th' bull and lost y'r horse, partner.'

'Na; A've no' lost ma stallion, buckie, A've only lent him ta th' wilderness f'r a wee while.'

They moved away a reasonable distance to make a camp and rest, for the pioneer had made his plans almost instantaneously, and did not mean to jeopardise his chances of getting "his stallion" by scaring the animal away from its haunts.

"Going to lose that bull hide, partner?"

'A am, buckie; ye ken there's foxes an' cats an' a' kind o' vermin roon'; they'll leave naething but th' horns in a verra few hoors, an' later on we'll get their pelts in exchange f'r oor bull meat an' hide; th' carcase wull no' ha' time ta taint th' watter; eef we dinna hang roon', yon bunch o' horses wull come back sune; they're thirsty, ye ken; eef we dinna leave tracks they can scent they'll maybe reason it oot that yon bull was struck wi' thun'er an' lightnin'.'

'I thought you said animals didn't reason, old sportsman.'

'Your kind don't,' snarled Mac, who didn't like being trapped in a snare of his own setting.

A little later Derry chanced his luck again, for he was in an irrepressible mood.

'You called that stallion yours, Mac.'

'A did, an' he will be mine when A rope him, an' A'm gawn ta rope him.'

Bubbling inside himself the lad said :

'If he's got another man's brands on him, even if he's been an outlaw from a foal, it will be horse-stealing, partner, and your conscience will keep you awake o' nights.'

Mac paused in his stride.

'Ma mannie, A wad ha' ye unnertsan' life is made oop o' commonplace happenin's an'—an' extraordinary' events. Ye canna apply commonplace rules ta events extraordinary'—an', buckie, this is yin ; eef A dinna get a clip o' sleep between noo an' th' day o' judgment, A'll ha' ma stallion. It—it were foreordained. Ye saw it yer ainsel' : three things cam' thegither, th' comet, th' stallion an' Jamie McGlusky. Wha' th' Lord ha' joined in natur's wedlock, na mon maun put asunder. A'll blaw him ta Tophet eef he tries.'

The pioneer's altered philosophy under a new set of circumstances tickled Derry immensely. His mateship with Mac was of such recent standing that he had no first-hand knowledge of the big man's passionate love for a good horse. Mac had picked him up in the Argentine capital, and the pair had come to the southern coast with their outfits in a tramp steamer, so that Derry's knowledge of horses was also limited, he having followed the sea most of his life, but by many a camp fire after a hard day's work the pioneer had set his young blood tingling with stories of his former life in Australia as a cattle man and horse tamer, and



his love, which was almost an idolatry, for horses had given Derry a good idea that it would not be hard to persuade the veteran to take a very broad view concerning the rights of property in wild horses, branded or unbranded.

True to his overnight's decision, Mac, on the following morning broke camp and left the vicinity; he had no means of capturing the stallion, nor could he go back to the trader empty-handed and try and borrow a couple of saddle hacks; he must go in with a fair show of pelts when he did go. Neither could he go back to their first camp until the same had settled down. The only thing to be done was to circle round and work back gradually to the first spring. He was in a fever of impatience, yet he cooled his desire by strength of will. None the less he walked Derry almost off his legs that day and the day following.

"Always get like this when you see a horse, partner?" Derry flung the query at his mate as he dropped by the second camp.

"Na, buckie. Why?"

"Because, if you do, I hope the next horse you see is a bicycle."

"Yon stallion's no' a horse, it's—it's an omen, it's a call; A've been waitin' f'r it a' ma life, mannie."

"Well, don't you go having any more 'calls' until you've got me something to ride." Then, because he was sore and tired and a bit savage, he said: "I bet you'll feel pretty mean, partner, if Black Pedro happens along and bags that blessed stallion."

Mac's whole figure dilated.

"Wha's that?—Pedro—bag ma stallion? He cud na ride him eef he did. Yon beastie is maist untameable; A've heerd o' him, but A thocht it was a lee—yin o' th' meillions o' lees yin hears roon' th' camp fires o' th' vaqueros, sae A paid na heed ta it, till th'

Lord led ma richt oop ta ma beastie as a little child is led ta a lunch.'

'Black Pedro may get the brute all the same; he's got a riding hack and a pack horse and a good outfit; what if he followed our tracks and runs into that bunch of wild horses, eh?'

Mac split his beard with both hands and held a tuft of hair in each clenched bunch of fingers.

'Mannie, did ye ivver see a big nigger lay doon an' try ta crawl inta a fox hole, or a snake hole, or any ither hole no' ha'f big enouch f'r him?'

'No.'

'Weel, ye wull gin he meddles wi' ma stallion. Losh, A'm no' bitter in ma ang'r, but A'll mak' Black Pedro squiggle like a leezard wi' its backbone broken gin A ketch him poachin' on ma huntin' groon'. A'm theenkin' th' time is ripe f'r th' white race ta assert itself mair in these pairts; th' black an' brown an' coffee-coloured ha' had theengs too, mooch their ain way f'r th' gude o' civilization. A feel th' Lord didn'a send ma here f'r naething. This bittie o' His vineyard wants purifyin',-an' gin Black Pedro comes, A'll purify it. A wull, eef a ha' ta pluck him like a fowl ta dae it.'

The pair sat smoking well into the night after despatching their frugal meal. Suddenly Mac took his pipe from his mouth, turned his big hooked nose to meet the wind and sniffed long and earnestly. Derry watched without questioning, but he said to his own soul: 'I hope to heaven he can't smell horse; if he does, he'll want to break camp—damn that horse, it's—it's gettin' to be a nightmare.'

Mac pulled at his pipe again, but his brows were knit in a frown that showed he was not satisfied. Several times he put his pipe down and sniffed the wind. At last he said sharply:

'Ha' ye got any sense in y'r nose, mannie?'

' I can smell ham an' eggs when I get near a cook shop, that's about all, partner.'

' Hivin didn'a gie ye a nose ta gang rootin' roon' after ham an' eggs a' y'r days, buckie. A mon wha hasn'a educated his nose is no' much use in th' wilds.'

' What do you think you can smell, old sportsman? '

' A'm no' sartin, but A've ma suspecions oor luck's gawn ta change. Bide a wee till th' wind shifts a point or two, A'll maybe gladden y'r heart.'

By and by the wind shifted round, and Mac with nostrils dilating sampled it point by point, as it went. All at once he beamed across the small fire at Derry.

' Noo, switch y'r nose ta th' win' an' eef ye dinna get gude news through y'r nose ye'd better swap it f'r a tin yin.'

Derry reluctantly put aside his pipe, faced the breeze and sniffed as if he meant to draw gravel.

' By the holy piper, Mac, what is it? '

' Doesn'a y'r nose tell ye, buckie? '

' Have we run into a private home f'r alligators, Mac? I smelt 'em once on the Nile—nasty musky smell just like this, sort o' smell you feel ought to be taken out to sea and washed.'

' No alligators here, ma son, but awa' no far fra here there's a whole colony o' skunks. A telt ye A'd gladden y'r heart, mannie.'

' You told a thundering big lie then. See here, Mac, I sampled one skunk and it nearly choked me. I wouldn't go near a colony o' them for th' crown of England.'

' A wull i' th' morn; there's a way ta kill th' vermin an' a way not ta, ye tried th' way not ta last time; you stan' an' tak' a keek at ma daein' it, it's easy as bein' fooled by a grass widder. It'll no' be huntin', it'll be slaughter, no' a cent o' ootlay an' big profit. We've foond a sma' siller mine. Every breath o' air y're drawin' noo is worth a dollar.'

' Sell you my share o' th' lot f'r ten cents, partner.'

' Hoots, y're no' canny ava', A feel th' han' o' providence in this, it's an almichty big colony an' in twa weeks we'll ha' enough ta gang inta yon trader an' mak' a decent show. Lie doon an' sleep noo; A'll root ye oot long afore th' scrub plover fin's daylight enough ta tell a worm fra a woodlouse.'

## CHAPTER VIII

### NATURE'S TREASURE HOUSE

**M**cGLUSKY awoke before the first bird had taken its head from under its wing. He lit the fire, prepared breakfast and then woke Derry, who, weary from the previous day's gruelling, resented the early call.

'You can't sleep since you've seen that damned horse, Mac. Play fair, it's not daylight yet.'

'A'richt, eef y're a weaklin', but A thocht A had a mon f'r a mate. Turn on th' ither shoulder; it's a peety y'r mither's no' here, she'd be able ta tuck ye ahint her petticoats ta keep th' cauld win's o' summer fra rumplin' y'r curls whin ye dae rise.' Turning away, he addressed the universe in tones of pity. 'Puir wee bit buckie, sae saft an' easily bruk oop an'—an' A thocht in ma foolishness it were spunky an' no' easily daunted. A'll maybe fin' time th' day ta mak' it a cradle; th' groon's tae hard f'r yin sae saft.'

Derry kicked off his blanket and rose, and the damp raw àir of the unearthly hour sent him shivering to the fire, where he indulged in language picked up in the engine room of a deep sea trader.

'He's a gran' swearer,' mused Mac. 'In a few years, eef he'd stuck ta his trade he'd ha' made a maist masterfu' chief engineer fit f'r th' China trade, where a' th' rifferaff o' th' sea coom ta sign on in th' treaty ports.'



A warm breakfast and the appearance of the first streak of dawn put a new complexion on life in general for Derry. He watched his partner cut a couple of stout cudgels and trim them.

‘What’re they for, Mac?’

‘F’r killin’ skunk; yin f’r you—A wud no’ dae ye oot o’ y’r share o’ th’ joy o’ this day—an’ yin f’r ma ainsel.’

‘Not for me, partner, not on your sweet life; I’m not going that close to a walking sewer if I know myself.’

‘When ye’ve seen ma dae it ye wull—it’s easy.’

Following his nose, Mac soon located the ‘colony.’

‘Noo watch.’

He pointed to a well-beaten track as wide as a man’s hand. Down this narrow highway hopped a full-grown male, full of his own importance. In the natural order of things, the creature would branch off on a line of its own as soon as it reached the outskirts of the colony. Crouching behind a bit of scrub close to the track, the pioneer waited with his club poised above his right shoulder; a piece of rock could not have been more motionless than he. Derry, full of recollections of a past experience, discreetly retreated. When the rodent was right opposite him, the pioneer struck, and without a kick the quaint creature fell.

‘Yin.’

Derry came forward.

‘Tak’ a keek an’ see eef yin mair is coming on any o’ th’ trails.’

In a moment an excited call brought Mac to the side of a second trail. Again he waited, and again he struck.

‘Twa.’

‘Shall I skin ’em while you bag some more, partner?’

‘No’ on y’r life, ma son, it tak’s a mon wha’ kens

hoo ta use a knife ta skin a skunk wi'oot startin' th' perfumery.

So Derry watched the slaughter, until the itch to slay woke in him.

' I'd like to try my luck, partner.'

' A'richt, A kened ye wad ; y'r een's gude an' y'r han's queeck, a' ye ha' ta dae is ta haud yersel' weel in han' till th' richt moment ; gin ye move an eyelash th' beastie'll see ye, an'—weel ye ha' had some, A need say na mair.'

A little later a thud and a triumphant yelp told that Derry had bagged his first clean skin.

' Weel done, ma sonnie, verra weel done, but eet's no' th' battle o' Trafalgar ye ha' won that ye shud mak' sic a de'il o' a skirl about it.'

Derry only grinned at the rebuke ; the time had not yet come for him to take even a small triumph or setback as merely part of the day's work—that is the prerogative of mature years, youth seldom assimilates it, and it is just as well for the young that enthusiasm is their heritage, else life would be too dreary at the outset. Soon the spirit of rivalry woke in Derry's soul, and he strained every nerve to capture more pelts than the pioneer, but therein he set himself a task that lay beyond him. He was very quick, but Mac was like some well-oiled machine, and he had the advantage of much experience. From one small 'run' to another he flashed with long, noiseless strides, bagged his game and was on the alert for more ; he selected just the right spot to go to at the right time, and never wasted a moment. Yet the lad kept him busy, for Derry too had the born hunter's instinct. When the sun was high the game became scarcer, and the pioneer called :

' Come awa', noo, mannie, an' eat, then A'll show ye hoo ta peel a skunk, an' that wull keep us beesy until sundoon, when those tha' went huntin' wull be return-

in', an' we'll get mair o' them.' Then looking at Derry's pile of carcasses he said warmly: 'Eh, but ye've done gey fine. A've seen "breeds" who ha' spent a' their days in th' wilds who ha' na done ha'f as weel, an', ma sonnie, ye niver misset yin beastie.'

'I was afraid to miss, partner; I knew what I'd get from the little devil if I did.'

'Tha's th' weesdom o' experience, buckie; eef ye'd no' had yin lesson fra a skunk in earnest, ye'd maybe spoilt oor day's huntin'; yin lesson straight frae th' shoulder is worth a year o' prechin' roon' th' bivouac fire—it gets there.'

'Mine got there all right, old sportsman, but it didn't come straight from th' shoulder, it came straight from th' tail. The man who wants two lessons o' that sort is a glutton.'

They washed before they ate, for even with the most careful handling, the animals were not 'posies,' as Mac dryly explained to the novice. After a hasty meal the skinning began, and Mac stripped a score, showing the lad how to avoid the perfume glands, before he would let him use the knife. They had all their work cut out to finish by sundown, then off they went to the beaten trails again, and, once more the slaughter began. If possible Mac worked faster than in the morning, for he knew how quickly the light would fade, and though the skunk often travels home late, the pioneer did not want to take any chances in semi-darkness. He called a halt when the light was nearly gone.

'Don't stop yet, partner; they're coming home like sheep now.'

'Ye've done gran', ye'd better stop noo an' let weel alane, it's no' hard ta mak' a misshit at a brown body in grey tweelicht; dinna spoil a gude thing by ower-daein' it.'

'I'll get this one anyway.'

A skunk was lolloping along in Derry's direction ; the quaint creature seemed so utterly regardless of danger, so cocksure of its own prowess that Derry did not take the care he had taken with all the others. He raised the club to strike, but before it fell the animal saw the danger and pivoted round like a flash and gave the young hunter two jets of effluvia that would have stopped a steamboat, and then with the uttermost insouciance ambled on its homeward way. Mac had called Derry a 'gran' swearer' when he woke him before dawn that morning, but Derry's output in the way of language at this juncture would have made a full-grown boatswain blush. He ran for a hundred yards, as if trying to get away from himself, then, discovering the futility of this manoeuvre, he raced back again. Mac was chuckling, but he took a spade and scooped out a shallow hole in the good rich earth. Derry paused by him, swearing savagely ; Mac waved him away with the spade.

'Keep awa', buckie, th' smell a' belongs ta ye ; ye asked f' it, an' ye got it.'

Derry rolled in the dirt, rubbing his face with the dampest handfuls he could gather, and again he swore savagely.

'Wha's wrang wi' ye, buckie? Ain't ye gettin' y'r share o' it? Off wi' y'r claes, an' inta th' hole, ye daft loon.'

Then, when he had buried the lad, he said :

'A gied ye fair warnin', but yin ha'f o' what A said ye didn'a believe, an' th' ither ha'f ye had y'r doots about. Noo ye ken ; ye've bought y'r experience, an' paid spot cash f'r it.'

Hour after hour the pioneer worked at the skinning, then he salted down his pelts, and when he had finished he dug shallow trenches, laid the salted pelts in the excavations and covered them over with earth, explaining the process to his youthful friend as he worked.

'Ye ken wha' saut an' alum are f'r, weel A bury them because th' earth wull draw every bittie o' perfume oot o' them, providin' it's done queeck. Noo A'm gawn ta set traps a' ower them, so na beastie can dig them oop when ma back's turned—A'm takin' na chances, mannie, fules tak' unnecessary chances in a' games o' life, an' then skirl like auld wives aboot bad luck. Maist bad luck comes fra th' womb o' bad sense or dom laziness.'

The hunting proceeded at a great pace, and many a grim chuckle broke from the pioneer as he noted the venom Derry incorporated into his work. He no longer despised the small swaggering rodents, but he hated them with all his heart. Once after an explosion of his wrath, the pioneer replied :

'Oh aye, y're recht, they're verra dirty fechtters ; A wad na like ta win a fecht wi' a smell masel', but wha' else can th' bodies dae? We're after their hides, an' they're daein' their best ta keep them. A'm yin o' those who theenk tha' in a scrap ta a feenish verra near ony means are lawfu'. Eef ye ivver gang ta China, ma son, an' get mixed oop in a scrap wi' any o' th' crews o' th' river junks, ye'll learn tha' they copy th' skunk. Losh, laddie, yince when A was daein' a wee bittie o' wha' ye ma term unlawfu' tradin', f'r want o' a harsher name, A got ma head in th' way o' a jar fu' o' smells ; th' ither side were throwin' jars like flower pots at us, by jumpin' Sarah, they didn'a smell like flower pots.'

'What did it smell like, partner?'

'Like something their great-great-gran'fathers had foon' in an unmentionable place an' bottled oop an' left 'em f'r heirlooms. A had tae shave ma head an' ma whuskers an' ha' some o' ma teeth oot before A cud begin ta forget it. There *may* be waur things in th' world, ma laddie, but praise be, A've niver met 'em—excep' yince.'



' Tell me about that, partner.'

' A wull. A wanted ta ken something about law, so A paid wha' they ca' a bit premium, an' a lawyer buckie took ma inta his office f'r a year. A only stayed a month; A cudn'a abide th' small o' wha' he ca'ed his practice. Buckie, A'd sooner be a worm an' get ma leevin' in a cemetery, than A'd be a lawyer.'

When they had quite cleaned out the ' colony ' they packed their traps and pelts and moved off.

' We'll gie that first camp o' oors a call an' see hoo th' game is; eef we ha' a few days' gude huntin' there we'll cache oor traps an' gang in wi' oor pelts to th' trader, an' gin we come oot we'll come on horse-back an' ha' a couple o' pack animals as weel.'

' What then, partner? '

' Then, mannie, nicht an' day, early an' late, we'll hunt ma stallion.'

' You seem mighty sure of getting the big horse; he looked to me to be too good for any ordinary hack to get near.'

' So he is. A'd no' be crazy about him eef he wasn'a. Ye see, gude an' gran' as he is, he's ainly a beastie; A'm a mon, an' A'll beat him wi' superior eentelligence; A'll ha' ta be cruel ta get him, but A'll mak' it a' oop ta him when A ha' him.'

' Can't see how you'll do it, Mac.'

' Weel, A'll tell ye: a horse maun eat, an' a horse maun drink an' sleep: A'll put a bit barbed wire roon' every watter hole A can fin' an' we'll hunt him doon, gie'n him na time ta rest or eat; we'll just get on his trail an' hang on ta it; A'll ride by nicht an' you by day, an' when ma horse is tired, A'll keep atter ma stallion on foot. We'll worry him till he canna raise a trot; then A'll manage ta rope him in spite o' th' dom thorn bushes. Ma heart wull be bleedin' f'r his agony a' th' time, but A maun ha' him, it's—it's foreordained. Dae ye min' yon comet? '

Something in the big man's indomitable will and fatalistic leanings stirred an answering chord in the runaway apprentice.

'Don't know if I'll be much good to you, but I'll stick to you as long as I can, partner, an' do my best. I'm no great shakes on a horse, did most o' my riding on donkey-back on the sands at Margate, with a year on a Canadian farm thrown in.'

'Dinna fash about that, sonnie, A've thocht it a'oot ; A'll tie ye on.'

There was a funny twinkle in Derry's eyes as he turned away.

'No half-way house about you, partner, you go the whole hog every time.'

'May A ask why, buckie ?'

'Well, you say you're going to tie me on.'

'Weel, why no' ? A'd tie ma' gran'mither on bare-back rather than lose ma stallion. Th' mon who starts ta dae a thing worth daein' an' does na gang through wi' it ocht ta be tied ta a sittin' o' eggs an' made ta hatch 'em wi' a china yin put in f'r luck ta gie th' gommerill/stabeelity.'

They found all quiet at the first water hole, and their cache undisturbed.

'Black Pedro didn'a follow us oot, buckie, an'—A'm theenkin' it's just as weel, f'r Black Pedro.'

'Why are you so sure ?'

'He'd ha' foond oor cache eef he had an' he'd no' ha' left it as he foond it ; yon mon ha' no' gotten th' law o' th' wilds graven in him, he's rotten core through ; he'll mak' trouble when he sees th' pelts we tak' in. We've been unco' lucky, mannie ; noo let's awa' an' set traps an' dinna ye set any mair f'r ostriches ; we'll deal wi' them a' in gude time.'

So good was the trapping that for ten days Mac could not tear himself away in spite of what Derry termed his 'horse fever.' The foxes proved that, in

their generation at least, no one had trapped over that ground, for as Mac said 'they cudn'a a let a trap alane till they had a leg in 't.' The cat tribe were nearly as foolish, but one day Derry, walking a bit ahead of the big man, saw a 'tree tiger' fighting with a trap that the brute had dragged from its moorings. The creature, frantic with the pain of the steel jaws that had gripped one hind leg, was clashing its big strong teeth on the steel, snarling and growling as it bit at this uncanny foe that had fixed upon it. The lad sprang forward. McGlusky shouted a vain warning. The great cat launched itself at the youth, knocked the club from his hand with a downward stroke of one paw, and slashed his chest badly with the other, sending him spinning on to his back. It would have gone badly with Derry if McGlusky had been slow on his feet, but he had realized the danger on the instant, and though furious with his companion for his foolhardiness, he dashed forward to render aid. He put all his weight into a kick that took the beast full in the stomach, and turned it half over. 'Yin f'r y'r wame.' Then came a swift, sharp duel between brute and hunter, the pioneer using his long hunting knife with deadly effect.

'I'm sorry, partner.'

Derry's voice was full of contrition as he noted the gashes on the pioneer's arms made by the tree tiger's claws.

'Ye'd ha' had gude cause ta be mair sorry eef A'd been twenty yards further behin'. A'm no' mindin' these bit scratches, an' wha' ye've got yersel' air worth havin'; they'll remin' ye maybe that God A'michty gies a mon a head ta carry brains in, no' f'r an ornament or—or a hat-rack. A've telt ye a tree tiger is a cooard till he's wounded or cornered, then he's no' a tiger, he's a de'il. A' th' cat tribe air, even th' tame hoose cat is no' ta be despiset when it runs amuck.

Strip off y'r shirt an' let ma fix y'r woon's ; th' claws o' a' carnivora air poisonous ; they dinna eat a' they kill while it's fresh ; th' last o' a big kill is maist rotten by th' time they feenish it, an' rotten meat poisons th' claws, an' it's th' same wi' their teeth.'

' Do your own wounds first, partner.'

' Yince an' f'r aye, learn ta obey orders. Eef y're ta march wi' ma, dae as y're telt, an' ask na reasons. Ma-woun's air where th' fresh air can get ta 'em, yours air no'. Noo strup.'

So Derry, in chastened mood, stripped and was well and truly washed and bandaged. Then Mac attended to himself.

' A'll mak' some ointment when we get ta camp an' we'll soon be a'richt, buckie, but it might easily ha' been waur ; wha' wud A ha' done eef ye'd had y'r jugular opened ? Ye'd ha' gone ta th' lan' o' shadows ; perhaps—A'm no' sure : ye might ha' gone ta hivin, but wha' wud A ha' done f'r a mate ta help ma capture ma stallion ? A cudn'a trust a "breed" an' th' trader's ower auld f'r sic work, though he's spunky enough, or his twa eyes air lears.'

Derry, in spite of his protests, was glad to have the strong arm of his mate around him long before he got to camp, and the whiteness of his lips was eloquent of the amount of blood he had lost. Mac made him comfortable then.

' Lie still an' pray f'r sense, mannie. A'm gawn ta mak' ointment.'

' No chemists' shops about here, partner.'

' Aye is there, th' gran'est an' th' cheapest in creation, sonnie. There's a thustle growin' here—it grows maist everywhere, A've seen it in hunner's o' fields in Englan', but niver met yin mon there who kenned th' value o' 't. A thustle is Scotch by richts, an' maist things Scotch air mair usefu' than ornamental—barrin' th' lasses, they're baith.'

He came back in a few minutes with a handful of thistles with big broad striped leaves.

'They're no' soothin' ta sit on' mannie, but gin A boil 'em doon an' add a wee bit lard we'll ha' ointment that wull draw a' th' venom fra oor scratches an' heal 'em in na time.'

'You haven't any lard, old sportsman.'

'A've some tallow, an' tha's maist as gude, an' eef A hadn'a tallow A'd sune fin' something maist as gude amang th' roots an' herbs. Ye're gey eegnorant, mannie; didn'a ye ken tha' ivery blessed theeng ye buy in a chemist's shop grows in some field at hame an' abroad? An' A'll tell ye this, th' Breetish are no' ha'f sa clever as they theenk they air; they send awa' ta foreign pairts f'r mony healin' things whiles better grows in their ain country lanes, only they dinna ken them when they see them; th' real gentlewummen o' a hunner' years ago knew a' about 'em, an' had a still-room in their houses where they brewed 'em; they were usefu' those wummen, th' yins o' to-day air verra often only something ta hang silks an' diamon's on. A'm a wee bittie auld fashioned masel', an' A like th' auld sort best.'

Whilst Derry's wounds were healing, Mac regaled him with the law of the wilds, and taught him much. Holding up a fine fox-skin he was curing, he said:

'It's no' like an' English fox, who is a red thief kep' alive tha' men who ha' naething better ta dae may chase it on horseback wi' hoon's. Lots o' them who gae huntin' in Englan', ma son, dae it because they luke weel in a pink coat, no' because they like huntin', lots mair dae it because it's wha' they ca' "th' thing ta dae." Those yins like ta ride ower a farmer's lan's ta show him he's common clay, whiles they air porcelain, but verra often it's only a bit siller in th' pooch that differs th' buckie on horseback fra' th' mon tha's trummin' th' hedges an' ditches. Ma certie,



A'd like ta see th' gommerill tha' wad ride roughshod ower Jamie McGlusky's farm lan'; A'd ding him yin in th' lug wad mak' him see stars in daytime. No' that A'm agin good honest sport, A love 't, laddie, but sport tha' mak's a country dependent on ither countries f'r its food is na th' sport o' real gentlemen, it's th' sport o' snobs.'

'These South American animals don't look like real foxes to me, partner.'

'A'm no' sure they are, mannie, no' a true fox, but it's the name they gie 'em here, an' it's no' a gude plan in th' game o' life ta be always tellin' folk they're in th' wrang. Noo, tak' a keek at this pelt; th' head's true fox, na doot o' that, but th' body's a meexture o' dog an' jackal; th' legs air long; an' that mak's th' beasties devilish speedy in th' open country, yet th' creature's sae supple it can wind in an' oot o' close brush like a snake amaist, though it's near as big as a young collie dog.'

'It's beautifully marked, partner.'

'Aye, is it, silver grey on th' flanks, dark grey risin' towards th' back, and a glossy jet-black line richt doon th' spine, twa an' a half inches wide, an' a freenge o' pure silver white hairs at th' edge o' th' jet-black streak—aye, it's han'some. Ha' ye noticed hoo th' skin fits in wi' th' licht an' shade in th' thorn scrub? It maist blends wi' th' bark o' th' thorns, buckie, an' when th' beastie steals awa' on its pads as saft as velvet, it looks mair like a shadow than a leevin' thing, an' when it comes ta shootin' yin, ye ha' ta be mighty queeck on th' trigger eef ye'd earn y'r oats at th' game. Noo an' again ye'll come across yin that looks like a ball o' leevin' siller; gin ye get yin o' those ye'll be daein' a gude day's work; th' ladies o' Argentina wull pay maist ony price f'r sic pelts.'

'They're pretty harmless, aren't they, Mac?'

'Ye wad whustle ta anither tune than that, sonnie,

gin ye owned sheep ; they're th' curse o' th' sheep farmers in lambin' time ; of a' vermin they're th' verra worst.'

So the pioneer filled in the time, and Derry drank in his education greedily, for he knew he was at the fountain-head of knowledge in such matters.

At last the dáy came when they could make a start for the trade outpost. Everything was cached except their rifles and enough food to last the journey, and yet they had a tremendous burden in the pelts. Mac's load was enormous, and when Derry saw it, he said :

' Say, old sportsman, that load would make a horse shy ; you'll never hump that to the trader's.'

' Never prophesy till y're sure, mannie ; the art o' bein' a successfu' prophet is ha'in a bit knowledge oop y'r sleeve. A'll hump yon pelts in, or—or A'll eat 'em.'

He got the great bale on his broad back and Derry helped him rope it to his shoulders. When he had wriggled his back until the bale snugged down to his liking, he remarked :

' It's no' gossamer, buckie, an' A'll be gey weary o' 't afore A'm done, but every mile A'll be theenkin' o' ma stallion an' th' pride o' ownership wull lichten ma load, an' when th' cords cut ma flesh A'll cheer masel', sayin', " Jamie McGlusky, haud ta it, this is th' last time ye'll be a transport mule.'''

He was as good as his boast ; never once did he utter a growl or complaint, and when Derry, sweating under his small load, cursed the flies and the heat, and said ugly things about trapping in general, the big man's voice would break soothingly in upon his railings.

' Na, na, wee mannie, dinna fash sae sair ; th' trapper's life's a gran' life, gin ye tak' th' honey wi' th' gall. Ye're free an' independen' here ; eef ye were on shipboard ye'd ha' a chief engineer who'd

remonstrate wi' ye no' gently wi' a bit spanner when ye didna please him. A've seen 'em dae it, an' a spanner on a bony part on a cauld morn is no' soothin'. Cheer up, an' swing a leg; God's verra gude ta us sinfu' mortals.'

'Don't see where the goodness comes in myself, old sportsman; looks to me as if the Almighty sat up working overtime inventin' vermin to torment man. The flies have bunged one o' my eyes.'

'Shut it, an' keek oot o' th' tither yin.'

'Every blessed bough and blade o' grass has got stingin' insects on it, that get inside your clothes and bite.'

'Y're ha'in th' time o' y'r life, eef ye only kenned it; th' speerit o' th' weelderness is lickin' ye inta shape. Th' trials o' th' flesh temper th' speerit; ye're bein' moulded, mannie, ye're bein' moulded.'

'Moulded—I'm being mangled. This cursed country eats you alive. A red wasp bit me on the wrist a while ago, and it's burnin' like blazes; my wrist is swellin' like a bladder.'

'Thank y'r Maker, buckie, it was no' a yellin' yin wi' twa red bars on its body; y'r gude angel's watchin' ower ye a'richt. Noo A'll tell ye a bittie aboot wasps.'

'You won't; I know all I want to know now; I can't understand your talk about goodness: I didn't break up no wasp's happy home, did I?'

'No' that A ken.'

'Well, what did it poison my arm for?'

'Wha' air ye carryin' on y'r back, buckie?'

'Cat skins mostly. Why?'

'Did any tiger cat break up y'r happy home, sonnie?'

'N-o.'

'Yet ye've killed an' skinned 'em. Eef ye live by th' weelderness ye maun put oop wi' th' ways o' th' weelderness, an' no' push oot y'r lip like a squalling wean when ye get as ye gie. Heart oop; we've only

a matter o' three mair hours' tramp th' day, then we'll camp.'

That was the way of it day after day, until they reached the trader's, where a dozen 'breeds' were hanging about, dressed mostly in the gaudy habiliments of the gaucho class.

'A stiff upper lip noo, buckie; swing a leg an' straighten y'r backbane, an' show 'em hoo white man walk unner a burden. Leeft y'r shoon as eef ye were daein' this f'r pleasure, no' because ye've na horse.'

Mac stepped along jauntily as he spoke, his back straight as a hoe handle in spite of his enormous load. His hat was perched at an almost indecent angle, and his feet came off the ground and fell again as nimbly as if he would dance if some one would only whistle, and yet the blood was showing through his shirt on both shoulders where the cords that bound his bundle bit deeply into the raw flesh at every swing of his body. The 'breeds' stared at him, and he gave them the gaze that a master gives his hounds, for it was part of his gospel that Anglo-Saxon blood was the vintage of the masters of the world, and it would have taken a great deal more than a big bale of skins to make him show that he was either tired or sore in the presence of a cluster of 'breeds.' Derry did his best to copy his model, and the pair swung jauntily up to the trader's door. The youth was about to slip his burden to the ground when a snapping glance from the pioneer stayed him. The trader, lounging against his door-jamb, saw it all, and because he was white, he understood. His eyes twinkled.

'Good huntin', McGlusky?'

'No' sae bad; we wud ha' done better only A had a bad attack o' fever an' ague oot beyon'. A'm subject ta it, ye ken. We'll dae better nex' time, me an' ma mate.'

He was standing easily yet so straight under his

burden that it might have been a cobweb package. He drew forth his pipe, loaded it carefully, lit it and took a couple of steady pulls. Derry did the same, though he was one big ache all over. The trader rose to the occasion like a white man.

‘Won’t you put your packs down and come in?’

‘A’m theenkin’ ma an’ ma mate wull jest hoont roon’ a bit first, an’ peeck a bit groon’ f’r a camp, eh, ma mannie?’

‘Sure thing,’ answered Derry, as if he hadn’t an ache in the world and wouldn’t know one if he saw it nailed to a post, but inside himself he was saying: ‘He’s a bully old sport, my mate, but I hope to gosh he’ll make this a one act comedy, or I’ll bust.’

‘I’d like to have a look at your pelts, if it’s all the same to you, McGlusky.’

The trader had seen something in Derry’s eyes, and he knew the ‘breeds’ eyes were keen, so he had chosen this way to help the men of his own colour save their faces.

‘Eef tha’s y’r pleasure we’ll no deny ye, Trader; we’ve brocht th’ pelts ta sell.’

He let his great pack down from his shoulders without twitching an eyelid as the cords came away from the sores on his shoulders. Then, seeing Derry was in some difficulty, he cried:

‘Dinna drop y’r pack, mannie, th’ glass bottle’s in it; haud a moment an’ A’ll help ye.’

And when he had done it, he lounged inside with the trader, whilst the breeds followed him with amazed eyes. Inside the trader was saying:

‘Try three fingers o’ whisky, Mac, and give one to your mate. I keep a special bottle f’r your sort.’

‘A’m beholden ta ye, Trader, but A’m no’ takin’ it.’

‘That’s all right, you clip your wool in your own fashion, Mac.’



McGlusky straightened as if he had been struck, his chin pushed itself forward, and a nasty snarl curled his lip.

'Air ye meanin' ma whuskers?'

'Good Lord no, man, it was merely a simile.'

'Tha's a'richt then. A thocht it were a backhan'ed way o' ca'in' ma a sheep, an'-A'd no' thole that fra ony mon.'

'You're no sheep, Mac, an' only a fool would take you for one.'

'A'm a lamb maist times, Trader, but A dinna like ta be walkit on.'

'Let's see your pelts.'

The three went out, and standing in the centre of a circle by McGlusky's bale of skins, they saw Black Pedro. His angel temper was evidently well out of hand, owing doubtless to the eulogistic remarks the 'breeds' had been passing on the two new hunters.

'Yours?' he said, kicking the bale with his foot.

'Mine an' ma mate's,' answered the pioneer silkily.

'You've been huntin' over my ground.'

'A'm fu' o' regrets,' purred Mac, 'but eef th' beasties were yours, Pedro, ye should tame 'em; they ran after me an' ma mate, an' we had ta kill 'em in self-defence.'

Pedro did not understand this kind of answer; men were mostly violent in the back country.

'You've poached my ground,' he growled.

'A man maun leeve, Pedro, ye'll admeet it yersel', a man maun leeve.'

The utter meekness of this rejoinder left Pedro gasping, and McGlusky went on calmly undoing his pelts.

'Don't stand for his bluff, partner.'

Mac looked solemnly at Derry and wagged his big head.

'Blessed air th' meek, f'r they shall inherit th' earth, ma son—an'—an' perhaps peeck oop a wee bit siller as weel.'

## CHAPTER IX

### BLACK PEDRO MAKES TROUBLE

THE next morning McGlusky drove a shrewd bargain with the trader for his pelts ; it was never his method to give away things he had worked hard for, and Derry listening to the chaffering between his partner and the trader, knew that his interests were in safe hands. The trader was a keen hand at driving a bargain himself, but at last he turned on Mac with a whimsical smile, saying :

‘ I’ve nothing against Scotchmen, Mac ; I’ve done business with a few o’ them in my time ; they’re all pretty hard nuts at a deal, but I’ve found ’em straight, but you beat the band, my friend. Why, you’ve made me pay top price for every blessed pelt ; I think you’d have charged me for the smell if you had thought to bottle it.’

‘ A wad, but A ken there’s na market f’r smells.’

‘ Knew you’d have a reason for not charging for it,’ jeered the trader.

‘ Dae ye run this store for fun or f’r profit, Trader ? ’

‘ Well, mostly for what I can make out of it, Mac.’

‘ Ma ain poseetion in regard ta huntin’ put in a pipe-bowl, ma man. We’re oot f’r profit, me an’ ma laddie.’

‘ Well, your pelts are good, and you know how to preserve ’em, Mac, and that’s half the battle. You haven’t shirked working on ’em as most o’ the “ breeds ” do.’

' A earn ma siller, A dae na thieve it, an' th' yin wha' sells shoddy work kennin' it's shoddy is na better than a peeckpocket, an' kennin' it's honest A want an honest price f'r it, Trader. Th' yin who trades on th' necessity o' a brither mon forcin' him ta tak' a wee price when he's entitled ta a big yin ha' th' soul o' a louse an' th' morals o' a monkey. A'm meanin' na disrespect'—A'm statin' a fac'. Eef a' man boucht an' sold an' worked an' paid fairly as mon ta mon, hell wad ha' ta go oot o' business, there'd be na crop o' new de'ils th' nex' generation.'

' Pretty sound sense that, Mac. Now how do you want your pay? In cash or goods? '

' Noo we're comin' ta groups. A dinna want siller an' A dinna want stores.'

' What do you want? '

' A want horses.'

' How many? '

' Three ridin' hacks an' twa pack hacks; horses air verra cheap, ye ken that.'

' They're not dear, and I have a good few half-broken animals runnin' round here, but you haven't earned enough for five horses this trip, Mac.'

' A'm no' askin' f'r saddles.'

The trader smiled a wry smile.

' Don't be bashful, Mac, ask for all you want.'

' Na need ta get sair about it, mon; a wee matter o' a sheepskin apiece wull dae ma an' ma partner f'r saddles, an' th' packs A can mak' masel' oot o' a bit tree tim'er an' a wee bittie o' cord.'

' Your pelts won't pay for five horses and bridles, McGlusky.'

' Weel, A'll ha' ta owe ye f'r th' bit deeference. A'll pay; A cheat na mon o' his just dues.'

' I'll give you credit, you and your mate, but what have you got in your bonnet this time? '

' Brains,' snapped McGlusky tartly.

' Don't doubt it, but you've got something in view besides pelts, or you wouldn't want five horses. What is it ?'

' A'm no' a free eenformation bureau, mon ; ma beesiness is ma ain.'

The trader had to be satisfied with that ; pump how he would, he could get nothing out of the pioneer. Some men would have warned a young mate to keep a still tongue concerning the big stallion ; that was not McGlusky's way ; where he trusted, he trusted with his whole heart, and Derry appreciated the confidence bestowed upon him. When Pedro came round trying to worm things out of him, he opened his heart very freely, so freely in fact that had Black Pedro been better acquainted with the ways of ship's engineers' apprentices, he might not have been so well pleased with what he gleaned in the course of his inquiries. As it was, he went away grinning and retailed his information to the ' breeds,' to their huge delight.

' A saw th' big coon leave ye wi' a grin on th' face o' him wad ha' done f'r a fog lamp. Ma certie, that mon ha' got a mooth like th' halls o' hell ; when he was tellin' th' " breeds " wha' ye telt him, he were gigglin' in his throat an' his mouth sae wide open it wad ha' made a kennel f'r a house pup.'

' Yes I saw him, partner ; glad he liked the hash I served up for him.'

' A hope ye didn'a stray fra th' truth mair than was absolutely necessary, buckie.'

' Not a bit, old sportsman, I just stepped off the beaten path as you say, a wee bittie.'

