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PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 4.

THE TALL MASTER
THE CRIMSON FLAG
THE FLOOD
IN PIPI VALLEY

THE TALL MASTER

The story has been so much tossed about in the mouths of Indians, and half-breeds, and men of the Hudson's Bay Company, that you are pretty sure to hear only an apocryphal version of the thing as you now travel in the North. But Pretty Pierre was at Fort Luke when the battle occurred, and, before and after, he sifted the business thoroughly. For he had a philosophical turn, and this may be said of him, that he never lied except to save another from danger. In this matter he was cool and impartial from first to last, and evil as his reputation was in many ways there were those who believed and trusted him. Himself, as he travelled here and there through the North, had heard of the Tall Master. Yet he had never met anyone who had seen him; for the Master had dwelt, it was said, chiefly among the strange tribes of the Far-Off Metal River whose faces were almost white, and who held themselves aloof from the southern races. The tales lost nothing by being retold, even when the historians were the men of the H. B. C.;---Pierre knew what accomplished liars may be found among that Company of Adventurers trading in Hudson's Bay, and how their art had been none too delicately engrafted by his own people. But he was, as became him, open to conviction, especially when, journeying to Fort Luke, he heard what John Hybar, the Chief Factor--a man of uncommon quality--had to say. Hybar had once lived long among those Indians of the Bright Stone, and had seen many rare things among them. He knew their legends of the White Valley and the Hills of the Mighty Men, and how their distinctive character had imposed itself on the

whole Indian race of the North, so that there was none but believed, even though vaguely, in a pleasant land not south but Arcticwards; and Pierre himself, with Shon McGann and Just Trafford, had once had a strange experience in the Kimash Hills. He did not share the opinion of Lazenby, the Company's clerk at Fort Luke, who said, when the matter was talked of before him, that it was all hanky-panky,--which was evidence that he had lived in London town, before his anxious relatives, sending him forth under the delusive flag of adventure and wild life, imprisoned him in the Arctic regions with the H. B. C.

Lazenby admired Pierre; said he was good stuff, and voted him amusing, with an ingenious emphasis of heathen oaths; but advised him, as only an insolent young scoundrel can, to forswear securing, by the seductive game of poker or euchre, larger interest on his capital than the H. B. C.; whose record, he insisted, should never be rivalled by any single man in any single lifetime. Then he incidentally remarked that he would like to empty the Company's cash-box once--only once;--thus reconciling the preacher and the sinner, as many another has done. Lazenby's morals were not bad, however. He was simply fond of making them appear terrible; even when in London he was more idle than wicked. He gravely suggested at last, as a kind of climax, that he and Pierre should go out on the pad together. This was a mere stroke of pleasantry on his part, because, the most he could loot in that far North were furs and caches of buffalo meat; and a man's capacity and use for them were limited. Even Pierre's especial faculty and art seemed valueless so far Polewards; but he had his beat throughout the land, and he kept it like a perfect patrolman. He had not been at Fort Luke for years, and he would not be there again for more years; but it was certain that he would go on reappearing till he vanished utterly. At the end of the first week of this visit at Fort Luke, so completely had he conquered the place, that he had won from the Chief Factor the year's purchases of skins, the stores, and the Fort itself; and every stitch of clothing owned by Lazenby: so that, if he had insisted on the redemption of the debts, the H. B. C. and Lazenby had been naked and hungry in the wilderness. But Pierre was not a hard creditor. He instantly and nonchalantly said that the Fort would be useless to him, and handed it back again with all therein, on a most humorously constructed ninety-nine years' lease; while Lazenby was left in pawn. Yet Lazenby's mind was not at certain ease; he had a wholesome respect for Pierre's singularities, and dreaded being suddenly called upon to pay his debt before he could get his new clothes made, maybe, in the presence of Wind Driver, chief of the Golden Dogs, and his demure and charming daughter, Wine Face, who looked upon him with the eye of affection--a matter fully, but not ostentatiously, appreciated by Lazenby. If he could have entirely forgotten a pretty girl in South Kensington, who, at her parents' bidding, turned her shoulder on him, he would have married Wine Face; and so he told Pierre. But the half-breed had only a sardonic sympathy for such weakness. Things changed at once when Shon McGann arrived. He should have come before, according to a promise given Pierre, but there were reasons for the delay; and these Shon elaborated in his finely picturesque style.

He said that he had lost his way after he left the Wapiti Woods, and should never have found it again, had it not been for a strange being who

came upon him and took him to the camp of the White Hand Indians, and cared for him there, and sent him safely on his way again to Fort Luke.

"Sorra wan did I ever see like him," said Shon, with a face that was divil this minute and saint the next; pale in the cheek, and black in the eye, and grizzled hair flowin' long at his neck and lyin' like snakes on his shoulders; and whin his fingers closed on yours, bedad! they didn't seem human at all, for they clamped you so cold and strong."

"For they clamped you so cold and strong," replied Pierre, mockingly, yet greatly interested, as one could see by the upward range of his eye towards Shon. "Well, what more?"

"Well, squeeze the acid from y'r voice, Pierre; for there's things that better become you: and listen to me, for I've news for all here at the Fort, before I've done, which'll open y'r eyes with a jerk."

"With a wonderful jerk, hold! let us prepare, messieurs, to be waked with an Irish jerk!" and Pierre pensively trifled with the fringe on Shon's buckskin jacket, which was whisked from his fingers with smothered anger. For a few moments he was silent; but the eager looks of the Chief Factor and Lazenby encouraged him to continue. Besides, it was only Pierre's way--provoking Shon was the piquant sauce of his life.

