

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

For most of his journey North, memory of that sweet abandon of her will and her loyalty to him kept him brave and shut those outer doubts out of his mind. Even her lack of perfect sympathy with his ambitions seemed a precious part of her winsome nature. And by dint of glorification of her weakness he stamped the life out of that little serpent of doubt that had hissed a hint that she might be selfish in asking him to stay — might, later be beguiled into solacing herself for his absence.

II

At Norray Junction, next day, he stepped down out of his Pullman and one of his dreams. He stopped thinking exclusively about Mary Laroche, and began to think pretty diligently about the Great Trust Company.

He had a vague idea that certain woods' gentlemen, named Smart and Niles, would be waiting eagerly and humbly at the car steps. Norray Junction had a station building, a tank on stilts, and coal sheds. Across the platform was a train, plainly ready for upcountry. He saw his trunk banged to the platform from the main-line train, and slammed into the baggage car across the platform! It had been checked through. Therefore, his course was made plain to him. But no inquiring Niles or Smart stood beckoning within range of his vision.

The smoking car, he could see, was filled with men wearing blanket coats and plaid jackets, uniforms of woodsmen. In the door of the car a burly man had braced himself, occasionally thrusting back with fist or moccasin-ed foot men who lurched up the aisle and tried to squirm out past him.

The brakeman, waiting for the conductor's word, stood by the steps looking on with a grin.

"Another grateful for the Great Trust," said the brakeman, as George reached him. "Shipped pickled as usual."

Sudden hope sprang in George. "That big man — is his name Niles or Smart?"

"Nope—Kyle. 'Big Bill,' they call him. Great driver for the G. T. Hurrooshes in the new crews."

The forester mounted the car steps. Here at least was a Great Trust Co. man. Kyle's great arms and sturdy legs barred the door with effective triangles. His head reached to the lintel, and a grizzled mustache, that ran down his cheeks and thrust out like horns from his jaws, seemed to bar in the upper part of the door.

He did not make way for George.

"There's a smoking place for drummers in the combination car, back," he advised the young man. "You don't want to get in here. They'll be fighting before they've gone ten miles."

The giant was bluffly good-natured. "I'm a Great Trust Co. man, myself," George hastened to inform him. "Forestry department. I'm looking for Mr. Niles or Mr. Smart."

"Don't hurt your eyesight — you'll strain it if you try to look to where they've gone."

He stopped to kick another persistent inebriate back into the smoky interior of the car.

"But they were to meet me here—they were to wait for me here," insisted George.

"Civ Niles and Lynch Smart don't wait, not when they get started for the woods," stated the big man. "Where were you yesterday?"

"I was — was detained," stammered the young man.

"Bad for you. I saw them just before they took the train to come out here to the junction. Told me they'd been sentenced to load themselves down with a tree-college dude. They followed their part of orders. And, to tell the truth young feller, I reckon they was glad of the excuse to give you the slip. If you've slipped up on your part of orders, you can't blame t'other fellers."

"But they could have waited," George muttered. "It was only twenty-four hours."

"You couldn't expect them to roost twenty-four hours on that waterin' tank or this station platform. And they ain't the kind of chaps to go back for fresh starts." He looked George up and down. "Better give it up, hadn't you? It's a big country, north, to find men in when they're tryin' to keep away from you."

"Is that the kind of feelings the employees of the Great Trust have for each other?"

"Well," drawled Kyle, "Civ and

Lunch ain't exactly the kind that will grab up a city tenderfoot and hug him hard — not reel hard!"

"I'll go into this car, if you'll let me pass," said George curtly.

"Better ride with the drummers, or the dames, back there!" Kyle was not rude; he was patronizing. "Lately, the Great Trust Co. is hirin' g'rilias, mostly — I mean for the gashin'-fiddling job, and I'm takin' in forty ring-tailed ones this trip."

"Gashing fiddling!" repeated the forester.

"Why, cross-cut sawyers, man! Say, you are a tenderfoot, ain't ye?"

After that, and with that humorously tolerant grin beaming on him, George would have gone into a den of tigers rather than back into the protected peace of the rear coaches. Somehow, he felt that his future reputation up that way rested on a little display of independence at that moment.

The conductor had signaled a start, and Big Bill stepped back into the car, George at his heels.

The boss strode the length of the "Set down, you arrub-bahoolles!" he bawled. No one raised hand against him. The men only rubbed their smarting cheeks and simpered after him. Some held bottles toward him placatingly. But he refused roughly. "Drink your own boolah juice. Get it all into you, and get over it and ready for work!"

He met the conductor in the centre of the car, and passed to him a little package of mileage books.

"Tear out for Bill Kyle and forty!" He looked over his shoulder, and saw George. "Make it forty-one. You might as well ride on a company ticket," he broke in, when the forester demurred. "The Great Trust Co. pays for its men, and its' got more money than you or I have."

That business transacted, he tossed a man across the aisle in order to establish himself alone in a seat, filled his pipe, and proceeded to solace himself with tobacco. George found a place beside a man whom he noticed now for the first time, deciding that he was the only individual in sight beside whom that ride would be endurable.