' Ma' A hear th' story ? Eef ye've leed wi' circumspection A'll dae ma best ta keep ye in coontenance when Pedro comes speirin' at ma ; it's no' weel that a gude lee should be wastit.'

' Well, he wanted to know what you were going to do with five horses.'



'He wad.'

'An' I told him we were going to build a corral in the bush and round up all the wild ostriches and start a farm for feathers, the same as we once had in South Africa.'

'Buckie, ye were niver in South Africa.'

'Never mind, partner, I may be some day.'

'A theenk,' remarked Mac judicially, "A theenk tha' pairt about Africa were unnecessary; th' rest was wha' A ma' ca' a poleetic deesqueesition on th' laws o' chance as applied ta huntin'; it were no' wha' A wad ca' a sin masel'. Black Pedro cam' f'r unlawfu' eenformation, an' ye gied him—feathers. Buckie, A've hopes o' ye developin' th' judeecial capacity—gin ye don't lan' in gaol in th' course o' y'r studies.'

'Nice boy that of yours, McGlusky,' remarked the trader. 'I heard him pumping ostrich juice into Pedro.'

'He should ha' been a wee bittie mair discreet, an' no' given ma game awa' ta ilka fule tha' asked him.'

Mac spoke with gruff anger in his voice, but the trader's eyes were merry.

'Fill Pedro and his sort up with that sort of stuff; it's too thin for me, Mac.'

'Thicken it ta yer ain likin' then, ma mon, add any kind o' dope ye like, ye'll no' offend ma.'

'Why don't you trust me, old lad? I might be able to help you; anyway, I wouldn't give your show away.'

'A'll tell ye a'—when A coom back.'

'I think I know now: you're after wild horses.'

For a moment the trader thought the pioneer was going to beat him to the earth.

'Ha' ye been pumpin' ma mate?'

'No, I've been watching you, and I'll swear you're going after horses; I've taken notice of everything you've bought from my store this trip.'

'Weel, an' eef they're no' brandit an' runnin' wild, why ma' A no' rope 'em as weel as anither?'

'No reason at all. Do you think I bred all the horses that now carry my brands, McGlusky?'

'A've no' pokit ma nose inta y'r beesiness.'

'You cantankerous devil, I tell you I want to help you; I'll buy any unbranded animals you bring in, horse, beef or mutton.'

'A've seen na mutton.'

'No, you were on foot and didn't go far enough south; there are a good many sheep running wild, bred in the thorns too, hundreds of 'em, and the unmarked ones belong to the man who finds 'em.'

'A'll no' forget it, Trader.'

'Most of the "breeds" earn more pesos that way than by hunting pelts.'

They talked for a long time; suddenly the trader said:

'There's a big stallion running with a bunch of mares somewhere in this district; he's worth having.'

'Oh aye, is there mon?'

'Yes; I'll tell you his history: old Señor Galvez, who once owned a ranche on the good lands about a hundred and fifty miles from here, imported some thoroughbred Clydesdale mares from England—paid a thundering big price for 'em too—he always would have the best, old Don Galvez. He imported from Ireland a thoroughbred horse that had a record as a steeple-chaser and crossed the mares with the racehorse; he had visions of breeding great weight carriers that would jump and gallop. He got himself killed in some trouble, and his estate, which the Government confiscated, went to the devil. One of the Clydesdale mares got away into the thorn country and dropped her foal there. The vaqueros often saw the mare with the colt foal running with her. He has never been caught or branded, Mac, and he's five years old now.'

'Why ha' no' th' "breeds" tried ta get him eef he's sa gude.'

'Tried?—they've tried all o' them. Black Pedro tried for best part of a year, and failed like the rest; if you get on his tracks send the boy in and I'll let you have half a dozen of my best "breeds," and if you get him I'll pay you anything in reason for him.'

'A'll gie it ma best conseederation, Trader. Noo, will ye advance ma a cheque book?'

'Sure thing, why not? You can't cash my cheques at any other "almacen," you know.'

It was the habit of almacens, or storekeepers, in the far back country, to have cheque books printed, very much like an ordinary bank; these cheque books they gave to hunting or droving parties, who when they wanted stores filled in a cheque and sent it in with the orders for goods. Mostly they put up a deposit before being entrusted with a book, though they had little to fear from fraud, as no almacen keeper would cash a rival's cheque. These books were chiefly valuable to the dealers inasmuch as they kept customers from straying to opposing firms. The hunters, trappers and drovers found the cheques useful, because there was always the danger of a messenger absconding if entrusted with cash.

With his cheque book in his pocket, Mac went outside to superintend Derry's work of packing. A 'breed' came to him, not for the first time that day.

'Weel, ma gommerill, wha' f'r air ye tryin' ta tak' th' place o' ma shadow? A'm no' needin' ye.'

The 'breed,' who was a crony of Black Pedro's, fixed greedy eyes on Mac's cheque book, which he knew meant credit at the almacen, then he smiled. He was ugly enough at all times, but when he put on the mask of a merry heart, he looked something between a nightmare and a drinker's dream. Mac stared very hard at him.

'Air ye lauchin' f'r th' sake o' y'r health, or makin' faces f'r fun?'

The 'breed,' who evidently had his plan of campaign mapped out, began to talk volubly of ostriches.

'Ta hear yon gommerill talk, Derry, yin wad theenk he'd been hatched by an ostrich. Eef he were, the face o' him wad ha' frightened th' rest o' th' brood inta their shells again.'

'What's he gettin' at, anyway, partner?'

'He's leein'—A can see it in his een. He says he kens where there's hunner's o' ostriches in th' deerection we're goin'.'

'Tell him to go to blazes.'

'Na, na, A'll try him wi' a wee bit craft.'

'You're sure not going to take a fellow with a face like that along with you, old sportsman?'

'He's na a fashion plate, as ye say, mannie, an' eef he were A'd no' ha' him. We play this han' thegither, you an' me.'

'Good enough. Get on with your "craft."'

Mac went to the 'breed.'

'Where's th' place ye spoke about?'

The 'breed' threw a warning glance at his compatriots, who had gathered round.

'I tella you f'r pesos, señor.'

He pointed a covetous finger at Mac's cheque book.

'A nivver buy ma whisky by th' label, an' eef A did y'r face is a dom bad certeeificate o' quality.'

Derry sniggered over this sample of his partner's craft; it might lead to a fight which would not have upset the ex-engineer's apprentice, who, to use his own phraseology, was 'fed up' with the covert jibes of Pedro and his gang of 'breeds.'

'Rub it in, Mac; don't be so careful of their feelin's.'

'Na, na, mannie. Blessed air th' peacemakers, f'r they shall gie mair than they get whiles it comes ta trouble.'

'I'm watchin' f'r knives,' crooned Derry. 'Th' first one that pulls a knife gets a bit of lead.'

'Twa bits ta mak' sure,' cooed McGlusky; then facing the purveyor of information, he said in his most dulcet tones: 'A'm a square mon, an' a mon' o' ma word; A'm theenkin' th' trader wull bear ma oot in that.' The trader nodded acquiescence. 'Weel, gie ma th' bearin's o' th' happy huntin' groon's ye speak o', an' A'll pay ye wha' it is worth ta ma, na mair, na less; gin ye dinna like ma terms keep y'r eenformation, an' A'll fend f'r masel.'

At a nod from Black Pedro the 'breed' launched into a description of that very country where McGlusky and Derry had decimated the skunk colony, and Mac knew there were no ostriches there. The 'breed' and Pedro had conspired to rob him.

'It's no' th' first time A've bocht a deescription o' country said ta be fu' o' reeches,' McGlusky murmured silkily. 'Coom y'r ways inta th' store, an' A'll gie ye a' ye've earned. A'm a mon o' ma plighted word.'

Slowly, with his tongue clenched in his teeth, and his big elbows sprawled over the place, he wrote the cheque, filling in the date with great care.

'Wha's y'r name, buckie?'

'Garcia.'

'Wha' else?'

'Garcia Palermo, señor.'

Mac wrote the name as if enscrolling it on the records of fame, then wrote in the sum to be paid to the aforesaid Garcia Palermo: 'Noo pounds an' nuppence.' He handed the cheque over with an almost regal air, and leaned back on the rough stool to await results. He did not have long to wait. Garcia gazed at the document with bulging eyes, then thrust it into the hands of the trader.

'How many pesos, how mooch money "noo póonds an' nuppence"?''

'Nothing.'

At the word, something must have cracked inside



Garcia, and the floodgates of his soul were unlocked. He cursed the pioneer and all his works, calling upon the Virgin and the saints to wither the man who had robbed him. Not a muscle of Mac's cast-iron face moved; he just looked at the frenzied 'breed' as if he belonged to a new species, and was worthy of calm scrutiny. At last he spoke and his voice and manner were worthy of his judicial calm.

'A didn'a rob ye, mon.'

Garcia waved the cheque in the stony face.

'Wha' diss?'

'It's ma cheque; A promised it, an' ye've got it.'

'De cheque no damn good.'

'Ye're speakin' th' truth, noo, ye gommerill, yon cheque represents th' full value o' y'r eenformation.'

The 'breed' polluted the atmosphere in a linguistic attempt to paint McGlusky's character from his viewpoint.

'Wha's wrang wi' ye? Ye gie'd naething, an' ye've got naething; ye're no' canny ava; eef y're greedy ta ha' something ta remember ma by, get yon cheque framed an' wear it eenside y'r shirt, eet may save ye wastin' time in future, an' time, like weesdom, is mair precious than rubies, Garcia.'

Black Pedro pushed forward; he had engineered the plan by which the 'breed' had hoped to dupe the pioneer, and he did not like the way the event was ending.

'You're a dirty swindler.'

Pedro's face was so close to McGlusky's as he growled out his insult that Derry expected to see his partner's fist land in the middle of it, but to the lad's unspeakable disgust the pioneer shrank away as if in fear of Pedro.

'Give Garcia a cheque, or stand up and settle with me.'

As he spoke, Pedro drew himself to the full of his

magnificent height and inflated his bull-like chest. McGlusky rose and moving hurriedly to the door said :

‘ Eet’s fu’ time we were movin’, mannie ; swing a leg an’ we’ll seek mair peacefu’ pastures.’

Derry stood stock still ; the grinning faces, the jibing laughter, the offensive gestures of the ‘ breeds,’ made him see red.

‘ I’d ha’ bet my soul he hadn’t a yellow streak in him, and—and he’s turned tail an’ bolted.’

The trader was frowning savagely, for he was as mystified as Derry.

‘ Guess he’s only game when he’s half full o’ whisky, lots o’ men are built like that.’

Black Pedro pushed Derry roughly on one side as he went in pursuit of McGlusky. With a snarl the lad swung his rifle and sent the butt at the woolly skull with force enough to have cracked it, thick as it was, but Pedro adroitly ducked and Garcia got the spent force of the blow on his ribs. Instantly there was uproar. Derry spun his rifle round and slipped home a cartridge. The trader unostentatiously reached behind him and produced a big service revolver, and then leant his elbows on his counter and blinked at the crowd out of half-closed eyes. He was dangerous when he did that, and Pedro and the ‘ breeds’ knew it, and though all were strong men and good weight carriers, none of them wanted to carry away the contents of the big old-fashioned weapon in the trader’s hand.

McGlusky looked in at the door.

‘ Com’ awa’, mannie, afore y’re hurtit.’

The pioneer spoke wheedlingly.

‘ I wouldn’t be found dead with you,’ shouted Derry.

Pedro grinned and held out his hand to the lad.

‘ I don’t shake with coons.’

The insult came low and level from the youngster’s

lisp; his eyes were snapping, his nostrils filling and closing. The next move lay with Pedro, and he took it, but not in Derry's direction, for if ever a rifle looked as if it would go off without preface or apology, the one Derry held did. So Pedro went towards the door, and McGlusky with a look of alarm on his face, hastily retreated. Derry turned to the trader.

'Give me a whisky; I want to wash the taste o' that mate o' mine out o' my mouth.'

Outside Black Pedro was abusing the pioneer in terms that ought to have made a mule kick its shoes off, but the pioneer did not seem to have enough spirit even to make reply; he only went on loading his pack horses, now and again ejaculating: 'Lord, th' ways o' th' peacemaker air a'michty rocky,' and again, 'Be verra near thy wee lamb, an' dinna let ma fa'inta th' han's o' yon mon o' war.'

Pedro went very close to him.

'Will you fight, you —— coward?'

'Na, A'll—A'll pray f'r ye, Pedro.'

The burly ruffian pushed Mac away so roughly that he nearly fell, then:

'Pay Garcia fifty pesos or fight me.'

Mac stood fingering his cheque book as if about to accede to this blackmailing demand. Suddenly his face was illuminated by a wistful smile.

'A canna pay th' money, ha'f o' it's ma mate's, but A—A can lose it ta ye, Pedro.'

'How?'

'A'll rin ye a hunner' yards fra yon stockyard ta yon bushes f'r fifty pesos.'

Now Pedro was fleet of foot for a big man, and he accepted the wager; the trader cashed the two cheques and held the stakes. It was a good race and the pioneer won with a yard to spare. Whereupon Pedro sought to force him to fight, in the end chasing Mac round and round his own horses like a sheep-dog

rounding up a sheep, and when Mac seemed to be going slow the pack of 'breeds' helped him by pelting him with any little thing that lay handy, and Derry, who an hour before would have joined issue with any crowd assaulting his mate, stood afar off and never lifted a hand, though he came near sweating blood in his shame, for pride of race and colour was strong in the youth. The two principals stood a few yards apart after a severe coursing match, and McGlusky spoke almost whiningly.

'A beat ye fair in th' fut race, Pedro ; it's no' sportsmanlike ta dae as y're daein'. A'll rin ye again, or —or A'll joomp ye f'r a hunner' pesos.'

Now if there was one thing more than another that Pedro prided himself upon, it was his leaping powers, a heritage from his negro ancestors, and it was strange if McGlusky did not know this, for the big fellow was eternally showing off in front of the 'breeds.' Perhaps he wanted to lose and get away peacefully. Anyway, that was the view Pedro took of the challenge. He snapped at the offer.

'I'll jump you for a hundred and fifty pesos, if you like.'

'Mon, it's a waesome lot o' siller ta reesk, but gin ye promise not ta quarrel afterwards, win or lose, A'll reesk it.'

Pedro had to wheedle a long time before the trader would cash his cheque for a hundred and fifty paper dollars, and Mac would not jump until the money was put up.

'You're into me a good deal deeper than I like as it is, Pedro,' snarled the trader. Yet after a while he consented, and Pedro, stripping, took a short run and with a splendid bound cleared the stockyard fence.

Mac had stripped.

'Lord, lend ma weengs !'

A moment later it looked to Pedro and the 'breeds'

as if the Lord had, for the pioneer striding like a stag, launched himself over the stockyard gate which was six good inches higher than the rail Pedro had leaped. Pedro, grey all round the mouth with fury, essayed the same jump and took the skin from his shins, and failed. McGlusky lost no time collecting his winnings. He held the money out to Derry.

'Ye'll haud it f'r ma, mannie, f'r a wee bittie ; ye're ma mate, we share an' share alike.'

Derry looked him full in the eyes.

'You're no mate o' mine, you—you quitter.'

'Ye've hurtit ma, mannie ; ye've bruised ma sair.'

He turned away with a look of intense pain and disappointment in his hard eyes, and Derry heard him murmur, 'Th' tooth o' a serpent an' th' tongue o' a thankless chiel nip like hell.'

Pedro, boiling to the point of madness with rage, literally hurled himself towards the pioneer. This time McGlusky did not run, but cringed and fawned like a collie dog that has been badly kicked.

'Ye said ye'd no' want ta bruise ma, Pedro, eef A won th' joomp.'

What the burly hunter said in reply it is not lawful to chronicle. Then Derry, white to the lips, stepped forward.

'Fight him, fight the dog ! If you don't, I will.'

'He'd kill ye, buckie ; he's a Goleeath amang men.'

'I'd rather he killed me than a man, a white man who had been my mate, should swallow what you've just swallowed.'

The pioneer heaved a great sigh.

'Eef it maun be it maun be, but A hardly daur, yon's sic a mighty mon.'

Pedro gave a yell of delight ; the 'breeds' howled like wolves.

'Haud y'r yammerin !'

It was McGlusky's voice, husky with fear. Pedro



fairly danced in front of him, his giant muscles bunching dreadfully.

'See yon mon,' gasped the pioneer, 'ye ken yin blaw fra him wad kill a steer.'

'He's got to hit you first. Take hold of your nerve and make use of your feet, partner, th' damn big swab'll never hit you.'

'A'm waefu' frached.'

Pedro grinned and grinned again; he had terrorized so many men in his day, and he loved creating terror. Then McGlusky spoke in a quavering voice.

'A'm no' gawn' ta reesk ma life f'r naething, Pedro. Hoo mooch wull ye fecht f'r?'

Pedro appealed to the trader for an advance.

'Not another damn cent,' was the curt rebuff.

When the colossus turned to McGlusky again there was foam at the corners of the black mouth.

'I've no money.'

'Ye ha' horses.'

'Yes, I'll put my two pack horses against a hundred pesos.'

'A'm no' wantin' pack horses, A ha' enouch.'

'What do you want?'

'A'll put ma saddle hacks, a' three o' them, agin your yin hack, Pedro.'

At this a glimmer that there might be visions in the vicinity flashed into Pedro's brute brain, for his riding hack was the best far and near, and it was the only horse within a hundred miles that could carry his vast bulk any distance at speed. McGlusky saw the man's hesitation, and spoke cringingly.

'A'm glad ye wull no' tak' ma wager. A dinna want ta fecht, A'll—A'll stan' ye a dreenk oot o' th' pesos A won fra ye, Pedro, an' gang ma ways.'

The mention of the money he had lost did the trick for Pedro. He clinched the matter by ordering Garcia to bring up his big grey, and when Derry had

brought along the pioneer's three hacks and the trader had fixed them to the stockyard fence, and taken his stand in front of them, fondly dusting his ancient revolver with his handkerchief, the two men faced each other, but in that short space of time a miracle had happened to McGlusky. Gone was the cringing bearing, vanished the craven fear and the laggard step. He advanced to the fray like a bridegroom to buxom bliss in petticoats; he did not, however, forget to pray, and when Derry caught the silent, low, fervent prayer, his boyish heart that had been like lead, awoke and began to sing. It was a short prayer: 'Lord, ha' Pedro in thy keepin', he's gawn' ta need ye.'

All the insults, all the wanton indignities that had been heaped upon the Scot, lived in the heart of the pioneer as he trod the few paces that separated him from the colossus. Straight to his man he went; for a second they stood toe to toe, then both struck with **all** the force that was in them, but the pioneer's blow was the quicker in reaching its objective, and Pedro fell as if he'd been looking for a mule in the dark and found the wrong end of it, and he lay where he fell. There are no time limits in a fight in the wilderness, a fray goes on until one yields or is broken beyond repair. McGlusky sat down and waited patiently whilst the 'breeds' did things of a restorative nature to the giant.

'Dinna hurry, wha's comin' ta ye wull keep,' said the pioneer slowly, as Pedro sat up and looked around him with the expression of a man who has crawled into a hollow log to look for honey and found a bear. When Pedro did rise all the pity vanished from the Scot's face; he darted forward and his blows fell like hail, and yet each was measured and calculated. On every part of the black body, above the belt, lumps rose like mushrooms pushing themselves through soft soil on a spring morning. He was a poor fighter, that giant,

for as soon as he was hurt, he held his head down and swung his arms in all directions. The white man's arms went straight as piston rods with a good fourteen stone of bone and muscle behind each blow. Again Pedro sank to the earth. Had he been pure negro, his savage courage would have kept him on his feet, but the mixture in his veins was fatal to him. Pure German or pure African, he would have made a better show.

'You've given him something he'll remember this round—partner.'

'Aye, wee mannie, an' eets blessin's in disguise eef he ainly has th' sense ta ken 't.'

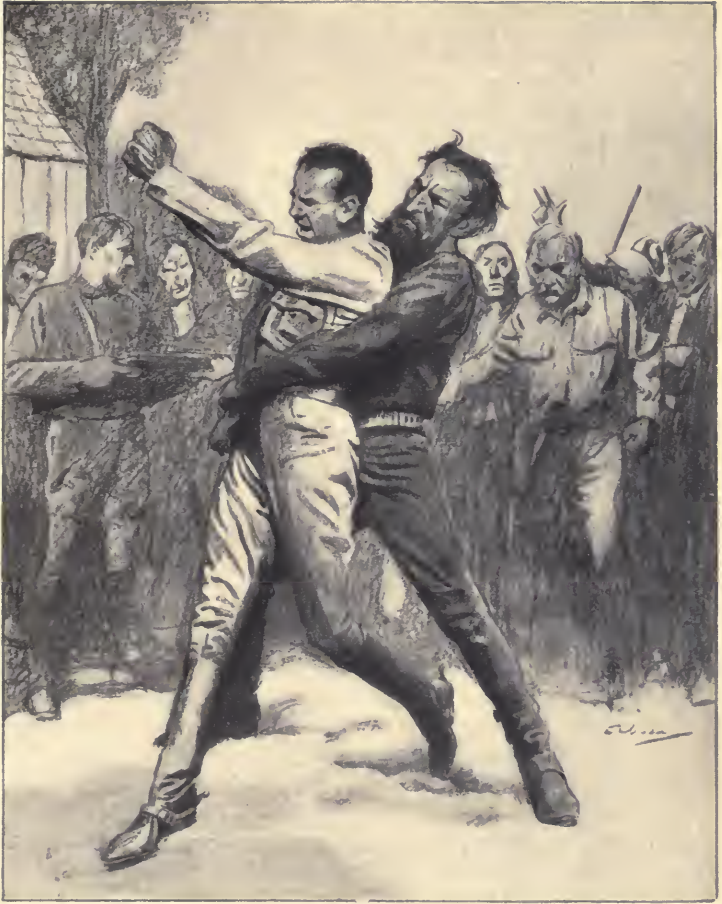
'If I ever have any blessings,' mused Derry plaintively, 'I hope they won't come disguised like this.'

When the unequal combat was renewed, Pedro gave up all idea of striking a blow; he bored in and gripped McGlusky, but could not throw him. Finding his efforts in vain, he took Mac by the whiskers with one hand, and fixing his other hand in the pioneer's hair, he kicked the legs nearly off the white man, whilst Mac pounded the black body from hip to armpit.

'Gin ma whuskers last, ma legs won't,' gasped Mac, and tried to break the other's hold, but Pedro knew where his one chance of salvation lay and clung to it. A sort of maniac frenzy took possession of him; he dropped to his knees, pulling Mac with him, and then he butted with his head and used his teeth, and Derry heard his partner gasp fiercely:

'Ma certie, th' buckie thenks A'm a free lunch; gin A get free A'll show him A'm na omelette—ouch—oh, tha's th' secon' bite oot o' ma shoulder, ye dommed cannibal.'

They rolled on the ground together, and at last the latent savagery in the Scotch nature woke, and then Pedro got a cup of sorrows brim full and running over. The 'breeds' drew their knives and pressed forward. The trader's old service revolver fell in line with them,



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Black Pedro makes trouble. The black meant murder, and the Scot meant maiming; it was man at his worst, brute passion going back to primeval instincts.

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and Derry's Winchester menaced the man who looked like their leader, and then fell back, for there was something in the two white faces that told them without words that these two would keep the ring for their countryman or die trying, and it would have puzzled them to say which face was fullest of grim resolve, the old, worn face, or the young. When the combatants regained their feet there was no thought of rest or parley; the black meant murder, and the Scot meant maiming; it was man at his worst, brute passion going back to primeval instincts; the world might have been only in its cradle, civilization unborn, for after all man and the jungle tiger are not so far asunder as armchair philosophers so fondly vaunt; a thousand years of so-called culture can vanish with a blow—and often does. Chivalry is found more often in the pen of the ready writer than in the practices of combating men; all males are killers an inch from the surface. So fierce was the black now, so tigerish his ferocity, that blows did not stop him, and McGlusky was growing weak from the awful kicking he had received and from the knee of the barbarian while the pair were on the ground. Fierce Indian yells broke from the watching 'breeds.' The black rushed with arms outstretched; McGlusky gripped the right wrist, turned his own body like a flash, pulled the arm he held over his own shoulder, gave the black his hip and pitched him high with the fateful 'flying mare' so dear to the hearts of Londoners half a century ago. He did not even look at the man he had thrown—he had heard the fall.

'He'll no' stan' agin f'r a month, eef he iver does, ma mannie,' he said curtly as he went to his friends. 'A'm theenkin' A ha' a horse fit ta ride in th' hunt f'r ma stallion; tha's why A played th' cooard wi' Pedro—ye'll be forgivin', ma mannie.'

## CHAPTER X

### A GREAT HORSE AND A GREAT MAN MEET

**A**N hour after the fray with Black Pedro, the pioneer, looking like a walking advertisement for sticking plaster, held out his hand to the trader.

'We'll be gangin' oor ways noo, frien'; eef Pedro cooms roon' a'richt, ye'll fin' him wi' a mair chastened speerit. Th' work o' educatin' th' theengs o' th' weelderness is rough, but gin a mon who is chosen by th' Lord f'r th' task blends gentleness wi' proper severity, a' theengs coom ta their appointed place in time.'

'And if Pedro doesn't come round, McGlusky?'

'It wull be a peety, an' ye maun bury him decently at ma expense—naething gaudy, ye ken, but decent an' in order.'

'I don't think you're fit to travel to-night, partner.'

'Wha? Ma? Gin ye'd followed th' shearin' sheds o' th' wayback pairts o' Australia f'r ten years, ye'd ken this is jest naething. A'm cuttit a bit an' scratchit, an' some pairts o' ma air missin' A cud ha' done wi', thanks ta Pedro's teeth, but it micht ha' been waur eef he ha' had a knife. A'm no' sayin' A'd care ta walk far th' nicht, but praise be, th' buckie didna theenk ta lunch off th' pairt tha' gaes in th' saddle—by jumpin' Sarah, eef he had, it micht ha' been serious. Gude e'en', Trader, ye're white a'richt. Com awa', ma mannie, it's na time f'r bletherin'.'

When they had ridden an hour Derry heard his comrade chuckling.

‘What’s bitin’ you, old sportsman?’

‘A were jest theenkin’ hoo A coaxed Black Pedro inta th’ foot racin’ an’ joompin’ ploy. A wanted that siller, mannie; we had nane, because A’d taken horses f’r oor pelts, an’ a mon wi’oot siller is a’ at th’ mercy o’ th’ world. A got his cash; A bruk his credit, an’ A got his horse, a’ by fair means, an’—an’ tactics. There’s naething unner hivin sae usefu’ ta a mon wi’ ambeetion as tactics, an’ A dinna min’ tellin’ ye A was feared a’ th’ time Black Pedro micht follow oor tracks an’ butt in on oor game, but he’s doon an’ oot noo f’r some time. We’re on horseback, he’ll be on fut; we ha’ siller an’ credit, he has neither.’

Derry was feeling far from comfortable, for he remembered how he had turned his back on his mate and repudiated his friendship. He wanted to make himself right in the eyes of his comrade, but the words were hard to come by. At last he blurted out:

‘Ever feel ashamed o’ yerself, partner?’

‘A ha’, an’ many a time A’ve done things A ocht ta ha’ been shamed o’, an’ A was na.’

‘Well, I’m ashamed now, Old Sportsman. I—I thought you were a coward and wanted to quit you.’

‘A ken, ma sonnie, an’ in a way A’m flattered; ye see A was actin’, an’ A acted th’ cooard sae dom weel A fuled Pedro an’ A fuled yersel’, an’ A cam’ verra near fulin’ th’ trader, an’ he’s an auld bird an’ verra keen. Yince A saw his lip curl in contempt o’ ma, an’ it hurtit ma like a slap in th’ mooth, but A’m theenkin’ he saw through mair o’ ma actin’ than he’d like Pedro or th’ “breeds” ta ken. He’s verra shrewd is yon trader body.’

‘I’ll be sorry for the trader if the “breeds” mob him.’

‘A’ll be mair sorry f’r th’ “breeds” eef they dae.

Yon trader is no' a buckie ta trifle wi'; a mon doesn'a haud his ain in th' back country o' these South American republics f'r half a lifetime wi'oot carryin' mair hell unner th' surface than ye ca' read through his skin. A've known dozens o' his sort. Did ye notice hoo he han'led that big pistol? He dan'led it like a mither dan'lin' her first wean. Gin th' "breeds" cut oop ugly he'll mak' 'em squiggle. Th' pride o' race is verra strong in th' trader, an' he'll uphaud it. A'm theenkin' he an' his big pistol ha' done some excitin' things between 'em.'

After they had jogged along for a couple of hours, Derry asked :

' Aren't you too sore to go on to-night, partner? '

' A'll confess A'm a wee bit sair, laddie, but this is a gran' hack o' Pedro's, wi' a fine easy gait, an' A'm wantin' ta put a lot o' groon' between us an' th' "breeds" afore we camp. Ha' ye noticed, we're no' steerin' towards oor huntin' groon's? '

' Yes.'

' A'm gawn in a deerection pretty near right angles ta oor stampin' groon'; A'm steerin' by th' stars.'

' Tryin' to fool the "breeds." '

' A'm gawn ta fule 'em. We'll travel this way f'r best pairt o' three days an' nights, then A'll break back an' hit oor auld cache an' gae on ta th' spring where we saw th' bull fight.'

' You're pretty thorough, Old Timer.'

' Gin A stairt ta dae a theeng, A dae it wi' a' ma nicht; workin' or makin' love, a mon should gae th' whole-hog or stop oot o' th' game.'

' Got a recipe f'r makin' love that you don't happen to want, partner?—I might find it useful some day.'

There was a glad chuckle in Derry's voice, for he felt he was back again on the old footing with the grim viking.

' Weel, laddie, A only ken yin way o' makin' love

masel'—eet's a gran' pastime, makin' love, gin ye dinna let th' microbe get into y'r banes an' unfit ye f'r th' serious theengs o' life. Makin' love is ta a mon wha' puttin' salt on ta his meat is ta a meal, it gies a relish ta things, but beware o' grass widders, mannie, there's too mooch dom salt about them, they ken mair than a mon iver knows or learns.'

'Adam got all th' trouble he wanted when he was looking for apples, an' Eve wasn't a grass widder, Mac.'

'Eef ye theenk it were "apples" Adam were speerin' f'r when he hit th' fountain o' tribulation, ma son, ye dinna ken mooch aboot human natur'; but ye were askin' f'r a recipe f'r winnin' a wumman. Some men ha' yin plan, some anither; A've kenned buckies wha'd lean over a garden gate sighin' an' oglin' a lass f'r months, an' gettin' na forrader wi' th' beesiness in han'. That's no' ma way. A'd just hop ower th' gate an' cut th' grass an' draw th' watter an' split th' kin'lin' wood f'r th' lass, an' gin she lookit pleased wi' ma, A'd kiss her gently where her neck met her goon. Eef she gied ma a backhan'er that brocht th' watter ta ma een A'd tak' it as a sort o' hint ta seek a job in some ither vineyard. Eef she squiggled an' made a fuss, an' her mither unchained th' yard dog, A'd go wi'oot ceremony, but wi' a certain amount o' deegnity; but eef th' mither reached f'r th' family shot-gun afore she loosed th' watch-dog, A'd hop it wi'oot deegnity but wi' dispatch.'

'Suppose she didn't squiggle when you kissed her, Old Sportsman?'

'Then A'd slip yin arm aroon' her, tip her chin oop wi' ma thumb an' touch her lips gently—no' bitin' at 'em as eef her mooth were a bun an' A were somethin' oot o' a circus. Kissin's a fine art, buckie, ye hae to ha' a geeft f'r it. After th' first yin, ye maun gasp as eef ye had cramp eenside, an' swear th' lass's lips air



like wild honey in th' comb, scented wi' wild thyme—eet's a gran' lee ta tell a lass, they a' ken it's a lee' but they like it. A niver kenned a lass tha' didna, even eef her lips were like a gash a horse's hoof mak's in a ripe watter melon. Gin ye get as far as tha', buckie, th' rest is a marriage licence, or—or a trip across th' watter, even eef ye ha' ta work y'r passage in th' stoke-hole ta get it. Eef ye ken a grass widder, an' she squiggles an' faints towards ye, keep y'r een skinned f'r trouble, it maistly means she wants a deevorce fra th' mon she has an' is lookin' f'r a fule ta foot the lawyer's bill; it's na use talkin' ta her aboot wild honey an' wild thyme—she knows, she's had some.'

'Does your love-makin' account for your being such a great traveller, Mac?'

'A'll no' deny, sonnie, there is a sma' connectin' link between th' twa.. Makin' love ha' caused ma ta tak' a lot o' speedy exercise in ma time, but, losh, laddie, it's a gran' pastime, providin' y're no' far fra th' sea.'

So they beguiled the tedium of the long, long trail by sunlight and starlight, talking of all things under heaven and a good many things in it. Derry would pull out the conversational plug by an adroit question, and then revel in the result. The lad had a great gift, the gift of tapping the source of information through the channel of his comrade's varied experiences. He would break an hour's silence with a casual question:

'You've prospected many gold and silver fields; how is it you never made a fortune, partner?'

'Frae Klondyke ta Kurnalpi an' awa' beyon', frae Broken Hill ta Lake Baikal, frae Northern Queensland an' New Zealan' ta th' heart o' th' Gobi desert, an' th' source o' th' Yellow River in China, buckie, A've prospected, an' A'm no' a fule at it.'

'Never strike it lucky, Mac?'

'Oh aye, many a time an' oft. A made a big pooch

at Broken Hill silver fiel', then A bocht masel' some gran' claes an' went ta Melbourne ceety ta teach th' buckies on th' stock exchange their beesiness.'

'Have a good time, Mac?'

'A did—walkin' back. A kenned maist a' aboot prospectin', they kenned a' aboot stockjobbin', an' while A was learnin' th' rudiments o' their game, they got ma siller. Be a maister o' y'r ain game, laddie, but dinna try ta teach ither men theirs—it's—it's too dommed expensive. Ye maun dae some theengs better 'n many men, but ye canna dae a' theengs better than a' men; ye'll get mair grit than grass atween y'r teeth gin ye try; ye may be clever enough ta teach a parrot ta talk, but A'll be dommed eef ye'll be clever enough ta teach it ta swim.'

'Why didn't you go in for floating claims into companies, Old Timer? That's how most o' th' big money's made, isn't it?'

'It is.'

There was a snarl in the pioneer's voice.

'A never foond a claim A *knew* ta be gude enough ta float into a company, an' A thank ma maker, Jamie McGlusky was niver sic a loosy hound as ta float yin tha' were na gude. When A turn ma face ta th' wall, sonnie, A'll gang ta ma God wi' ma han's clean o' tha' muck. A cud ha' been rich on any yin o' twenty minin' fields A've been on in tha' way. Eet was no' tha' A didn'a ken hoo. A kenned a'richt, but gin A start thiev'in' A'll gang oot an' be a bushranger an' pit th' chance o' ma life agin th' siller A mak'. A'll no' be a white-weskittit, smug-faced, church-gaein' son o' a barkin' quadruped tha' robs widders o' th' money tha' shud keep 'em fra want, or despoil orphans o' their patrimony. Mannie, when A'm wearin' ma hard-earned halo an' ha' cleaned some o' th' stains o' ma sins off th' mantle a mercifu' Maker gies ma ta cover ma shame in th' lan' o' shadows, A'm gawn ta

tak' a keek inta hell ta see th' white weskits fryin' amang th' brimstane, an' eef yin o' them asks Jamie McGlusky f'r watter A'll gie him a drappie frae th' bowl o' tears which th' angels gather oop fra weepin' wummin's een. A'm no' a bitter mon, as ye saw in ma fecht wi' Pedro, but afore A'd gie ice in hell ta a bogus company promoter, A'd use it ta toboggan lawyers ta Tophet.'

'Tell me about mining claims, partner; I'm going to try my luck that way some day.'

'Weel, it's this way: on ivery minin' "rush" there's mony hunner's o' claims pegged oot. It's a gran' "rush" that deescovers ten fair mines, an' it's a wonnerfu' "rush" that opens oop three really payable mines that will last. There air exceptions; A'm speakin' o' th' average rushes in a' countries. Yet, ma mannie, scores air floated inta companies by lyin' prospectors. An honest prospector tries his groon' an' findin' it a duffer, abandons it. A dom thief tries his groon', fin's it na gude, an' pays a son o' Judas tae write a false report on 't, an'—an' floats it, an' th' promoters pocket th' siller they steal. They ca' it "beesiness," but na rogue in preeson gairments is mair truly a thief than yon men. A'm theenkin' "beesiness" is th' best cloak a knave can wear, mair especially eef he puts a patch o' piety doon th' middle o' 't, an' puts a smooth ha'f-croon he canna pass at th' store, or palm off on a taxicab driver, inta th' plate o' sawbath.'

'Ever try to float a company for roundin' up other people's horses, Mac?'

The pioneer screwed round in the saddle and peered through the starlight at his interlocutor.

'Hoo many whuskies did ye ha' at th' trader's, mannie?'

'One.'

'Tak' mair watter wi' it nex' time, ye yammer lik'

an eediot bairn greetin' f'r its minnie. Dinna speer any mair fule questions at ma th' nicht, A'm gawn ta try an' get in touch wi' th' speerit o' Mahomet as A ride; A'll need a' th' weesdom A can get when A write ma new bible, an', mannie——'

'Well, partner?'

'A'm no' needin' th' bletherin' o' a fule ta break in on ma reflections.'

After a rebuff of this kind, Derry would shroud himself in wise silence, and Mac would ride for miles wordless, communing in thought waves with Mahomet or some one else, who of old time had been familiar with animals, for like a silken thread running through a cotton garment, there ran the memory of the big stallion he had come out to seek.

At last the pair came to their old cache, for the pioneer could steer a course by sun or stars as straight as a bird flies from summer to winter quarters though the width of an ocean may divide the twain. He did not take the horses within a mile of his cache, fearing a 'breed' might follow his old foot track out, in which event he knew his horse tracks would surely give him away, and the long detour he had made in the saddle be all in vain.

'Don't you think you're overdoing the "carefulness act," partner?'

'Na, A dinna; th' mon who unnerrates oppoesection is no' fit ta plan a campaign; always gie y'r rival credit f'r mair sense than he's got, then eef y're surprisit, th' surprise wull leave ye lauchin'. Gie him credit f'r less brain than he ha' an' he leaves ye greetin'. Th' Lord may look after fules who air fules a' through, but ha'f fules ha' ta luk' after their ain-sel's; ye're no' a whole fule body, ma buckie.'

'Thank you for the half, partner,' grinned Derry, who mostly took the pioneer's sly shots at himself good-humouredly.

'Ye're welcome ta th' ha'f, though maybe A'm ower-generous, ye ken A'm fon' o' ye. This thing ye're grummlin' aboot seems a sma' theeng because we ha' ta carry oor traps a mile, but, buckie, it's ma expeerience that it's th' sma' things we overlook tha' upset th' big schemes we plan. A've seen a loose saddle girth lose a mon the Derby an' a rotten shoe-lace cost a sprinter th' championship o' th' world. Always look after th' wee matters; ye wad na owerlook a sma' matter like a hole in th' seat o' y'r breeks, eef ye were gawn ta ask a banker's dochter ta wed ye, wud ye?'

'If I did, I'd ask her sitting down, Old Sportsman.'

'Aye, ye nicht, but when y're wooin' th' weelderness there's nae sic thing as sittin' doon ta it; she's a gran' mistress is th' weelderness, laddie, but a mon maun coort her on his twa feet an' no' be a shirker.'

In his quaint way Mac was training the youth to be thorough in all things, for he knew that thoroughness paid in the long run. There is no place in the world where a youth can more easily drift into laziness and viciousness than in the wilds, if the example set him be bad, and the nearest thing to an ape is a bush hoodlum. Mac's panacea for most of the evils flesh is heir to was work, and work that was not scrupulously performed was in his eyes a sure sign of the lack of moral and mental backbone. Now that he was upon his own peculiar stamping-ground, the pioneer meant to take no chances. By the unwritten law of the wilds, this was his territory as far as hunting or trapping went, and no one knew better how to apply the law than he. Water for man and beast any wayfarer passing through was entitled to, and game for subsistence was the right of all, but neither water nor game for a prolonged stay in pursuit of profit.

