

THE BACKWOODSMAN

By Acton Seymour

Behind the coffin, came the rest of the rout. Men on foot, most of them staggering. All had been doing full justice to the hospitality that Cornelius Corran had flung to them from his deathbed. And, last of all, the second hand closed the file, playing "Auld Lang Syne."

Thus departed Cornelius Corran to his last resting place.

George had laid aside only coat and waistcoat when he lay down for his nap. He put them on, and went below into the deserted men's room of the tavern, and woke himself thoroughly by dousing water upon his head at the sink. The westerling sun had left a corner of shade on the porch, and he sat down out there in a rickety, strap-bottomed chair, and seized his pipe. He was trying to compose himself in patience until such time as Mr. Bragg should conclude that he had exhausted the resources of the Corran funeral and should be ready to start on the trail of the eloping explorers.

Bill Kyle appeared to him. Mr. Kyle had apparently dropped out of the procession.

"I was afraid they'd call on that orator for another oration at the grave," he confessed to the young man. "I stood one up at the house, and that's enough for one day."

He filled his pipe, and lighted it. "What do you think of her, now that you've seen her?" he asked, closing one eye as he looked at George. "I know a lot of young chaps that would fall in love with her before they fell in love with her timberlands. But, in your case, I suppose you can combine business and pleasure."

George was too disgusted to reply to this rally.

"I was speaking to Blinn Wiggin about it," went on the jocose trouble stirrer. "I told him the Great Trust Co. knew what they were doing when they picked out a good-looking chap and sent him up here. Why, son, you began making good with her right there on the railroad platform, to-day, when you stood on the burning trunk and all but you had fled, or words to that effect. She began you, and that's something like loving. Now, you—"

"Kyle, I've told you once or twice that I don't relish that kind of joking. Now, you cut it out."

"What be you going to do about it, if I don't?" inquired Kyle lazily. He balanced his huge fists on his knees. "But I won't hurt you, son. All I'll do is brush you away, if you ever come at me. I'll have to do that much. But you really ought to get this matter with Blinn Wiggin straightened out. Save your muscle for him, son. For he didn't seem to like what I was telling him about you."

"What grudge have you got against me, Mr. Kyle? I'm attending to my own business. But you seem determined to get me into trouble."

"Don't they ever have a little innocent fun down where you come from?"

"Damn your sense of humor!" exploded the young man. "Try it on some one else."

"It seems to work best on you," replied Mr. Kyle serenely. Then, he chuckled his appreciation of the young man's wrath. "And young Wiggin has been paddling in enough foolish water, to-day, to have it work on him just about as nicely. I like to see things brought to a head."

"What in Heaven's name do you want to be so malicious for?" pleaded George desperately.

"Maybe I ain't had theatre shows enough in my lifetime," confessed Kyle. "I have to get up my own shows. A man can't go through his whole life suffering for entertainment."

Others had begun to flock back toward the tavern, the centre of the village. The hot sun had dulled the sparkling ardor of some; in the tavern was a room where Corran cheer was dispensed freely. In a few moments the big room, the porch, and the street in front were thronged by clamorous celebrators.

One young man interested George in spite of himself. He passed and repassed several times, and stared at George with an expression that combined interest and insolence. When he strode by and stared, Kyle chuckled. George guessed the identity of this young man in the belted corduroy coat before his attendant tormentor saw fit to fully enlighten him.

Kyle was relishing the first rehearsal of the little drama he had planned.

"Blinn," he called, at length, when young Wiggin was at some distance, and the call therefore attracted attention, "you'd better come over here and be introduced. This is the feller, and he says he's going to show you a few city tricks in the girl-catching line that will make your performances up this way look like a June pelt after the moths have been into it."

Young Wiggin came forward promptly. It was plain that he was heated by liquor, though his gait was steady. He was excited enough by what he had drunk to be a victim to Kyle's malicious meddling.

"There's such a thing as joking on the wrong subject," he declared hotly. He addressed himself to the two of them.

"I am not joking Mr. Wiggin — I take that to be your name," interposed George, with dignity. "Kyle is making all the talk. You'll kindly leave me out."

"If you want to pick this thing up," cried Wiggin, now turning on George to the exclusion of the real culprit, "go ahead and pick. But you'll find it's got a hot end to it." It was plain that Kyle had done some artistic provoking. Young Wiggin was ready to fight at the first word from the one whom he thought his rival.

"You may make a fool of your own self over gossip, but you can't make one of me," said George, keeping his temper.

"If you hadn't been making some kind of cheap talk," insisted the other, "Kyle wouldn't have had anything to start on. I don't stand for any gossip about me. There's been too much of it along this border already. This is a good time to put a stop to it."