"Set in, mister," invited this person cordially. "I've been afraid one of them ring-tallers would tumble in here — and if there's anything worse than the sound of wind in a knothole it's a drunken man talkin' to you."

He was an elderly man, and his fuzzy silk hat and sun-faded, worsted suit made him a unique figure in that mob of woodsmen.

"If gents can get together in a bunch like this," he remarked, as George crowded in beside him, "gents better do it. Have a segar?"

But, before he could produce a questionable weed, George had courteously rescued himself by explaining his preference for his brier pipe.

"I smoke a pipe myself, mostly," agreed the elderly man, "but when I'm wearing my plug hat and, as you might say, attendin' to official duty, a segar seems to be more genteel. I'm on official duty, now. I'll make myself known to you. I'm Governor Harriss, of Corran-cache."

He glanced sideways at George to note how the young man took the announcement. His seatmate seemed to be puzzled rather than impressed.

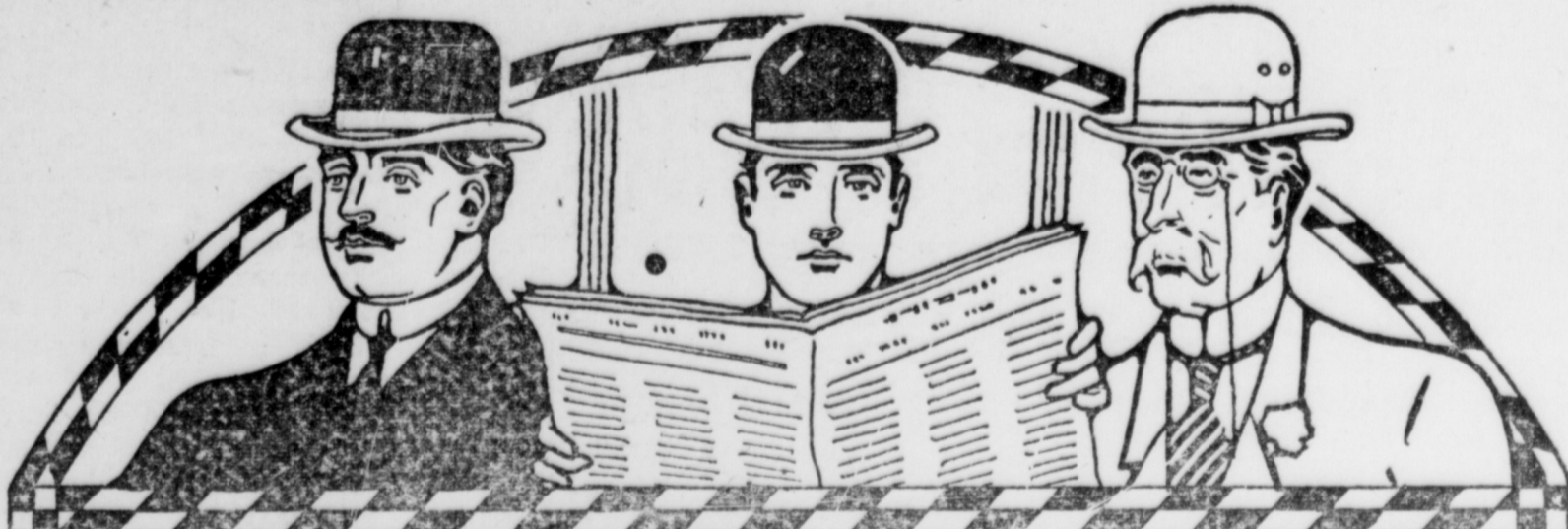
"Governor, I will say is an honorary title, that the boys along the river have given me, and at the same time it ain't so cussed honorary as a lot of titles be. What I mean to say is, some honorary titles mean that a man ain't got any power. But I have. I'm plantation assessor, constable, road commissioner, and justice of the peace, and quorum. Could have other offices, but don't want 'em. So the boys have put all titles into one and call me 'governor.' And I've took it, and I use it. I've got a lot of power up our way, and I ain't bein' called out of my name a mite when I'm referred to as 'Governor' Harriss."

There was a challenge to this stranger in his tone. It was plain that other strangers had deprecated or ridiculed.

"It's pleasant to stand well enough among your neighbors to be called governor," agreed George, so frankly that he disarmed Mr. Harriss's hair-trigger suspicion. "And I'm glad to know you, for I'm headed for Corran-cache, myself. And, by the way, that's a queer name for a town! I only heard it two days ago, when I was hired by the Great Trust Co."

Governor Harriss removed his cigar, and slowly faced around in his seat.

"Do you mean to tell me that you come from any place so far away that you never heard of Cornelius Corran, the duke of the Great Toban country,



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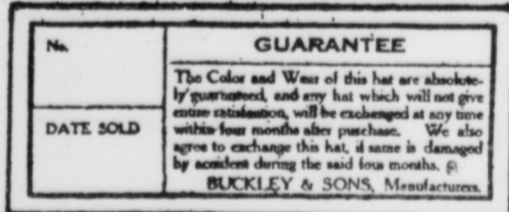
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and the founder of the village of Corran-cache?"

"I'll not lie about my ignorance, sir; I never did."