'Oor first beesiness is ta run a few lengths o' barbed wire roon' a' th' watter holes except yin, mannie.'

'I wondered what you had brought all that wire



for, partner, an' I can't follow your plan now ; if we wire in all the water, bar one spring, we'll drive away all the big game, won't we ? '

' We wull ; tha's pairt o' th' price we maun pay f'r th' capture o' ma stallion.'

' Won't he migrate with the rest ? '

' He won't have a chance ; by th' time he realizes a' the springs bar yin are closed, A'll be on his trail, an' yince A get on his tracks, A'll niver leave him nicht or day, till A ha' him roped. It's gawn ta be a gran' fecht between mon an' beast, wi' maist o' th' odds on ma side. A'm only feared o' yin thing.'

' What's that, Mac ? '

' Pedro an' a bunch o' " breeds " may butt in ; eef they dae——'

His big brows came together and his right hand fondled his rifle, and Derry knew that his partner would brook no interference with his plans.

They ran wire round every spring they could find, excepting the one where the bull-fight had taken place. Often in their journeying they came across the tracks of wild horses, and Mac always picked out the bunch of mares the big stallion was travelling with by the size of the stallion's hoof prints, and every hour the fever grew upon him to possess the great beast. He became short and snappy in his replies to his young comrade's queries.

' Dinna ding questions inta ma lug noo, mannie ; A'm no' in th' humour f'r them. A'm eatin', drinkin', sleepin', theenkin' naething but ma stallion ; he's pairt o' ma destiny ; th' comet was na sent f'r naething.'

' Found a name f'r him yet, partner ? '

' A ha' ; A'm gawn ta ca' him th' Leeon.

' I wouldn't ; I'd call him Red Comet.'

' Buckie, sure as A leeve, ye've a spark o' sense in ye somewheres ; it's maistly get hard ta fin', but ye've got it. Red Comet it shall be, it fits him maist as weel

as his ain hide daes. Losh, when this work is ower, A'll fill a' th' gaps in y'r curiosity wi' chunks o' natural heestory f'r makin' ma a present o' tha' name. Maybe,' he addèd dreamily, 'yon name wull gang doon in heestory wi' ma ain.'

Derry wondered at this horse madness that obsessed the pioneer, but had Jack Burgess, Will Frost, Jim Connelly or Billy Delancy, the greatest of all the old school of Australian stockmen, been there, they would have understood and made it plain to the laddie that horse madness is part of every true bushman's heritage; without it a man could not be great in his calling.

The day came at last when all was ready for the trial between man and beast. Mac had secreted provisions at every spring, and had made a wallet for himself and Derry to carry slung over one shoulder. He inspected his horses.

'We'll hobble th' pack animals oot, an' let 'em scratch grass an' get fat; they'll no' be wantit till this job's ower. O' oor ain saddle hacks ye'll tak' twa an' A'll tak' yin an' Pedro's animal—we'll call him Pedro in memory o' his late owner; ye're licht, an' each o' y'r animals wull carry ye; only yin A got fra th' trader wull carry me at a', an' that no' far, but Pedro's horse maun ha' been sent ma by th' angels.'

Derry thought Black Pedro would not have subscribed to this belief, but did not say so; his partner looked too grim for raillery.

'A'm theenkin' th' bunch o' mares wi' th' big stallion at th' head o' them wull be comin' ta drink as soon as th' sun gets hot; we'll just be able ta see their heads above th' giant thorn. A'll charge him before he has time ta dreenk, an' cut hin oot fra his harem an' he'll gang like blazes wi' ma as near his heels as A can get. A'll gie him a start, an' you follow ma hell f'r leather on th' red roan; when we've fairly got him

started A'll fa' back an' wait at the watter hole ; ye ride on th' heels o' th' stallion till dusk an' niver let up on him ; keep him movin', dinna let him stop f'r a moothfu' o' grass, an' as dusk is comin' on drop a match in a clump o' ostrich grass an' mak' a blaze ; A'll be watchin' f'r it, an' A'll mak' a bee line ta join ye, an' bring ye a fresh horse, f'r th' yin ye're ridin' wull be maist pumped oot by then. When A get ta ye, A'll gie ye y'r bearin's, an' tell ye wha' ta dae, an' A'll gae after Red Comet an' hunt him a' nicht. Come th' morn A'll licht a tuft o' ostrich grass, an' ye'll coom ta ma, an' hunt Red Comet through th' day again.'

' Sounds easy as going to sleep on watch in a fog,' remarked Derry with a grin.

' Daes it? Weel, A'll tell ye, ye're gawn ta be maistly skinned aleeve by th' thorns ; th' stallion will bust through everything, an' ye'll ha' ta foller where he leads.'

' Yes, I've counted on that, Old Sportsman. I shall look like a rag picker before noon. I guess what giant thorn can do to a man who rides hell f'r leather through 'em ; I'll look the rag picker part all right.'

' Ye won't ; ye'll look like a drunken wumman that's fallen through ten skylights, an' feenished through a plate glass window, an'—an' ye'll feel waur, but A'll doctor ye oop when it's a' ower. Ye'll ha' daylight ta ride in, buckie, an' wull be able ta dodge some o' th' thorns. A'll ha' th' nicht, an' A'll no' be a fit subject ta be framed an' hung in th' Academy by th' morn. We've got nae saddles, only a sheepskin apiece ; ye may be draggit off y'r horse ; gin ye air, an' ye lose ma stallion, dinna waste time tryin' ta fin' him, licht th' grass an' A'll unnerstan' an' be wi' ye in a shake. Dinna fear aboot th' grass ; th' fire wull no' spread, it wull burn till th' tuft is a' gone, then die oot, there's no' enough grass ta carry a fire, it's no' like Australia. A' we maun carry is rifle an' cart-

ridges, we maun ha' them; yin niver kens wha' th' wilds hold in store f'r yin. Noo, buckie, ye'll no' fail ma? A ken th' dour stuff that's in y'r veins—A leaved in Liverpool yince masel'.'

'Do my darndest, partner, I—I owe you something for what I said to you in front o' Pedro's gang—I want to pay it.'

'A'm paid. Noo le' ma cinch yon girth f'r ye; A'm theenkin' ye dinna ken hoo hard a bough o' giant thorn can pu', an' A dinna want ye ta lose y'r sheepskin; bare-back ridin' on a sweatin' horse mak's a mon sore as a hen that's had a double hatchin'.'

Half an hour later the watching pair saw the kingly head of the big red bay stallion above the scrub; his harem trod behind him; he sniffed the breeze suspiciously, then he winded the hunters' horses and tossed his head, throwing his mighty mane free to the breeze. Pedro's big horse saw the monarch of the wilds, and being also a stallion, he snorted defiance. Then Red Comet showed the mettle that was in him; he could not see the men crouching in the undergrowth, but he saw the head of a rival; back went his ears until they lay flat; his big nostrils poppy-red, expanded; his teeth showed through the velvet muzzle; then he reared himself straight up and his challenge came like a trumpet-call, fierce, resonant, clangorous. To his equine mind the presence of a rival meant only one thing—an interloper of his own species had designs upon his harem; it was sex again, as it always is sex among animals or men, the great propagating principle stirred to its depths. Red Comet crashed through the scrub like an avalanche, full of the lust to rend and destroy this other male.

'Oop wi' ye, laddie, oop an' foller ma!'

McGlusky bounded on to Pedro's horse as he shouted his command, and Red Comet bursting through bush and bramble, with murder in his equine heart, saw this

hairy apparition that had so suddenly lifted itself above the foliage. Had he been struck by a bullet, Red Comet could not have checked in mid career more suddenly than he did. This was an enemy he knew and dreaded; man had hunted him since he was a two-year-old; man had set cunning traps for him; savage, yelling demons had pursued him over the open plain, whirling 'boleros' round their heads; he had seen his equine friends and comrades done to death by the 'bolero,' the cruellest weapon ever used by hunters in any land, with its forty feet of raw hide leash, and its three great balls of wrought iron, each suspended to a thong at the end of the long leash, balls that, deftly hurled from the back of a galloping horse, would twine around the body, neck or legs of horse or steer, and break backbone, neck or leg, whichever they came in contact with in their wild, whirling swing. Red Comet knew man and feared him. He plunged his forefeet into the earth at sight of McGlusky, stopped as if an avalanche had checked him, went right back upon his haunches until his hocks touched the earth and his great tail swept the fallen twigs from the dry ground, then he whinnied and screamed his eagle note of warning, like the gentleman he was, to his lady folk, and McGlusky gave the yell the clan McGlusky used a hundred years before when charging on their foes through the windswept Lochaber passes. Where he got that slogan from he could not have told if his life had depended upon it, but deep down in the brain-cells of every human being there lie stored memories from forgotten ages like honey in a sealed-up comb. Pedro's horse was bred and foaled in the wilds, but of his own volition he would not have faced those terrible thorns with the same wild abandon that electrified Red Comet, but with McGlusky on his back he had no option, for the pioneer had a length of thorn bough in his right hand, and on his heels spurs of his



own making, with rowels made out of two silver dollars, big as British pennies, and the teeth of those rowels were as the hooked teeth of a woodsman's saw. Straight in between Red Comet and his mares McGlusky drove 'Pedro,' cutting the king out from his harem, driving him like a storm with shout and yell in the direction where open plains lay, and Derry, hanging on to his sheepskin with one hand, guiding his beast as best he could with the other, rushed in the wake of the partner who had so suddenly been transformed into a howling, cursing, hairy demoniac.

A bough hooked from end to end with inch-long, curving spikes as hard as steel and sharp as fish-hooks, slashed McGlusky's right arm from wrist to elbow, tearing the shirt away as if it had been gossamer and sending the blood in dripping streams on to the sheepskin that did duty for a saddle. Something broke from McGlusky's throat; Derry could not catch the words, but as he crouched low he muttered: 'Dunno what th' Old Timer's saying now, but I'll take my oath he's not praying for rain.' Mac wasn't. If he were praying for anything just then, it must have been for a rainbow, judging by the colour of his conversation. Ten seconds later Derry joined in on his own account; a grappling thorn branch had ripped his breeches nearly off one leg, and taken a lot of the leg with it. 'Buyin' horses is *my* game in th' future, not catchin' 'em,' moaned the lad; but in spite of his assertion he kept on, though he got his punishment from all sides except one, and that was on the sheepskin.

Red Comet left traces of his passage through the maze; shoulders, flanks and quarters were bleeding, and he blazed his own trail as he went, and he travelled like a storm, but he could not shake off that wild thing yelling in his wake. He came to an oasis, a bit of level open ground, and his past experience told him that here lay his great danger, for only in the open can

a 'bolero' be thrown. Mac had no 'bolero,' but Red Comet did not know that. Once clear of the bushes the wild horse let himself go, and McGlusky shrieked with pride :

'Ma stallion—ma stallion ! Jamie McGlusky's Red Comet ! Losh, he'd win th' Melbourne Cup !'

The big brute simply devoured distance. He had thrown more to his sire's side than his dam's when foaled ; his lifelong training in the wilds, his meagre diet of grass dry as hay and full of rich seed as rich in staying juices as oats, had left him in galloping condition, and though 'Pedro' was a half-blood horse, he was like a cab animal in comparison with the red thing that fled before him. There is something in great Clydesdale blood that speaks for fire and courage equal to that of the racing strain, though it comes out in a different fashion. Cross the Clydesdale of high lineage with the race-horse, get the right 'nick,' and sometimes—say once in a hundred times—you get a mighty steeplechaser ; mostly the crossbreds have to be bred back to the racing strain before the marvel happens, but the old Spaniard who had bred Red Comet had hit it in once.

When the wild stallion flashed across the open ground and burst into the scrub beyond, Derry swore savagely, for the awful scourging he had received had fired his temper, but it had not tamed his spirit—he was bred the wrong way for that. McGlusky, on the other hand, chuckled, though he also had received his share of punishment.

'He's a leon, ma certie, he's a leon ; he'll mak' a gran' fecht f'r his leeberty. A wad no' ha' it any ither gait. Losh, eef A iver ride him in battle when A'm fulfillin' ma destiny, he'll carry ma through th' ranks o' ma foes like a storm. A'm theenkin' ma enemies will be able ta spell th' name o' Jamie McGlusky an' his war steed Red Comet wi'oot th' aid o' a deectionary.'

The stallion might have cleft his thunderous way through all obstacles, and lost himself in the dense scrub in spite of all the pioneer's obstinacy and skill, had he been a less perfect equine knight, but he would not leave his ladies without a leader in what he thought was their hour of trouble. Instead of going right away, he swung round in a half-circle, until his nostrils picked up the scent of his harem on the wind; then he trumpeted to them, and they answered and tried their best to get to him as he strove to get to them. That is the real power of leadership among beasts or men: if the leader is the real thing, the rank and file will seldom refuse to make an effort at his call. Again and again Red Comet would have succeeded in rejoining his mares, but always at the critical moment the pioneer cut across the line of junction and yelled them asunder. Small wonder he frightened them: blood streamed from brow and cheek into his beard; blood was on his hands and arms, and the lust of conquest in his heart. Just so had lion-hearted Hector McDonald seen him once in the Boer War, in the days before McDonald was slandered to death by cowards who would have fallen dead with fright had they looked him in the eyes in war, and Hector had laughed as he saw the Scot Australian raw red from the fray, and had cried with the old joyous lilt in his voice:

'Man McGlusky, ye ken weel hoo ta get joy oot o' a fecht.'

Poor Derry was in bad case: battered and buffeted, his clothes in ribbons, though he had the advantage of galloping at the big man's heels.

'Curse the mares,' Derry yelled, 'curse th' lot o' them!'

'Dinna dae it,' roared Mac in reply, 'gin he sticks ta 'em we'll get him, gin he leaves em we'll na see his heels f'r dust.'

Pedro was becoming a source of great trouble to Mac: the flaying the horse got from the scrub, added to what McGlusky was compelled to serve out to him, had him wellnigh out of hand; he had great blood in him on one side of his pedigree, but his dam had been a commoner of the worst sort, and the strain of the race and the punishment was finding him out. More than once when Mac hurled him back on his haunches to swing him round in pursuit of the quarry, 'Pedro' had tried to throw the pioneer, with a swift buck to right and left, and a hurtling bound he did his best and his worst, but Mac was watchful and always ready:

'Ye spawn o' Sawtan—tak' that an'—this yin—an' this.' The big right arm rose and fell, the spurs rowelled the heaving flanks. 'A hate ta dae it, but there maun be ainly yin general in this campaign, an' his name's McGlusky.'

But every hour 'Pedro' got worse, and the pioneer had to watch him as well as the big stallion and the bunch of mares. Then trouble came to Derry: he loosed the clutch of his legs on his sheepskin for a moment, because the cramp was gnawing into the nerves, and in that moment a big bough laden with many thorns swung its length across his middle as it rebounded from Mac's onward rush, and Derry was jerked headlong to the earth, where he lay inventing new names for thorn scrub and wild horses and hunting in general, and mad Scotch Australians in particular. Then his sense of humour came to his relief.

'I don't want no pioneerin', take me back to Liverpool,' he crooned, and then the thought of his mate's disappointment if he failed him brought him to his feet, but the moment he tried to walk, language bubbled out of him, for the cramp on the inside of his thighs and in his calves wrenched and tore at him until he squirmed. 'I know what McGlusky means now when he says he'll make his enemy "squiggle,"' he gasped.



'Oh, Santa Maria, it's—it's hell.' Then he set his teeth. 'What's that McGlusky told me Hector McDonald used to say to his soldiers who had got the knife in the Indian campaign? Oh, "Bite on th' steel tha' guts ye, an' dinna squeal." Well, this isn't in my guts, but I don't think it could hurt more if it was, but I'll stick it if I have to crawl.'

He did crawl and saw his tired horse feeding on a bunch of grass. 'Soon be O.K. now,' gurgled Derry optimistically, but the steed had other views. At sight of Derry it moved slowly away, trailing its reins and every now and again stepping on them, jerking its teeth badly. When Derry walked fast, the animal walked faster, when he ran it trotted, when he stopped it stopped also, and ate grass. If there had been a gramophone receiver about just then, some one would have got a record in profanity as solid as a cheese.

The pioneer had gone on oblivious of the fact that the lad was not following him; he hunted the stallion as if his soul's salvation depended upon the issue, until as he was charging across an open space 'Pedro' put one fore hoof into an armadillo hole and turned a complete somersault, shooting the pioneer forward on his chest and chin—and the ground was pebbly. With a swift spring Mac was up, and had made a dash at 'Pedro,' for he knew more than Derry about the ways of horses that got away from a rider in the wilds.

'Ye misbegotten beastie! A'm theenkin' ye were lukin' f'r a saft spot ta lie doon upon, an' A'm dommed eef ye ha' sense enouch ta fin' it. Th' bittie A foon' wi' ma chin were no' saft.' He stroked that part of his face very, very tenderly. 'Maist o' 't's gone; ma certie, eef ma whuskers had na made a pillow f'r ma chin, it had been butted in, or—or rubbed off.'

He vaulted on the unwilling 'Pedro,' scanned the bush, located the mares in the far distance, and saw a



great head above the thorns, a head that was making for the mares.

'Ye dom fine gentleman, A'm prood o' ye; na wumman o' y'r ain sort wad gae short o' a protector wi' ye roon'; ma word, there'd be na white slave traffic eef a' humans in troosers were ha'f as cheevalrous as yersel'—ma stallion.'

He urged 'Pedro' in pursuit, but 'Pedro' had other views and emphasized them. He didn't buck or rear or plunge, he did what every horseman dreads to see a brute he is riding do, he just dropped his head sullenly, let his tail droop dejectedly like a pennon on a beaten battle-ship as it starts to flutter deckwards; every muscle in the big body went flabby, no resistance, no devil, just inertia from ears to hocks; it is then that a horse looks like a cow and defies coaxing or punishment. Anger, contempt, scorn, all rushed in turns across the pioneer's face, and at that moment the stillness of the wilderness was broken by a proud, defiant trumpet-toned note from Red Comet as he greeted his mares. McGlusky's head went up, his rugged, battered, bleeding face flushed with pride.

'Ma stallion—ye dandy, ye unconquerable speerit o' th' unmapped places, A—A greet ye.'

He lifted his old, disreputable felt hat from his head and did the victor reverence. It was a semi-savage act, yet almost sublime in its way, the tribute of a man who never acknowledged defeat to a spirit as dauntless as his own. He had the seer's vision even in little things, and in this he looked below the surface, and saw the soul of the lonely places defying the inexorable march of so-called civilization.

'Ye've won th' first roon', buckie, but th' fecht's ainly beginnin'; y'r ain cheevalry an' ma knowledge wull bust ye in th' end; then it wull no' be maister an' servant, but just twa fren's, then A'll learn ye ta love ma, by th' back hair o' jumpin' Sarah A wull.'

He turned his grim eyes on 'Pedro' slinking sullen, beaten.

'Losh, an' A thocht ta conquer *him* by th' aid o' sic as you.'

He spat over the bowed head with ineffable disgust, and slid to the ground. Walking round 'Pedro,' he took in every detail of the dejected form.

'Ye cooard, ye turnip-hearted beastie! Gin A were ta set yé free an' ye went near his harem, ma stallion wad eat ye. Y'r mither maun ha' been bred fra a grasshopper, ye gutsless accumulation o' hair an' hide. Ye challenged him th' morn when he cam' wi' his mares ta watter, an' ye ha' had ma ta help ye wi' lovin' care an' experience; where he went a mile in a circle A took ye across in a quatter o' a mile, an' he beat ye a' ends oop. Ye're no' fit ta carry his fodder when A ride him. A'd gie ye a kick in th' wame th' noo, ainly A may ha' ta mak' use o' ye later.' Then glancing round: 'Ma certie, where's th' wee buckie?'

He cooed loud and long, but got no response. Derry was a long way back, seeking to capture his runaway steed and using up his vocabulary in the attempt.

'A'm feared th' wee mannie ha' come ta some mishap; A'm hopin' he's no' hangin' head doon in a thorn tree; he'll no' be comfortable gin he is, eet's no' pleasant ta be hangit oop wi' naething but thorns f'r company.'

He led 'Pedro' for a few hundred yards on the back trail, following his own tracks, then mounted, and 'Pedro' realizing that he was not required to race, cantered along quietly enough. At last the pioneer came in sight of Derry who by this time had more than lost his temper, and was pelting his wayward steed with pebbles and language.

'Wha's wrang, ma laddie? A thocht maybe ye were hurtit.'

Derry eyed himself up and down as well as he could,

his tattered and blood-stained garments flapping about him like a scarecrow's ragged raiment, then he raised whimsical eyes to his comrade's figure which looked pretty nearly as bad as his own.

'Me hurt, partner? Not a bit of it. I'm as happy as a peacock in a mud puddle.'

'Ye luk it, ma son. Where's th' seat o' y'r breeks?'

'On a blasted thorn somewhere, partner—most everything I started out with this morning is. I could find my way back to camp followin' my own bits o' skin an' flesh.'

'Hoo did ye coom ta dismount, buckie?'

'A branch full o' fish-hooks gathered me in, an' I've been trying ever since to catch that fiddle-headed apology for a horse I was riding.'

'It micht ha' been waur, mannie. A'll no' let ye reesk anither fall when y'r gang after ma stallion th' morn's morn—A'll tie ye on.'

'You won't,' snapped Derry. 'Look here, Old Sportsman, if I get jerked off my horse again, I want to come off in one lump as I did to-day; I don't mean to be tied on an' pulled off a cutlet at a time.'

Mac captured Derry's horse, and together they cantered back to the camp by the spring, winding in and out between the big bushes as only horses bred amidst scrub can. As they neared camp, Mac said:

'Ye'll be none th' waur o' a gude nicht's sleep, mannie, after ye've had some grub an' A've touched oop y'r wounds wi' ma ointment ta keep 'em fra festerin', an' fester they will eef ye neglect 'em.'

'What about yourself, partner? A sleep won't hurt you either.'

'Ma? A'm gawn ta seet oop an' watch th' watter an' scare ma stallion awa' when he comes f'r a drink, puir de'il. He'll try a' th' ither springs afore he cooms here, thirsty as he maun be, an' when he fin's oor wires aroon' 'em he'll coom back wi' a thirst ragin' in his

innards. It'll be moon oop by that time, an' A'll tak' a fresh horse an' keep him on th' move a' nicht. When A'm ready ta start huntin' him A'll ca' ye, an' you can watch th' watter an' let th' mares ha' a drink.'

' Why th' mares, Mac ? '

' Because they'll no' travel far fra watter, an' th' stallion won't leave 'em. There's ainly yin thing A'm feared o'.'

' What's that ? '

' It's verra hot, an' we may ha' a thun'er storm. Gin we dae, there wull be pools o' watter lyin' roon a' ower th' place, an' it'll be a sair hard job ta catch Red Comet then, laddie, he's as fast as th' wind.'

The two horses they had ridden that day were hobbled out to feed and the two fresh ones tied ready for use, and as soon as food was attended to McGlusky went to the spring to watch, whilst Derry, very sick and sore, got gingerly into his blankets and slept as only youth can sleep.

Sitting by the water, his rifle across his knees, McGlusky watched tirelessly; he knew Red Comet was leading his mares from one water hole to the other, and knew also that the horses would be disappointed at each on account of the wire, and would surely come to where he sat in the end, forced by thirst.

' A'd ha' built a stockyard roon' this spring wi' shelvin' wings ta it, an' trapped him that way, eef there had been any tim'er stout enouch f'r th' job, but there is no'. A cud mak' a dead fall in th' groon' an' get him that way, but A'd maist surely eenjure him, perhaps break yin o' his legs. Na, A'll stick ta ma plan an' starve him doon'; it's cruel an' it will tak' time, f'r he'll get a certain amoont o' watter fra th' grass when th' dew falls, an' his sense wull tell him ta lick th' grass when th' dew's on 't, he's bush bred an' he kens.'

So he mused, but all the time he kept his ears attuned to every sound in the wilderness. Foxes came, and scenting his presence, stole off like ghosts; big cats of various kinds fixed eyes upon him that glowed like green globes in the darkness, and went away spitting feline curses; tree lions gazed at the motionless human figure with bluish-green eyes like balls of luminous paint, and slunk away to growl their gurgling growl in the depth of the scrub. He saw them all.

'A'll attend ta ye a' in gude time; A've nobler game afoot.'

A skunk ambled directly towards him in search of water, and Mac rose and gave the little beast the right of way rather than dispute it. When he went to crouch down again, some of the deeper cuts he had collected on his calves and thighs put in their plea for consideration, until he ached and smarted as if he had been harried by a crosscut saw.

'A'm no' gettin' ye f'r naething, Red Comet; A'm payin' f'r ye in woun's an' pain, but as ma soul leeveth, y'r worth it, aye, an' mair.'

Once a dry stick snapped in the scrub. Sharply like a pistol shot, Mac half lifted himself.

'Horses or cattle. Nae ither animals tread heavy enough ta break a bit stick as thick as yon, a thin twig would no' mak' sic a clatter gin it broke.'

Soon he knew what it was. A bunch of cows led by a tawny bull came up, snuffed the air, smelt him, and whirling, crashed away, making a thunderous noise through the aisles of night. The pioneer smiled, for he knew the tawny bull had turned too late to have escaped his rifle if he had been hunting beef.

'Ye'll keep f'r th' noo, but, ma gentleman, A'll ha' tha' tawny hide later, an' mak' a coverin' f'r th' saddle A'm gawn ta mak' masel' f'r Red Comet. Ye're a fine beastie, but th' finest is no' too gude f'r ma purpose.'



The young moon came into view, gilding the world with a silver sheen ; even the thorn scrub that by sunlight looked forbidding, grotesque and ugly, took on a loveliness of its own under the magic spell of the moonlight. Mac kept his ears wide open for all sounds of the wilderness, but turned his eyes upon the radiant moon.

' Oh aye, but y're a'thegither lovely, like a bonny wumman in th' autumn o' her days. A wonner wull a day iver come in anither life on anither planet, when A'll be oop alongside o' ye', an' unnerstan' y'r weetchery an' y'r loveliness ? '

He stretched himself out luxuriantly on his back on a patch of grass, and gave himself up to his wooing of the moon.

' Fra a bairn A've lo'ed ye, ye pale-faced Queen o' th' nicht. There's naething in natur' A dinna love ; A worship a' th' great designer fashioned. A cud fin' it in ma heart ta forgi'e yon creecket that's been playin' yin tune on yin string o' his ain fiddle wi'oot variations f'r th' last three hoors, till th' drum o' ma ear aches wi' th' dom monotony o' 't. There's naething A cudna forgie this nicht, A . . . Ouch—hell—wha's gettin' ma ? Let go, ye beastie ! '

He reached his hand round the back of his neck, and tore away a creature something between a toad and a frog, the great animal plague of the thorn lands : dark green in colour, excepting at the extreme end of the abdomen, where it was an almost regal crimson, in make and shape it was unutterably hideous, and its facial expression loathsome. Its mode of livelihood was as loathsome as its looks : creeping through the grass noiseless as night, it would fix its teeth in any animal of the larger kind and hang on to its grip until gorged with blood, then drop off and remain where it fell, a bloated mass, until hunger claimed it again. Some instinct always made it fix on a part of its vic-

tim's anatomy which could not be reached by hoofs or teeth. A horse or a cow when attacked by this mean little vampire, would rush off like a thing demented, and keep going until the gorged robber fell from repletion, and it was one of these prowlers that had broken in upon McGlusky's rhapsody. He forgot that he had just sworn to the vestal Queen of Night that he loved all things in nature; he only remembered that he, Jamie McGlusky, had just got his soul in tune with the universe after a day of most devilish hard work, when this hopping vampire had seized him and bitten deep enough with its rows of needle-like teeth to cause him exquisite anguish. He turned the beast belly upwards on his left palm, and before it could right itself, he brought his other fist down like a smith's hammer on the unclean animal, causing it to explode with a noise like that caused by a boy bursting a paper bag inflated with wind.

'There, ye nicht lawyer, A'm theenkin' A've done y'r beesiness f'r ye; ye dommed eempudent wee beastie, ta daur ta tak' th' leeberty ta mak' a mid-nicht debauch off th' best bluid iver bred in th' Hielan's o' Scotlan'.'

He rose, and in spite of his love for the moon there was anger in his face, for he knew the bite must be taken seriously and the insignificant wound treated with more care than if it were a deep bite from one of the bigger beasts, for the creature always injected some foul liquid into its victim when it bit, possibly the residue of its last gorge, which had putrefied in its body, for if not attended to, the flesh surrounding the wound would rot, and leave a hideous sore that might take years to heal without the aid of competent surgery. He himself had used the knife for this purpose on horses, sheep and cattle, but in his own case no such drastic measures were necessary, as the wound

was fresh, and the creature had not been given much time to inject anything.

'A'll awa' ta camp an' mak' th' wee buckie attend ta it.'

## CHAPTER XI

### A HOMERIC STRUGGLE

THE pioneer had no little difficulty in waking his comrade when he returned to camp, for the day's riding had taken a lot out of Derry.

'What's up, partner?'

'A grass toad ha' beeten ma neck where A canna atten' ta th' woun' masel.'

Derry was all attention on the instant, for Mac had told him of these vermin.

'Let me suck the wound, Old Sportsman.'

'Na, A canna let ye run sic a reesk; y'r lips air all torn wi' brambles, an' A'll no' ha' ye takin' chances f'r ma. Here's a razor, cut a' roon th' teeth marks, an' sponge ma neck wi' hot watter ta mak' th' bluid flow free, an' A'll tak' na harm. Eet's while th' beasties air gorgin' themsel's they pump th' poison inta yin, an' this yin didna ha' mooch time f'r a banquet.'

Derry did as he was bidden, though his rough surgery brought remarks from the pioneer the reverse of complimentary.

'Derry mon, ye micht be a gran' han' at whittlin' knobs off a club . . . Ouch . . . but, laddie, A'm no' a club. . . . Jumpin' Sarah! . . . Air ye lauchin' at ma, ye randy wee de'il? . . . Ouch, oh . . . Mannie, A telt ye A kilt th' beastie, ye needna dig inta ma neck wi' th' bit razor ta luk f'r it.'

Derry got hot water, for he had a holy horror of the rotting wound the grass toads leave. He had no sponge, but put the sleeve of a clean shirt into the boiling water and dabbed it on the raw wound. Mac tore it off and hurled it afar.

'By th' whuskers o' Mahomet, buckie, ye're no' a surgeon, ye're a butcher; ye're no' a nurse, ye're a boilin' doon works in breeks.'

'Bite on th' steel that guts ye, Mac, as Hector said.'

'Laddie, eef ye'd boiled Hector's neck as ye've boiled mine, he'd ha' pushed ye unner a stane an' sat on it till th' grass grew roon' y'r grave. Ye didna ken Hector, he were no' gentle as A am.'

'Have a little more hot water, Mac, just a little; it will make the blood flow.'

'A'm bleedin' fine, mannie'; gin ye want ta boil anything, boil y'r head.'

He went out into the night, and as he approached the spring he saw a bunch of mares with Red Comet at their head crowding round to drink. With a yell he rushed to his hack that was tethered hard by, and in a moment he was charging in the wake of the bunch that had fled at his fierce shout. The mares, suffering from thirst, scattered all over the place, and the pioneer had no difficulty in locating the big stallion who repeatedly trumpeted to call them to him. Mac drove his mount into the scrub and kept the stallion moving. The big horse did not speed away as he had done at dawn; want of food and water, and the cruel hard driving he had received, had taken a lot out of him, and his harem did not come to his call with the alacrity of other times; they could smell the water their parched throats craved for, and one by one they crept back and Derry let them get just enough to keep them alive and no more. All night long Red Comet ranged in a circle round the spring, calling clangor—



ously to his loves, and McGlusky cantered after him, inexorable as fate. When the dew came with the dawn, the stallion, half crazed by thirst, would have stopped to lick the grass, but the pioneer pressed him furiously until the sun got high in the heavens and scorched up every drain of moisture.

'A'm waesome sorry ta ha' ta dae it, but A maun; A maun drive ye till ye're near droppin'. It's no' a labour o' love, it's a labour o' necessity.'

The man's cast-iron frame stood the strain until well past noon; then he made back to the spring and sent Derry in pursuit.

'Ye're light, an' th' horse ye'll ride is fresh an' no' a bad yin. Gang after ma stallion; ride like a red-skin, an' drive him a' ye can. Th' end o' th' day is th' hottest part, an' he'll feel it sair.'

'So shall I, partner; I'm feeling sore before I start. By thunder, Old Sportsman, I wouldn't ride this race to-day f'r any other man on earth. I'm light, as you say, about ten pounds lighter than I was yesterday morning, I think, and most o' that ten pounds is hangin' in bits on brambles. I feel as if I'd been fightin' a cage full o' wild cats.'

'A ken,' said the veteran, 'eef ye luk verra closely at ma, ye'll notice A got ma fu' share o' wha's gawn in th' nicht; there maun be about enough o' ma skin ta mak' a blanket spread about yon scrub.'

'You've had no picnic, Mac; now I'll away and do my best.'

'Shall A tie ye on, mannie? A bit rope is a gran' comfort ta a green han' at th' game like yersel.'

'You tie yourself in a knot. I'm not having any; I've been tied to a spar in a hurricane, and I know what tying means. You sleep till sundown, then follow my signals.'

He went off at a gentle canter, and if his horse could have understood the language the pain drew from him,

that equine would have bet his breakfast he wasn't carrying a missionary.

The stallion did not want to leave the vicinity, but Derry gave the big beast no rest ; every time he got near Red Comet he loosed a yell, and made a dash ; the yelling relieved his feelings, for the thorns seemed more plentiful than before, and to add to his torment, the flies followed him in clouds and did things to his wounds that left him with bloodshot eyes and reeling brain, but the strange magnetism of leadership in the pioneer which had made men follow him on mad, desperate enterprises half over the world, had the lad under its spell, and he did his part grimly and gamely. At last Red Comet faced away from the spring, and struck for the open country. When he reached the edge of it, the noble animal turned and three times called to his ladies, but the rich ringing note was absent from the call ; the blazing heat which had made the air quiver all day had left his parched throat hoarse, cracked, non-vibrant. There was agony in those last appeals ; the thrilling trumpet call was gone ; it was like the despairing cry of a vanquished but great-hearted leader trying to rally shattered forces for a forlorn effort—an effort to cut his way through rather than suffer the ignominy of surrender. The mares did not respond ; they were cowed by the scarcity of water, and preferred to hang around in the vicinity of the spot where they had secured a few mouthfuls to joining their lord and leader in a quest into the unknown. Had Derry not been hard on his heels, the mighty stallion would of a surety have turned again and rounded up his mares and forced them to follow him, but the lad had been well instructed by the pioneer ; he drove his hack forward, and Red Comet bade farewell to the scrub and struck out on to the plains, which reached further and further away into the wilds. Derry rode in pursuit ; he did not push his

horse, for even yet Red Comet could easily have out-paced the hack he rode. 'Keep him moving, an' th' heat, thirst, an' th' fretting f'r his harem wull dae th' rest,' had been the pioneer's parting injunction. On and on the big animal strode, as if far away in the distance there lay a water hole that he had known in other days when vaqueros had hunted him for his life. Possibly instinct warned him that the chances were it would be dry in these late summer months, lying out in the sun-baked plains, but dry or not, he meant to reach it or die trying. Derry was no skilled stockman, but slight as his knowledge was, he realized that the stallion was not now galloping at haphazard, he had set his course running as straight as a great liner runs from Liverpool to New York.

'The old sportsman ought to know of this.' Derry had long since dropped into the bushman's habit of thinking aloud. He took a pull at the canvas bag that carried water mixed with tea, the finest thirst-killer known to men of the burning trails. 'I'll blaze a trail; if he's awake he'll see it, and understand.' For a moment he drew rein near a patch of ostrich grass, dropped a match in it, saw the red flame spurt up and rode on. 'Pillar o' fire by day, cloud o' smoke by night,' he muttered, thinking of a text he had seen framed on the walls of a sailor's home he had lived in in Buenos Aires before shortage of money had given him the key of the street. Half an hour later he took a pull at his horse again, and lit another bunch of grass, and looking back as he rode, he could see his fiery beacons ruddy against the skyline. Then he looked at the noble brute away ahead of him, galloping gallantly. 'You poor devil; th' odds are all against you; you might beat me even yet, an' a dozen "breeds," but you'll never get away from McGlusky; he's—he's your fate, with whiskers on it.'

The pioneer had dozed fitfully at his camp. Tired

as he was, the fever, the horse-madness, that was in him would not let him sleep ; he rose and gazed under his hand out over the far distances. Suddenly a pink haze caught his keen eyes even against the sunlight, and he woke instantly to volcanic action.

' Yon's a fire, A'm theenkin'.'

He caught Pedro, vaulted on his back and stood upright, so that the intervening scrub would not block his line of vision. It was the second tuft of ostrich grass that Derry had fired that he-gazed upon. He was in a fever of apprehension in an instant, yet he knew the value of careful observation too well to 'rush his fences.' He watched steadily and saw the smoke from the first fire.

' Jumpin' Sarah, A'm feared somethin's gone wrang wi' th' buckie, but he's oot on th' big plains an' he canna ha' lost his ain horse ; he's no' on foot, there's a big gap between yon twa fires. He's a wise han' f'r a cub.'

He looked at the sun and took his bearings carefully, but swiftly, then leaping lightly to the ground he ran to the hobbled horses, brought up the two best, watered them and Pedro, strapped provisions upon them, and struck out steadily for the beacons Derry had left. By the time he came to the ashes of the first fire, the sun had dipped and a soft grey haze draped the world. He did not pause, but rode for the next fire and the next. Far away in the distance a red blaze leapt from the earth.

' Gude wee mannie, A ken y'r tactics noo. A tak' back some o' th' hard things A ha' said ta ye in th' past ; mair than ha'f y'r head is no' mud.'

He was riding a horse that was not up to his weight, for he was saving Pedro for the final effort.

' A ken y'r heart is no' mad' o' granite, ye big coo, but ye'll gallop weel oot here in th' open, though ye wad na face th' punishment o' th' thorns. Ye're a



fair weather fren' ; A've had mony like ye who wore breeks, an' some who wore petticuts : gude stickers while ma siller lastit, but queeck ta turn an' gie ma th' go by wi' noses in th' air when ma pooch were as empty as th' belly o' a starvin' dog. Men, wummin an' animals air a' alike ; some air good, some air bad, some dom gude, some sae a'michty bad they're no' worth a cat's yowl, an', Pedro, A'm theenkin' ye're th' ha'fan' ha'f sort, no' sae bad till th' pinch comes, then ye're like wummin A've kissed in th' starlight who like it till they hear a footstep an' fear the've been seen ; then it's " McGlusky, ye're a ruffian, 'an'—an' a letter fra a lawyer buckie. Hell's made oop o' stolen kisses an'—an' payin' f'r 'em.'

Every now and again the pioneer looked back and followed with his eyes the lines of the fires he had passed.

' Straight as a bullet fra th' barrel, na waggin' fra richt ta left ; yon stallion kens where he's gawn ; he's makin' f'r watter as a wild bee mak's hame ta its honey. Noo A'll tak' th' bearin's fra th' fire ahint ma, an yon stars tha' air beginnin' ta peep oot, an' A'll be able ta follow ma stallion in th' dark wi'oot seein' or hearin' him. A horse crazy wi' thirst niver swerves an inch fra a straight line in open country. Ma certie, but he's led ma mannie a braw gait, an' th' buckie ha' stuck it wi' grit an' eentelligence. A always said they bred gude stuff in Leeverpool. A'm theenkin' it's because sae mony Scotch sailors air paid off there.'