"Begin with those who have gossip about you," advised George, coldly and contemptuously. "As far as I'm concerned, I never heard of you till a few hours ago."

This did not placate Blinn. It rolled him more. It was dismissing him as a nobody.

"Because you're a Montreal dude, don't you think that anybody else amounts to anything else in the world? Now, you can't come up here and sneer at people! I'm going to close your mouth for you, and close it, now."

"That's the kind of talk, Blinn," shouted one of the bystanders. "You've sure got a reputation up and down the border, even if they don't know you where the bantam come from. Back it up, now!"

There was a good-sized crowd by this time. Others came running, summoned by the magic word, "Fight!" They grouped themselves in a hollow square, hemming in the two principals. The celerity with which this was done showed that fist duels in the north country were prized, respected, and were common.

"I was just thinkin' that that band music was liable to smooth out tempers and spoil the fightin', to-day," confided a burly woodsman to his neighbor in the press; "and that wouldn't have suited Cornelius. But them two young chaps seem to be husky enough to start 'er off in good shape."

"Now, back up what you've said about me," demanded Wiggin. "And there's only one way of backing it up."

The crowd had massed around so quickly that George could not retreat without fighting his way through the press. But he had no quarrel with this young fire eater. He had no appetite for fight. His desire at that moment was rather to fight the meddlesome Bill Kyle. The grin on that worthy's face stirred fury in his victim. To the astonishment of the crowd George turned his back on Wiggin, who already had his fists up, and walked over to Kyle.

"I'll not stand for this. You tell that man, there, that you've put up this job, or I'll settle this thing with you, Kyle, here and now. You've gone too far."

"Oh, go get a reputation!" chuckled the imperturbable boss. "Begin with a man of your own size. I'm startin' you right, son."

"Look-a-here," cried Wiggin, rushing to them, "don't you insult a friend of mine. You tattled your gossip to the wrong man, young fellow. Bill Kyle told me. Now, don't you go to giving him your impudence."

George kept his hands at his side in spite of the flourishing fists of his adversary.

"I'm not in the prize-fight class, Wiggin," he said. "When I have any reason for fighting with you, I'll do so. Just now, I don't propose to be made a spectacle of to entertain these drunken cattle."

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It was righteous resentment, but it turned them all against him. The on-lookers were used to seeing any man fight when he was provoked to it. This stranger seemed to be shirking. And his insult capped the climax. A man swore, and ran at George from behind, jolting both hands against his shoulders. The blow drove him forward toward Wiggin, and that young man did not wait for more definite challenge. He did not even give his opponent a fair chance. George's hands were still at his side. Wiggin struck him in the face and he went down. A roar from the crowd greeted the act, but it was not applause.

"A dirty trick Wiggin," shouted Kyle, first to resent it. "And now I hope he'll do you." There was no mistaking the sentiment of the crowd. They were woodsmen, and fair. A chorus of protest showed that they had turned against Wiggin in an instant.

Several men leaped to George, and raised him to his feet. His face was bleeding, and they wiped away the blood, giving him profane encouragement at the same time.

"I've a mind to give you a wallop, myself, for that," Kyle went on. "If you was that afraid he'd lick you fair, you ought to have stayed out of the fight. And now I hope he'll get the girl, too."

Drink and these reproaches drove out of Wiggin what little self-restraint he had left.

He cursed the lot of them. "This feller," he growled, "came up here bragging all along the way that he'd do me and have Clare Corran away from me."

"You lie, you drunken pup" George wrenched away from the hands that supported him. He was still dizzy from the blow, but his righteous anger now cleared his brain and steadied his nerves. As the other had become frantic, he became master of himself, though his face was rigid and gray with passion; the blood was a scarlet smear against the whiteness of his skin.

"I know what I'm talking about," screamed Wiggin. "It's my girl he's up here after, because she's got money, now."

Men in the crowd were crying protest. In that section, it was not well for any man to bandy Clare Corran's name in public brawl.

It was a mob that had grown till it filled the street. All the throngs had returned from the cemetery. They crowded on the outskirts. A man for whom they made way came thrusting through. He was tall and gaunt, a figure of angles. Even the gray beard on his cheeks was cut in the form of a carpenter's square.

"It's Jepson Wiggin — Blinn's old man," was the mutter that followed him through the crowd. "I guess he'll cal'late the youngster is talkin' too devilish much, just now."

In the wake of the old man followed Clare Corran on her big horse. She had caught a word on the out-

skirts of the crowd. Hats came off to her as she passed. But she was too indignant to respond.