Harriss replaced his cigar, and faced the front. "I ain't goin' to make comments, for I never believe in bein' disagreeable when words don't do a subject any justice. But if you never heard that such a man as Cornelius Corran ever lived, it may be that you never heard the news that Cornelius Corran has just died."

"It is news to me."

"Then, it probably didn't occur to you to be surprised to see me on official business wearing my plug hat — didn't occur to you that I might not be anything but an ordinary salve peddler traveling upcountry, hey?"

"I'll be honest. I didn't think anything about it, or what you might be."

Governor Harriss puffed at his cigar, squinting his eyes at vacancy. "That shows how little a man can judge by his own inside feelin's what kind of an impression he's makin' on the world in general. But I'm pretty blunt, young man. I'm goin' to say to you that I believe you ain't been mixin' in very thick with the general public lately, not to know any more about the world's news than you do. You've either just come out of some college, or else you've been settin' in some back yard courtin' a girl!"

George was glad that his seatmate aise, cuffing to right and left.

"A college feller thinks he knows too much to pay any attention to what the worlds doin'; and the feller in love don't think about anything. And here Duke Cornelius, of the Great Toban, lays dead in his house at Corran-cache, leaving for helress a daughter that is the handsomest girl in all the north country, leavin' half a million acres of timberland and all the men from St. Francis to St. Agathe to mourn him; leavin' five thousand dollars in hands of a committee, to be spent in one day in celebratin' his funeral, and the crowds now comin' from every village and loggin' camp two brass bands ordered, and me down to the city to get 'em!"

"That's my official business, young man — to get them bands and an orator and a thousand-dollar coffin that's ahead of us, now — the coffin,

I mean — out in the baggage car! All that happenin' and you settin' here beside Governor Harriss, comin' back from his official business, and not knowin' him from a corn doctor, or understandin' his business! My stars! That shows that this world needs something more than wireless telegraphin' to get news circulated!"

He sat for some time and dragged at his cigar, and gazed out of the window.

George was glad that the tumult in the car, recently stilled by Kyle's passage, broke out now afresh. A fight started up just behind them, and men rushed that way. An apology for his ignorance could not have been heard, and he could not think of a suitable one. Governor Harriss took off his plug hat, and guarded it on his knees.

"I never had it touched, yet; but you never know what a drunk is goin' to do when he's too far gone to recognize dignity."

Big Bill came up through the car, knocking men to right and left, battering down the innocent and the guilty, until he burst through the press and clutched the two who were battling. He tore them apart, cracked their heads together, left one, and dragged the other to the opposite end of the car.

"It's goin' to keep Bill Kyle pretty busy if he cal'lates on stopping every fight that's due in this section for the next three days," observed Governor Harriss critically. "Funeral committee reckons on spendin' at least three thousand on licker — and, seein' that it's been smuggled over from the States, you get more run in the dollar. The other two thousand will be spent on the barbecue. All outdoor cookin' for this feed! They got the fires to goin' before I came away."

He mentioned these details with a satisfied relish that jarred on George, considering the reason for the amazing demonstration.

"This strikes me as being a queer funeral you're talking about, if you'll pardon me for saying so. It sounds like a celebration of some sort."

"It is a celebration," stated Mr. Harriss calmly. "Celebration is called for by the will. That was Cornelius Corran's idea — to have his friends enjoy themselves."

He produced another cigar,

"Even these segars come out of the appropriation. Boxes open everywhere in the village; help yourself. That's why I offered you one," he added naively. "Eat, drink, smoke, and whoop it up, was the motto of Cornelius Corran, and he says, 'I want the boys all to remember me as that kind of a feller. I want 'em to look back and say that the last thing old Cornelius ever done was to give 'em the time of their lives.' And he's doin' it."

The old man eyed his silent companion slyly from the corner of his eye. "You don't think that's the right kind of a funeral to have, do ye, city feller?" he demanded.

"No, I don't!" blurted George. "It seems rather heathenish to me. Your Corran must have been a—"

"You'd better not pass comments on Cornelius, not at this time, in this section," broke in Governor Harriss briskly, but calmly. "You're a stranger and young, and I'm advisin' you for your own good. Nobody ever ain't been in the habit of criticising the duke of the Toban. Nobody criticised how he got hold of most half a million acres, nor whether his titles would stand law, nor how he handled his men when they didn't toe the scratch, nor how he spent money when he was spendin', nor how he hung on to it when he had a 'close' fit. And he's windin' things up in a blaze of light that will flicker 'round his memory for a long time to come. Young man, I reckon it'll settle into a steady halo for him, so far as the old chaps up this way go; as for the young ones — he's Clare Corran's (To be continued)

Massacre of Jews Predicted in Russia.

Tsaritsyn, Russia, Sept. 8.—Heliodorus, the "mad monk of Tsaritsyn," today publicly declared that attacks upon Jews and the Russian intelligent classes would be commenced after the holding of the forthcoming congress of the black hundreds. The declaration of the parish priest whose fantastic methods have startled the whole Volga region, has created an impressin of semi-panic in this city. Talk of a probable massacre of Jews is current at the Bazaars.