It was long before he came up with Derry, for he was too good a horsemaster to push the animal he rode beyond its powers, and he knew it was overloaded with his weight. The second horse he would not ride ; that was reserved for Derry ; he knew he might have to leave the lad alone, and did not intend to leave him on a half-beaten horse on the big plains where water might be sought for in vain. A fresh



horse would take the light weight back to the spring, and reckless of his own life as he was, McGlusky never jeopardized a follower's more than the hazards of the venture demanded. The moon had just lifted her eyelids above the horizon when he came upon the youth; he was toiling along on foot, dragging a woe-fully distressed hack by the bridle. The young face that was turned triumphantly to the pioneer was haggard and tired, but strangely handsome in spite of the thorn scratches; a pair of big, dark-brown eyes fringed with lashes any court beauty would have given much to possess flashed McGlusky a glad welcome.

'For why air ye walkin', mannie?'

'This blamed crock has cracked up f'r one thing, partner, an' I could follow th' tracks of your stallion on foot, but I couldn't from the saddle, it's too dark.'

'Why did ye no' camp an' wait f'r ma, ma son?'

'Because I said I'd stick it, or—or bust. It's your stallion, ain't it?'

Down to the ground slid McGlusky and took his mate by the shoulders.

'Ye're *man* a' through, no' a yeller streak in ye, buckie; ye're a mate worth ha'in'.'

Derry laughed, and his laughter was the prettiest thing about him; it gurgled in his throat as now and again in a lifetime you hear a lass's laughter gurgle. It was seldom any one heard Derry voice his merriment; but when once you had heard it, you listened longingly for it as an angler listens for the splash of a trout midst shadows and sunlight down stream.

'Ye're sair spent, A'm theenkin', ma son.'

'I'm none too fresh, partner; it's these sores all over me, and those cursed flies, Mac, they damn near drove me off my base.'

'A ken th' de'ils. A'll gie ye a warm tub an' rub a meexture o' paraffin an' mutton fat inta y'r sairs, laddie, when A've got ma stallion.'

'You haven't got a tub and you haven't any mutton fat,' jeered Derry.

'A've a wee bit tarpaulin at camp, an' A'll sling that fra yin thorn ta anither, an' there's a tub A'd bathe a prince in or a princess either. As f'r th' mutton, A've a rifle an' A've seen sheep tracks. Th' rest is easy.'

'Paraffin an' mutton fat—a good recipe, partner.'

'Yin o' th' best. Bush flies lay eggs in green woun's, mannie, an' eggs hatch maggots. This is a wonnerfu' country, th' maist wonnerfu' in th' worl', but by th' whuskers o' Solomon—gin he had any, which th' buik doesna specify—this same country can gie a' th' rest o' God's creation a long start in th' way o' vermin. Ye'll be findin' tha' oot whiles.'

'I've sampled the tree of knowledge as it is, thanks, Mac. Now what's the next move?'

'Camp f'r ye, buckie—th' trail f'r ma. It's neck or naething wi' Red Comet noo; it's him or Jamie McGlusky goes unner.'

'I'd like to see it through, Mac.'

The pioneer's big right hand dropped not unkindly on the youngster's shoulder.

'There's a time ta obey orders, mannie, an'—this is yin.'

'Sure thing; spit out your orders, I'll do as I'm told.'

'Yon engineer tha' had ye aboard ship laid th' foondations o' deescipline in y'r innards, ma son.'

'He did—with a yard o' lead pipin' when there was nothing else handy.'

'Weel, ye sleep till sun oop an' then tak' a' th' horses, ride th' fresh yin, put his nose ta y'r ain tracks, an' he'll carry ye back ta th' spring. A'll join ye later; ye canna help me mair wi' ma stallion; it's a yin mon job noo.'

Derry watched his mate fix three canvas water bags full of water he had brought on the horses, on to

Pedro, then when he had mounted, the pioneer said :

'Sonny, ye tie th' reins o' th' fresh horse A brocht ye ta y'r belt ; A've hobbled th' beastie f'r fear o' accidents ; th' beastie ma' deesturb ye a bittie in y'r sleep, but it's better than waking oop an' findin' na horse wi' ye ; as f'r th' ithers, they'll maybe mak' off in th' nicht. Dinna fash eef they dae, an' dinna leave y'r ain tracks ta luk f'r 'em ; they'll mak' th' spring a'richt ; a horse can smell watter leagues awa'. Promise ma this, an' A'll no' worry about ye, f'r A ken weel y're no' a leear.'

'On th' word o' an engineer.' Derry's voice had a chuckle in it.

'Oh aye, a ha'f-baked yin, but A tak' y'r meanin' f'r no engineer iver gaes back on his duty. Sleep soond, buckie ; ye'll be alane wi' God an' yin or twa speerit buckies A've askit ta keep sentinel ower ma mate.'

'I'm a half-baked engineer as he said,' mused Derry as he watched Pedro lope off in the long, space-devouring, half-canter, half-gallop of the horses bred in the wilderness, 'an' he's a half-baked pagan who believes the spirits of all kinds of dead 'uns come back and talk to him and teach him anything from the way to make his whiskers grow to ruling a kingdom, but I'd follow him to a snowballing match in hell, an' be proud to hold his coat while he knocked three tailed devils off their pet ash heap. He's a pagan an' a man.'

As he dropped asleep with his horse tethered to his belt, the last words that crept through his lips were 'A pagan and a man.'

Every now and again the pioneer bent down far below Pedro's neck and scanned the trail of the big stallion ; he was a master of horse-craft and had made Pedro sniff that trail by dropping a few chunks of broken biscuit on the hoof marks of Red Comet before

he started, and Pedro, being a stallion himself, would follow scent like a bloodhound, because he had never known a stable and had not had his natural instincts civilized out of him.

'Ye'll follow a'richt until y're tired, then ye'll shirk, but A'm hopin' A'll see th' beauty afore y're leg-weary. Anyway A can follow his trail wi'oot ye eef A maun dae-it, it's maist as licht as day noo.'

But Mac had underrated Red Comet's powers of endurance; the hours passed, and he caught no glimpse of the hunted animal. When Pedro flagged he touched him with the spurs, and forced him on.

'Eef he strikes watter an' gets his fill an' a mooth-fu' o' grass, he'll show ye a clean set o' heels, ye dom coo, leg-weary an' crackit f'r want o' sleep as he is.' Then in savage scorn of the animal he bestrode, he began searching round in his mind for comparative matter he could apply to Pedro. 'Eef ye had been a jackass, an' y'r mither a thoroughbred, ye'd na ha' sic nice wee shapely ears, Pedro, but ye'd probably ha' guts which ye ha' na; y'r sire were an owerstrung racehorse, an' y'r dam a chicken-hearted mongrel o' th' wilds inbred fra brither an' sister, an' baith o' them wasters. Y're jest fit ta be fed on corn an' ha' a mon in leivery ta wait on ye, an' then be ridden f'r an hoor every day by a mon monkey in th' haunts o' fashion where senioritas nicht admire baith ye an' y'r rider, an' mistak' ye baith f'r th' real thing.'

An hour later when, having pushed Pedro to the top of his pace, he saw unmistakable signs of sulkiness, he grew grimly sarcastic.

'Oh aye, Pedro, by ma mither's soul y're a record breaker; ye'd race through a bushel o' good oats wi' ony animal in Chreestendom, A dinna doot, an' niver grow weary a' day lang eef ye were tied ta a hayrick an' had th' run o' y'r dom teeth. Gin A iver get ye ta a ceety, A'll swap ye f'r a rockin' horse, A wull, ma

certie, A'm no' certain A'd no' swap ye f'r a bairn's go-cart, ye beastie, ye're no' as gude as Balaam's quadruped—that yin wad answer back, ye're too dom sulky e'en ta talk.'

He lifted Pedro into a gallop again, and then in the far distance he saw a huge form that had been hidden by a hollow, climb slowly up and pause with drooping head and bedraggled mane.

'Ma stallion!'

Pity, triumph, self-reproach, all blended in his voice. Pedro whinnied, and on the instant Red Comet swung half round, lifted his glorious head, arched his drooping tail and sent back a low, heavy, hoarse defiance. All his dejection vanished; he became once again the monarch of the wilds; he stretched himself out in a gallop and went away. McGlusky dismounted, poured about a pint of water into his old felt hat, and held it whilst Pedro drank greedily.

'Drink, dom ye, drink! A begrudge ye as mooch as a rain drop, ye cooard. A wanted it a' f'r him when he fa's, but eef A dinna gie it ye, beastie, ye'll pick a saft spot an' lie doon wi'in th' hoor. God kens hoo ma stallion is sufferin', but he'll lie doon in his death agony A'm feared, afore he'll surren'er. Dinna rub y'r muzzle agin ma shoulder, ye squigglin' beastie. God kens, A'd ding ye a buffet wi' ma naked feest wud loosen y'r teeth, eef A didna need ye. Lord send A ma pu' oop a better fecht when ma hoor comes than ye've pu' oop th' nicht, Pedro; A'd cut a stouter heart oot o' a stale cheese than ye've got inside o' ye.'

He rode on in pursuit, handling his sullen mount as only great horsemasters can, coaxing a mile or two of speed here, easing the brute by running beside him when the undulating ground displayed an upward tendency, slowing down to a walk when the sandy patches intervened, and all the time he looked for signs



of failing in the noble quarry. He saw in the dawning that Red Comet's proud head had drooped; he noticed the tracks and saw many a drag where the weary beast had been unable to lift one leg or another.

'Weary unta death, but no' beaten. A'm feared he'll fa' dead in his tracks.'

The sun came up, and still Red Comet fought for his liberty, straining like a giant in the toils. Then Pedro gave out. Mac had touched him lightly with the spurs, hoping to steal a few yards of the distance between himself and the hunted animal. He had noticed Red Comet stumble a dozen times from sheer weakness during the last hour, and he could see how the massive quarters drooped.

'Yin wee run an' he'd fa'.'

But that last run was not in Pedro. He stopped. Mac swung to the ground in a blaze of rage; he tore his rifle from his back and held the muzzle to Pedro's ear. Then he let the weapon slide to the ground.

'Ye're no' worth it, A'm dommed eef ye air.'

For a moment he gazed after the weary figure blundering away with broken gait, then he unbuckled the rough girth, tossed the sheepskin saddle to the ground, removed the bridle, turned Pedro back on his own tracks, gave him a slap on the quarter with his open palm.

'Awa' wi' ye, eef ye've any spunk at a', ye've strength enouch ta reach watter, ye—ye cross between a grey coo an' a grasshopper, an' A'm dommed eef A care eef y'r old owner gets ye—y're a pair'

He buckled the water bags round his waist, wound his raw hide lasso about his body, took bridle and hobbles and left his beloved rifle and food and all else and stepped away in Red Comet's tracks.

'It's ma an' ye f'r it, ma stallion, jeest we twa, yin o' us ha' got ta go unner.'

Men in many lands told of great walking feats per-

formed by the pioneer, but never had he walked as he walked now. He seldom looked up ; he knew the stallion was going in a bee line to his destination, and there could be no short cuts. With scowling brows and lips set in a savage line, he kept on at the tremendous pace he had set himself. The sun scorched him ; the flies settled on his many wounds ; salt sweat trickled from his hair over his forehead, turning his eyes bloodshot ; the sole of one boot came away ; he flung himself down and tore off both boots, knowing he could not walk in one ; then he went on, until when he reached a stony patch and the hot stones cut his feet, the first grim chuckle broke from him.

‘Th’ odds air in y’r favour noo, Red Comet, ye’ve got hoofs.’

Noon had long passed, and the sun was blazing blood-red in the midst of black clouds, as it dipped westward ; a breeze met him in the face, and the flies true to their instincts, left the front of his body and packed in a mass on his back ; a few minutes later, and mosquitoes were swarming on his face.

‘Watter,’ he gasped, ‘we’re no’ far from where watter is, or ha’ been lately.’

He gazed at Red Comet and saw the big brute laboriously dragging itself up the side of an incline

‘Yin o’ us wins wi’in th’ hoor ; eef there’s watter there it’s him, eef there’s none it’s ma.’

He collected all his reserve of strength and broke into a Japanese jog-trot, the step with which the coolies kill distance. Every step was a torment for his feet, flayed by the scorched earth and cut by the stones, throbbed agonizingly, but he went on. The top of that long slope was reached at last ; he crossed a few yards of country on the ridge, then looked down into a bowl or basin which in the rainy season must have held a good volume of water—it was dry, and in the middle, where the depression was greatest, he saw



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McGlusky "masters" his stallion.

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Red Comet pawing at damp earth, nosing it, licking it with his dry tortured tongue; then the big brute pawed again; instinct told him there was water not very far below, and he pawed madly, for the torment of Gehenna was upon him.

'Ma God!' muttered McGlusky, 'ye gallan' beastie; eef it were ta be done ower again A'd let ye gae.'

Suddenly Red Comet went right down upon his knees, sinking his muzzle to the bottom of the hole he had scooped with his hoofs. Mac stole down upon him like a ghost, his lasso ready in his hands. Red Comet saw him as he approached, and tried to rise, but all the strength was out of him, he could not lift himself, but he turned his noble head, his leonine mane brushing the damp earth, and then the big eyes were fixed full on Mac's own, and if ever a king looked his scorn, it was in the dumb brute's eyes then. With a quick rush the pioneer was by the beaten monarch's side. He did not throw the lasso, but slipped the noose over the stallion's head. Another minute and the hobbles were on the great forelegs. Red Comet had slipped over on to his flank, his jaw lay flat upon the soil; he was nearly gone, but the pioneer knew the wondrous vitality and recuperative power of the wild horses that are bred from great stock. Swiftly he put the bridle that had been Pedro's on the great red bay head, and tenderly he forced the bit between the clenched teeth, noting as he did so that the tongue was black and swollen until it nearly filled the mouth. When this thing was done, he unslung one of the canvas water bags from his belt and, cradling the massive head in one arm, let a little water trickle over the discoloured tongue down the scarred throat. Scarcely a ripple stirred the giant frame.

'A'm feared y're sped, wae's ma, A'm feared y're sped.'

Again he tilted the water bag. Still no sign. The



pioneer put a thumb gently on one eyelid and raised it. The eyeball was glassy, but McGlusky thought he saw it quiver. Again he pressed the water bag to the baked mouth, and poured every drop of its contents down the contracted throat. This time there was no doubt about the result ; the horse moved, moved distinctly, and a big breath came slowly whistling through the bleeding nostrils. Mac laid the massive head down as gently as if it had been a babe's, and freed the last water bag from his belt.

'Noo A'll save ye.'

He raised the weary head again, and let the water gurgle over Red Comet's tongue to the last drain, and he had his reward when in a few moments the stallion tried to turn from his flank to his knees, but his vital force was too far spent, and he sank back.

'Ye'll dae, ma fren', ye'll dae. Bide still a wee, an' A'll ha' ye oop.'

He spoke as to a human being. Giving a turn of the lasso round a tree stump, he went down on hands and knees in the hole the horse had tried to paw out of the damp soil, and attacked the earth with his long bladed knife, scooping out the dirt with his hands until he felt the water bubble very slowly between his fingers. He had dug down to gravel, and his experience told him this water hole was what the bushmen call a 'soak.' There was no spring ; the rain water in the wet season poured from the high ground into the natural depression, and whatever liquid the sun did not scorch up, percolated through the porous soil into the strata of gravel below, and was held there. The pioneer worked with tigerish energy, scraping out gravel until he had sunk the hole three feet below the level of the gravel surface, and so formed a natural well into which water trickled, driven by the law which forces water always to find the lowest levels. Slowly the gravel bed sweated forth its treasure ; Mac measured it with his

hand, then found that he could fill his hat. No need to coax Red Comet to drink. As soon as the water touched his nostrils, he turned his muzzle and gulped down what was proffered him. A glad chuckle broke from Mac.

'Ye'll win oot, ma bonnie, y're gran', jest gran'.'

He sat on his heels and watched and waited until he could lift another hatful of water, and again the stallion sucked it up with one pull of his breath. So the hours sped; drink after drink was given and devoured, for the stallion's big body was on fire with the fever brought on by the fierce ordeal he had gone through. The pioneer knew he would not hurt the horse, because the pauses in between drinks were so long and a hatful was no more to the big animal than a spoonful would have been to a man. The dawn found Red Comet on his feet, weak from hunger, but out of danger; it found McGlusky ragged, scratched, cut and limping, with eyes bleary from want of sleep and flanks drawn in from fasting, but superbly elated. He looked towards the East where the sky was flushing a dainty salmon pink that heralded the birth of a new day, a new miracle. Then he let his eyes rove over the massive yet shapely proportions of his captive, and throwing out his arms he cried as the first red shaft of light announced the coming of the sun god:

'Lord, Thy works air wonnerfu'. Yon's a glorious dawnin', an'—an' A'm no' theenkin' ma an' ma stallion dae deescredit ta th' picture.'

The dawning and the stallion might easily have gone together in the eye of an artist, but just what part of the picture the pioneer would have filled unless the artist used him as a blot on the landscape, it would be hard to guess. No such thoughts troubled McGlusky; he was supremely content with himself as his parting apostrophe to the dawn proved up to the last button.

' Thank th' A'michty, A'm no' a weaklin'. An' noo A ha' a horse fit ta carry a king ; aye, Jamie, son o' Derrick McGlusky, fit ta carry yer ainsel'. Noo for a bit grass ta fill y'r belly, Red Comet.'

He undid the end of the lasso he had twined around the tree stump and moved soothingly towards the stallion. In a moment the big brute reared and tried to swing round, but Mac had passed the lasso through the rings of the cruel Spanish bit, and Red Comet got the first taste of discipline that had entered his nomadic life. The struggle was long and trying : hatred gleamed in Red Comet's eyes ; again and again he tried to ' savage ' the pioneer, when he found he could not escape, but McGlusky evaded every clumsy rush with ease, for the hobbles on the forelegs not only took the speed out of the stallion's movements, they upset his judgment ; creepers of trailing vine had caught him many a time in his wanderings, but no creeper had ever clung like these things that locked his legs. . He squealed in impotent fury, and when he thought he had a chance he pivoted and sent both heels at the head of the man who so skilfully avoided all his rushes. McGlusky never lost his temper.

' A'm no' blamin' ye, buckie, A'd dae th' same masel' gin A were in y'r place. Losh, tha' was a close yin ! Twa eenches lower doon an' ye'd ha' made an angel o' ma, an' A'm theenkin' A'd ha' needed a three-cornered halo ta fit ma head.'

He worked the animal out of the hollow and down the sloping ground beyond with infinite patience and skill, joying in the work that called upon the utmost of his strength and resource. Possibly if Red Comet had not been weakened by want of food, the pioneer would have found the task too much for his unaided efforts, for the water had brought back much of the stallion's strength and all his indomitable courage. After a long and exciting struggle, the animal was worked

close to a patch of grass, and the pioneer slipped the end of the raw hide lasso round the bottom of a giant thorn and made it secure.

'Ye'll dae noo ; A'll move off a few yards an' leave ye ta yersel', ye'll soon be eatin', A'm theenkin'.'

He took up a position close by, lit his pipe in the hope that tobacco might stay the cravings of his stomach, for he was feeling ravenously hungry, and wished he had not discarded his food when he had freed 'Pedro.' But in spite of hunger, he was possibly the happiest man in the Southern Hemisphere just then. The stallion stood champing the unaccustomed bit that galled his mouth and fretted his temper, but at last hunger drove him to make the best of it, and he started tearing off the grass in great wolfish mouthfuls.

'Ye'll be a nice packet ta han'le when ye're fu' o' meat, ma beastie. A'm weeshin' A had na sent ma laddie awa' ; there's plenty o' ostrich grass roon' about ; A theenk A'll try an' signal him, though A'm feared he's too far awa'. Still A'll no' complain, th' Almichty ha' been verra gude ta ma ; His lovin' marcies like the dew fra hivin ha' fallen on ma ; there maun be some gude in ye, Jamie McGlusky, or th' Lord wud no' croon ye wi' sic success as this. Ye canna sing, but ye can mak' a joyous noise before th' Lord. Wha' ees it th' auld hymn says :

"Gie praise f'r wha' we ha',  
An' f'r wha' we air about ta receive,  
Gie praise—gie praise,  
F'r wha' we air about ta receive,  
Gie pr——"

He bit the last word off in the middle, for on the slope above him rose the body of Black Pedro the hunter, and half a dozen 'breeds' rose with him. Black Pedro had McGlusky's own rifle at his shoulder, and his vindictive eyes were gleaming down the barrel.

'For what you are about to receive, McGlusky, give praise!'

The mocking words came jeeringly on the wind.

'A'm dommed eef A dae.'

'Do you want lead for breakfast?'

'A'm no' needin' it ava.'

'Well, get up and march.'

'Verra weel, A'll just unhitch ma stallion an' A'll gae.'

Black Pedro laughed aloud and every 'breed' grinned.

'How many cartridges does this Winchester o' yours carry, McGlusky?'

'Fifteen, na mair na less.'

'Well, if you don't move off without the stallion in ten seconds, I'll pump the lot into you; that stallion belongs to me; and I'll put my brand on him before sundown. Now move.'

The pioneer knew when he was up against destiny. He rose and moved away. As he did so, Pedro, who was possessed of a devil, shouted:

'McGlusky!'

'Weel?'

'I was educated at the mission.'

'Weel?'

'I know that hymn you were singing.'

All the blood went out of the pioneer's face and left him the colour of granite.

'Dom th' hymn.'

Pedro picked up McGlusky's wallet of food and threw it to him as he would have thrown offal to a dog.

'I found this when I found your rifle, and sheep-skin saddle; take it and finish the hymn.' Then he chanted in a rich, melodious voice inherited from his negro ancestors:

'For what we are about to receive  
Give praise—give praise.'



'A'm thankin' ye, Black Pedro.'

McGlusky's voice was low and steady. He did not threaten what he would do when his turn came; he did not rave and rage; it was not his way. With his head in the air he walked slowly to the water hole, nor did he once look back, though at every step he expected to feel a bullet smashing between his blade-bones, for in the far pampas every man is a law unto himself and the law of the cities never troubles about the death of a casual hunter or prospector. When he had filled his canvas bags, he sat calmly down and ate a full meal, and all the time his shrewd, canny brain was working. At last Black Pedro rode to the top of the mound and looked down exultantly on the Scot Australian. Then Black Pedro lifted his hat, copying the fine gesture of courtesy which all real South Americans, either 'distingrados' or peons, are born with.

'Adios! Señor McGlusky, ten thousand thanks for all the trouble you took to capture my horse for me. Adios!'

McGlusky rose, and standing straight as a spear-shaft, slowly lifted his own battered hat.

'God be wi' ye, Black Pedro, till we meet again.' Then, lifting his eyes solemnly to the skies: 'Ma Maker, ye ha' smitten ma sore in th' hoor o' ma triumph; gran' ma yin thing in return, ainly yin; gran' tha' neither fire nor flood, nor th' vengeance o' mon or any ither harm befa' Black Pedro till he fa's inta ma han's; then eef A dinna sew his breeks on ta him wi' his ain sinews, ca' ma a weaklin'.'

He stood a little later on the top of the rise, a ragged, bootless, bloodstained, lonely figure, and watched from under his hand Red Comet with half a dozen lariats noosed round him being driven away in the centre of a crowd of 'breeds,' each one of whom with the inherent cruelty of their kind, cut at the noble captive with their 'revinkees,' raw hide whips which a

'breed' never lays aside, even in his sleep, for it is carried on a loop over the wrist. At each stroke the stallion received, the pioneer winced, as if his own flesh quivered to the stroke.

'A'd mak' a garden in hell an' sow it wi' watter melons gin th' de'il wad gie ma a rifle an' a score cartridges.'

He looked round as if he half hoped his pagan bargain would be accepted, and if it had been, few of those 'breeds' would have travelled far.

A long way out Black Pedro swung his hack round, and seeing the lonely watching figure, he stood high in the stirrups and saluted again with his hat, and McGlusky with just such a gesture as an ancient Highland chief might have used, raised his hat, and so he stood in the red glow of a surly sunset, alone but indomitable.

## CHAPTER XII

### MERCY MIXED WI' A' THINGS

**D**ERRY was busying himself about camp, when happening to look up, he saw his partner reeling towards him, and in the twinkling of an eye the lad read disaster in the sight. He sprang forward at a swift run, and flinging an arm around the pioneer, propped his own lean strong shoulder under the big man's arm-pit, for McGlusky staggered like a very drunken man.

'Wae's ma, buckie.'

'Shut up; bad news'll keep; let me get you under cover.'

The first mate had taken the helm with a vengeance, and meant to keep it. Mac gave him just one look and submitted; he had the sense to know good steel when he saw it, and there was steel in Derry's big eyes just then, fighting steel. Mac fell on the floor of the tent like a log. Derry slipped a folded blanket under his head for a pillow.

'A'll sleep a wee, mannie.'

'I'll feed you first.'

The youth moved with the deftness of a woman, no hurry, but lots of speed in every motion. Cold tea, biscuits, tinned meat appeared at the pioneer's elbow like magic. He took a mouthful.

'A canna—le' ma sleep.'

'And wake up with nothing in you to fight on? Not much, partner.'

At the word 'fight,' Mac started to his elbow.

'Ye're richt, buckie, y'r head's no' mud.'

He wolfed his food, then dropped much as Red Comet had dropped by the dry water hole. He slept as soundly as the seven sleepers, and whilst he rested the Liverpool lad stripped him bare of his tattered garments, then he got warm water and bathed the pioneer's mangled feet.

'Dunno what's happened, but he never walked his feet into this state for fun; somebody or something's going to pay f'r this.'

He washed the sleeping man from head to foot as he lay miles deep in slumber, then he got ointment and did his best, and it was not a bad best, for this friend who in times past had done so much for him. When all was done he went out and watered the horses, then put food and things ready for instant travel.

'If he hasn't got anything to go for when he wakes, there's no harm done; if he has, why we're ready. Wonder where the devil he left his rifle. Well, he can have mine, and I'll take the axe; I won't miss with that if I get close enough to anything that wants hittin'.'

Again he went over the kit he had prepared, to see if he had omitted anything. Then he missed the sheepskin Mac had used for a saddle and Mac's bridle.

'This hasn't been a rainfall, it's been a deluge; I'll try my hand at bridle making—good job I followed the sea, makes a man handy.'

He was working as he talked, and when at last McGlusky awoke and sat up, things were as shipshape as if he had prepared them himself.

'Hoo lang ha' ye let ma sleep, mannie?'

'Four hours, partner. I'd have made it fourteen if you hadn't waked on your own account.'

'Foor hoors' sleep is mair than enouch f'r any mon, buckie; Napoleon did na need mair when he were conquering th' worl'.' He made a move to rise, and then realized the state of his feet. 'Tear ma clean shirt inta strips an' bind oop ma twa feet, they're a wee bittie th' waur f'r wear.'

'Bet Napoleon would have done with more than four hours, partner, if he'd had feet like these; they don't look like feet, they're more like pie melons ripe to bursting.'

'They're no' nice ta look at, tie 'em oop.'

Derry, who had bandaged many a man badly scalded by bursting steam pipes in engine-rooms, did his work well and quickly.

'Noo, split ma blanket inta strips, an' bind 'em roon' ma feet; naething sae saft an' springy as a gude bit o' blanketing f'r a lame mon ta walk on.'

The job was soon done, and in an incredibly short space of time the pair were riding hard in the direction of the trader's store, and as they rode McGlusky told of his struggle with Red Comet and the attack by Black Pedro and the 'breeds.'

'Wish I'd happened along with my rifle,' was the Liverpool lad's pithy comment.

'Niver mind, mannie, A feel in ma innards there's a gay time comin' f'r Black Pedro. Gin some gude angel gies him inta ma han', A'll mak' him sing:

"F'r wha' we air aboot ta receive,  
Lord mak' ma truly thankfu'."

'He may sing it, but if he thinks it, call me a liar,' chuckled Derry.

They said little after that for the rest of the journey. Once after a very long silence Derry asked:

'Thinking out a plan, partner?'

'A'm thenkin' oot ways o' makin' life eenterestin' ta Black Pedro.'



' Nice for him.'

' A'm no' sure, ma buckie, A'm no' sure ; some men ha' a habit o' takin' their pleasures sadly.'

When at last they came within a few hours' journey of the trader's homestead, McGlusky swung away in a westerly direction.

' What's the game, old sportsman ?'

' A'm no' gawn ta th' trader's, A'm gawn direct ta Black Pedro's cabin. A ken where it is, yon trader told ma.'

' Better go to the trader and borrow another rifle ; Black Pedro will have a mob o' " breeds " with him.'

' He'll be needin' 'em.'

They rode on until at last the pioneer discerned the smoke rising from his enemy's shack.

' Noo we'll tether th' horses an' stalk Black Pedro an' his gang.'

' You can't walk with those feet, partner '

' A canna leave 'em behin', ma mannie. A'm gawn f'r ma stallion, eef A ha' ta lay doon on ma belly an' wriggle.'

The light of a smile leapt into Derry's eyes at the indomitable will power of his mate. The pain the big man endured as he stalked his foe was written upon his cast-iron face, but no sound came from his lips ; the sweat of agony bathed him from brow to chin, and his comrade could see the thigh muscles of his sinewy legs contracting and quivering at every step. Only once did he break his adamant silence : his right foot struck a projecting root ; he stopped, drew a massive forearm across his eyes and whispered :

' Eef hell ha' anything waur than this, Lord gie ma grace ta bear it when ma hoor o' penance coomes.'

Then, moistening his lips with his tongue, he went on.

In a little cleared place in front of a rude shack six ' breeds ' were holding a mighty red bay horse, not

a dark chestnut, nor a true bay, but red bay, nearly the colour of a Venetian woman's hair. The 'breeds' had the big beast roped; a lariat was round each leg, and two more round his neck, with a 'breed' at the far end of each lariat, and they stood apart at every possible angle. Somehow the proud, panting, furious beast was reminiscent of Samson in the toils of the Philistines. Half a dozen other 'breeds' lounged upon the outskirts, with tin pannikins of aguante in their hands, cigarettes in their mouths—as wicked and dissolute a crowd as the heart of a freebooter could desire. Their horses could be seen tethered not far away, ready for use, for they had knowledge of the big animal roped in the open space, and knew that roped as he was, he might, if luck favoured him, break away. Black Pedro was squatting on his heels in front of a fire, heating a branding-iron red hot. He turned his head and called:

'Make three of those lariats fast to stumps in the ground; you've had too much aguante, all of you.'

One 'breed' who held a neck rope did the leader's behest; one who had roped the near foreleg did likewise; and the 'breed' who had roped the off hind leg followed suit. The horse stood quivering from ears to hocks—rage, fear, wonderment in his eyes.

McGlusky, lying flat by the side of Derry in the bushes, breathed but one sentence:

'Ma stallion.'

Black Pedro rose with the red-hot branding-iron in his hand, a cruel, exultant look in his sullen eyes. By the unwritten law of the wilds, when once that brand was burnt into the glossy hide, the noble beast was his.

'Ready, partner?'

The cool young voice, with scarce a tremor in it, came in a sibilant whisper.

'No' yet.'

Black Pedro advanced with swift strides towards Red Comet.

'Noo buckie.'

Derry rose to his knee, flung his rifle forward and covered the astonished 'breeds.'

'Han's oop, ye dunghill dawgs! Th' yin tha' moves dees!'

Then the tattered figure of the pioneer rose, an American axe in his hands; bearded, haggard with pain, his bloodshot eyes full of unspeakable menace, he looked, as Derry graphically explained later, like the figure of the god of vengeance after a night out among the bottles.

Derry said nothing; he had no need to—his menacing Winchester was petrified eloquence. The 'breeds' lifted their hands high, for except in rare instances, their kind have small stomach for a fight, unless their opponents are at their mercy. Black Pedro stopped in his tracks, mouth agape, eyes rolling. McGlusky forgot his maimed feet, forgot that he was a civilized man, forgot all things in heaven and earth except the taunting mockery of a hymn that had never ceased to beat on the drums of his ears since he had heard Black Pedro sing it. He lifted up his unmelodious voice and, regardless of time, tune or circumstance, bellowed:

"For wha' he is aboot ta receive,  
Lord mak' yon dom gommerill thanku'."

Then he charged, as Highlanders charge on belching guns.

Black Pedro wasn't thankful; perhaps the pioneer's prayer hadn't had time to reach the mercy seat; and as he rushed forward, axe in hand, McGlusky didn't look as if he was bringing good gifts with him. Black Pedro, heedless of Derry's rifle, wheeled to flee, but as well might a sea-gull fly before a storm. Three bounds

took the pioneer level with the man who had robbed him first and mocked him afterwards; a jerk of the axe, and the branding iron was on the ground. What McGlusky called a 'wee bit tap' followed on the back of Black Pedro's head, and he sprawled on the earth. That one stroke at a human being woke some latent demon in the pioneer; he scorned to touch a fallen foe, but the 'breeds' were left; they, too, had mocked him; he went to them, turning the axe in his hand so that, as he put it to Derry later, he might 'gie them th' saft side o' 't, no' th' edge or th' butt, ye ken.' What the soft side of an American axe may be, no chronicler has yet defined; the 'breeds' never expressed any opinion on the subject; they had long knives in their gaudy sashes, but they also had fear and plenty of it in their boots, and fear is winged. One ruffian who got 'th' saft side o' th' axe' on the ribs, laid down and refused to be comforted; the rest streaked for their horses. Derry, seeing there was no need for trigger-work, rushed forward and did rude things with the butt, whilst the pioneer, after the first stroke, used only the axe handle. The wild yelling, the dust, the shrill neighing of horses, drove Red Comet frantic; he plunged and reared and fought with his bonds, but the 'breeds' had fixed him beyond all equine power of escape.

When the 'breeds' fled, the pioneer turned his glowing eyes on the clearing, and saw Black Pedro stealing away.

'Stop him or drop him, buckie!'

The raucous voice pealed the order out in trumpet tones. Black Pedro heard and understood. It was well he did, for there was little pity for him in Derry's eyes as the Winchester went up.

'He left you to die out on the plains, you barefooted and half beat, with no horse; he meant murder if he didn't do it, partner.'

' Dinna shoot, sonnie; we'll gie him th' law an' th' justice o' 't; we maun dae naething in anger, it's no' decent. He shall dreenk his cup, fu' measure, but no' brimmin' ower.'

He ordered Black Pedro to him, lifting his hat that looked grotesquely battered as he did so, but his enemy was in no mood for social amenities; he cringed as he obeyed the order: all that fine jaunty devilry he had displayed when baiting an unarmed and half broken rival had flown.

' Y're no' sae gay an' debonair as when ye lef' ma on ma lone in th' wilds yonner, señor.'

Black Pedro made a weak gesture, just as a cur dog will half wag its tail in the presence of a better dog it has snarled at through a fence. Mac, who had been leaning upon his axe, threw it away from him. He reached out an arm and touched a knife in the sash his enemy wore.

' They say ye've killed mair than yin mon wi' that. A theenk they lee, unless ye stabbed from th' back or in th' dark.'

Black Pedro twiddled his thumbs nervously.

' A ha' a knife; wull ye fecht? '

The mongrel-bred one called on all the saints in the calendar, and some he invented, to bear witness that he was a man of peace. The pioneer heard him right through with wonderful patience, then with a gesture of his hand:

' A canna kick ye, ma feet air too sair; eef A had a bit boot on yin fut, A'd drive it sae hard inta y'r hunkers, ye'd be able ta tie y'r hair wi' th' laces. Whose brandin'-airn's yon? '

' Mine—señor.'

' Derry, ma buckie, get yon brandin'-airn an' put it in th' fire.'

' Sure thing.'

Black Pedro watched the iron getting redder and



redder in the fire. Something in the uncanny calm of this man whom he had outraged made him feel as if his clothes didn't fit, even where they touched him. Suddenly McGlusky lifted the axe, and this time Black Pedro saw two little white lines of froth at the corners of his mouth.

' Strip ! '

' Mercy, señor ! '

' Strip ! '

With fingers that shook as with an ague, the colossus took off his garments, and stood as grand a figure of man as ever faced daylight. McGlusky's voice came purringly; no wood-dove in the mating season ever spoke more woingly.

' A heard ye sing yince, ainly yince, but A've niver gotten th' soond oot o' ma ears.'

He pushed his bearded chin within an inch of the black face that had turned grey round the mouth, and in a blaze of wrath that made his whole frame vibrate, he snarled :

' Seeng, seeng noo, th' same theeng ye sang ta ma yonner by th' dry watter hole.'

Three times the cavernous black mouth opened wide, but no sound came forth.

' Seeng, dom ye, seeng.'

The axe went up with a swing that made it hiss in the air. Then Black Pedro found his voice.

“ For what we are about to receive,  
Lord make us truly thankful.” ’

' Seeng it again; put mair warble inta it, mair curly bits; chase her oop th' stairs an' doon th' back alleys o' th' ceety o' song, as ye did when ye had ma at y'r mercy, ye—ye indiarubber eemage o' eeneequety.'

Derry would have laughed aloud, had it not been for the suppressed ferocity in his partner's manner

Black Pedro sang again, and did his best under the

circumstances to 'put in the curly bits,' by which McGlusky evidently meant trills and quavers. As a vocal effort it could not have been considered a classic, but the pioneer must have been satisfied, for as Black Pedro chased the last words 'doon th' alleys o' th' ceety o' song,' he sprang to the fire, and seizing the branding-iron from Derry, he faced round again, on his enemy. Black Pedro saw the red-hot branding-iron and, naked as he was, fled. The pioneer forgot his mashed and lacerated feet, forgot all mundane things, except Black Pedro; he caught him half-way across the clearing, and plunged the iron at him where the flesh lay deepest; the air was filled with the smell of sizzling flesh, and horrid imprecations. Thrice the iron reached the black hide ere Black Pedro reached the limit of the little clearing and plunged into the scrub. Then McGlusky threw down the brand and hobbled to Derry.

'Weel, A'm hopin' he's truly thankfu' f'r wha' he received. A gave him yin f'r himself an' yin f'r Red Comet, an' yin as a reward f'r singin' ta ma. A'm no' sure, but A'm o' th' opeenion th' nex' time his fren's ask him ta mak' harmony at th' expense o' anither mon, he'll maybe ha' some slight recollections o' Jamie McGlusky.'

'He'll never sit in a saddle without thinking of you, partner,' grinned Derry.

'Na, he wull no'; yon brand he meant f'r ma stallion bit a'michty deep; he meant ta burn richt through th' hide instead o' just burnin' through th' hair an' touchin' th' skin. Wha' he were gawn ta gie he got. A'm theenkin' we'll free Red Comet an' get a move on.'

'Wait a bit, partner, there's a nice-looking animal tethered over yonder; I guess it belongs to this "breed" who hasn't attempted to get away since you touched him with the flat o' your axe.'

'Th' spunkless gommerill—A did na mair than cloot th' wind oot o' him. Weel, he an' his robbed ma, an' A'll tak' his horse eef it's worth takin'. Dae unta ithers wha' they try ta dae ta ye. A'd rather do than be done by any mon; eet may no' be screepture, but eet's human.' He went and looked the 'breed's' horse over. 'Ma certie, wee mannie, God's gude ta ye' th' day.'

'Why, partner?'

'This filly is just aboot oop t'r y'r weight, an' she's a lady. A'll tak' ma oath yon "breed" never cam' by her honestly; she's o' racin' stock.'

'How could he loot her?'

'Hoo? It's done often: yin o' th' han's in a breedin' ranche changes a brood racin' mare's foal, replacin' it wi' a commoner, an' sells it ta yin o' these "breeds" f'r a song. Look at her, an' love her; she'll gallop far an' gallop fast unner y'r weight. Tak' her an' thank God, an'—an' dinna speer too closely inta th' won'rous workings o' providence.'

Derry accepted this bit of philosophy without a murmur—after all, it was only spoiling the spoilers, and that law is as old as primitive man, and will be in existence when the last two humans are griddling cakes by the heat of the last sunbeam.

The removal of Red Comet was a work of difficulty and danger, for the stallion was savage and vindictive after the brutal treatment the 'breeds' had given him, but by degrees they got him to their camp by the big spring, and made him secure, and then, but not till then, the pioneer let his partner see how he was suffering.

'Mannie, A'll ha' ta trust ta ye ta be watchdog an' a' things else; ma twa feet air burstin'; A'm fly-poisoned A'm theenkin', an' A'll ha' ta lay oop while ye gather marshmallow near th' spring an' boil it an' mak' ma poultices.'

'That's all right; only Mac, don't you tell me not to shoot if I see any of that gang hanging round, for I tell you straight, I'm going to shoot.