"Blinn!" cried his father, over the heads of the crowd, trying to get to him. "What do you mean by disgracing yourself in this fashion?"

But his son did not turn his head. Neither he nor George saw the girl, though she was lifted above the throng on her horse. The two, like gladiators in the arena, had eyes only for each other.

"Every one along this border knows how I stand toward Clare Corran," insisted Wiggin. "There's no Montreal dude coming along here and take her! You've got one sample of—"

A man stood between the two, wondering whether he had better let them get together. George settled his doubts. He seized the man, and tossed him far against the bulwarked bystanders. He faced Wiggin, breast to breast, and eye to eye.

Silence fell on them all. They wanted to hear what this stranger with his blood-marked face had to say to the man who had struck the foul blow. George broke in on the threat.

"You cheap coward! I never saw you before to-day — but you are a coward. I'm not talking about how you struck me. I'll settle that with you, later. I'll do it without making a public show of it. But just now I want to say to you that if you insult a woman's name by bringing it into this quarrel again I'll drive your blatherskite tongue down your throat. And I'll do it now."

In his rage, Wiggin might have provoked the decisive combat there and then by persisting in his charges, but an interruption occurred that checked even his speech, much more his attack.

Clare Corran leaped her horse through the ring of humanity that hemmed the foes, and rode between them.

"I heard my name, here," she said simply and icily. It was a tone that hushed both the combatants. She gazed first at one and then at the other. It was the same look for both — indignant reproof.

Shame, sudden and almost unexplainable, choked George when he strove to speak. He did not wholly understand his embarrassment.

"You were the one that spoke it," she went on, turning at last to Wiggin. "Come, sir, tell me — by what right are you shouting my name in your street brawls?"

Wiggin hesitated, sullen and apprehensive.

Continued next week.

"What a Nut"

Senator La Follette, himself one of the directest of speakers has a natural horror of speeches of the rambling, boring kind. In a recent session a certain Senator, after elaborating in a speech of two hours a statement that would have been better made in a speech of two minutes, concluded: "And that's the situation, gentlemen, in a nutshell."

"Gracious," said Senator La Follette, sotto voice, "what a nut!"

MORE LABOR MEN IN NEXT PARLIAMENT.
Attraction of \$2000 Per Annum Is Great in Great Britain.

An interesting phase of the British government's proposal to pay salaries to members of parliament in the future at the rate of \$2000 per annum is the lamentations of the privileged classes. They say that with salaries about four times greater than the wages they can earn in the shops, factories and mines dangling before their eyes as prizes the labor persons will struggle about ten times harder to be elected to the house of commons.

As the labor party members are all radicals or socialists, the aristocrats, landlords and money lords are complaining that their inherited "rights" will be seriously menaced and that evil days are descending upon their houses. J. Keir Hardie, the socialist leader of the labor party, very politely agrees with the privileged personages for once in his lifetime. Hardie says the number of labor men in the next parliament will be at least doubled and progressive legislation will be put through.

Won the Bet.

They were sitting in the smoking room of the hotel, and the conversation was about endurance as shown by men of the past and present. During a lull in the conversation a young commercial traveller said:—

"Any man, if he has the will-power, can endure pain or fatigue. I know I can."

There was silence for a moment, and an older man replied:—

"I'll wager a dinner you can't hold your foot — boot on — in a bucket of hot water as long as I can."

The offer was taken, and two buckets of hot water were brought in, as well as a kettle of boiling water to raise the temperature to the point of endurance. In went a foot of each contestant. Soon the young man's face began to pale, but the other called for more boiling water.

"What on earth is your leg made of, sir?" said the former, suddenly taking his foot from the bucket.

"Cork, sir — cork!" was the cool answer, and the other left that he had indeed lost.

Darwin Caught On.

When Charles Darwin was visiting the country house of a friend the two boys of the family thought they would play a joke on the scientist. So they caught a butterfly, a grasshopper a beetle and a centipede, and out of these creatures they made a strange composite insect. They took the centipede's body, the butterfly's wings, the grasshopper's legs and the beetle's head and they glued them together carefully. Then, with their new bug in a box, they knocked at Darwin's door.

"We caught this bug in a field," they said. "Can you tell us what kind of a bug it is, Mr. Darwin?"

Darwin looked at the bug and then he looked at the boys. He smiled slightly.

"Did you notice whether it hummed when you caught it, boys?" he asked.

"Yes," they answered, nudging one another.

"Then," said Darwin, "it is a hum-bug."

Christianity was first preached in Britain in 178.

Melodrama began in Germany in eighteenth century.