'Weel, ma son, eef th' speerit moves ye ta shoot, dae it, but dinna waste ma ammunition; ye canna get a peso f'r a "breed's" skin, there's na market f'r 'em.'

He turned to hobble painfully to the tent, and in doing so went too near Red Comet's heels. The stallion lashed out; McGlusky sensed the danger but could not avoid it; the great hoof took him fairly in the hind quarters, and lifted him yards; fortunately he was almost out of range, and got only just enough of the force of the kick to speed him headlong on his way, and whilst he went he travelled like an engine that has bolted down grade. Derry picked him up with all speed.

'Smashed something I'm afear'd this time, Old Timer.'

'A dinna theenk A'm smashed, mannie, but A'm feared wha' was ahint ma ha' been kickit through ta th' front; it'll no' improve ma feegure. It were a waesome skelp he gied ma. Eef his hoof ha' got right unner ma A'd be humpbacked f'r life.'

'The vicious devil.'

'Hoots, buckie, ye've na sense ava; ye'd dae th' same y'r ainsel' eef some mon had made ye a preesoner f'r life. He hates ma noo, but yin o' these days he'll love ma like a brither.'

'All right, if that's the way you look at it; it was you the big devil kicked, not me.'

When Derry had got him into his blankets and examined him, he asked:

'Wha' dae ye theenk o' 't, buckie; a wee bittie bruised, is 't no'?''

Derry gasped at the cast-iron hardihood that took such a hurt so philosophically.

'A wee bittie—on my soul, partner, I'd like to know what you'd call a real hurt. You look to me as if a shunting engine had caught you at your prayers; your butt end is as black as a boot, and half way up your back you're red and yellow and crimson like a rainbow peeping through a fog. If that kick had landed a few inches higher up, it would have smashed your spine—curse that horse.'

'Na, na, dinna curse ma stallion, he was ainly an eenstrument; th' theeng itsel' were a veesitation o' providence ta hum'le ma. A nicht ha' gotten puffed oop wi' pride, seein' A'd rubbed the noses o' ma enemies in th' dirt. In this life, ma son, th' strong yins tak' th' honey wi' th' gall.'

'Well, I don't know whether your pride is puffed up or not, but the part Red Comet kicked is; if it goes on swelling like this it'll be as big as Cape Cod in the morning.'

'Oh aye, he's a gran' keecker, ma stallion, naething ha'f-hearted about anything he daes.'

'Not in the least; he tried to eat me just now when I was going for water.'

'Ye'll deal faithfully wi' him whiles A'm restin' here, ma son?'

'I will.'

Derry spoke with emphasis which Mac in his single-ness of heart mistook for earnestness.

'Y're a gran' mate, barrin' a streak o' eediocy ye ha' in ye, mannie, but none o' us air perfec'—A'm no' masel'.' Then, with a smile that was childlike, he remarked: 'This kick on ma hunkers cam' straight fra th' han' o' providence, buckie.'

'Did it? I thought it came straight from the hoof o' that damned horse.'

'Ye shud learn ta luk' richt back ta primal causes, an'—an' forgit th' eentermediary eenstruments. A—A cursed providence when A were limpin' in fra th'



great plain, an' thocht A'd lost ma bonny stallion, an' that curse ha' come hame ta roost.'

'It's roosting all right.'

'Dae ye no' see hoo mercifu' th' Lord were ta ma even when He punishit ma?'

'Oh yes,' scoffed Derry, 'the mercy of it is sticking out all over you.'

'A'm glad ye ken it; ye said yersel' ma spine wad ha' been shattered eef A'd got ma medicine a few inches higher oop. Th' Lord is mair mercifu' than mon, Derry; Black Pedro offendit ma an' A pushed yin brandin'-airn red hot on him, no' on his hunkers alane, but wherever A cud push 't, as he bolted, an'—an' A'm dommed eef A'm sorry A did, e'en noo, unregenerate son o' Belial as A am. Th' Lord used Red Comet as an eenstrument, as A used th' brandin'-airn, but he ainly gied me yin bit skelp.' He lifted himself on his elbow. 'A tell ye, buckie, eet's as sure as doom, everything tha' comes fra th' Lord is mixed wi' marcy.'

It was five full weeks before even McGlusky's chilled-steel constitution could throw off the effects of his hurts. His lacerated feet which the flies had poisoned gave him exquisite torture, which he bore without once murmuring at his mate, though in the still watches of the night Derry often heard him praying in his own half-heathen fashion, and at times talking to his spirit friends, and at odd intervals Derry had to chew his blanket to keep from internal combustion. After a more than usually fierce twinge of agony either on the part Red Comet had kicked or from his poisoned feet, he would launch an appeal for help into space.

'A'm no' unmin'fu' o' a' Thy marcies, or Thy justice, Lord, but gie ma a bit relief or A'll bust inta profanity—wow—ouch—oh, ye blastie, wad ta God A cud mak' a' th' flies o' th' weelderness inta yin an' ha'

yin gude skelp at it.' Then a pause, and palpitating silence in the darkness. 'Ten toes an' a thoosan' de'ils pullin' an' tweestin' at each yin—ouch—ho—hell—Lord, gie ma grace ta bite on th' steel th' guts ma . . . Air ye here th' noo, Mahomet? Ye kenned a' aboot flies; ye were raised in th' desert an' han'led camels, an' naething draws flies waur than camels, unless its poleeticians—they're baith dirty. Gin y're in this neighbourhood, Mahomet, be a gude buckie, an'—an' magnetize ma twa feet—ouch—Jumpin' Sarah, yon were a de'il o' a tug at ma great toe. A'm no' theenkin' that were ye, Mahomet; eef it were, ye maun ha' been a gran' prophet, but y're a dom fule as a medicine man, meanin' na disrespec' ta yersel'. Ouch—by th' whuskers o' Solomon, A canna stan' mair o' y'r meenistrations th' nicht, Mahomet, it's na camels y're han'lin'. Chuck oop th' medicnie job, an' gang awa' ta y'r prophesyin', there's a lot o' fules on the newspapers jumpin' y'r job.'

During his terrific suffering, he was gratitude itself to his youthful friend, and Derry, who saw how the agony racked him, wondered at his patience, for in health the pioneer could be fiercely impatient. When dressing the damaged feet Derry would say:

'Sorry, old sportsman, if I hurt you; this is a woman's job by rights; all my fingers feel like thumbs.'

'A'm hopin' A'll niver ha' a worse nurse, mannie; y'r fingers feel as ten'er as boiled chicken ta ma, ye ha' th' healer's touch.'

And that praise did wonders for the lad. He cooked and nursed, fed and watched the horses, and was in fact the spirit of protection for the camp. As Mc-Glusky mended he began to get a little bit impatient.

'Ye ken it's th' speerit movin' ma in ma soul, urg'in' ma ta be oop an' daein'; A'm just bubblin' ower wi' eagerness ta begin th' breakin' in o' Red Comet, but A daur na tackle that job till th' full o' ma strength

returns, f'r A maun be his maister fra th' moment th' fecht begins; there maun be no ha'f-way hoose beesiness aboot it, A maun conquer him or be conquered once an' f'r a', then there wull be perfec' confidence atween us.'

'You feed up and get strong, and I'll put him on short rations an' get him a bit weak, Mac.'

'Losh, buckie, ye've na cheevalry in ye at a'. Na, na, it maun be a fair fecht; gie him his fu' strength an' gie ma mine, an' we'll ha' it oot fair an' square; he'll na best ma yince A'm on his back, unless he kills ma, an' eef he daes, ye'll gie him his freedom an' let him roam th' wilds.'

'Sure thing, I'll set him free all right.' Then in an undertone to his own soul, 'Yes, I'll set him free if he kills you—with a bullet.'

It was wonderful to note how McGlusky schooled his temper in those days, curbing his fierce desire to begin the combat with Red Comet. As his feet got better, he started trapping to kill the time and earn money. Then one day, after looking very carefully at the dainty filly Derry had got from the 'breed' by the law of the wilds, he said:

'Dae ye ken ye've got a treasure in yon filly, buckie?'

'She's a little lady, old sportsman, she's as gentle as a dove, she'd follow me now like a dog. I've been digging into our sugar supplies on her account, partner.'

'A kenned tha', an' A liked ye th' mair f'r it; ye thocht A didn'a notice, eh?' There was a kindly twinkle in his eyes as he spoke. 'A keeked at ye when A was ill, an' saw ye moistenin' brown sugar an' dryin' it square in th' sun. A kenned it was f'r yon lady—wha' dae ye ca' her, Derry?'

'Just that, Mac—My Lady.'

'Laddie, A've hopes o' ye yet, there's poetry in th'

soul o' ye, ye've picked a dainty name f'r a dainty beastie. Wad ye like ta teach her tricks?'

'Don't know how.'

'A dae, an' A'll teach ye.'

'Teach my filly you mean, old sport.'

'Na, a mon should teach his ain.'

Then the big man, who could train horse or dog to do nearly anything except talk, explained the method of it all, and Derry trained My Lady, and those were the happiest days his life had known. The filly was taught to come to a call, to trot eagerly forward to a whistle and to gallop to her master at a peculiar shrill cry; she was trained to lie down and lend her body to her master for a rest for his rifle, and taught to kneel to let a wounded man crawl on to her back.

'A learnt yon trick fra th' Cossacks when A were wi' them, it's gey usefu', was the pioneer's comment on the latter exploit.

'You seem to have picked up something useful whêrever you have been, Mac.'

'Tha's why A travelled, sonnie; A'd like ta be president o' Australia yin o' these fine days, an' th' mon who fills that job maun know things firsthan', because he'll be dealin' wi' firsthan' people.'

'Wouldn't New Zealand do as well as Australia, Mac?'

'New Zealan' an' Australia will be yin nation yin o' these days, buckie; it's written large on th' walls o' destiny; an', ma certie, wha' a nation they'll mak'—Maori an' Pakehas an' hard-bitten Australian, th' salt o' th' earth an' th' might thereof: brain, bone an' brawn amang th' men, an' beauty, grace an' gudeness amang th' wummin. Aye, A'd like fine ta be their presiden'; A've dreamed o' 't, worked f'r 't, travelled ta gather weesdom f'r 't since th' day A pulled at ma mither's dugs; an', he added modestly, 'A theenk A'm maist fitted f'r th' job.'



'You'll be president o' somewhere before you die, partner.'

'A wull, an' f'r that end was A born.'

They sat in silence for a time after that outburst, Derry watching the wild bees gathering honey, Mac looking into his own soul and taking it to pieces, a thing few men dare do. After a while Derry, who had noticed an enraged bee plunge its sting into a bit of fungus because its legs had been caught in a spider's cobweb, remarked :

'Funny beggars bees are, Mac.'

'Why?'

'Well, when a bee goes back to its hive without its sting, the others always kill it.'

'They dinna, buckie.'

'I've taken stings out of lots with a handkerchief, and let 'em crawl into the hive, and next day I've seen the bees carry them out dead.'

'Ye've ainly gleaned ha'f knowledge, mannie, an' ha'f knowledge is dom dangerous—ye killed th' bees.'

'That so? Tell me about it.'

'Th' sting o' a bee is its ainly weapon; eef ye examined it ye'd see it were shaped like a harpoon; yince driven in it canna be pulled oot. A dinna ken why natur' made that law, onless it were ta teach th' bee no' ta be too dom ready ta start a row. Ye may ha' observed a honey bee ha' a blastie's ain temper.'

'I have, partner.'

'Weel, when th' bee drives its harpoon into anything, it gies a jerk ta recover it, an' ruptures its inwards, an' th' rupture is a' times fatal, but th' bee thinks o' its duty ta th' hive ta th' last, its duty ta th' community it belongs ta, an' flies hame wi' its honey or its pollen, an' deposits it in th' hive; then th' game wee buckie turns its face ta th' wall an' snuffs oot; it dees o' rupture. Th' workin' bees inside th' hive haul th' carcass oot, so's it shall na



contaminate th' honey stored f'r th' nex' generation. Ye see yon buckie ha' freed himsel' fra' th' cobweb ; noo watch him, he's off hame, an' yet he kens he's got his death woun' wi' him. Hoo mony men, dae ye think, wad ha' th' guts ta stick ta duty like yon sma' beastie ? A tell ye, laddie, th' fowls o' th' air an' th' beasts o' th' field verra often shame us a', an' we ca' oorsel's th' lords o' creation ; tak' awa' oor troosers which air maistly th' sign o' oor sovereignty, an' where wud we be ? '

## CHAPTER XIII

### McGLUSKY PLANS A FORTUNE

IT was whilst McGlusky was on his road to perfect health that he gave voice to an idea he had been hatching.

‘ Buckie, A’ve been theenkin’ that sometimes when we invent wha’ we thenk is a lee, we air in reality drawin’ upon some mysterious source o’ information.’

A joyous grin illuminated Derry’s countenance.

‘ Ma’ A ask why ye air transfeegurin’ th’ face th’ A’michty gied ye? It’s no’ a bad face if ye let it alane, but when ye grin like tha’, ye look like a nigger tha’ theenks he’s drinkin’ gin an’ watter, an’ is gettin’ Epsom salts instead.’

‘ Bit touchy to-night, aren’t you, partner? ’

‘ A’m no’, but A’ve a gran’ scheme f’r a fortune, an’ A dug it oot o’ a lee ye told Black Pedro.’

‘ Glad to hear that big waster has been of so much use in the world. What’s the scheme, Mac? ’

‘ Dae ye mind tellin’ him we were comin’ oot after ostriches, an’ were goin’ ta build a corral an’ tame ’em an’ raise feathers? ’

‘ I do. That was not a lie, it was——’

‘ It was brushin’ th’ bloom off th’ petals o’ th’ flower o’ truth—at th’ time, son.’

‘ What has put that yarn into your head now, partner? ’

‘ There is sens in ’t.’

' You think it could be worked ? '

' A dae, when A've broken ma stallion. We'll ha' twa gude horses, My Lady an' Red Comet ; we'll hunt an' trap a' this district first, an' get stores fra th' trader, then we'll pack back ta th' country between here an' th' place where we were seekin' th' Rosas treasure, A noticed it was gran' ostrich country ; A'll sit on ma ain head eef it's no' th' regular hatchin' groon' f'r maist o' th' big birds in these pairts. We can mak' gude siller, A'm theenkin', in mony ways, but we maun wait until after th' hatchin' an' catch th' birds we mean ta tame while they're young.'

' Any old game that will suit you will do for me, partner.'

' Weel, there's na harm in tellin' ye wha' A ken fra personal observation aboot th' king o' birds. A've studied 'em an' they're won'erfu'. We can gae on curin' oor pelts as A talk, f'r eef we're gawn inta th' ostrich beesiness ye'll need knowledge. It's th' " bull " bird ye need ta study, th' hen dinna coont f'r mooch—in a' creation there's naething tha' coonts as little in th' scheme o' theengs as a hen ostrich. Maist ither animals an' birds owe th' best tha's in them ta th' female side ; in this case, ma buckie, th' ladies o' th' hoose dinna coont mooch mair than a knocker on a door, th' " bull " fills near th' whole bill, an' owes mighty little ta his mither, f'r she lets him gae on his lonesome as sune as he is able ta peck oop a leevin'. When a young " bull " conseeders he's mon enough ta run a hame on his ain account, he stalks off inta th' wilds an' selects a site f'r a hame ; he picks oot a big roomy bunch o' grass, gaes inside 't, an' treads doon th' middle o' 't, breakin' off every stem ; then he widens th' circle by duckin' doon his head an' spinnin' his body roon' like a bairn's top, an' th' way he whirls roon' is a caution ta a' creation ; he leaves naething standin' on th' eenside o' his bunch

o' grass, but th' outer edges he leaves alone; he maistly leaves a grass wall about five fut thick an' ten feet high ta protect his nest fra winds an' rains. The grass is green an' fu' o' sap when he makes his selection, so he daes na dae mair than break it doon. When he ha' done this, it's his by a' th' laws o' honesty an' decency, as his tribe unnerstan' honesty. His next move is ta prospect roon' th' adjacent country ta ken wha' sort o' feedin' groon' it is f'r himsel', an' there's mighty little tha' escapes his eyes; he learns evn inch o' 't by heart; he keeks at any spot on his patrol tha' may harbour enemies, an' he makes life a meery hell f'r any four-footed prowler he may come across. There's naethin' on th' pampas wull stan' oop ta him an' gie him a fecht; th' foxes skiddoo f'r their lives at sicht o' him', an fast as they air, he runs 'em doon in short order eef they tak' ta th' open country, an' eef they tak' ta th' thorns they attend streectly ta beesiness when he's after them; they can move like shadows, but when th' thorns air no verra thick, he can geet about amang them fast enouch ta keep a fu' grown fox fra stoppin' ta mak' poetry or admire th' scenery, an' gin he catches yin, a kick in th' ribs wull put that yin oot o' beesiness yince an' f'r aye, or maybe he'll tap th' beastie on th' skull wi' his big horn beak, an' yin tap wull addle th' brains o' a bigger animal than a fox. He hunts a' th' cat tribe, f'r he kens they'll be after his young brood when they're hatchit. Ye'll see a tree tiger commence spittin' an' blinkin' its whuskers as soon as th' homing bull bird comes roon', but th' tiger doesn'a stop ta be sassy, he gaes an' doesn'a stan' on ceremony concernin' th' order o' his goin'. A've watched mair than yin fecht when th' bull bird ha' treed a tiger, an' th' four-footed beastie's had na chance, no' an earthly. The bull just whirls aroon' th' thorn, shootin' oot his long neck ivery chance he got an' drivin' his beak at th' tiger's head, ribs,

back or legs, th' tiger slashin' wi' his claws a' th' time at th' lang neck, but he doesn'a often hit it; when he daes, it's death ta th' bull bird an' a feast f'r th' tiger.

After he's done a good deal o' this work, th' bull gaes back ta th' bunch o' birds he's been brocht oop wi' an' theenkin' he'll gie th' ladies a hint o' th' direction o' his hame. He doesn'a stay long; every male in th' bunch is gettin' love proud an' short tempered, an' each yin makes off on its lonesome f'r its homestead, an' th' females remain thegither, lookin' as forlorn an' godforsaken wi'oot th' males as a paddock fu' o' auld maids wi'oot a mon keekin' at 'em ower th' top rail. There's sma' beauty aboot a hen ostrich, they ha' na feathers worth ha'in, an' naething else ta recommend 'em that A cud find oot; th' bull ha' all the beauty, an' bravery, an' love o' hame, an' love o' th' weans. When th' bull gets back ta his homestead, he first of a' gaes carefully roon' his selection' an' pays surprise veesits ta a' kinds o' vermin, an' nane o' them wait ta enquire eef he's lost or mislaid anything. Then he gaes straight ta his hame an' fin's th' sun ha' dried all th' grass he broke doon on his first veesit. He tramps it ta a fine powder, an' wi' th' shoulder o' his wing gathers it inta a pile saft an' fine as flour fra a mill. He sits himsel' doon on this an' works it wi' his body till he's got a fine, deep, warm nest: when that's a' ta his likin' he gathers soft grass an' lines th' nest wi' it—all lady's work, but his ladies air too dom lazy f'r sic duties, sae he carries on till it's a' feenished. Then he's a sicht ta see: he plants himsel' ootside his hame, an' gies himsel' a' th' airs o' a chief or a landed proprietor. He swaggers an' struts like th' prince o' a' th' pipers an' dresses his plumage till he shines in th' sun like a fresh oiled nigger. Noo an' again he'll tak' wee short rins o' a hunner' yards or sae, shakin' oot a' his feathers, let-



tin' th' breeze play through 'em till they dance an' flutter, an' A can tell ye, buckie, he's no' ta be despiset at sic moments, f'r ivery white feather is sae white it wud mak' mountain snaw luk dirty brown, an' ivery black feather sae black tha' polished ebony wud be mean compared wi' it. He's dancin', ravin' love-mad by noo, an' wad see grace an' beauty in a pair o' stilts wi' a feather mattress spilt ower it. A've met mony men like tha', an' th' first wumman tha' comes along ropes 'em an' marries 'em; they dinna seem ta min' eef she's got a feegure like a camel, or a face like a dust storm wi' holes in 'it, an' a temper tha' wud deesgrace a hyena in a steel trap—eet's enouch f'r them she's a wumman, an' when they come ta their richt senses a month after marriage, they maistly tak' ta dreenk or relegion, an' wail ower their blasted lives, instead o' blamin' their blasted fulishness.

'Must be near as bad as poisoned feet,' cooed Derry.

'Mannie,' growled Mac solemnly, 'when it grups ye y're poisoned a' ower, y're at th' mercy o' any hen tha' wags a fing'r at ye. But le' ma get on wi' ma story. A left th' ostrich makin' a fule o' himsel' ootside his ain hame, as A've na doot ye'll dae yersel' afore y're verra mooch aulder—God send A'm near ye ta warn ye, an'—an' head th' hen in petticuts off by tellin' her y're a homicidal maniac wi' a fondness f'r shortenin' honeymoons wi' an axe.

'When th' bull ha' satisfied himsel' he's ready ta th' last button f'r a love tryst, he squats doon on his hams, lays his long neck alang th' groon', an' lets loose a love ca'. Eet soon's something atween th' bellow o' a bull an' th' roar o' a leon. Conseederin' it as a call ta come an' be kissed, A dinna theenk mooch o' 't masel', A cud dae better wi' a fog horn, but laddie, there's na accoontin' f'r taste amang females o' any kind, whether the wear feathers or—or petticoats, an'

th' hen ostriches seem ta like th' ungodly row th' bull mak's. They dinna answer him ; they dinna seem ta ken hoo ta answer back, which is a dom gude job f'r th' bull. As soon as a cluster o' hens hear th' love note, they break oop th' mithers' meetin's they hold when on their lonesome wi'oot th' bulls, an' each yin saunters off in th' direction o' a bull call ; they dinna run, they jouk along, feedin' as they gang, but A've na manner o' doot they'd rin fast enough eef they thocht there were any chance o' losin' th' man bird. Th' bull keeps boomin' away a' th' time, lettin' loose a roar aboot every quarter o' an hoor. When a hen gets in sicht o' a bull, she gies a wee bit start an' preten's ta roon awa' ; her actions seem ta say : " A cam' here quite by accident, young mon, an' A'm feared y'r attentions air no' honourable," just as eef she hadn'a come ta him wi' her een wide open. When th' bull sees her turn ta rin awa', he mak's na end o' a blitherin' ass o' himsel' ; he spins roon' an' roon' in a circle, an' rins towards her wi' his neck pushed oot as far as he can push it, f'r a' th' worl' like a gander coortin' a goose ; he takes wee short steps in th' love rin, though when he's rinnin in earnest he can stride twenty-five feet. Th' hen doesn'a rin—none o' them dae when they mean ta marry a puir beastie, whether flesh or feathers. He coaxes her wi' a' th' coquetry in his mak' oop, an' at lang last she saunters ta him. A've seen a few female things in ma time, but f'r doonricht cold-bloodedness A've met naething ta match a hen ostrich. She treats th' bull as eef he were just something ta ha' handy aboot th' place, an' he waits on her an' attends ta her comfort as eef th' A'michty had made him f'r jest that an' naething else ; she doesn'a gie him a bit caress, but a' th' time he's walkin' roon' her, dressin' her shabby plumage, pullin' oot a' broken feather here, smoothin' doon a bunch further along, combin' an' brushin' her an' gie'in' her a de'il o' a

gude time. She stays wi' him fra three ta six days until she's laid yin egg, then wi'oot a "gude day ta ye, ma Jo," she walks off, leavin' him ta take care o' th' egg, whilst she, forgettin' a' aboot him an' her short wedded life, gaes gallivantin' off ta find a fresh male thing ta mak' a fule o'. Th' bull doesn'a gae after her an' gie her a gude hidin' an' bring her back ta atten' ta her family duties, he gaes an' has a keek at th' yin egg she's left him, an' by th' fuss he makes ower it ye'd theenk he'd laid it his ainsel'. He gets bits o' stick an' lays 'em gently ower th' egg, then fills in th' crevices wi' some o' the fine powdered dust he's made from th' dry leaves, an' on top o' a' he puts a layer o' dry leaves an' sma' twigs. Then oot he gaes an' starts boomin' again f'r a fresh mate, as eef th' silly gommerill had no' had yin sañple o' female faith an' foond it enouch. He hasn'a lang ta wait. Anither hen that ha' served her lord th' same trick comes ta his ca', an' he gaes a' through th' whole performance again. Fra fifteen ta twenty-three wives he has in a season, an' each yin leaves him an egg ta tak' care o' while she gaes trapesin' roon'. Na hen in her wild state ever sticks true ta yin "bull," she has no' a suspesion o' a sense o' morality, an' like a' females o' that class, she has dom little love f'r her weans.

· ' When th' layin' season is ower th' hens gang aboot in groups an' ha' a gude time, feedin' an' seein' th' sights; na hunter bothers them, their plumage is na gude, an' they ha' na beef on their backs ta mak' them worth huntin' f'r th' pot, but th' "bull" ha' scarce time ta ca' his soul his ain. Each yin stan's sentry roon' his ain nest ta keep th' vermin awa', for hunner's o' creepin' an' crawlin' things an' sma' four-footed beasties wull rob th' nest o' its eggs gin they get th' chance—th' armadillo is a gran' robber o' sic nests, but th' bull paradin' roon' snatchin' a

beakfu' o' grass an' maybe a nice tasty pebble or bit gravel doesn'a gie 'em mooch chance; th' armadillo's thick armour o' shell daes na save his life gin a bull catches him; he gets lickit like a futba' till at last he rolls on his back when a' his vital pairts are exposed—the bull's beak does th' rest. Sae it gaes on until th' sun hatches oot th' young yins, but eef it comes on ta rain th' bull, buckie, sits ower th' nest an' shelters it. Noo le' ma tell ye, buckie, o' yin extraordinar' circumstance connectit wi' th' hatchin'. When th' last hen leaves th' bull he digs oot yin egg fra th' nest, an' puts it close handy where th' weather can mak' it rotten—ye'll fin' yin sic by every nest ye iver come across, an' there's a won'erfu' plan in it. A'll tell ye. Th' bull kens to an hoor an' a day when th' sun wull hatch oot th' brood, sae dae th' foxes an' eagles an' hawks an' bush rats, an' a' th' ither enemies o' th' young ostriches, an' they keep th' bull gawin' like a race-horse in th' Derby. Noo, buckie, ye ken yersel' there's millions o' flies in an' roon' ivery bunch o' ostrich grass.'

' I do, partner, damn 'em.'

' A quite agree, but th' bull ostrich wad na, f'r eef it were no' f'r yon flies, he'd lose best pairt o' his young ivery season; tha's yin reason why th' A'michty made flies—there's a use f'r iverything in natur', mannie. Th' day th' brood is hatched, th' bull breaks th' egg he ha' left outside th' nest, an'—did ye iver smell a rotten ostrich egg, ma son? '

' No, partner.'

' Then dinna hanker after th' experience, f'r it smells like th' soul o' a slanderer o' gude lasses wull smell through eternity—rotten.'

' Well, what's the perfume for, Old Timer? '

' Ta draw th' flies, an' it draws them in millions roon' th' broken egg. Th' bull wi' won'drous care helps oot th' young yins fra th' bottom o' th' nest—a



mither's work, but a mither ostrich dinna dae a dom thing ta help, she's like a wumman o' fashion nursin' a loosy lap-dog when she ocht ta be huggin' her weans. Th' young brood air no' big enough ta joomp at th' flies on th' grass stems, but they can toddle in amang th' masses aroon' th' smellfu' egg an' catch them, so they dinna ha' any call ta gae ootside th' grass walls o' their hame in search o' food, an' it's weel f'r them they dinna ha' ta, f'r th' earth an' air are alive wi' enemies waitin' ta snap 'em oop, an' th' bull gaes roon' an' roon' on th' ootside like a Catherine wheel on legs, an' woe ta th' leevin' thing he meets; th' reptiles an' sma' things he stamps inta th' earth, an' th' big yins he whirls after like a tornado in feathers. Th' foxes he hunts wi' th' fury o' a fiend, an' they scatter from th' pack like raindrops fra a cloud as he charges, but while he's chasin' yin anither wull nip through th' grass wall on th' ither side o' th' nest, snap oop a chick, an' awa' like th' wind, an' eet's no' healthy f'r that fox if he meets th' bull as he's comin' oot. At nicht time there's na rest f'r th' bull either, f'r then th' big cats come on th' prowl, an' scrub rats, an' snakes, an' the big red-throated leezard no' unlike th' iguano o' Australia, only shorter an' broader—yon beastie is verra fond o' young' ostrich.'

'Why th' devil don't the hen ostrich come and help the bull guard the young? It seems a two-handed job, partner.'

'It is, but th' hissy dinna help, she doesn'a come near. A'm theenkin' she's like a' hissies, she's too beesy braggin' ta her sister licht o' loves aboot th' num'er o' gallants she's had ta worry aboot her weans—it's a way a' licht o' loves ha'. The troubles o' th' bull air bad when his brood air verra young, but it's waur when they get big enough ta want mair food than flies, an' ye ken th' smell ha' died awa' maistly by that time, an' th' flies ha' naething special ta draw



them, but A wad like ta point oot, ma son, that in th' plan o' natur' not even a smell is wastit, even that is pairt o' th' great plan tha' moves th' universe an' keeps it in order. Ye'd be theenkin' maybe th' noo th' bull ha' weaned th' young ostriches, sae ta speak, th' mithers wad drap in an' see hoo things were gawin' on, but they dinna, an' this is th' time th' vermin get awa' wi' maist o' th' young brood, f'r they scatter in a' directions seeking food, an' a fox wull make a feint in yin direction whiles its mate creeps oop in anither ; th' bull charges th' yin he can see, an' th' ither snaps a baby bird, an' awa'. Hawks an' eagles swoop cot o' th' skies an' tak' toll o' th' brood, an' generally between 'em th' spoilers get awa' wi' fra ha'f ta twa thirds o' th' chicks, which is no' nice f'r th' bull. When th' young air aboot as high as ma knee, then th' prood bull leads then oot ta their shameless mithers an' han's them ower ta her.'

'How the deuce does each hen pick her own chicks, seeing she had laid twenty-three eggs in twenty-three different nests, partner?'

'She dase na. Ye see each bull comes wi' his chicks ta th' big bunch o' hens an' han's ower th' goods ta th' lot. Th' hens form a hollow circle an' all th' chicks air placed in th' centre ; th' hens form a cordon roon' them, an' th' bulls mak' a cordon roon' th' hens ; they march ta th' best feedin' groon's like that unner th' command o' a veteran bull who has his advance guard an' sentries, an' his screening parties an' his rear-guards a' in order, an' when danger is signalled they a' fa' back an' guard th' young, an'—an' th' hissies. An', ma buckie, tha's th' time f'r us ta mak' a scoop.'

'I was wondering where we come in, Old Timer.'

'We'll get a bit siller by huntin' an' roondin' oop wild horses an' cattle, then we'll mak' a big barbed

wire compound wi' wide wings ta it, an' we'll ride doon on a mob an' frichten th' auld birds awa' an' drive th' young yins inta oor compound, an' we'll weed oot th' bad yins an' breed ainly fra th' best, an' in time, mannie, we'll be feather kings.'

' Sounds easy, partner.'

' A'm no' sayin' it's easy, but it's possible, an' onything tha's possible Jamie McGlusky ca' accomplaesh wi' a wee bittie o' luck.'

' I'm thinking,' drawled Derry, ' that luck is going to play a pretty big hand in that game, but whatever you say goes with me.' Then with a joyous grin he added: ' No matter what game we take up, Mac, we'll have a better time out of life than a " bull " ostrich. Catch *me* dry-nursin' a squad o' kiddies an' bringin' 'em up on my thumb, Mac. I've lost half my respect for bull ostriches; no wonder they have all the beautiful feathers and the hens none worth carrying—they're half hens in their hearts.'

' They *air* a meastery,' confessed McGlusky, ' an' A'm dom sure eef A had twenty-three wives an' they left ma a bairn apiece, A'd see ta it they turned oop ta dae th' washin'.'

The day arrived at last when the pioneer felt his full power had come back to him.

' A'm ma ain mon again, Derry.'

' You look it, partner.'

McGlusky threw up his great head with a gesture Derry had learned to know.

' A'm gawn ta ride ma stallion.'

' If you say you will, you will, but——'

' Na buts, ma son.' He thrust out one big foot, safely housed in moccasins he had made out of hide; the foot landed on a thistle that was proudly carrying its pale purple bloom. ' When a mon o' Scots bluid ha' a fut on a thistle, he's hame, na matter where th' thustle grows, buckie; ma fut is on ma native heath—

ma name's McGlusky. A'll ride yon mighty beast an' maister him th' day, or A'll never see th' meeracle o' anither dawnin'.'

'That settles it, partner.' Then in an undertone : 'You're not the only one who won't see the sun get up to-morrow, if things go wrong.'

The glance Derry threw at Red Comet left little doubt who the other traveller would be.

'Gie ma yin o' those lassoes, ma son, an' A'll show ye hoo ta rope a horse. Ye ken he's got twa gude raw hide ropes roon' his neck noo ; A'll fix yin on each leg in a whiff o' ma pipe, gin ye dae as A tell ye.'

Derry handed him a lariat, which Mac had carefully tested.

'Tha's a' richt ; A'm theenkin' he'll squiggle a bittie, but he canna break awa' ; touch his near hin' leg wi' something an' mak' him kick—it wull no' be hard, he's fon' o' kickin'.'

Derry pitched a piece of earth and struck the stallion. In an instant there was the flash of a great hind hoof in his direction. It was the work of a second, yet McGlusky's motions were quicker ; the lariat fell over the extended leg as if a snake had sprung from the coil.

'Yin.'

'By thunder, that was quick, partner.'

'No' sae bad. Noo, mannie, th' ither yin.'

'Ain't you going to make that one fast, eh ?'

'A' in gude time. A'm gawn ta tame ma stallion, no' creepple him.'

Again Derry did his part, and again Red Comet fell into the trap. A shadow of a smile appeared at the corners of the pioneer's eyes as he dropped his end of the lariat.

'Twa.'

'That's what I call perfect lassoing, Old Timer.'

'Hoots na, A've seen knee high bairns dae as weel

in Arizona amang th' cattle; it's neat, tha's a'. A mon ha' nae richt ta conseeder he's perfec' wi' a lariat until he can rope a wild duck on th' wing. Haud y'r gab noo. A'll gae in front o' th' stallion a bittie, on yin side, an' ye gae richt in front o' him an' walk t'wards him; he'll rush at ye, sae be carefu' an' dinna gang nearer than ye need; he's joompin' wild noo.'

'If I go too close, call me back, won't you, partner? Damn him, I wouldn't get near him for a free ticket to a ham-an'-egg shop f'r life.'

There was no doubt about the state of Red Comet's temper. At sight of Derry back went his ears, his mouth opened, and he lunged forward as far as the ropes round his neck would let him. When he felt the pull of them, he half reared and pawed savagely with his fore legs, and in that instant with a deft underthrow the pioneer had the lasso over both fore legs, and with a mighty heave brought him over on his flank.

'Grab th' hin' ropes an' mak' 'em fast—dinna loiter.'

Derry did not go to sleep over his task, though ere he could get a purchase round a stump, the stallion's frantic kicking had nearly dislocated his arms. Mc-Glusky made his ropes fast in the same way, though the savage animal, squealing with rage and fear, put up a desperate resistance which took not a little of his prodigious strength out of him.

'Let him wear himsel' doon, buckie, naething weakens a mon or beast like futile rage—tha's why a mon who is maister o' his temper wull maist always beat yin tha' is na. Eef iver y're fechtin' a mon big enough ta eat ye wi'oot salt, wheesper theengs ta him concernin' his parentage till he runs amuck an' rushes like a bull, he'll gae weak in time wi'oot any help fra you. See hoo yon beastie's sweatin' noo, an' th' sweat o' rage is weakness.'

' Suppose the other fellow talks about *my* pedigree, what then, partner ? '

' Preten' y're deaf, an' answer him nicely ; mak' oot he's talkin' about th' weather. A'll ha' th' bridle, noo, ma son—na keep awa', ye canna help, an' ye might get in ma way.'

He watched his opportunity, and at the right moment pinned the big savage head to the earth, and after a fierce struggle got the bridle on, the stallion doing its best to tear his hands to pieces. It took another battle to get a sheepskin on his back and lash it there. Then with infinite patience he worked the ropes from the legs, and then the fateful moment had come.

' Ha' ye nerve enough, buckie, ta cut th' lariats close oop ta his neck ? A'll no' be able ta dae it fra his back, an' eef he bucks wi' his neck in twa nooses, he'll maist likely break his neck.'

Derry drew his knife.

' Say, when, partner.'

' Noo, mannie.'—

Derry cut both raw-hide ropes close to the mighty throat and leapt away. McGlusky launched himself on the sheepskin, and Red Comet forgot he was a horse and became a demon. Never had anything crossed his back before, and he meant that nothing ever should again. He worked for a long, long time in savage silence ; nothing was heard but the pounding of his hoofs on the hard earth ; he bucked straight and he bucked in circles ; he rose high and he stretched himself low, but he could not shake that clinging figure from its hold. Fear and rage seemed to blend in his heart at last, and he squealed as he plunged and tore up the earth with his hoofs. Derry caught sight of McGlusky's face when the first fierce squeal came from the stallion, and the lad saw a smile among the whiskers.



' If that makes him happy, gettin' caught in a steam winch must be his idea of heaven. I'd prefer the steam winch myself.'

Red Comet made a wild rush to reach scrub country. McGlusky shortened his grip on the reins and knowing the character of the cruel Spanish bit he had fixed in the stallion's mouth, he began to saw with both hands until it became a case of the stallion giving way or having his under jaw shattered. His rush was broken, and for the first time in his life he turned under the guiding hand of a man and in obedience to a will stronger than his own, but he was not yet near the surrender point. He got his head round in spite of that masterful grip on the reins, and tried to tear at one of the rider's legs with his teeth.

' Ye wad, wad ye ? '

The big heavy plaited raw-hide whip fell upon the grinning muzzle, until even Red Comet's savage spirit quailed, then Mac, whose temper had been stirred by the stallion's attempt, put the whip into the heaving flanks in grim earnest.

' Lunch—off—ma—leg—wad ye ?—it's—it's na gen'lemanly.' Between nearly every word the whip fell like a flail, until Red Comet squirmed under the ordeal. ' Buck—fair an'—dae y'r domdest—but na bitin'—ye'll sune ken—A can bite masel'.'

In spite of the fierce lesson he got in regard to using his teeth on his master, it was not long before the untamed brute made another and still more desperate attempt on McGlusky's leg, and once again he was disciplined. Then in a perfect frenzy of equine madness he did everything a horse could do to unseat the man. Rising upright on his hind legs, he hurled himself backwards, coming to earth with a thunderous crash, hoping to crush the clinging body beneath his own tremendous weight, but at the right moment the pioneer always flung himself clear and, as the stallion

rose to his knees, Mac each time fairly hurled himself on to the immense back and resumed the struggle for mastery. All the stubborn fighting instincts of his nature were awake now, and he revelled in the savage battle, for he was one who not only loved victory, but revelled in the hardship and danger by which victory is achieved. Red Comet's fury was tigerish; the whites of his eyes were bloodshot, he was covered with foam from muzzle to hocks, his great flanks were heaving, his tail pressed sullenly down, his small, beautifully shaped ears laid flat, all his big front teeth showing, whilst Derry could hear him grinding madly on the cruel Spanish bit as he tried in vain to crush it between his jaws. There came a moment when both man and beast did their utmost, and the man just managed to last out. Then came a pause in the duel, and McGlusky was busy pumping the strength-giving oxygen into his lungs. Then :

'Mannie, he's a gran' fechter, ma word, this is an hoor worth leevin'.'

'I wouldn't live it for a million spot cash, partner.'

'Ye cudn'a.'

The boast came from the pioneer's lips not scornfully, but with a ring of pride, for he knew the men who could have ridden that untamed mass of speed, vital energy, strength and massive power were but few, if the world's best horsemen were winnowed down until only champions remained.

Not long did the wild creature stand cogitating, for the first time in his life, over the possibility of defeat. His vitality flowed back upon him in a wave, for his organism was perfect, his blood pure, his muscles in natural training. He whirled to the off side in a half-circle, then back to the straight line, and made a tremendous sweep to the near side, wrenching McGlusky nearly over his shoulders as he did so; then he plunged off fighting for his head, and his objective was a dense

mass of giant thorn through which even he would have found it hard to crash a way ; if he could only reach it, he knew that thing that clung to his back like a vampire would be torn from its hold—instinct told him that, and then what would it matter that his glossy hide would be ripped and scarred by the cruel spikes ? He would be free, and freedom seemed worth more than life to him just then. He carried his head high as he launched his massive frame forward. McGlusky knew the danger of the moment ; he worked as he had never worked in all his life before, wrenching, sawing, pulling with all his fierce energy. The blood streamed from the stallion's mouth, the big tongue was cut deeply in many places, but it looked to the solitary watcher as if the stallion must win. But McGlusky battled on ; inch by inch he brought the big head down to the proper level, and then just as Red Comet would have dropped his under jaw upon his chest to break the leverage of the reins that way, the man, using his higher intelligence, chose the absolute second when the beast relaxed the tension of the muscles of the neck, and putting all his weight and power and energy into the action, threw every ounce of strength on to the off rein, and catching the stallion at a disadvantage, screwed his head and neck half round. He could not gallop with that leverage upon him ; he must stop or go heels over head and break his neck. He stopped, and from that moment the man was his master.

That was the beginning of the duel between McGlusky and Red Comet ; it lasted three weeks in all ; day by day the savage fight went on, but each sunset saw the horse a little more subdued, the man a little bit more triumphant, until in the end a perfect understanding was reached, and McGlusky gentled the great beast until he would prick his ears at sound of his master's footfall, and whinny with delight at his approach. In those days

the pioneer lived for his horse; he schooled him over jumps that took Derry's breath away to watch; he trained him to follow like a dog; he taught him to stand steady as a rock whilst he fired rifle or revolver from his back, and Derry, who loved to copy all he saw McGlusky do, rode My Lady and, as far as in him lay, taught her all that the pioneer taught the stallion.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE COMING OF TROUBLE

THE horse-training days had long passed by, not that the pioneer had given up teaching Red Comet, he never did that, but this had now become merely a pastime for idle hours. He and Derry followed their calling as hunters and trappers, varying this with occasional hunts after small mobs of cattle and wild horses whenever they came across their tracks. McGlusky had put a brand on the stallion, the same brand as he had put on his hacks and pack animals, and perhaps it was this which made him so particular when rounding up wild animals, for no matter what the value of a beast might be, if it carried a brand, ever so old, the pioneer would set it free again.

'A'll tak' wha's ma ain wi'in th' law, an' na mair; na mon can claim as his wha's bred in th' wilds, they're as mooch mine as anither's gin A can catch 'em, but a brand is a mon's private property.' Then with a fond glance at the brand on Red Comet, 'It's—it's sacred, laddie,' and Derry chuckled to hear the sacred rights of property so eloquently voiced by his partner.

The chuckle nettled the pioneer.

'When ye grin, laddie, y'r mooth's mair like a ha'f-opened port-hole in a hide-an'-tallow coaster tramp than th' road ta hivin. Air ye impleein' A'm a reformed cattle thief?'

'Not on your life, partner. I—I see no signs of



permanent reformation about you. Say, did the ancient clan McGlusky steal cattle when they raided the English Marches ?

'They didn'a. They—weel, they just took 'em.'

'Merry old days, partner. Do you know I sometimes think you belong to those days; perhaps some English Moss trooper hit you on the head when you were a boy, and sent you to sleep for a century or two, and you only woke up in Australia.'

'Ha' ye been dreekin', buckie ?'

'I have not. Why ?'

'Because yon thochts dinna seem ta ma ta be th' thochts o' a sober laddie. A'm no' a prehistoric remnant lef' ower by th' win's o' chance—A'm a product o' th' electrical age wi' yearnin's ta leeve cheek by jowl wi' natur'; no' tha' A dislike humanitee, but A canna thole th' eenjustice ta th' bulk o' monkind tha' follows in th' footsteps o' ceeveelization. Eef A iver found a state,' he added ruminatively, 'A'd like ta fashion it so's a' th' benefits o' oor age o' enlightenment were on tap f'r th' hum'lest ta tak' a swig at wi' none o' th' abuses croodin' th' gude things agin th' wall.'

'You want the roses without the thorns, Mac, the bird's song without the birds pilfering in the harvest fields. Can't be done, Old Timer, unless'—with a wave of his hand—'unless you're greater than the power that made all this.'

McGlusky pushed his leonine head forward and peered from under craggy brows at his mate.

'Losh, wee mannie, f'r a chuckle-headed gommerill that maistly talks as a monkey chatters, ye dae get hold o' a gran' truth noo an' agin. There maun ha' been a thinker amang y'r forbears. When ye strike a patch o' sense agin, ma son, put y'r pegs inta 't, an' cultivate 't. Mannie, y're na a' daft by a dom lang chalk.'

At this backhanded flattery Derry's face became convulsed, and Mac, looking at him in wide-eyed astonishment, remarked :

'Th' speerit o' weesdom ma' be deep in ye, but th' speerit o' dom fulishness lies verra near th' surface. When ye grin like that, mannie, y'r mooth luks like a last nicht's posy tha' a soldjer's wench ha' been sittin' on. Gin ye giggle agin, A'll heave ma boot at ye.'

After that they pulled at their pipes in silence for quite a long time.

'Mannie.'

'What is it, partner?'

'A'm theenkin' we'll gae f'r a gran' ride roon' th' morn an' ha' a look at yon ostrich country A telt ye aboot; th' young birds maun be aboot hatchit noo, or near it.'

'Your programme's mine, Old Sportsman.'

'We've had gran' gude fortune, ma son.'

'Well, we worked hard for it, didn't we?'

'We did, but th' Lord ha' blessed oor efforts; we've siller in oor pooches, an' twa gran' beasties ta ride, an' pack horses ta carry oor duds. A'm feelin' th' nicht tha' a' is weel wi' ma, th' speerits o' th' mighty yins ha' been verra near ta us these few months gone; A ha' na th' geeft o' song masel', or A'd leeft oop ma voice an' mak' a joyfu' noise afore th' Lord.'

'Why not, partner, if you feel like it?'

'Na, na, A ken ma leemitations; ye've niver heard ma try ta seeng, buckie.'

'No, but I'd have a shot at it, if I were you, if I felt it was the right thing to do.'

'A were ainly askit ta sing yince in a' ma life, mannie.'

'When was that?'

'A were actin' as hunter ta a party o' money-bags in East Africa, an' yin nicht five o' us got lost on th'

plains no' far fra th' Tana reever. A were haudin' on ta ma 405 Weenchester mighty tight, f'r it's no' a nice place ta wan'er roon' in o' nichts, eet's fu' o' leons an' rhinos, an' a' kin's o' fearsome beasties tha' theenk na mair o' chewin' a mon up or buntin' him ta glory or stampin' him inta th' dust than ye'd theenk o' pottin' a fox. A'll tak' ye there maybe, yin o' these days—ye'll enjoy yersel'.'

'Thanks,' remarked Derry very dryly. 'If there's one thing more than another would give me joy it would be getting bunted from behind by a charging rhino in the dark.'

'Weel, as we walkit alang, yin o' th' men tha' had hired ma as hunter said: "Mac, gie us a song." "A'm no' a minstrel," A said wi' deegnity. "Niver mind, sing." Weel, in a way, A felt flattered, buckie, sa A tuned oop an' gied 'em twa verses o' Annie Laurie, an' were just startin' ta tear a hole in th' third verse o' Annie's lament, when th' buckie who'd asked ma ta seeng started cursin' something awesome. "Shut off steam, McGlusky—bite it off, dom it a', mon, A'd rather ha' th' leons." A were hurtit, mannie; th' gommerill had na' wanted ma melody f'r pleasure, but ta scare leons. A kenned A were na a prima donna, but A didna theenk A screechit as bad as a' that, an' th' funny pairt o' 't a' was tha' it *did* scare 'em.'

'Well, I hope nothing scares our good luck away, partner.'

'It wull no'. A' ye ha' ta dae is ta ha' faith in th' guiden poowers. There's ma fren' Mahomet, his speerit is never verra far awa' these days, laddie. Faith is a gran' thing, it mak's ye feel at peace wi' a' things. A wad na slip th' anchor o' ma faith f'r th' best alfalfa farm in a' th' Argentine. Faith mak's ye like a wee bairn trustin' ta th' weesdom o' its minnie. A'm like tha' th' nicht; A'm jest suckin' in hope an'

love f'r a' mankind wi' ivery breath A draw ; A——'  
' Throw up your hands—quick—señores ! '  
' Wha' in hell——'

McGlusky's faith vanished in one wild explosion, and his right hand reached for his Winchester.

' If you touch the rifle, my men fire, señor.'

The voice was not harsh, it was almost suave and persuasive, but there was an undertone in its cadences that warned the pioneer's practised ear that the speaker was no trifler. He threw up his hands ; he also threw up language that had not the faintest resemblance to the gentle disquisition on faith he had so recently been favouring Derry with.

A slender, graceful figure in natty cavalry uniform sauntered quietly into the light of the camp fire, and a cordon of troopers stepped forward also. They had service carbines at the ' ready.'

McGlusky rose and towered over the officer who had stretched his hands out to the blaze of the camp fire, for the night was chill.

' Ma' A ask wha' this means ? '

The officer smiled indulgently.

' It means arrest, señor.'

' A dinna unnerstan'.'

As the pioneer spoke the last sentence he saw something which gave him understanding. Black Pedro had pushed through the cordon and stood close behind the officer ; his face was one malicious grin.

' That is the man, and the stolen stallion is in the corral close by ; I have just seen him.'

McGlusky's face worked fiercely ; the veins on his neck swelled out as if they would burst ; his hands clenched and he threw one leg forward. Black Pedro shrank back ; he had seen the pioneer angry before, but not with an anger like this. The officer glanced from one man to the other ; he was an Argentine soldier, therefore he was brave—all the Argentine officers

are. A little whimsical smile played round his mouth ; it was all comedy to him.

‘ Is this the man who stole the stallion ? ’

‘ Yes, señor capitan, that is the man.’

‘ Ye low-down son o’ a—a indecent mither, ye spawn o’ a jackal-hearted feyther, ye full brither ta a black patch in a dirty necht, A’ll button y’r eyebrows ta y’r boots f’r yon lee.’

Black Pedro would have melted away into the shadows of the surrounding gloom, but the quiet voice of the officer held him.

‘ Then this is the man you asked that I should leave in your hands after I had taken the stallion ? ’

No answer came from Black Pedro, he was too busy moistening his suddenly parched lips with his tongue. The officer touched him contemptuously with the point of his sword scabbard.

‘ I spoke.’

The soldier did not raise his voice, yet there was that in its quality of command that such as Black Pedro would never dare question or disobey.

‘ Th-a-t is the—man—señor.’

‘ Very good. I am always pleased to gratify the wishes of an honest man like you. Go and take him.’

A low rumbling, gurgling sound full of incarnate fury came from the lips of the pioneer.

‘ A’m thankin’ ye f’r tha’, señor, wi’ a’ ma heart an’ soul. Noo, Black Pedro—coom.’ He spread out his arms invitingly. ‘ Na floower tha’ were iver pluckit fra th’ tree o’ life was iver mair welcome ta th’ arms o’ beauty than ye air ta me. Coom, Black Pedro, coom.’

But Black Pedro did not think he was the right kind of flower, or that grisly, menacing thing on the other side of the fire the correct kind of beauty.

The officer was laughing silently ; he gave a curt command, and a couple of soldiers pushed Black Pedro forward. With a yell that made the horses in the



corral kick and plunge, McGlusky went across the fire, and Black Pedro fled round and round the little circle made by the grinning soldiers, and as he fled McGlusky kicked and kicked again, and each kick added about a yard to Pedro's stride. A laughing soldier dropped his carbine, and stooped to pick it up, and Black Pedro, bounding over him, fled into the night. McGlusky knelt by the fire and examined his heavy riding boot.

'I think, señor, you have nearly kicked the life out of that animal.' The officer's voice was still very soft and suave.

'A'm no' carin' about his leefe, but A've bustit ma boot, an'—boots dinna grow on trees, they cost siller, ye ken.'

'Well, consider yourself under arrest, and remain quiet; I'll go and look this stallion over; I expect the beast will fit the rest of that coward's story.'

The officer moved lightly away with the ineffable grace of his nation. Outside the cordon he met his grizzled sergeant.

'Well, you've seen the horse?'

'Yes, capitan.'

'What's he like, eh?'

The sergeant threw up his hands.

'Magnifico!'

'Eh, what?'

The sergeant was bankrupt in terms of praise before he and his officer reached the corral in which Red Comet stood alone. Half a dozen soldiers were illuminating the scene with torches, and the glare which startled the mighty beast, made him look his very best: head up, tail flung out, neck slightly arched.

Not a word could the officer say for a long time, then softly:

'Magnifico—magnifico.'

'He will be the pride of the army, capitan.'

' You think I have a right to take him, sergeant ? '

The sergeant had no doubt of it ; the stallion had been foaled on Government land, and had been captured by a man who had not taken out a licence, not even a hunter's or trapper's licence ; the animal plainly belonged to the Government, or to any servant of the Government who could get him, unless the heirs of the breeder, Don Gomez, could make good their claim, and as they were revolutionaries they could not do that, and would not be likely to try.

' I don't like to take the horse from this man. Did you see how he stood over big Black Pedro like a lion over a jackal ? If the big black had had courage, it ought to have made a fight worth seeing.'

' Capitan ? '

' Well ? '

' If you do not take this horse, another surely will ; the informer Pedro will tell others ; the stallion will surely be taken from this man, he has no real right to it.'

Just then Red Comet cantered round the corral, every line of his glorious frame outlined in the glow of the torches by his actions. That did it. The officer who loved a horse better than his own soul, confiscated him there and then. He went back to the pioneer.

' You caught the big red horse running wild on these lands, did you not, señor ? '

' A did, an' he were unbranded.'

' Where is your licence to trap or capture on Government lands ? '

The question came like a pistol snapping. A look of baffled rage swept over the rugged Scottish face.

' A ha' none.'

' Whose brand is on the stallion now ? '

' Ma ain.'

' Have you registered your brand according to the law ? '

' A ha' na.'

' Then it is worthless ; no man who has not a ranch, or has not leased one, has a right to a brand of his own ; do you know that ? '

' A ken it.'

' You have broken the law, my friend, and you must suffer.'

' Ta hell wi' th' law ! '

' Certainly, señor, I have said the same thing many times.'

' Ye—wull—tak'—ma stallion ? '

' Yes ; if I don't another will.'

The pioneer felt Derry push his rifle towards him with his foot ; the lad's eyes were jumping crazy ; he was mad for fight.

' Na, na,' whispered the pioneer, ' this is th' time f'r tactics.' He had curbed his own headlong passion with a giant effort of will ; he was backing his brains now, not his brawn. ' Ye'll tak' naething else gin A le' ye ride ma stallion awa' quietly ? '

' According to the strict letter of the law, I suppose I ought to take you too, but I sympathize with you on the loss of such a horse.'

' You'll na tak' ma or ma laddie, or anything in ma camp ? '

' No, not if you let the stallion go quietly. After all, your offence has not been so bad, unless you resist authority.'

' A'll no' reseest. A were a dom fule no' ta tak' oot a licence ; ye shall ride awa' wi'oot trouble fra ma, though it grieves ma sair ta lose ma stallion.'

' You show great good sense, señor, and—may I congratulate you on the way you kick ? '

' He'll no' forgit it f'r a wee while, he'll be takin' his meals stan'in' oop for a wee, wull Black Pedro.'

They sat around the fire, the officer smoking cigarettes, the pioneer blowing big clouds from his uncouth,

home-made pipe, Derry puffing soberly at his briar. The lad seemed to be taking things philosophically, but all the time he was watching the pioneer like a lynx, waiting to see what line his 'tactics' might take, for deep in his heart Derry knew his mate would not part with the stallion to an army of soldiers, let alone a squad, without some sort of an effort on behalf of Red Comet. Whatever the move McGlusky might decide to make, the Liverpool lad meant to stand behind him, even if in the end he might be stood in front of a bush with a firing party in front of him and his grave at his feet. Sentries were on watch through the night, but McGlusky made no suspicious move, and the officer arrived at the conclusion that the big backwoodsman had yielded to the inevitable. At dawn the camp was astir. Red Comet carried the officer's saddle and bridle, the troops were dressing their horses, when a fierce oath broke from Derry. He whipped a pistol from his belt, but the pioneer had him by the wrist in time.

'Wha's bitten ye, buckie?'

'Look there.'

He indicated the second corral and the pioneer saw the sergeant putting a saddle on My Lady.

'Haud still, mannie, we'll win by tactics. Dae ye think ma head's made o' butter-milk? Bide still.' He swung easily over to the officer, who was trying to make friends with Red Comet. 'Ye ha' ma horse, capitan.'

'Well, yes, señor—it's the fortune o' war.'

'A thocht A had y'r word o' honour in return, capitan.'

'You had; what is wrong?'

Without a word the pioneer pointed an accusing finger at the sergeant who had just mounted My Lady.

'One of your horses, eh, my friend?'

'No, no' mine, but ma mate's.'

The captain caught the sergeant's eye, and beckoned him. He cantered up on My Lady.

'Dismount!' The non-com. with an ugly scowl obeyed the order. 'Strip off your saddle and bridle and hand the filly to the young caballero.'

This order also was obeyed with a malignant look, the non-com. whispering to Derry: 'I'll come back for her, señor, never fear.'

'I'll try and be ready for you when you come.'

They looked into each other's eyes and each read challenge and defiance in the other's gaze.

'That's a beautiful little filly; you and your young friend are keen judges of horseflesh.'

Mac glanced carelessly at the captain who had spoken.

'We're no' bad.' He spoke like a man who had resigned himself to destiny; then, with a grim smile: 'Ma mate an' yon sergeant wull be at each ither's throats like twa dawgs gin we leave 'em near each ither. A'll send th' laddie ta tidy th' tent—A want na bluidshed.'

'You've lots of good sense, my friend; by all means do as you say.'

'Go ta th' tent, slip y'r ain saddle an' bridle on Ma Lady, an' gáther a' th' cartridges ye can an' cram 'em inta twa huntin' bags ta y'r saddle. Then, ma son, cram a' th' food ye can inta twa ither bags, an' when yon troopers ride awa', fix 'em ta th' saddle; tak' y'r ain rifle an' ride inta cover ahint yon cloomp o' thorns.'

'Tactics,' was all Derry said in reply, and went with speed to obey orders. He was not the sort that has a perpetual 'Why?' in his mouth.

The officer beckoned the pioneer; he was holding Red Comet's bridle rein in one hand and McGlusky's Winchester in the other. He indicated the rifle.



' Shall I order my men to smash this, or will you give me the word of a caballero you will not use it against me or my men ? '

' Smash it if ye wull, but A gie ye ma word o' honour A had na thocht o' drawin' a bead on ye or yours ; A'll pass ye ma word A wull no' fire, onless ye or yours coom back ta tak' fra us wha' is oors.'

' That is enough, señor ; no man could make a fairer bargain. Take your Winchester.'

Mac took it. The officer put his foot in the stirrup, and instantly Red Comet, resenting a strange hand on his bridle, plunged wildly. Mac caught him by the head and gentled him with a word. The officer bounded into the saddle and sat there, a perfect picture of a finished horseman, for all the pure white Argintronos can ride like centaurs, and for sheer grace have no superiors on earth ; in this latter respect they can and do give North Americans, Australians and Britishers a long, long start and a bad beating.

' Ha' a care o' him when A le' go his head, señor ; y're th' first beside ma'sel' tha' ha' thrown a leg ower him.'

' Thanks for the warning ; I'm quite ready ; let go, please.'

McGlusky let go and Red Comet plunged wickedly. For a full minute he behaved in a manner that would have sent an unskilful horseman flying through the air. The officer sat him beautifully. When the stallion quietened down, the troopers fell in and the officer rode away at their head, looking as gallant and gay a figure as any eye might wish to feast upon. McGlusky never gave him a second glance ; he tried the Winchester with the hands and eyes of an expert, to see if it had been tampered with, found it perfect, and jammed home a full complement of cartridges. A snap came into Derry's eyes.

' Looks as if th' old sportsman means to try a new line of " tactics." '

He had fulfilled his orders and now cantered My Lady to the cover he had been told to take. He slung his rifle so as to have it ready for instant use. Mac was leaning on the muzzle of his 405 Winchester, immobile, as if stricken to stone.

The troopers passed the pioneer's boundary pegs three hundred yards away. Up went both hands to McGlusky's mouth, he jammed two fingers of each hand in between his teeth and emitted a wild, piercing whistle; another and another followed, as if an engine driver was hurling danger signals out of a steam siren.

' Clever old devil.'

The words broke from Derry who had instantly grasped his partner's tactics, for this was the signal the pioneer had taught the stallion with long and patient care—the danger call.

When the first piercing note reached him, the big horse had leapt as if spurs had been driven into his flanks, then with three wild bounds, to right and left and right angles, he shook the unprepared rider from his grip, and a dozen whirlwind bucks did the rest. The next instant he was thundering homewards, the military stirrups banging against his flanks at every stride. The troopers rushed first of all to their officer's assistance, then some of them scrambled to their saddles and started in pursuit of the runaway, but by the time they had turned their bridles Red Comet, travelling as befitted his name, had reached the clearing where the pioneer stood. A word of crisp command, a touch on the bridle rein, and the pioneer had sprung to his seat and was racing to Derry, who laughed him a greeting. A volley from the carbines did no harm beyond dropping one of the pack horses in the corral.

' Awa' wi' ye ! '

That was all the pioneer's order as he headed into some fairly open thorn country. He explained his intentions as they rode.

'We'll keep ta th' thorn f'r a wee; lay y'r head on Ma Lady's neck, the sojer Johnnies wull na be able ta hit ye. We'll wind in an' oot f'r a bittie, then tak' ta th' open. A've ma plan a' ready, A made it last night while ye were sleepin'.'

A little later: 'Wha' dae ye theenk o' ma tactics? A kept ma word, an' A got oor horses. Ony fule can fecht, but, losh, buckie, it tak's a general ta plan a campaign.'

Several volleys splashed the lead around them.

'Let's give them a couple each to teach them manners, partner.'

'Mannie, wad ye ha' ma break ma word? A pledged yon officer buckie A'd no' fire onless he made it necessary, an' eet's no' necessary; we air safe enouch, an' A tell ye, A wad no' lose th' respect' o' yon officer buckie f'r a harem fu' o' angels.'

If he could have heard what the captain was saying concerning him just then, he might not have put such a high value upon the 'respect' he had left behind him.

'We've lost maist o' oor gear, an' we daur na show oor noses in this pairt o' th' country ony mair, but we've got siller an' we've got oor horses, an' maist o' all we've got oor self-respec'. A'm theenkin' ye'll agree wi' ma noo tha' gude speerits ha' been watchin' ower us a' th' time.'

'Didn't doubt it, partner,' chirruped Derry, who was bubbling with happiness.

'Did ye no'? A'm feared A did f'r a wee while last night, an' A said theengs ta th' spook o' ma frien' Mahomet A hope he'll na cherish again ma. A were a wee bittie rattled when A ca'ed him, an' he didna seem ta hear ma. Ye ken, buckie, ye canna always ha' th' speerits o' y'r frien's on tap just when ye may need

'em, they ha' ither folk ta atten' ta beside yersel', an' A thocht in ma fulishness Mahomet had landed ma in a dom mess an' wad no' help ma oot, but he did, ye ken. Noo, here's th' open country, an' we maun gallop f'r it; A dinna want a stray bullet ta hurt yin o' th' horses; ye'll ken afore nicht wha' stuff Ma Lady is made o'.'

'Don't you worry about My Lady, partner, I think she'll gallop the legs off your big brute.'

'When th' plums air in a puddin' ye canna fin' oot their quality till ye bite, laddie; she's all racehorse; sometimes they air gran' stayers, sometimes they're no'. Sit easy an' save her a' ye can.'

They moved out into the open at a fine free gallop; the stallion's action was long and low, his hoofs just swishing the grass, but My Lady was a dream in motion. McGlusky was watching her.

'Man Derry, she's a lawn mower, a daisy clipper, she doesn'a waste yin inch o' space; she's sae clever wi' her feet A'm theenkin' she cud wind a watch oop.'

'She'll do,' replied Derry, speaking as if he'd owned thoroughbreds all his life, but his heart was warm towards his friend for speaking so enthusiastically of My Lady.

The troopers wasted some lead in their direction, and then started in pursuit, but the cattle they rode made this a hopeless task; the further they travelled, the further they fell behind, until they were but specks in the skyline behind the fugitives. After having turned in the saddle and watched the pursuit, Derry remarked:

'Didn't think we'd get away like this, partner; it's as easy as gettin' into debt at a boardin' house.'

'We're no' oot o' 't yet, ma son; ye ken there's sic things as telegraph wires, an' they'll be hummin' as soon as th' officer buckie can get ta yin. A'm feared they'll outlaw us.'

'Let 'em,' was the cheerful response.

'Since A canna stop 'em, A wull, but it's mair serious than ye seem ta grup on ta.'

'Why?'

'They'll offer a reward f'r us, an' th' police wull try ta win it, an' sae wull ivery vaquero between here an' th' Andes. We'll ha' fresh men on fresh horses startin' after us whenever we're seen.'

'We've got the legs of anything in the country, Mac.'

'A ken it, but legs alane won't win, it'll ha' ta be legs an' brains. A'm glad we didn'a lia' ta shoot any o' yon troopers; eef we had, the Government wad set th' country buzzin' like a hive o' bees aroon' us. Sae far it's ainly wha' they ca' a horse-stealin' job. Niver fire on a mon in uniform till it comes ta be a question o' his life or yours, it niver pays in th' long run, ye ken, a uniform's a symbol o' authority, gin ye mak' a hole in 't, ye hurt authority itsel', an' th' whole machine turns an' rends ye.'

He flung out odd scraps of wisdom from the pages of a troubled life as he sat holding Red Comet together and keeping the stallion from making the pace too hot. A clay pan with rain water in it caught his eye.

'Halt!'

The horses came to a standstill and were quickly stripped and hobbled out to feed; the men ate sparingly and rested. Then on again until sundown, and another halt, and a long rest, Derry sleeping whilst Mac with his ear to the ground listened for every hoof stroke. Away again in the soft starlight, the horses now steadied down to a gentle lope that covered the maximum of ground with the minimum of effort.

'Hope I'm not inquisitive, partner, but I'd like to know your plan.'

'Weel, it's no' mooch o' a plan. A'm breakin' across country ta th' mountain ranges o' th' Andes; eef we



get there we'll streak ower th' border inta Chili ; we'll be a'richt then. Gin they head us off, we'll wheel an' mak' north an' gang inta Bolivia.'

' Carry maps in your head, Old Sportsman, eh ? '

' Weel A dae. Losh, ma son, wha' a bird can dae Jamie McGlusky can dae too.'

They wasted not a moment ; every mile they put between themselves and the original pursuit added to their chances of safety, yet they never asked too much of their horses. If they saw tracks that led them to believe they were nearing a ranch or a settlement, they swung away and made a long detour. They never cut a wire fence when they came to one, knowing some vaquero would soon discover it and hurry away with the news. When they struck fences, Mac would dismount, place both their coats side by side on the top wire to give the horses a good sight, and Red Comet would leap the obstacle like a buck, and where the stallion went the filly would always follow. There was grass for the horses in abundance, but their own food ran out.

' What are we going to do for grub, partner ? Risk a visit to some small settlement and buy some, eh ? '

' We air no'. A'll put a bit lead inta th' first lamb A see an' we'll just ha' ta leeve on mutton till we win ta th' Andes.'

' That means we'll have to light a fire an' cook, and we'll leave a track that way for some blessed vaquero to blunder on. We've had no fire since we started.'

McGlusky looked very reproachfully at his mate.

' Buckie, A gied ye creedit f'r a wee bittie sense ; we'll need na fire f'r oor mutton.'

' What will we do with it then ? '

' Dae ! Wha' wud we dae wi' 't but eat it raw ? A didn'a theenk ye a weaklin'.'

Derry was silent for a mile. Then :

' I think, partner, you'd eat a rancher's prize bull raw.'

'A'd eat th' rancher rather than A'd lose ma stallion.'

The grimness of his face as he spoke added realism to his words, and Derry registered a prayer of gratitude that he was not a rancher. The lad did not take too kindly to raw mutton as a diet, not even when McGlusky suggested he should add a toothful of plug tobacco as a relish, but he made no complaints.

The pioneer left no trace of any of his kills; he took the skins with him, and the bones he distributed over a wide area as he rode; the thoroughness of the man shone out in this as in everything he did. 'A'd sooner trust ta an old witch ridin' astride a broomstick than just trust ta luck,' was a formula of his, and he lived up to it.'

They met no one for a long time, thanks to the extreme care of the pioneer, and were beginning to hope that a hue and cry had not been raised after all, when one morning they came full tilt on a vaquero rounding up cattle. As soon as he saw them he put spurs to his horse and made off at top speed.

'There goes oor hope o' dodgin' trouble, ma mannie, th' cry's oot agin us after a'.'

Mac was right. Soon mounted police, armed with rifles, were seen galloping so as to try and cut them off. The reins were loosed, and then began a long, stern chase, and scarcely had they shaken the first lot off, ere they saw a second coming from their left front on fresh horses.'

'Dom th' telegraph wires! Yon secon' lot ha' been ca'ed oot by telegram, an' God ainly kens hoo many mair settlements lay ahead o' us. We'll bust oor horses eef we dinna use head work.'

'Why not rifle work, partner? I'm tired of being chivied like a mad dog.'

'Kill yin o' them, an' wha's th' use o' gettin' ta Chili? They'll extradite us on a charge o' murder.'

Gin we get cornered we'll turn an' fecht, an' fecht ta a feenish. A'm no' gawn ta let ye put a rope roon' y'r neck eef A can help it ; A want ta rise in life—but no' that way, it's—it's no' deegnified.'

With infinite patience and craft the pioneer worked his way to cover. Only once did he speak to Derry.

'Mannie, stop tha' awfu' swearin' ; ye'll be leavin' language in chunks a' th' way an' they'll follow th' trail.'

'My Lady is near pumped out, partner ; her heart's thumpin' my knees.'

The glance the pioneer shot at him was full of sympathy, for Red Comet's heart had been pounding like a sledgehammer for many a mile.

They worked back under cover and circled right round their enemies and struck out in a new direction, but the hunt never ceased ; day and night they were hounded like wild beasts ; often they had to dismount and lead their weary animals in order to ease them, but the closer the danger got and the longer the time without food or sleep, the greater became the pioneer's control over his temper, until at last with consummate skill he got through the last cordon and led the way into a ravine of the first line of the Andes.

'They're beat now,' gasped Derry, who was half dead with sleep famine.

'Bide a wee before ye crawl ; we've na food, mannie, an' th' way is lang ; eef we dinna strike grub soon we'll drop in oor tracks. But ye've made a gran' fecht o' 't, an' A'm no' shamed o' ma mate.'

'Nothing to shoot in these mountains, partner ?'

'Naething A ken o' barrin' packers' mules. Gin we come across a mule transport we'll no' die. A ha' eaten waur things than transport mule in ma day, it's no' a tasty deesh, but it wull serve.'

That night they tethered their dead beat horses in a

little glen that had an inlet so narrow that they had hard work to squeeze the horses through.

'A'm no' theenkin' any pursuin' buckie wull venture in ; eef they dae, they'll no' gang oot ; A've reachit th' end o' ma patience.'

There was a rasp in the pioneer's voice that told how close to the surface his fighting temper had risen.

The pair of fugitives threw themselves down and slept very, very soundly, and yet so alert was McGlusky's subconscious self that at the slightest sound he opened his eyes and looked at that narrow inlet towards which the muzzle of his Winchester pointed, and it was the big 405 cattle-killing Winchester which he had brought with him.

In the early hours they were astir, and then Derry got a glimpse of the Andes he would never forget. Tier upon tier in rugged grandeur rose the great barriers of rock that had laughed at the elements for a million years. Storms fierce enough to wreck all else in nature had raged amidst, around and over them, scarring their faces, but leaving them masters and monarchs of all elemental things, and on each hoary head rested a diadem of spotless snow. Famished as they were, they stood awed by the majesty of the Creator's handiwork. Here a rock-ribbed giant towered proudly up until its snow-crowned crest met and mingled with the drifting clouds that lay across the face of the skies like veils of woven wool. Near by a lesser brother, split in myriad places by volcanic forces, upreared its riven face as if appealing to the snows to fill its gaping wounds—wounds that opened wide enough to engulf an army, and so deep they seemed to reach the very bowels of creation. To left and right mountains shaped like slender spires shot their slim length skywards until the wearied eye, seeking the summits, turned earthward dazzled by the Master Architect's supreme creation. Where the shadows



lay, the giants seemed to frown in austere dignity that chilled the imagination of those who gazed. But on the outflung points where the sunlight met the snows, or where the icicles fathoms long hung downwards from the shelving crags, there beauty that beggars all expression ran riot in a wilderness of colour. Rainbows high up betwixt earth and heaven spanned great gulfs that separated mountain from mountain, fairy bridges fit for angel feet to tread. From one stone giant's breast, far up beyond even rifle range, a torrent poured, the water leaping forth to fall in clouds of spray that sparkled in the rays of the newly risen sun, as though some genie of the silent under-world were tossing diamonds, millions to the moment, to try and outshine the sun. As the spray fell lower and lower, and lost its substance by attrition, the light moving air, whispering like stolen kisses in a lover's dream, caught the floating spray and rolled it into ropes and girdles, festooning crags and cliffs, hiding their ugliness and covering up their scars.

'Man Derry, dae ye see yon wreaths an' ropes an' draperies o' soft white gossamer th' breeze is playin' wi'? Gin A'm ever a presiden' or—or a king, A'll bring ma bride here an' a' her dressmakers an' le' natur' teach her hoo ta mak' a royal robe. By th' whuskers o' Solomon, laddie, natur' can gie a' the airts o' mon three laps in a mile an' win in a walk.'

'I wish,' murmured Derry plaintively, taking a pull at his belt, 'I wish nature had thought of providing breakfast for two instead of wasting all her energies on white tablecloths for stones.'

'Whisht, buckie, dinna talk pagan talk here in th' cathedral o' th' A'michty. Listen—dae ye hear th' music o' th' fallin' watter? It beats bird music ta blazes.'

'I'm listening all right, partner, not for fallin' water, but for th' sound o' mule bells. You promised



me mule for breakfast ; it's got to be that or my saddle-flap, I'm—oh, damn it, partner, I didn't mean to squeal, but I'm all in, I'm beat.'

'Ye poor wee de'il, A didn'a remem'er, an' A were feedin' ye on poetry when A ocht ta ha' been on yon high trail lookin' f'r mules. Bide where ye air, A'll bring ye something ta put y'r teeth in, or A'll mak' ye something tasty oot o' moss—there's moss enouch on yon boulder ta feed a squad o' marines.'

He crawled up the steep narrow trail, leaving his mate to guard the horses ; the lad had gone weak through long fasting, and shook in every limb ; he laid himself flat on his back and watched a great condor, imperial lord of all things that fly, floating majestically overhead.

'I wish I could reach you with a bit o' lead, but I can't. McGlusky calls you the silent sentinel o' th' lonely places ; if he saw you he'd call you an omen ; perhaps you're one of his spooks that has grown feathers ; if you are, for the love of Mary, lead him to a mule—never thought I'd grow so fond o' mules.'

The youngster was very near the end of his strength reserves, and could not keep from babbling.

'Hope my partner hasn't lost or mislaid Mahomet this morning.'

He laughed, and was surprised to find he could not stop laughing. A motherly woman would have told him he was on the edge of hysteria born of utter prostration.

McGlusky had not found a mule, but he had come across a big transport party that used llamas to carry goods from the plains of Argentina to Chili and back again. As soon as the pioneer saw the llamas feeding near their packs, he made up his mind that a fatal accident of some kind was going to happen to one of them. Their drivers were still wrapped in their blankets, for the peons do not love the raw air of the morn-

ings. Creeping quietly past them, he came to a spot where a llama was feeding very close to the precipitous edge of the cliff that overlooked the valley in which Derry and the horses were camped. The beast of burden had eaten its meagre fare of fodder provided by its drover, and was searching for more.

'A'm no' sure, but A theenk a deespensation o' Providence is about ta happen ta yon puir beastie.'

He crept close up to the trained and unsuspecting creature feeding sideways on to the cliff edge, and so close that the faintest shove would be likely to overbalance it, though the creature is chosen for pack work on account of its perfect sureness of foot. When two yards away, McGlusky crouched and hurled his right shoulder into the body of the unsuspecting beast. The startled creature jumped sideways and went headlong into space, to break its neck in the ravine below. Not a sound had been made, except the soft thud of the man's shoulder on the matted hair of the llama's body. Softly and quickly the pioneer resumed possession of his Winchester, then gliding like a ghost through the sleeping peons, he made his way to the spot where Derry lay counting his fingers over and over again, and giggling because he could never get the same total twice. One glance was enough for Mac, he knew what the matter was.

'Keep on coontin' till A come back, and dinna fash ; Providence ha' gied us food enouch ta see us ower th' mountains. Yin gude juicy steak wull drive a' th' cotton wool oot o' y'r head, mannie.'

He went in search of his quarry, quite unconcerned about the peons high up above his head on the pass ; he knew they would never look in the ravine for the missing llama, because no man had ever known a llama to fall over a cliff. They would reason that it had either taken the back track to Chili, or had gone on

ahead towards the Argentina plains—in either case they would simply distribute its load amongst the packs of a few of the other animals and go on phlegmatically, for nothing short of an earthquake will ruffle a peon's serenity sufficiently to make him do five minutes' work more than the ordinary routine compels him to perform. McGlusky had studied peons as he had studied everything else he had come in contact with. He opened the llama's skin sufficiently to cut a couple of good steaks, and with these he hurried back to his mate, improvised a fire in a small cavern, and in a few minutes was feeding Derry gingerly on small scraps. Then he ate himself, and again fed the lad, and kept on feeding him at intervals, knowing the danger of a full meal taken straight off on a starved stomach.

'Noo smoke, buckie, f'r A'll gie ye na mair.'

'Didn't have any respect for mules until now, partner; I've—I've eaten my prejudices.'

'Ye ha' na, this were no' a mule.'

'What was it then?'

'It were a meesguided llama tha' fell ower th' cliff by th' mercy o' Providence, an' a wee bit help from masel'. Y're y'r ain mon again noo, buckie, so watch th' horses while A pack th' rest o' th' beastie. A gave th' horses a gude feed o' moss at dawn, eef y're no' too weary gie them some mair, there's plenty roon' an' its gey strengthenin'. We maun push on, we're too near th' plains yet ta be safe, an' we canna expect Providence ta be always buttin' in ta help us. Joompin' Sarah, wha's yon?' He snatched up his Winchester, had a steady look, then: 'It's naething ta greet aboot, it's no' but a great condor tha' ha' smelt th' bluid an' he coom doon fra th' clouds ta help himsel' fra ma llama; th' thievin' de'il, losh, A'm theenkin' there's na honesty in man or beast or bird in a' th' world, th' whole universe needs

purgin' wi' a besom or—or wi' fire—na honesty anywhere.'

'I expect the chap who lost the llama would say amen to that, partner.'

'Him? Hoots, he's only a dom lazy peon who had na th' sense to watch wha' he'd gotten; he needed a lesson an' it's cheap at th' price o' yin beastie.'

When they took the trail, beaten by ages of caravans across the mountains, it soon became manifest that they had been headed off, several posses of vigilantes being ready to intercept them.

'Stumped this time, eh, partner?'

'We air no'; we'll just plunge inta th' unknown glens an' work along as best we can. Maybe we'll work through, maybe we won't, but we'll try—na mon can dae mair than his best. A'd rather gie ma bones ta th' eagles than surrender, buckie.'

'We'll give some o' them to the eagles before we do either, partner.'

## CHAPTER XV

### THE COMING OF BILL ADAMS

**F**OR many miserable weeks the indomitable Scot led his comrade in and out amid the terrible mountain gorges. Sometimes they climbed so high they became lost in the clouds, sometimes they dived down into valleys that seemed as if they had been hewn out of the very belly of the earth, but always they were stopped from reaching the Chilian border by some gaping chasm or utterly unscaleable height. They existed on the things they could shoot, and those things were so few and far between that their bones were almost pushing through their skins, yet no thought of yielding ever entered their minds.

'It's a wee bittie tryin' ta th' temper, mannie,' was as far as McGlusky ever got when some impassable barrier barred their progress.

One day, just as McGlusky had decided to try and make back to the trail and trust to the rifles to win a way across, they blundered into a rude cabin built on the slope of a mountain. They looked a pretty desperate set, horses as well as men were terribly emaciated, for mountain moss, though it will sustain animal life in good style for a little time, soon loses its virtue unless backed by other food. The two men had been forced to exist upon it for a long time, as well as the horses, and Derry had things to say about mountain moss that would melt the snow, especially when he



was bent double with the colic. Worst of all, they had run right out of tobacco which somehow seems to hold a man together when once he has acquired the habit. Smoke was issuing from the cabin, so they knew it was inhabited.

‘Yon place looks like th’ portals o’ paradise ta ma, buckie.’

‘I’m not looking for paradise, Old Timer, I’d rather see th’ portals o’ a Liverpool hash house this minute than a brand new heaven full o’ music an’ flowers.’

‘Ye ha’ na got a soul, son.’

‘I’d pawn it for a big plate o’ steak and onions if I had, partner.’

‘Whisht, ye wee de’il, dinna talk o’ sic hivinly things; eef A smelt steak an’ onions noo A’d skelp a beeshop ta get ‘em.’

‘An’ fried eggs browned both sides, an’ a mug o’ coffee.’

‘Derry, eef ye dinna haud y’r blether, A’ll back han’ ye; ye’ve set ivery twist in ma internal economy achin’ a’ready. A’m gawn ta buy food fra th’ mon in that cabin.’

‘Perhaps he won’t sell.’

‘He wull; A’ll persuade him ta; A’ll hold ma siller in yin han’ ah’ ma pistol in th’ ither—he’ll tak’ his choice, but he’ll sell.’

‘I’ll be surprised if he don’t.’

They had been leading the emaciated horses towards the haven of refuge as they talked. Suddenly a man appeared at the doorway, a rather tall person, very thin, past middle age, but without a vestige of hair on his face, but what he lacked in hair he made up for in ears—they stuck out from the sides of his head as McGlusky said, ‘like saddleflaps,’ and gave him the appearance of a man who had been created to make the world laugh. He looked like a humorous story in trousers with the jokes poking out in all directions.

He was holding a very old-fashioned Colt revolver in his left hand, and peering at the visitors from under the other. It took a good deal to startle McGlusky, but the sight of the man in the doorway did.

'Joompin' Sarah—if yon's no' Bill Adams, A'm walkin' in ma sleep, or yon's a—ghost.'

The owner of the cabin proved he was no ghost, by suddenly wrinkling his face into many millions of lines and curves with laughter peeping out of every crevice.

'Looks like a joke that's going to bust,' remarked Derry.

The stranger threw down his revolver and came forward with strides so long, the wonder was he didn't split himself. His hands were outstretched in welcome. He flung a greeting as he advanced.

'Hell's cracked an' Jimmy McGlusky's come through with the cinders.'

His voice was like his face: it was a series of chuckles that ran one into the other until the words sounded like sentences set to music that had gone mad and broke in bits.

'Dropped in f'r lunch, Bill.'

That was all the pioneer said, but something in the tone caught Adams's big ears. He shot an amazingly keen glance over the whole outfit, that took in the two men and the horses.

'You sure don't look like a tourist party just landed off a number one Pullman car. Give me the horses, I'll fix 'em. Go right in, grub's just ready f'r me an' my mate, I was waitin' f'r him; you wait f'r nobody, wade right in, you an' your mate, an' bury that grub.'

McGlusky drew his tired figure up stiffly.

'Afore A accept y'r hospitality, Bill, A maun tell ye we're hunted by th' law. A'll no' breeng trouble on an old frien' wi'oot puttin' him wise ta th' fac's o' th' case.'

‘Bury the grub first, Jimmy, we’ll bury the section o’ th’ law that comes ths way later. Th’ stars an’ stripes are nailed to the wall inside that shack, an’ wherever that rag flies, th’ ground is consecrated to hospitality an’—an’ help.’

If his voice had chuckles in it at first, it bubbled with laughter now.

‘Mon Adams, y’re white, aye, white ta th’ bone.’

That was all McGlusky said as he and Derry stumbled forward and fell upon the victuals, and they were still eating when Adams put in an appearance with his mate, a man so sparing of his words that he might easily have passed for a mute. As soon as the wolfish hunger within them was satisfied, the two outlaws sat back in an ecstasy of ease that city men never know. The ‘mute’ pushed his tobacco pouch in front of them, and the beatitude that there and then enveloped McGlusky was, as Adams quaintly phrased it, ‘worth killing a man to see.’ The hosts asked no questions; they had the brand of the great open spaces carved all over them, and to such men inquisitiveness is an unpardonable offence. They had proffered hospitality, and it was up to their guests to talk of their affairs or remain silent, whichever suited them best. The ‘mute’ was a Klondyke man; he had heard of McGlusky, but had never met him. Adams and the pioneer had worked on Broken Hill silver fields and Coolgardie and Murchison gold fields, and on the White Cliff opal diggings side by side for years. That was enough for the ‘mute’: he knew Adams, and stood ready to back any friend of his mate’s, just as he knew Adams would back any friend he asked aid for. Soon McGlusky and the man of mirth were digging up reminiscences of days spent under the burning sun. Derry’s head fell lower and lower, until at last his face was buried in his arms, and he slept the dreamless sleep of the utterly weary. The ‘mute’ rose, picked the youth’s

light figure up in his gnarled arms and laid him on his own bunk, pulled off his boots, wrapped him in his blankets, and went back to listen to the stories of toil and gold finding that fell unceasingly in short crisp sentences from the lips of the men who had been through it all.

‘ Good boy that mate o’ yours, McGlusky, eh ? ’

This astoundingly long speech from the ‘ mute ’ filled in one of the pauses in the flow of talk.

‘ A’ll no’ say he’s perfec’, but gin ye can show me yin as gude f’r his age, A’ll believe th’ days o’ meeracles air no’ past. A’m bluidin’ him ta th’ long trail, an’ he runs true.’

‘ Feel like hitting blanket land yourself, Mac ? ’

‘ A want ta tell ye aboot oor trouble wi’ th’ law first, Adams.’

‘ Pull out th’ plug and let her ripple, or wedge up the bung hole an’ preserve th’ liquor, Mac—it’s up to you.’

So McGlusky told his story from the beginning, adding : ‘ Eef me an’ ma mate air makin’ trouble f’r you, we’ll push on afore daylight.’

‘ What’s your opinion, Old Talking Machine ? Just bust into eloquence for once.’

The ‘ mute ’ looked at Adams who had addressed him, then spat contemptuously into the fire, then jerked his thumb in the direction of a Springfield rifle that hung on the wall, and went on smoking.

‘ Petrified eloquence, ain’t he ? ’ gurgled Adams. ‘ Why, when he proposed to his wife, he didn’t say a word, he just pointed to a heap o’ his dirty clothes an’ a bar o’ soap, an’ held up a weddin’ ring. One o’ these days th’ flood-gates of his soul will break an’ he’ll drown himself in a flood of speech.’

‘ Y’r frien’s silences air un’erstan’able, an’ tha’s mair than A cud say f’r a lot o’ speeches A’ve heard. Th’ gran’ fau’t in ceties is sae many men talk sae



mooch an' say sae leetle. A'm thankin' ye baith on beha'f o' masel' an' ma wee mannie. A'll just ha' a keek at th' twa horses, an' then hit ma blankets.'

He found Red Comet and My Lady doing themselves right well in a rough stable that contained half a dozen mules. Satisfied on that point, he returned, and soon fell asleep. When he awoke the day was well forward, but Derry still slept like a log.

'Pretty near all in, that kid. He must be good stuff to have kept with the game till he had you nearly tuckered out, Mac.'

'He's rock-ribbed an' steel-bottomed; he'll mak' a gran' pioneer, gin he doesn't a rin wild amang th' wummin when he hits th' toons.' Then, after a glance around, 'A dinna see y'r mate th' morn, Adams.'

'No, he took a little pasear over this chain o' mountains; there's a fine lookout where he's gone, an' he'll see if there's anything doing in the way o' law traps; you can rest easy, he knows his job.'

After breakfast Adams told McGlusky he and the 'mute' had struck a narrow vein of rotten quartz, pretty rich in gold, and were working it.

'Got no machinery, you know, we just "dolly" the gold from the quartz by hand.'

'Eet's a mon's life, this prospectin', A love it.'

'Well, we've talked it over, me an' my mate, an' we can put you on to a nice little vein o' th' same kind o' quartz in a valley half a day from here. We can fix you up for grub and tools, and you can square the account out of the gold you get. That mate o' mine has taken a big fancy to your young partner; he's mighty slow as a rule to freeze on to any one, but it takes a lot to make him let go his grip when he likes or dislikes a man.'

'A always kenned ye were na fair weather frien', Adams, an' A'm gratefu', but eef th' law fin's ma here, th' law wull try ta collect me, an' some buckie may get



hurtit in th' process an' tha' wad mean trouble f'r ye an' y'r frien'.'

'Say, Mac, we've both cut our wisdom teeth, me an' my mate, let us hoe our own row, wull you? It just amounts to this: you can't cross to Chili because they won't let you; you can't starve in these mountains because *we* won't let you; all you've got to do is to sit round and get fed up, you and your horses, then locate that reef and work it. No one will suspect you are here, and in time the vigilantes will think you've either got across safely or perished. In either case they won't make trouble. If they should strike your trail by accident and come pushing us to the wall, there will sure be an accident in these regions, and the vigilantes will be in it. That quaint partner o' mine is about as healthy a beast to crowd into a corner as a grizzly with a flesh wound. I'd take the chances if I were in your place, and peg away at the reef I spoke of. I know a bit about mining, and I feel it will pan out worth your while.'

'A ken a' about y'r knowledge o' minin, Bill Adams, A'd back y'r opeenion o' a bit gold bearin' country against tha' o' ony mon in th' three continents where minin' is un'erstood. In some matters y're th' maist chuckle-headed eembecile A've met, but minin' is no' yin o' them, an' y're straight.'

'Let it go at that, Mac. As for what I've done, why, I've only done by you as I have known you do by other men in a tight place.'

When Derry heard the news he had to search his memory for a hymn that would express his joy.

'I didn't mind if we had to run or fight,' he confided to the 'mute,' 'but I did dread goin' again on a grass an' mountain moss diet. It was bad when it was raw, but when the Old Sportsman cooked it, it smelt like something that had died in the garden of Eden and Adam hadn't had the savvee to bury. He's

the greatest thing that lives, my partner, but the things he makes you eat on the long trail to keep you alive make you wish you were dead.'

It was not long before the two outlaws were fit to carry on; the fine clean life they had led, free from alcohol and all viciousness, had given them recuperative powers that only needed a little rest and good feeding to bring them back again to normal conditions. Their horses needed a far longer time to pick up than they did, but in those idle days it was worth a good deal to watch the pioneer helping Red Comet back to perfect health. He groomed him and plaited mane and tail, until the big fellow began to look himself again, and Derry copied his leader and worked on My Lady until the dainty thing began to nip him playfully in a slyly human way that made McGlusky's eyes twinkle with sheer delight.

'That's th' heart comin' back inta her, laddie; she's a wee dandy thing, she's—she's fit ta be mates wi' ma stallion.'

Higher praise than that no horse could win, and Derry knew it, and knowing what a master of horsecraft the pioneer was, he glowed with the pride of ownership.

Bill Adams, true to his promise, took them out to the valley where the narrow reef lay, and he and McGlusky examined it. The reef was a mixture of decomposed granite, red porphyry and sugary brown quartz. It was about a foot wide, and lay between walls of grey slate. After crushing a few samples McGlusky, who was now in his rightful element, exclaimed:

'Eef A had five head o' stampers an' a sma' cyanide vat, Derry an' masel' an' a dozen peons wad rip oot enouch gould in twa years ta enable us ta tak' oor proper place in th' sun, but wi' ainly oor twa sel's an' na battery, we'll raise enouch o' yon ore an' "dolly"

th' gould oot by han' ta gie us a fine start in any pairt o' God's gude earth we may feex upon as a permanent address.'

Then began the work of making camp, carrying stores and tools, dynamite and horse fodder, and when that was done they settled down to work. More than once in the early days Derry nearly blew his partner out of this wicked world by his recklessness with dynamite. The pioneer never got angry; he would expostulate and explain, knowing that the young are prone to carelessness.

'Mannie,' he would say, after just missing a free passage to the home of the blessed, 'Mannie, A'm wantin' ta gae ta hivin, but no' tha' way; a hoist wi' a plug o' Noble's best superfine dynamite is no' wha' A'd be choosin' ta hoist ma ower th' top bar o' th' pearly gates. A'm feared A'd no' land in yin piece, an' A'm no' ambeetious ta be a yin-legged seraphim.'

But the work progressed at a great pace, for if Derry was reckless he was a glutton for work, and the purified mountain air flowed into them like champagne of the rarest vintage; the rude rough winds tanned them almost black, but every muscle in their bodies became like pliable steel; they were trusting nature under the most favourable conditions, and nature took them to her bosom and adopted them. As the months sped by the two gold sacks grew heavier and heavier, and happiness dwelt with them cheek by jowl.

One night when the moon was at her full, gilding every snow-encrusted minaret and spire, and every embattled crag and mighty buttress with soft and mellow splendour, the pioneer, touching Derry on the shoulder with caressing gesture, said:

'Ma mannie, A dinna ken wha' A've done in ma life ta deserve a' this wealth at ma feet, a gran' horse ready ta ma han', gude frien's roon' ma, an' a' this won'rous beauty ta feast th' eye an' uplift ma soul.

Eet's a gran' worl', ma son, a gran' worl', ma mooth is filled wi' honey, ma soul wi' sweetness; na babe clinging ta its mither's dugs is mair at peace than A am th' nicht, A'm——'

Just then the ring of hoofs on mountain track came to them.

'Wha's that, buckie?'

The sound came rapidly nearer, waking the vibrant echoes near and far.

'Some one galloping like the devil, partner.'

'Aye, some yin in rare dan'er or mad drunk, ridin' hell f'r leather on a bridle track in-th' moonlight; eef he blunders he'll fa' a thoosan' feet.'

McGlusky's philosophic calm had vanished; he stood snuffing the night air. All at once, as if some unseen sentinel had whispered a warning, he dashed towards the stable.

'F'r y'r life, buckie, quick, saddle Ma Lady!'

Derry was racing him stride for stride. Everything was in readiness: saddles, rifles, ammunition, food, all strapped and ready for just such an hour, for McGlusky never trusted to luck, he pinned his faith on foresight. The saddles were on, their gold bags buckled to their waists, when with a rush and a scrambling clatter, a big black mule pulled up near by and the 'mute' leapt to the ground. He was a man of action; every word snapped from his lips like thorns crackling on a fire.

'Ride for it, you two; they're nearly on top of you now. Bill Adams has taken 'em on a false scent down the left-hand cañon, but he can't hold 'em. Bill means well, but he can't ride, he'd fall off a fence.'

Derry and McGlusky leapt to saddle.

'Got your gold?'

'Aye.'

'Good man. Now, every pass to Chili's blocked,

th' trail behind me's watched, they'll shoot on sight.'

'Sae wull we.'

'Ride down this trail as if old Scratch was after you, for half an hour, then turn into a pass about as wide as a door on your right, and work back on to the Argentine plains and then steer north. I'll take hold here and swear this claim is mine.'

'It is yours; we mak' ye a presen' o' 't, na need ta perjure y'r soul.'

'Ride now; I'll divvy up the output with you if we ever meet.'

'They'll take the claim from you,' snarled Derry.

The 'mute' laughed.

'Will they? I'll fly "Old Glory" from one o' th' pegs on my claim an' th' man who disregards that will meet with an accident—maybe accidents will be plentiful round these parts. Good-bye, an' luck in lumps.'

A hasty hand-grip, a slackening of the reins and the two outlaws were plunging down the narrow trail which had been fashioned by rushing water in some bygone period. The pioneer was in the van, his old felt hat turned up in front, his whiskers blowing in the wind, his hands well down, his leonine head held high. One false step, one blunder on a loose boulder, would mean being hurled into fathomless space, but his blood thrilled to the danger, and his heart beat high, for in such an hour he was at his best. Derry also caught the throb of joy that lies in peril for some natures. The love of dare-devil deeds was strong in them both.

They found the narrow trail the 'mute' had described and followed it. Time passed; they camped and went on again, the trail winding, twisting, turning as if it had been made by a giant corkscrew, but it took them to the plains at last and McGlusky headed north with the instinct of a homing bird. No one was on the look out for them on the Argentine side, the vigilantes thinking they were in hiding in some moun-



tain glen, just watched the trails that led to Chili and waited, reckoning that hunger would sooner or later drive the hunted pair into their hands. Carefully avoiding all human haunts, the fugitives travelled only by night and rested by day, never scrupling to help themselves to the meat they needed.

'What if a vaquero comes across us this time, partner?'

'Leave th' vaqueros ta ma, an', buckie——'

'Well?'

'Ye whisper a bit prayer f'r th' soul o' th' vaquero, it may help him on his way. They're after bluid money, gie'n information ta betray eennocent men—they who gang oot f'r bluid money maun run th' reesks o' 't.'

'Now you're talkin' sense, partner. I'm going to fight for my skin.'

'It's y'r richt, mannie—a tapeworm wad eef it kenned hoo.'

But they did not have to fight; they were riding inland, and there was no hue and cry out for them there; had they travelled towards the coast they would have had men swarming at their heels.

They reached the ancient town of Ju Juy, not far from the borders of Bolivia, before they struck trouble. This old town had been founded by the first Spaniards who had invaded South America; very quaint and old-world it looked, surrounded on all sides by dense forests. McGlusky would have avoided it, but he came upon it so suddenly that he was seen before he realized where he was.

'Better face it, mannie, gie y'r hat a bit cock ower yin ear, an' look jaunty, an' remem'er we're just twa planters comin' oop ta buy lan' ta stairt a sugar plantation.'

He had given his own old slouch hat a hell-raking twist as he spoke.

' We don't look it, partner, we look more like two ruffians going to raid a bank.'

' Wha' o' 't? Canna we drap a hint we've been spyin' oot unbroken lan' f'r oorsel's, an' got a wee bittie disarranged in oor wardrobe whiles we were at it? '

Derry looked at him and grinned.

' Yes, partner, a wee bittie disarranged just expresses it.'

They walked their horses unostentatiously along the great main street, which at the noonday hour, the hour of the siesta, was barren of all except Indian servants, lithe brown men who did all the field work, whilst their women did all the house work of their white overlords. They were called peons, but were just one remove from the negro slavery that at one time disgraced the Southern States of North America, one remove, and that not a big one.

McGlusky drew rein in front of the best hotel. Rags would not count since they had money and plenty of it in their pockets, without disturbing the gold in their wallets. Two Indians took their horses, and McGlusky, for purposes of his own, spoke to them in English. They could not follow his meaning, but they knew a word here and there.

' Inglesa.'

The Indian who held Red Comet's bridle uttered the one word eagerly, and his teeth showed in a quick smile.

The pioneer nodded, and passed the man a very liberal tip, telling him to take great care of the horses. He did it carelessly with the grand air of a great seigneur, but he was very wise and knew the value of making friends in an enemy camp. Derry, quick to imitate all that his leader did, tipped the Indian who held My Lady. It was the biggest tip these sons of the soil had ever received or dreamed of, and instantly

the two ragged 'Inglesa' were transformed into Caballeros of the highest grade in the eyes of the recipients. As they moved towards the doorway McGlusky said :

'There's an airt in tippin', mannie ; gin ye tip a mon dae it as eef he were conferrin' a favour by acceptin' it, ye dooble its value tha' way. Dinna gie it as eef ye were throwin' a bone ta a dog.'

'I didn't,' snapped Derry.

'Na, A ken ye didna. A'm expoundin' th' gen'ral preinciple o' tippin', it's—it's an airt. A've had men gie ma an eenvitation ta dinner in a manner tha' hurtit maist as mooch as a backhan'er across th' mooth. A geeft should be wrappit in courtesy, otherwise it's like a pretty wench in a dirty frock, an' ye air apt ta judge wha's unner by wha's ower.'

Having ordered food for themselves, the pair sauntered to the stables and saw to it that their equine friends were well provided for. They found that their fame as caballeros had preceded them, for every red man about the place treated them with uncommon deference. Back in the hotel again they found that the chief of the local vigilantes had ensconced himself at the table they had selected for themselves. With an understanding glance, the pioneer signalled Derry to take no notice. The chief expressed himself as being delighted at the arrival of two Inglesas, and placed the town and himself, especially himself, at their disposal. Then McGlusky developed his strategic genius. Did the chief know of a good local man, one of his own vigilantes for choice, who for a handsome retainer would pilot them round the adjacent country ?

'What was it the señors were in search of ?'

McGlusky explained that he had yearnings towards soil that was suitable for sugar growing—virgin soil.

The chief knew of leagues of it, but it lay on the wrong side of Ju Juy for the pioneer's purpose. Then

McGlusky made his first blunder in tactics, for he said he wanted it as near the Bolivian border as possible. Now men who want to live near the border in any of the South American States usually have good reason for the choice. The pioneer saw his blunder almost before it was made; he saw also the quick flicker in the chief's eyes, and guessed he had given himself away. The next moment he was sure of it. No one on earth, not even an Oriental, is so suave as an Argentino of the better class; such an one may pistol you if it lies in the way of his duty, but he will do it politely like a gentleman, and when he starts he generally makes a job of it.

'I can surely assist the señors; I have five men who shall go with them.'

McGlusky did not think the occasion warranted the presence of five. The chief explained. Henrico knew every inch of the country between Ju Juy and the Bolivian border, but he was a noted drunkard and would need Tommaso to keep him from wasting the Inglese señors' valuable time. Tommaso would see to that, he was a jewel; unfortunately neither of them knew anything about soil suitable for sugar growing. Leon was the man for that; he had been reared amongst the sugar cane, but unfortunately, again, Leon was a dunce, a very dull fellow, except in regard to sugar soil; he would only confuse the señors and make their journey profitless. Maximilian was the only man in Ju Juy who could properly get at the workings of Leon's obtuse mind, but—the chief cursed fluently in beautiful Spanish, a language that adapts itself charmingly to this mode of working off an overcharged temper—Maximilian and Leon were rivals in love and would not travel five leagues before cutting each other's throats unless Jose were there to keep the peace. He was desolated, but such were the facts, and he swore to them by the Virgin.

Derry nearly saved the situation by suggesting that the chief himself should accompany them to get the best results out of his men. The chief said he would go away and give this latter suggestion his best consideration. It was strange that in order to get the best results from his brains, he had to go and carefully scrutinize their horses to try and discover by horse signs how much of the 'sugar' story was true. Then he removed himself, not hurriedly, no one ever hurried in Ju Juy unless some one bent on private business is after him with a lethal weapon in his hand. Ten minutes later he was telegraphing a very full description of the two Inglesas and their horses to headquarters in Buenos Aires, finishing by asking if by any chance the travellers were wanted, and if so to what extent.

As soon as the chief had left them, McGlusky remarked :

' A pu' ma hoof in it tha' time, wee mannie.'

Derry's eyes twinkled.

' Both hoofs, partner, that chap smells a rodent.'

' Le's ha' a keek at th' horses.'

' At our rifles and revolvers too, Old Sportsman. We've travelled too far to be stopped now, eh? '

McGlusky said nothing, but the baleful light in his eyes was an endorsement of his comrade's opinion. They sauntered into their bedrooms and carefully examined their weapons and found them ready for any little thing that might arise; then went to the stables. The Indian Derry had tipped made them a sign; they went to him where he was half hidden behind some fodder at the far end of the stable. With finger on lip he put a query that startled them: Did the Inglesas know the chief of the vigilantes had come to the stable and examined their horses very carefully? No, but they were glad to get the information and would reward him or any Indian who brought



more. They again added to his earnings in a manner which must have made him think he had run into a banking institution on legs.

'This is no' ta ma likin', ma son.'

'Glad I had my lunch before I heard it—don't think it's a blessing in disguise myself, Old Timer.'

An hour later an Indian made signs to them through their bedroom window, which overlooked the stable yard. The pioneer raised the sash an inch or two, and the red man whispered :

'Twenty mounted vigilantes all armed have gone in different directions towards the Bolivian frontier ; they are all picked shots.'

He got his reward, and vanished.

'Mannie, a tip properly gie'd is like bread cast upon th' watters, it cooms back in th' shape o' usefu' eenformation.'

'Don't know just how you feel about it, Mac, but I've doubts about Ju Juy as a—a health resort, it's the open country and the back of My Lady for me.'

'Dae ye say sae? Why, mannie, th' hoose richt opposite is fu' o' armed men ; ye'd no' travel far, A'm theenkin'. A'm feelin' gey bashfu' masel', too dom bashfu' ta gang awa' in daylight ; nicht time wull cover oor blushes best, A'm theenkin'.'

They lounged about, apparently very much at their ease, in front of the hotel and took their bearings.

'Yon big cedar forest awa' ta th' richt o' us is oor best route as sune as nicht fa's, mannie. Noo coom in an' A'll gie ye a game dominoes, then A can watch th' front door while ye keep y'r e'en on th' back yin.'

Scarce had they seated themselves when McGlusky turned his head half round and spoke to some one or something in a whisper. Derry looked and saw nothing.

'Joompin' Sarah, but ye've got sense, Mahomet, thank ye kin'ly f'r th' tip.'

Then he murmured to Derry :

'It's a'richt, mannie, ma frien's are wi' ma.'

'Hope they've brought something bullet-proof with them.'

'They've brocht sense, an' y're needin' it sairly. They've gied ma an idea.'

'If it's for publication, let's have it.'

'Weel, ma frien' Mahomet, who had subtlety enouch ta mak' th' whole Eastern world bow doon ta him when he were naething but an earthworm, th' same as you an' me, ha' telt ma ta eenvite th' chief o' vigilantes ta dinner, an'—an' ta send ower th' wine list f'r his eenspection.'

'I'm not pinin' to dine with th' chief o' vigilantes, partner.'

'A am, eef he cooms, an' A theenk th' wine list wull bring him. Ye can leave th' rest ta ma an' Mahomet.'

'Anything for a quiet life, partner. Hullo, there's that red skin making fancy signs again. I wonder if your pal Mahomet has been putting *him* up to a new wrinkle.'

McGlusky lounged out of the public room, stood yawning for a bit, and then followed the Indian. The man showed him a lot of cartridges, and the pioneer demanded where he had got them from.

'The chief of vigilantes sent me to take them from the Inglesas' rifles in the bedroom and bring them to him.'

'A'm becomin' interestit in th' chief masel', growled the pioneer. 'Dom him, he can ha' them; A'll be addin' yin ta 'em th' nicht eef he's too pressin' in his attentions.'

'He told me to put a cork into the barrel of each rifle from the breech end, caballero.'

'Th' hell he did! Ha' ye done it?'

'No, caballero.'

'Why no? A'm theenkin' y're runnin' some reesk in refusin'.'

'The Inglesa will want a guide when they escape.'

'Aye, wull we. Dae ye want th' job?'

'Yes, caballero, I would escape to the woods, to my own people.'

'A'm beginnin' ta see daylight; gie ma th' rest o' 't.'

'I will borrow a horse from the stable and follow the caballeros; if they are shot, I return the horse quickly; if they are not, I gallop up to them and lead them. Once in the woods you can laugh at pursuit; you are armed men, and armed men are dangerous in the forests.' He held out the cartridges. 'Now I go to give them to the chief and collect the reward of service.'

McGlusky found Derry awaiting him, and explained the situation.

'Why the devil didn't he take the rifles instead of doing all that fancy work, Old Sportsman?'

'Weel, A'm no' sure, but A theenk he's wired to Buenos Aires because he suspec's us, but is no' sure. He'll dae things fast enouch when word cooms through on th' wire.'

'Sounds like the real thing. Why not see if your pal Mahomet's oracle will work.'

'A'm gawn ta; Mahomet's no' th' buckie ta say theengs wi'oot reason.'

'He's been dead a bit too long for my liking,' grumbled Derry, 'couldn't you dig up a fresher one? Mahomet's had time to forget most he ever knew.'

'Eef he had he'd remem'er mair than ye'll iver fin' oot—he were a skyscraper at deplomacy.'

The pioneer sent the invitation and the wine list, and the invitation was gratefully accepted. Then the two comrades repaired to their bedroom, re-examined their rifles and reloaded them, and McGlusky

had a word with the Indian. The red man's eyes flashed as he listened, and his teeth showed as he laughed silently.

'Ye quite unnerstan'?'

'Quite, caballero.'

There may have been three merrier men in Ju Juy than the two fugitives and the chief as they dined together; if so Ju Juy was jollier than ever before in the memory of man. Just as they had lighted cigars, a sergeant entered and gave the chief a telegram. A sardonic smile played round his good-looking mouth as he thrust it into his pocket. The sergeant saluted and departed. Then the chief spoke with the smoothness of a lover asking through a keyhole for admittance on forbidden territory.

'I am desolated to have to tear myself away, señors, but,' tapping the pocket where the telegram lay, 'business must be attended to.'

Derry was looking serious, McGlusky laughing out of his eyes.

'Wull ye dae ma a favour before ye gang, señor?'

'With all my heart, your dinner has been of the best.'

'Th' dinner was no' sae bad, but y're missin' th' dessert; just oblige ma by takin' a keek unner th' table.'

With a merry laugh the chief obeyed—the wine had indeed been good and plentiful. McGlusky's two large rough hands were on his knees under the table, and gripped in each was a revolver of North American make and large, very large, bore. Slowly the chief raised his eyes above the white table-cloth; he was a brave man, the Argentine Government does not often employ cowards.

'What's that, señor?'

'Dessert.'

The one word came from the pioneer's lips like the

sound of a walnut cracking sharply beneath a man's heel.

'And very prettily served, señor. May I say you are in your way 'an artist?'

It was all Greek to Derry; he looked from one to the other and wondered which was the madder.

'Air ye takin' dessert wi' ma, or—or a wee bittie fresh air, señor?'

'Oh, let it be fresh air by all means, señor; I—I never like to spoil a good dinner.'

'Y're a gen'leman o' rare gude sense, eet's a peety there air no' mair like ye.'

'Thanks, señor—I did you a slight favour just now, will you pay the debt and do me one?'

'Anything yin gen'leman can dae anither un'er th' circumstances A'll dae. Wha' is 't?'

'Spare me the ridicule of my men, do not let there be any display of force.'

'Ha' we y'r word o' honour ye'll gang wi' us f'r ha'f an hoor an' mak' na outcry?'

'Certainly, señor.'

'Tha's gude enouch f'r Jamie McGlusky any day or nicht; A'd tak' th' word o' a gen'leman o' Argentina before maist.'

His hands went to his trousers pockets without appearing above the table, and when he lifted them they were empty.

The officer rose and bowed.

'Señor, as far as it marches with my duty, you've made a friend to-night.'

McGlusky linked his arm in that of his captive, and laughing and chatting they strolled out to the stables, Derry loafing along in the rear with one hand on the butt of a pistol. A sharp command from the pioneer to an Indian who seemed to have the power of melting out of or into the shadows, so softly did he come and go, sent the red man to the stables, from which he



rapidly reappeared leading Red Comet, followed by another who led My Lady.

‘It seems, señor, I am to have the anguish of parting from you at once.’

The officer’s voice as he addressed the pioneer carried a whimsical note. There was a touch of irony in McGlusky’s tones as he answered :

‘A wad na cause deestress ta a frien’ by pairtin’ wi’ him too abruptly, señor. In a wee bittie yin a yon red men wull bring a horse f’r ye, an’ ye’ll dae me th’ honour ta ride a matter o’ a mile or twa oot o’ toon wi’ us.’

‘You haven’t absolute faith in me then, señor?’

‘Oh aye, ma faith is as strong as the pillars o’ Gaza tha’ tested blind Samson’s strength ta th’ uttermaist, but A ha’ a belief tha’ it’s aye wise ta temper faith in humanity wi’ a wee bit circumspection. Ye’ll no’ be takin’ offence where none was inten’ed ; A’m sure it wad break y’r prood heart eef y’r men were ta open fire on us from th’ hoose yon’er wi’oot orders ; they’ll no’ fire, ye ken, eef y’re wi’ us ; it’s your pride no’ ma ain carcass A’m theenkin’ o’.’

‘I’m sure of it, señor,’ replied the silky voice, ‘quite sure, and it will give me joy to ride with you.’

They mounted and an Indian on a borrowed horse rode close behind them, and as they clattered noisily out into the street Derry noticed with a grin that McGlusky was so careful concerning the officer’s pride that he had placed the officer in such a position that if the vigilantes should fire it was all Britain to a bunch of beans that the officer would receive most of the bullets. No one fired, and the little cavalcade continued towards the big cedar forest in light and happy mood, if one could judge from the merriment that mingled with the hoof-beats of their horses.

When they were well in among the cedars, the Indian riding at the rear urged his horse forward, and in silence

took the place of guide. This was evidently a pre-arranged signal, for McGlusky called a halt.

'We pairt here, señor, an' A'm hopin' A've no' discommoded ye at a.'

'Not in the least, señor.'

'A've a favour ta ask eef A may.'

'It is granted before it is named.'

'A wad be obliged eef ye wad gie ma th' telegram ye received tha' bruk oop oor wee bit dinner party.'

As he spoke, as if by the merest accident, the pioneer's rifle barrel pointed directly at the spot where the officer's share of the wee bit dinner lay. He produced the telegram without a murmur. McGlusky struck a match and read.

"Arrest both men, wanted for horse stealing and offering armed resistance to the police, be careful, they are clever and very dangerous. Shoot on the slightest show of resistance." A'm surprisit,' murmured the pioneer as he handed back the wire, 'A'm a lamb masel'an' ma wee mannie is sae ten'er-hearted he wad ha' been in a nunnery eef he'd been born a wumman.' He raised his battered hat courteously. 'Adios! señor, ma' y'r dreams be sweet as musk n' mignonette.'

'Adios! señor Inglesa, God go with you!'

The officer wheeled and cantered very quietly out of sight. McGlusky jumped to earth and put his ear to the ground as soon as his guest had faded out of view. In a minute he rose.

'Shift a leg, red skin, yon buckie's ridin' like hell.'

There was no need to urge the red man, he knew what his reward would be if captured, and he did not want to take his payment out in lead or hemp. They travelled all night and well on into the next day before he drew bridle, and then he only rested long enough to breathe the horses. That night when they camped they were in a tangle of woods so dense that they could

not see the stars above them, nor two horse lengths on any side. The Indian had brought them by tracks so narrow and so well hidden that not one white man in a million would have found them in the labyrinth of shrubs, creepers and undergrowth of every description.

'Think we'll be followed? I feel pretty good on that score after looking at the country we've passed through, partner.'

'A'm no' sweatin' wi' fear, buckie, but A'm gawn ta mak' siccar afore A crow. We'll watch, turn an' turn aboot through th' nicht; ye turn in, A'll tak' th' first spell, A'll gie ye a nibble wi' ma boot when A want ye.'

It was forest twilight when the red man started again. Soon the sun came up, but in that wilderness of trees no heat penetrated. Again 'and again the white men thought all progress was barred by the density of the thickets, but the red man found a way through the maze; sometimes he had to hew a track with his machete for the horses for a few yards, but he always went back and rearranged the thicket with infinite care and patience.

They travelled many days in this fashion in country that, according to their guide, was the home of the wild tribes who were the descendants of those Aztecs whom the first invading Spaniards drove out of their towns and cities with fire and sword. At night when they bivouacked, he told weird stories of the past: how his people had been a mighty nation with a civilization and a literature of their own, little, if anything, inferior to the white man's knowledge of to-day. In one thing he claimed the red men of old were far superior to the modern whites, for they could and did irrigate the soil, conveying the life-giving water fabulous distances without the aid of machinery. And when McGlusky asked how it was done, with his insatiable thirst for knowledge, the red man said some day, if

McGlusky proved acceptable to his tribe, he would take him to the site of cities lost long ago to all white men, surrounded by irrigation works that would make everything of the sort the white race had accomplished look child's play by comparison.

'Why dinna y'r people gird oop their loins an' rebuild their ancient ceeties, an' reopen th' irrigation canals?' demanded the pioneer.

'The cities are accursed; the ghosts of many thousands of men, women and children who were given to the sword still mourn there, and the living red men dare not go near.'

'Canna ye open oop th' watter ditches an' build new ceeties?'

'The canals have run with the blood of a whole nation; tribes and peoples were slain there; they too are accursed.'

'F'r why were they gied oop ta th' steel?'

'For gold.'

The red man spoke quietly, but his whole soul was in his eyes, his frame shook with the intensity of his passion.

'Dom th' gold.'

'It was our curse,' mourned the red man, 'if it had not been for the gold, my nation would not have been tortured and butchered.'

'Air there many o' ye noo?'

'We are like the leaves on the trees, but we no longer dwell in cities, we live in small tribes and cultivate but small spaces, but even as it is, white men sometimes find us and drive us from the soil we have won from the forests, and rob us of the fruits of our labours. It was in such a raid that I was captured; they taught me a strange religion, and when I did not understand it, I was beaten; they said their God was a god of love, and they made me draw water and hew wood, and fed and housed me as they fed and housed

their dogs. I do not understand a religion like that, that is why I fled with you. I am forest-born, I would die in the forests when my time comes, caballero.'

'Wha' ye an' y'r people want,' thundered McGlusky, 'is th' releegion o' ma frien' Mahomet, th' releegion o' th' sword. Why dinna ye fecht like men an' if need be dee like men?'

'We have no leader, none big enough to draw the tribes together and hold them together as a nation. We fight amongst ourselves; we are as a bundle of faggots strewn over the forest with no one man great enough to bind us together.'

McGlusky rose and paced up and down for hours, and Derry could hear him from time to time talking to some one or something that he could not see.

'Ye mean 't? Y're no' pullin' ma leg, Mahomet?' A long pause. 'Ye say ye led ma here; weel, ma buckie, ye tuk a dom roon'about track ta dae it.'

The night was hot and sultry; a red moon was riding amid sullen clouds in the sky, Derry could catch glimpses of it through the thick foliage. The spot where they had camped was surrounded by bloodwood trees, so called because the bark was dark, dull red. Suddenly the Indian touched Derry's arm and whispered in awestruck tones:

'Look, señor, it is *the* man!'

Derry looked, and saw McGlusky standing just where a narrow beam of moonlight fell upon him. Perhaps it was the reflection from the trees or the colour of the moon itself, but the pioneer looked like the figure of some ancient viking badly off for decent wearing apparel, standing in the centre of a stained-glass window. His hands were raised above his head, his eyes were glazed, his lips moved.

'Got 'em bad this time! Damn Mahomet! He's dead; why don't he stay dead?'

Derry spoke snarlingly, for it was his opinion that



when once a pilgrim got inside a cemetery in the orthodox way, he should remain quiescent, or confine his activities to realms where creditors cease from troubling and even prima donnas are at rest. The pioneer woke as from a trance, and strode to his young comrade.

'Derry, ma sonnie, A've got ma call, eet cam' on th' weengs o' th' nicht fra th' halls o' th' unseen. A've been listenin' ta 't ringin' doon th' pathways o' th' ages, an' th' feet o' them tha' brocht it clanged through th' aisles o' nicht like thun'er on a rocky headlan'. Mannie, f'r this end was A born, A've got ma call.'

'Better sleep on it, partner. I don't like these carmine moonlights myself.'

But McGlusky was fey.

'Blessed is ma mither amang wummin; she too shall leeve in heestory as th' mither o' th' mon who restored an ancient people ta their bithricht an' set oop their lan'marks tha' had been trodden doon by th' usurper. A'll draw th' scattered tribes thegither, an' rebuild their ceeties, an' mak' their barren fields blossom like th' rose. Th' Aztecs shall be a nation again an'—an' Jamie McGlusky shall be their presiden'—eef they'll elect ma. Eef they dinna, A'll put th' toe o' ma boot inta th' wame o' th' buckie they dae elec' fill he sees veesions an' gies ma th' presidential robes. Buckie, A've got ma call.'

The very next night Derry had an idea the pioneer had got a 'call' to go to another and a happier realm. The horses had been tethered to trees by their strong raw hide lariats, Red Comet being placed by himself in a nice patch of grass some little distance from the camp, as there was not enough grass in the glade where the camp was pitched for all the animals, and the stallion was liable to 'savage' the Indian's gelding. Suddenly they all heard a fierce squeal from Red Comet, half rage, half terror. McGlusky, hunting knife in hand, dashed to the spot and saw the stallion madly

straining on the lariat. Fifteen feet from him, an immense black jaguar was crouched, its tail slowly beating the grass in a semi-circular wave. The black jaguar is the monarch and the terror of the woods; he will not turn a stride from his path, even for man; no Indian hunter ever attacks a black jaguar single-handed, though the bravest hunters will readily assail the striped creatures of the same species. The beast had its eyes fixed on Red Comet's throat: one leap, one deadly downward stroke of the short, massive fore claws, and the stallion's jugular vein would be ripped as no knacker's knife could rip it, and the greedy jaws would fasten on the gaping wound, for the black jaguar loves hot blood pumping fresh from the heart; flesh it will eat when hard pressed by hunger, but blood that jets and gushes from a wound is the joy of its existence, be it the blood of man or beast. There was no time to waste, the waving tail was the herald of the spring to follow. Red Comet knew his danger; he could not swing round and use his heels; the great cat had chosen its point of attack too cleverly for that, for its ferocity is only equalled by its cunning.

'A'm wi' ye, Comet!'

With this slogan the pioneer launched himself knife in hand between his beloved stallion and the beast of prey, and at that moment the jaguar made its leap, hurling the pioneer over as if he had been made of straw, but he got no stroke from the murderous claws. The lithe, newy body was stretched in mid-air as it met the man; had it been springing upon him he would have received the swift, ripping downward strokes of two sets of curved claws two inches long, strong as steel and sharp as fish hooks. The jaguar never by any chance miscalculates a distance; the blows were intended for the horse's throat, and the man was six good feet in between that objective, that alone saved

the pioneer. As he went down, the snarling beast, upset in its flight through the air by the impact, came down too. Instantly McGlusky struck, and he struck vengefully, with all the might that was in him. The knife went home, and man and beast were close locked in a battle for life. It was the complete surprise of the thing that gave the man his chance ; all the brute's calculations had been upset, and the hunter, knowing his business, gave no time for fresh planning. Savagely he struck, sending the long knife home to the haft every time, and it is worthy of note that no men fight better with the steel than men with good Scotch blood in them. Claymore dirk or battle-axe have always been the national weapons, and the lessons of the ages always tell in a fight to a finish. The Englishman loves the long-range rifle, as his fathers loved the long bow ; the Irishman has a predilection for the rifle butt, he likes to feel something smash under his hand, but the swinge of the steel through flesh is bed and breakfast to a fighting Scot. The jaguar was not idle, though instead of taking an enemy at a disadvantage, the tables had been turned. The beast was growling, spitting and snarling, the Scot prayerful and linguistically indecent in turn.

'Noo Mahomet'—stab and a gush of blood. 'Blast ye, Mahomet, y'r ower slow wi' y'r help'—stab—stab—stab. 'Where in blazes air ye, Mahomet?'—stab. 'Ye randy loon, air ye gallivantin' wi' y'r houris?'—stab.'

Derry could not fire, the combatants were too close, and though McGlusky had surely wounded the great beast unto death he would just as surely have been killed himself if the Indian had not thrown himself upon the jaguar and used his machette almost as savagely as Mac used his knife.

They had to camp for nearly a month where they were whilst McGlusky's wounds healed. They were

close to water, and food was plentiful, for the woods were full of monkeys, many of which fell victims to the Indian's skill. Derry objected to monkey as a diet, either boiled or baked, at first, but McGlusky had no scruples.

'Wha's wrang wi' ye, mannie?'

It was the pioneer's voice full of reproach, as Derry turned away from the first monkey meal.

'I'm not squeamish, old sportsman, but I'll be damned if I can eat monkey; the little chaps look too infernally human.'

'Ha' ye been readin' tha' fule body Mister Darwin?'

'Yes, I've read Darwin.'

'Dae ye theenk y'r mither was a monkey, laddie?'

'If you ever come to Liverpool, you ask her, partner, and you'll get a taste of her flat iron,' grinned Derry.

'Did ye iver see y'r feyther tryin' ta swing himsel' by th' tail fra th' window-sill when he wanted an airin'?''

'Can't say I have, partner.'

'Weel, dinna fash about Darwin; he were a fule, buckie, wi' a pimple f'r a head. A mon is a mon an' a monkey is a monkey; there were men an' there were monkeys as far back as heestory gaes, an' ha' been all doon th' ages, an' neither mon nor monkey ha' differed yin hair since we've known 'em. Dae ye no' theenk there wad ha' been na change in a' tha' time eef Darwin were richt? Darwin wanted ta make a splurge in th' world o' letters, sae he wrote doon stupeedity an' ca'ed it science, an' ivery wee puppy who wanted his little world ta theenk he had a scientific mind, swallowed th' Darwin trash an' ca'ed himsel' a scientific thinker. Lots o' them may ha' been prood ta trace their descent fra th' monkey tribe, but A'm dom sure th' monkeys were no' flattered. Ye eat monkey meat, an' thank th' gude God A'michty it



is na boa constrictor, we ma' coom ta that yet.'  
After a bit he reopened the subject.

' A yince kenned a doctor body who opened a corpse ta see eef it were deed, an' he foond a wee bit pipe hangin' fra th' innards ca'ed th' appendix, an' th' loonie joomped ta th' conclusion it were th' end o' th' tail o' preheestoric mon. A were on th' coroner's jury sittin' on tha' corpse, an' th' doctor buckie, wi' a copy o' Darwin in yin han' an' th' bit appendix in th' ither, gied us a lecture an hoor long explainin' hoo men yince had tails an' got free board an' lodgin' hangin by that same tail fra boughs o' trees, but when mon tuk ta wearin' breeks he had na use f'r a tail, an' in time th' tail ceased ta grow, an' A said ta him, " Sir, wull ye explain ta us eef th' human tail were cut off short or—or pushed in ? " A'm na blind believer in science, ma son, f'r wha' yin generation o' scientists swear by th' nex' generation lauchs at. A'll wager eef we had a hungry scientist wi' us noo he'd eat monkey meat rather than starve, even eef he thocht it was his gran'mither.'

After the third week of resting the Indian guide said he would push on alone and prepare his people for the coming of the new saviour, for ever since the night he had seen McGlusky in the crimson flame of the storm-charged moonlight he had persisted in treating him as the redeemer of his people, and he explained to Derry that that was the reason why he had thrown himself upon the dread black jaguar maddened with wounds as he had. McGlusky had no doubt of the guide's good faith. When the red man told of his proposed departure the pioneer with a truly regal air gave him his hand to kiss.

' Noo buckie, hop 't, an' tell ma people A'm comin' ta set them free,' and after a very short pause, ' Ye said yin nicht tha' ye ha' in y'r tribe a lassie—a preen-cess, th' last o' a' th' royal bluid o' th' Aztecs. Wha'



like is she? A'm hopin' she's no' fat an' bowlegged, A dinna like th' fat bowlegged yins, A like them tall an' slen'er. Ye canna wheesper love ta a wumman wi' any degree o' comfort eef y'r strainin' y'r arms oot o' th' sockets ta reach roon' ta her backbane ta gie her a mon's grup, an' it tak's a' th' poetry oot o' 't eef ye ha' ta rope her ta ya wi' a saddle girth. A'm no' a lover o' th' spindle-ribbed yins whose waists ye can span wi' yin han'. Wha' suits ma is just a nice armfu', no' a bag o' hay or yin tha' wull snap across th' meedle eef ye sneeze when y'r tryin' ta fin' oot hoo many heart beats she has ta th' meenit.'

The red man drew a picture of the princess, the last of the line of royal Aztecs, that made McGlusky sit up on his couch of leaves, in spite of his wounds.

'She'll dae, aye buckie, she'll dae. Dinna say anither word, or ye'll be startin' a fever; ye ken A'm a bittie weak yet fra ma woun's.'

Later in the night Derry heard him murmuring: 'Did ye catch wha' th' guide said, Mahomet? Hair like th' raven's plumage, reachin' ta her feet—A'm theenkin' he's a leear aboot that—eyes like th' love bird's, big an' beautifu' an' brown, an' twa lips like th' pomegranate flowers bathed in dew. Ma certie, A wush he had no' been sae expleecit aboot her feegure, A'll be needin' a sleepin' draught th' nicht. Wha's tha' ye say, Mahomet? Ye've seen her, an' she's like yin o' y'r ain hooris in y'r harem in paradise? Wha'? Ye say there's anither yin lovely as th' dawn? Weel, weel, A'll be th' law maker gin A'm presiden', an' A dinna see why polygamy should no' be lawfu' in th' republic o' th' weelderness, leastways f'r th' Presiden'.'

Derry chuckled, because he had very often heard his partner hold forth vehemently against polgyamy, preaching the creed of 'yin wumman f'r yin mon.' He had even asserted that a woman who looked long-

ingly on more than one man should be stoned to death, adding, 'Ye ken, eef yin mon is no' enouch f'r yin wumman, she fin's twenty no' too many,' and he had always held that in their marital relations men and women were absolutely equal.

'Seems as if the very thought of power alters some of the old sportsman's outlook on life.' Then, with a gladsome chuckle, 'If he goes ropin' in all the girls, there won't be much chance for me in the new republic.'

The guide came back, true to the very hour he had appointed, and the first question the pioneer fired at him was :

'Weel, ha' ye seen ma preencess ?'

The guide became gloomy on the instant.

'The princess is accursed.'

'Wha's tha' ? Ha' a care, mon, we dinna like sic talk.'

Derry grinned at the royal 'we.'

'Blessed if the old sportsman won't soon be talkin' of "our" dynasty, as Napoleon did when he fired Josephine and took up with the Austrian woman. An' he ain't play actin' either, he believes it all. Well, a man who believes in people that other men can't see or hear, as he believes in his Mahomet, will believe anything. I only hope he'll be able to make the Indians believe in him ; if he don't, well, I guess I'll soon be on speaking terms with Mahomet myself.'

The red man, rather fearful of McGlusky's abrupt manner, had moved away and busied himself about camp. The pioneer, who never let go of an idea, called the guide to him.

'Wha' did ye mean by yon speech ? For why is ma preencess accursed ?'

'The priests say that there is a prophecy that in the days when none but a woman is left of the old royal Aztec line, a god or a king shall come to rule over the people.'

' Mon, yon priests ha' a gran' lot o' gude sense A'm theenkin'. But where does th' curse coom in ? '

' The princess has to be sacrificed by the priests, and carry the curse that has rested on the nation to the grave; she will bear the burden of all sins, and go to her own place.'

' Wha'! Sacrifice ma preencess! They wad, wad they? Th' dom loosy coards, ta saddle a' their ain misdeeds upon a wumman! Losh, A'll mak' sic a sacrifice o' yon priests there'll be na room in hell f'r ither folk till they've added a new weeng ta Tophet. We'll be movin' noo, Derry, there's mon's work in front o' us.'

' Believes every blessed word of it—sane as a boatswain on any other point, but mad as a box full of beetles on this.'

Quite unconsciously Derry was communing aloud as he rode a couple of horse lengths behind the pioneer. The big man caught the murmur of the voice, but not the words. He screwed round in the saddle.

' Did ye speak, wee mannie ? '

' I was only asking my spirit friends if they thought it would rain,' lied Derry without turning a hair.

' Oh aye, that's gran', laddie, A'm glad ye've got in tooch wi' th' speerits, but for why ask 'em sic a dom fule question, an' ye ha'f a sailor? There's no' a cloud in th' sky. But,' with an ingratiating smile, ' perhaps ye were just practisin' wi' th' spook folk, tunin' oop y'r fiddle, as 't were.'

' Good guess, partner. Say, what if the tribes are hostile ? '

' They wull no' be; rest y'r min' or wha' daes duty f'r an intelligence, easy on tha' score.'

' I'm out for a nice quiet ride with a private lunatic asylum, that's what's the matter with me,' sighed Derry; ' but I wish his visions would come true, I'm tired o' being hunted; I'd like to settle down with a bit

o' mornin' glory in petticoats for a mate; don't much care if she's copper-coloured or pink an' blue, if she represents domestic bliss an' a quiet fireside.'

Four days later the guide said :

'This evening, as the sun sinks, we will get to the place of my tribe.'

Derry took a good square look at him.

'Well, my friend,' he muttered under his breath, 'if you're not playing the game you're going to be our guide to heaven. I'll take care of you,' and from that moment he never took his eyes off the guide or his finger off the trigger.

That afternoon the travelling was the worst they had had, the weather was stifling hot, the sky was covered with dense masses of clouds as black as the inside of a bear, not a break showed anywhere, and the clouds were so dense they fell lower and lower until it looked as if they would touch the tops of the trees.

'Nice evenin' for visitin',' remarked Derry.

They emerged from the forest and came on cleared land where maize and many kinds of vegetables were growing, but they could not see a living soul, though there was plenty of evidence that people had been at work in the fields within an hour or so of their advent. Right in front of them lay a low hill.

'We pass over that,' said the guide, 'and we look down upon the cabins of my people.'

As they rode up the hill, the pioneer looked down, having noticed that the guide's horse, which was shod, struck fire from the track.

'Haud a meenite.' McGlusky sprang down from his saddle and examined the substance of the hill. 'Joompin' Sarah !'

'What's wrong, partner ?'

'Naething, mannie; dae ye ken wha' y're ridin' ower ?'

'No.'

' A hill o' airn, ma son.'

' A hill of iron? Well, what's the good of it to us?'

' It's dom near pure railroad airn, ma son. Gin A'm ruler here, ma people wull no' want f'r weapons o' war.'

Just then the thunder began to roll in deep waves of sound; they could almost fancy they could see it, billow on billow, sweeping majestically through the sky. McGlusky sprang to saddle.

' Ride weel ahint ma, baith o' ye; A wad ha' a keek at ma presidency alane.'

The stallion did not like the thunder; he rose on his hind legs and pawed the air; McGlusky gave him the spur, and quivering with fear, the great beast went up the hill, lifting his feet majestically, and it flashed through Derry's mind that he had never seen the mighty beast look so well as he did that moment—head up, mane and tail flying, ears pricked and body quivering. McGlusky reached the crown of the hill and swung the stallion broadside on; if he were posing, he was a great actor, for sitting straight as a lance in the saddle, he looked on his horse like some superb equestrian statue perched upon a hill of iron, and at that moment, as if he had stage-managed it all, the clouds in front of him were rent in twain and great bands of crimson lightning flashed all round him, drawn doubtless by the iron outcrop of the hill. The stallion threw his hoofs out and stood rooted to the iron hill. McGlusky never moved a muscle as the crimson flame lit him and his great horse from head to foot, flickering round the stallion's legs, flashing in dazzling fashion round the pioneer's rifle barrel, whilst down below thousands of wild wood Indians, descendants of the once highly civilized Aztecs, watched him with wonder and awe in their eyes. It was a 'coming' worthy of a god of the old mythology, and McGlusky's barbaric soul revelled in it.



'A'm theenkin' this clenches ma presidency ; eef it doesn'a, they're past prayin' f'r.'

A motion of his hand brought the guide and Derry to his side. Then the people gave a great shout of joy, for they recognized their countryman.

'Fa' in ahint ma.'

The pair did his bidding ; then waiting his moment, waiting for the thunder to volley a welcome louder and fiercer than ten thousand guns, the pioneer drove the spurs home and hurled himself down the hill-side with lightning playing round him and thunder crashing a more than royal welcome, and Derry said to his own soul :

'He'd ha' made a million on th' pictures ; he does the right thing in the right way at the right time, damn his old skin, and I was fool enough to think he was crazy. I thought Mahomet was fooling him ; I don't like the old camel driver's chance of getting ahead of my Scotty, he's the boss actor of the world, and his theatre's the universe.'

McGlusky let Red Comet rush at the top of his speed until almost on the crowd, then a stiffening of his arms brought the stallion to a dead stop. The people broke into a wild, weird dance, barbaric but splendid, one of the few things that remained to them of ancient Aztec teaching. They opened a lane for him, and motioned him to ride between the living walls.

'Lead ma ta th' headmon's hoose.'

'The headman is the chief priest.'

'A thoct as mooch ; lead on.'

He vaulted from Red Comet's back in front of the headman's abode, a kind of open temple, closed only at the two ends and the back. On a rude dais sat a thick-set man in the prime of life, whose scowling face showed how little he relished McGlusky's advent, and the applause of the people. With two or three quick

springs McGlusky was up the steps and in front of the priest who glared at him savagely.

'Dom ye, eef tha's th' way o' 't, A may as weel fin' oot ma richtfu' poseition at yince, na use makin' twa bites at a sour apple.'

He took the priest under the armpits and lifted him bodily from the seat of power, then sat himself quietly in the priest's place. A great roar and clapping of hands from the people greeted this revolutionary act; a masterful man had come at last to lead them. The priest moved back a step and deliberately spat on the floor in front of the usurper. Very quietly and without haste or passion, but with great force, McGlusky rose and kicked the deposed ruler. The man threw up his arms and fell. Having asserted his dignity, the pioneer resumed his seat with the utmost gravity. Later Derry said to him:

'It was not a very dignified way of settling an opponent.'

McGlusky replied:

'A ha' no' studied heestory f'r naething, mannie.'

'Got a first-class historic precedent for that kick, old sportsman?'

'A ha'. Th' first Napoleon when he were Emperor had a mon at his coort named Volney, a buckie who were conseederd th' verra first philosopher o' his day. He thocht he cud dae verra mooch as he pleased, an' he opened his head yin morn in front o' a' th' coortiers, an' gied th' great Emperor a tongue whangin', an' when he had done Napoleon rose quietly an' planted th' toe o' his boot richt in Volney's wame, an' brocht oop mair than his philosophy. They had ta carry him oot, sae ye see, A didn'a act on mere impulse, A had ma plan. A'm gawn ta model ma rule on Napoleonic lines; A'm no' as great as he—yet, an' A may mak' blun'ers, but A'll try, mannie, tae gang yin better than th' great Corsican afore A dee. Why should A no?'

The people had heard a wondrous story concerning McGlusky from the guide, who had told them that this man with only one follower at his back had ridden into the big military town of Ju Juy and captured the commandant, and taken him prisoner under the eyes of his troops, none of whom had dared to fire upon him. He told also how McGlusky, armed only with a hunting-knife, had fought and slain a black jaguar. He omitted to mention his own share in that action, and to crown all, he stated that this new-comer was of a race altogether different from the Spaniards. So the people, who were heartily sick of priestly rule, were ripe for hero worship, and all that McGlusky did seemed good in their eyes, and Mac was not long before he did things.

'Derry, ma mannie——'

'What is it, partner?'

'A want ye an' th' guide ta fin' th' chancellor o' th' exchequer in ma keengdom. A want ta see hoo th' siller stan's, an'—an' find th' high factotum o' th' law. A want lessons in Aztec law. A'll soon mak' 'em a code th' same as Napoleon did f'r th' French. A'm gawn ta bring these buckies oop ta date.'

'Thought you'd be looking up that princess first thing, old sportsman.'

'Aye, in gude time. Beesiness first, wummin after.'

The guide brought what McGlusky termed 'th' high factotum o' th' law,' and as soon as the pioneer saw him he scented trouble, for the lawyers and the priests had banded themselves together in secret against the rule of the usurper. The high dignitary flatly refused at first to tell McGlusky what he wanted to know.

'Tell him,' cooed the pioneer to the guide, 'ceef he doesn'a open th' floodgates o' knowledge an' pour it oot as freely as a she-goat pours oot milk ta a kid, A'll dae theengs ta him wull mak' him weesh his mither had been as barren as a hill o' limestane.'

The man said he represented the law of the nation.

'Dom ye,' thundered McGlusky, 'A' *am* th' law. Noo answer ma.'

The man answered the query then, for rage rode on the brow of the usurper. But there was a sly look in the eyes of the man as he unwound the thread of the tangled skein of legal knowledge.

'A believe y're a leear.'

Then McGlusky put a question to the guide.

'Is tha' th' law, or ha' he got ma by th' leg?'

The guide said it was not the law, not anything like it. Without a word the pioneer fell upon the legal luminary and beat him with his fists.

'Eef A canna knock law oot o' ye, A can knock maist everything else oot,' an' by joompin' Sarah, A wull.'

When he had finished, he pointed a scornful finger in the direction of the door.

'Oot o' ma sicht, an' dinna coom inta ma presence again; y're disgracit an' oot o' favour; remem'er wha' A telt ye, dinna coom ta ma presence again, or—or A'll maybe lose ma temper wi' ye.'

## CHAPTER XVI

### PRESIDENT McGLUSKY MAKES GOOD

**M**cGLUSKY ruled his people with a rod of iron, but he held it in a glove of love. One thing only troubled him : the Aztec princess had been spirited away by the priests on his arrival, and he had not even set eyes upon her. They hated him from the first, and did not mean to consolidate his power by marriage with the last of the ancient royal line, whose power they themselves had usurped.

‘Plenty of beautiful women here, partner,’ remarked Derry.

‘A want tha’ yin, an’ eef she’s aleeve A’ll ha’ her.’ All his days McGlusky had had yearnings towards the unattainable. Soft eyes languished upon him, sweet red lips smiled at him, bosoms round and soft and lovely as a poet’s dream heaved voluptuously in the presence of the strong, masterful man who had leapt out of the unknown, for woman love strength in a male, especially when strength of brain is allied to power of body. The buck that lays its rival dead in the heather wins the love of the doe ; the cock pheasant that sends its spur through the brain of its competitor brings the hens fluttering to its side with its first call of triumph, and the same instinct, the instinct to mate with the fittest, is in the marrow of every woman ; subconsciously she thinks of her unborn children, she would have them spring from the



loins of the best of her species, from something that can protect them—and her. McGlusky was stirred to the foundations of his being by the allurements of the women; their eyes haunted him through the still watches of the night, their deep indrawn breathing which made their bosom rise and fall, filled his ears as he lay awake trying to get guidance from Mahomet. At such times he would throw his big arms out restlessly and cry:

‘ Mon, Mahomet, eet’s na gude tryin’ ta fill ma oop-wi’ weedom; A canna hear y’r voice. A saw yin wumman th’ day, th’ seester o’ th’ high priest, she were slen’er as a lily stem an’ gracefu’ as a frond o’ fern shaken by th’ wind, her face were like th’ birth o’ a new day in its beauty, an’ A kenned by th’ way she lookit at ma her bluid is as red as ma ain, f’r she queevered fra head ta toe when ma e’en met hers, an’ yince she swayed towards ma like a moonbeam meltin’ inta a mist. By joompin’ Sarah, Mahomet, A were nearly gone tha’ time. A just felt like gatherin’ her in ma arms as a harvester gathers a bun’le o’ sweet-scented hay, an’ cryin’ alood ta th’ people: “ This yin is th’ wife o’ y’r presiden’.” But A caught a sly grin on th’ face o’ th’ priest, her brither, an’ A kenned weel he had set a trap f’r ma fut, an’ th’ lassie were th’ bait. A’m theenkin’ an hoor after th’ marriage they’d ha brocht forth ma preencess an’ played her agin ma as th’ richtfu’ ruler o’ th’ people because o’ her lineage, an’ Mahomet, ye daft buckie, dinna ye ken Jamie McGlusky cud na fecht agin a wumman battlin’ f’r her lawfu’ richts?’

A spell of silence, broken only by the tossing from shoulder to shoulder of the pioneer’s bony frame.

‘ Wha’s tha’ ye say, Mahomet? A cud marry th’ priest’s seester an’ put her awa’ by divorce an’ marry ma preencess later? Shame on ye f’r a randy auld heathen o’ th’ East! Gin ye canna theenk o’ a

better plan than yon ye'd better get ta y'r harem o' houris an'—an' stay there. Napoleon tried tha' wi' Josephine, an'—an' it busted him; he niver got haud o' th' eemagination o' his people after tha', an' serve him richt. Na mon ha' a richt ta build his ain glory on th' ruins o' a wumman's life.' A long sibilant silence, then: 'Air ye there, Mahomet? Ye air, A can smell th' meexture o' musk an'—an' camel-dung ye always bring wi' ye. Buckie, eef ye canna fin' ma preencess, f'r gude sake fin' a sleepin' draught. A'm fair distraught an' ma e'en air heavy an' achin' f'r want o' sleep, but A tell ye, it's ma preencess or naebody.'

Perhaps it was as well Mahomet did not produce that sleeping potion, for Derry and the guide coming to him on soft feet with tidings of evil omen, found him wide awake.

'Wha' is it? Dae ye coom to say ye've foon' her f'r whom ma soul thirsteth?'

His thoughts were still running on the princess, and he voiced them.

'No, partner,' snapped Derry, 'it's not love, it's war.'

'Wha's tha'?' McGlusky was on his feet with a bound; the dawn was just breaking, and as Derry looked at him, he thought that war would suit this grim masterful creature better than love. 'Gie ma y'r tidin's.'

'A big band of white ruffians, the sweepings of the world, the scum of all the seaports, are pushing here. They know the secret paths through the woods; they are well armed, and are led by an old friend of yours.'

'A frien' o' mine? Laddie, y're a leear, na frien' o' mine wad come on sic an erran' ta rob ma people o' th' fruits o' their toil, ta tak' their harvests an' seize a' th' lan' they ha' cleared an' th' wells they ha' digged an' th' irrigation canals they ha' cut sae cleverly. Tell ma, who is th' low-down beastie?'

'The same man that sold you the plan and map of the treasure hidden on the coast by the dead president o' the Argentine.'

'Dae ye mean Antonio Loretto, th' agent?'

'That's the man. He's at the head of a hundred and fifty scallywags of all nations armed to the teeth and—they've got machine guns, partner. They're only toughs, but you know how that sort can fight. A priest is showing them the way here; the priests mean to be rid of us at any price, even at the cost of shambling their own people.'

'A dinna care eef they ha' got a' th' arteelery between here an' hell, they won't ha' ma people's lan'. A'll whip 'em, buckie, A'll whip th' spawn an' a fecht wull bind ma people thegither in bonds o' steel, naething welds a nation like a fecht. Lord, A thank Thee f'r a' Thy marcies.'

He thrust his hand inside his shirt and drew out a small iron cross that he had carried against his heart ever since the day he had fashioned it in memory of Antonio Loretto.

'Twa hunner' paper dollars ye robbed ma of, Antonio. A kenned weel th' Lord wud na let His ain ewe lamb be despoilit, an' no' gie him a chance ta get his ain back.'

He signalled with his hand in the direction of the front.

'Coom on, Antonio, there's somethin' waitin' ye.'

McGlusky's first act of war was typical of his shrewd hard sense.

'Derry, tak' enouch men, gather oop ivery priest an'—an' lawyer. Put 'em un'er guard; we dinna want an enemy at large wi'in oor gates. Only congenital eediots permit that.'

Then the pioneer flung himself with fierce energy into the task of defending his own. He marshalled his fighting men, sent the old men with the women

and children into the woods at the rear for safety. Some of the people wanted to cut the crops which were ripe.

'Na, ye'll no'. There's na time ta garner th' harvest, an' maybe A'll be wantin' th' crops ta help ma in ma defence.'

He had fashioned himself a battle-axe out of iron ore as soon as he had taken over the presidency; he carried this weapon now, and it suited him better than any other weapon would have done. He was still at his preparations when the marauders broke from the woods and opened fire at long range with their rifles and three machine guns. For a moment the red men cowered; they had only bows and arrows and spears and machetes. The bullets whistled high or fell short.

'Yon gommerills dinna ken mooch aboot firearms; though they air white, they're ainly scum. Gie ma ma rifle, Derry, A'll set 'em th' tune.'

In a moment the 405 Winchester was snapping, and Derry's Springfield got busy. When the Indians saw the marauders dropping before these two deadly rifles, it put new heart into them; their blood began to grow warm, they had a leader.

'Eef A ainly had a score o' white hunters wi' ma as gude as yersel', Derry, A'd drive yon scum back ta th' sea, aye, an' eef A had fifty Maoris at ma back A'd—A'd eat 'em. A wad—by joompin' Sarah A wad. Th' Maori's th' mon f'r just sic a job as this yin. The worl' dinna ken th' stuff th' Maoris air made o' yet, mannie, it wull some day.'

'These chaps of ours are standing it better than I thought they would, partner.'

'They'll stan' as long as A dae, or—or God ha' mercy, on th' yin tha' don't, but we maun mak' allowances f'r generations o' persecution, maist o' th' natural guts ha' been frichted oot o' them.'

He was shooting all the time he spoke, shooting too as he did when hunting, and cartridges were scarce and not to be wasted.

'Dinna put lead inta their leader, Derry mon, A want him, there's a wee matter o' twa hunner' paper dollars between us, dinna forget it.'

If the ruffians could not shoot, they were game, and every land had bred them and spewed them forth; ships had been glad to be rid of them: Norwegians, Danes, Italians, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Australians, Britons, Russians, Yankees—scallywags all, ready to get money anyhow rather than work for it.

McGlusky had posted his best men in front of the standing crops. Now he called upon them to charge, and he leapt to the front, axe in hand. His red men knew nothing of war; the marauders were natural born fighters; the machine guns smashed McGlusky's ranks; many of his men fell; the greater part fled. McGlusky and Derry side by side, with a gallant few, got to the enemy and for a space heaven opened for the pioneer, but fiercely as he fought, McGlusky never lost his sense of leadership. He realized quickly that the scallywags were better fighters than his men, so he gave the order of retreat.

'Back wi' ye, buckie, an' rally ma men ahint th' standin' crops: A've left ma reserves there. A'll fecht through ta yon trees an' win roon' ta ye.'

Derry obeyed orders, and all who tried to bar McGlusky's path realized that the way of the transgressor is hard.

'A McGlusky—a McGlusky!' His slogan rang above the din of strife. 'Rob ma people, wull ye—ye scum o' a' th' seven seas. Noo, Mahomet, put strength inta ma arm.' He split a Norseman from skull to chest. 'Gude f'r ye, Mahomet, ye old pagan, ye've no' forgotten hoo ta smite.' Then he burst into a chant:



“ Gen’le Shepherd, guard Thy lambs,  
 Lead us where th’ watters flow.  
 Dinna let th’ wolves prevail,  
 Be oor Shepherd here below.”

Gen’le Shepherd’—the axe whirled on a man—‘ Guard Thy lambs’—he thrust the heel of the axe into a bearded face with all his might, and burst through the circle of his foes into the woods and ran like a buck to rejoin his command.

He found Derry holding the reserves together finely. Before he had started out to the fight, he had posted men ten yards apart all along the inner edge of the maize fields, and the maize was ripe. The enemy had plunged into the crops and were coming forward fast, laughing and shouting.

‘ Ye’ll ha’ oor wummin, wull ye? Ye’ll ha’ oor store o’ siller? Na, by th’ whuskers o’ Solomon ye’ll no’. Ye’ve ta reckon first wi’ Presiden’ McGlusky.’

He leapt to the ripened grain, a flaming torch in his hand, and hurled it into the dry crops. Every man posted along the edge of the maize fields did the same. A vast sheet of fire leapt up that spread like a river bursting from its banks.

‘ A’m theenkin’ we’ll ha’ ta lose this year’s crops, wee mannie, but A’ve a suspeecion there may be ither things roasted th’ day besides mealies.’

There were.

‘ Noo bring Red Comet an’ Ma Lady.’

He led the charge of the red men over the smoking ground on to the remnant of the marauders, and the sight of him plunging through the disheartened enemy on the back of the great red beast confirmed the Indians in their belief that this was not a man but a god that had been sent to lead them.

Antonio Loretto met McGlusky in the shock of battle ; it was a bad meeting for Antonio ; he was game,

but the luck that had helped him swindle so many men deserted him in that hour, as luck has a habit of doing with swindlers in the long run. McGlusky looked down on the dead face, then solemnly drew forth the rude iron cross he had so long ago fashioned, and placed it on the cheat's chest.

'A'm paid, Antonio. Rest in peace; th' receipt A gied ye wi' ma axe may no' ha' been soond in law, but A'm theenkin' 'twull serve. A'm hopin' ma frien' Mahomet may no' be hard on ye on th' ither side; he were waesome fon' o' gie'n a bit skelp wi' th' sword.'

That night there was high revelry in the Indians' camp; victory for the first time in many generations rested with them. McGlusky did not join in the joy-making, but Derry did, and few feet were lighter in the dance, few had such languishing glances from lovely eyes, and if the truth must be told, none took toll more generously from sweet red lips than the Liverpool laddie. Small blame to him, for who has more right to woman's dainty lips than a lad who fights to guard the maids?

Once the pioneer looking out on the revels, saw his young partner, and his grim face softened.

'Gather y'r harvest, buckie, gather y'r harvest. A wad be daein' th' same eef th' cares o' ma office did no' rest sae heavy on ma shoulders. Poower is a waesome théeng, eef a mon tries ta leeve oop ta his responsebeelities. There's th' plump yin yon'er, A cud cut a caper wi' in th' dance wi' th' best o' 'em, an' th' slen'er yin lookin' like a lily stem in th' moonlicht, A cud dan'le on ma knee eef A were no' presiden', an' yon lassie playin' th' zither wad mak' a mon's mooth watter gin she were no' sae bandy leggit. Wae's ma, A've ha'f a min' ta chuck ma ambeetions ta th' de'il an' jest be a mon. Na, na, A canna luk back, A've put ma han'ta th' plough, A'll see it through, by joompin' Sarah A wull.'

He sat in loneliness in his darkened chamber, and soon he began to talk.

'Ye here wi' ma, Hector? Hoo did A dae th' day? Ye taucht ma a' A iver kenned aboot war, ye mauna theenk A'm a cooard—A had ta be a wee bittie carefu' o' ma ain' carcass, seein' A were comman'er in chief. Wha's tha' ye say? A should ha' sent ma secon' in command, ma wee laddie, ta lead th' first charge? Weel, weel, maybe y're richt, ye were th' first leader o' y'r day, a mighty warrior ruined by foul slan'er, but dinna blame ma f'r th' bit axe ploy, A cudn'a stop oot o' 't; A cudn'a thole 't, Hector, ye wad na yer ainsel'. Ye loved a fecht wi' a' y'r soul when th' cause was just.'

He lit his pipe and smoked, nodding his great head now and again, as if consenting to some mysterious advice.

'Ye wad ha' ma dae it, Hector? Weel, A wull. Ye were aye generous in veectory.'

He rose, and walking to the open space in front of his official residence, commanded that all the imprisoned priests of the ancient Aztec faith should be set free, and the priests, seeing that the tide had set against them, determined to curry favour with the man in power. To this end they went amongst the people saying:

'This is not a man; he is a god; only a god forgives his enemies; let us worship him.'

Derry brought him the news. He smoked on it in silence for a bit.

'Na, buckie, A'm feared th' honour is a wee bittie too mooch f'r ma, A'm no' sure A cud leeve oop ta 't; there air moments when th' flesh wad triumph ower th' speerit; it wadna look nice in a god ta pound th' lug o' a dishonest meeneester o' state, an' A'm feared there's mair than yin o' ma meeneesters who air pocketin' th' taxes. Gin A'm sure A'll pound th' ear

o' th' first yin wi' ma fist ; it's no' gentle, but eet's efficacious, mannie.'

' You'll have to do something to please the people, partner.'

' Weel, A dinna min' a wee theeng ta please 'em. This president beesiness after a' is ainly a ha'f way hoose sort o' theeng. A'll conseeder eef a crown wad no' suit ma—Emperor Jimmy McGlusky the First wad na luk sae bad on a seal ta mark ma linen, dae ye theenk ? No' tha' A want th' purple, min' ye, buckie. Weel, weel, we wull gie it oor best conseederation.'

' " We," ' grinned Derry, ' why he's got the tail o' the purple toga in his teeth already. I wonder what the boys on Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie and the Klondyke will say about it when they know.'

The priests had not let the grass grow under their feet. They came with the mass of the people behind them, bringing gifts to offer to the superman. McGlusky received them with dignity. The people brought whatever they could lay hands upon : fruit, flowers, copper and gold ornaments, butter, cheese and eggs, and one, a butcher, brought a leg of mutton and laid it reverently on a stool near to McGlusky's right hand, and bowing humbly, slipped away. He did not know what glorious prominence was to be given to his gift. Last of all came the priests in a compact mass, robed all in white. They prostrated themselves, and as they bent to earth McGlusky saw in their midst a woman, glorious beyond all women he had ever beheld. She stood straight as a pine, her black hair reaching to her feet was drawn by her arms in front of her like a curtain, garments or ornaments she had none. Two great eyes looked proud defiance into McGlusky's own, yet fear was written on her face, the fear of death, and she was so young to die. Covered as she was from neck to ankles by the glorious masses of her hair, enough of her figure was revealed in all its matchless symmetry to

set McGlusky's pulses bounding. She moved, and her undulating grace brought a prayer to the president's lips.

'Help ma noo, Mahomet, or—or dab oot th' lights. A—A canna stan' it.'

The priests upraised themselves, and their spokesman, who held a sinister-looking knife of burnished copper in his hand, spoke :

'This is the princess, the last of the Aztec royal line. We will lay her dead at your feet, then there will be none left to dispute your authority.'

The breath whistled through the gaping nostrils of the president. He upreared himself, and again his eyes met the eyes of the princess.

'Shamble ma preencess ! Dae her ta death !—Wull ye ?'

In his blind rage he thrēw out his right hand ; it fell upon the butcher's votive offering, the leg of mutton.

'Tak' it.'

The priest took it, and if he liked his mutton that way he was no epicure. Then with a growl McGlusky leaped over the man he had felled right in amongst the priestly band, and if the flail of Gideon fell heavier and faster than the butcher's offering, small wonder Gideon had a walkover.

'Shamble ma preencess'—thud—'Rob ma o' th' joy o' life?'—thud—'Hoo dae ye like y'r mutton?'—plop—'Coom back f'r mair th' morn's morn'—splosh—splosh—splosh.

Derry, gurgling with laughter, looked down on the white-robed figures on the floor: McGlusky turned to him, and holding out the mutton, said with unshaken gravity :

'Gie 't ta th' cook f'r ma weddin' breakfas'. A've beat it till it's ten'er. Noo f'r ma preencess.'

He strode to the lovely woman, reached out his



arms and gathered her in, and at the grip of those mighty arms fear fell from the beautiful face, and she knew him for her mate, as the lioness knows the lion. In that moment inspiration came to Derry. Whilst McGlusky was presenting the princess to the multitude as co-partner of his power and of his future happiness, the laddie slipped away. McGlusky heard the ring of hoofs a moment later, and as Derry leapt from Red Comet's back in front of the assembly, the big stallion tossed up his head, and clear and trumpet-like his challenge rang out on the perfumed air. McGlusky answered with a shout that made the roof above him quiver. Picking the princess up in his arms, as though she were made of thistle-down, he carried her down the half-dozen steps, and with a great laugh—the first Derry had ever heard from his bearded lips—he sprang to Red Comet's back. Then with his beloved across his saddle in front of him, her arms around his neck, he stood in the stirrups, touching the stallion ever so lightly with his spurs until he reared straight up like an equine statue, and as the people ceased their joyous cheering, his big voice boomed out :

'Mahomet—Hector—A've won, won a' along th' line ! Ma presidency, ma stallion—ma wumman !'

FINIS



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