"Lyin' awake I was," continued Shon, "in the middle of the night, not bein' able to sleep for a pain in a shoulder I'd strained, whin I heard a thing that drew me up standin'. It was the sound of a child laughin'; so wonderful and bright, and at the very door of me tent it seemed. Then it faded away till it was only a breath, lovely, and idle, and swingin'. I wint to the door and looked out. There was nothin' there, av coorse." "And why 'av coorse'?" rejoined Pierre. The Chief Factor was intent on what Shon was saying, while Lazenby drummed his fingers on the table, his nose in the air.

"Divils me darlin', but ye know as well as I, that there's things in the world neither for havin' nor handlin'. And that's wan of thim, says I to meself. . . . I wint back and lay down, and I heard the voice singin' now and comin' nearer and nearer, and growin' louder and louder, and then there came with it a patter of feet, till it was as a thousand children were dancin' by me door. I was shy enough, I'll own; but I pulled aside the curtain of the tent to see again: and there was nothin' beyand for the eye. But the singin' was goin' past and recedin' as before, till it died away along the waves of prairie grass. I wint back and give Grey Nose, my Injin bed-fellow, a lift wid me fut. 'Come out of that,' says I, 'and tell me if dead or alive I am.' He got up, and there was the noise soft and grand again, but with it now the voices of men, the flip of birds' wings and the sighin' of tree tops, and behind all that the long wash of a sea like none I ever heard. . . . 'Well,' says I to the Injin grinnin' before me, 'what's that, in the name o' Moses?' 'That,' says he, laughin' slow in me face, 'is the Tall Master--him that brought you to the camp.' Thin I remimbered all the things that's been said of him, and I knew it was music I'd been hearin' and not children's voices nor anythin' else at all.

"Come with me,' says Grey Nose; and he took me to the door of a big tent standin' alone from the rest.

"Wait a minute,' says he, and he put his hand on the tent curtain; and at that there was a crash, as a million gold hammers were fallin' on silver drums. And we both stood still; for it seemed an army, with swords wranglin' and bridle-chains rattlin', was marchin' down on us. There was the divil's own uproar, as a battle was comin' on; and a long line of spears clashed. But just then there whistled through the larrup of sound a clear voice callin', gentle and coaxin', yet commandin' too; and the spears dropped, and the pounding of horsehoofs ceased, and then the army marched away; far away; iver so far away, into--"

"Into Heaven!" flippantly interjected Lazenby. "Into Heaven, say I, and be choked to you! for there's no other place for it; and I'll stand by that, till I go there myself, and know the truth o' the thing." Pierre here spoke. "Heaven gave you a fine trick with words, Shon McGann. I sometimes think Irishmen have gifts for only two things--words and women. . . . 'Bien,' what then?"

Shon was determined not to be angered. The occasion was too big. "Well, Grey Nose lifted the curtain and wint in. In a minute he comes out. 'You can go in,' says he. So in I wint, the Injin not comin', and there in the middle of the tint stood the Tall Master, alone. He had his fiddle to his chin, and the bow hoverin' above it. He looked at me for a long time along the thing; then, all at once, from one string I heard the child laughin' that pleasant and distant, though the bow seemed not to be touchin'. Soon it thinned till it was the shadow of a laugh, and I didn't know whin it stopped, he smilin' down at the fiddle bewhiles. Then he said without lookin' at me,--'It is the spirit of the White Valley and the Hills of the Mighty Men; of which all men shall know, for the North will come to her spring again one day soon, at the remaking of the world. They thought the song would never be found again, but I have given it a home here.' And he bent and kissed the strings. After, he turned sharply as if he'd been spoken to, and looked at someone beside him; someone that I couldn't see. A cloud dropped upon his face, he caught the fiddle hungrily to his breast, and came limp'in' over to me--for there was somethin' wrong with his fut--and lookin' down his hook-nose at me, says he,--'I've a word for them at Fort Luke, where you're goin', and you'd better be gone at once; and I'll put you on your way. There's to be a great battle. The White Hands have an ancient feud with the Golden Dogs, and they have come from where the soft Chinook wind ranges the Peace River, to fight until no man of all the Golden Dogs be left, or till they themselves be destroyed. It is the same north and south,' he wint on; 'I have seen it all in Italy, in Greece, in--' but here he stopped and smiled strangely. After a minute he wint on: 'The White Hands have no quarrel with the Englishmen of the Fort, and I would warn them, for Englishmen were once kind to me--and warn also the Golden Dogs. So come with me at once,' says he. And I did. And he walked with me till mornin', carryin' the fiddle under his arm, but wrapped in a beautiful velvet cloth, havin' on it grand figures like the arms of a king or queen. And just at the first whisk of sun he turned me into a

trail and give me good-bye, sayin' that maybe he'd follow me soon, and, at any rate, he'd be there at the battle. Well, divils betide me! I got off the track again; and lost a day; but here I am; and there's me story to take or lave as you will."

Shon paused and began to fumble with the cards on the table before him, looking the while at the others.

The Chief Factor was the first to speak. "I don't doubt but he told you true about the White Hands and the Golden Dogs," he said; "for there's been war and bad blood between them beyond the memory of man--at least since the time that the Mighty Men lived, from which these date their history. But there's nothing to be done to-night; for if we tell old Wind Driver, there'll be no sleeping at the Fort. So we'll let the thing stand."

"You believe all this poppy-cock, Chief?" said Lazenby to the Factor, but laughing in Shon's face the while. The Factor gravely replied: "I knew of the Tall Master years ago on the Far-Off Metal River; and though I never saw him I can believe these things--and more. You do not know this world through and through, Lazenby; you have much to learn."

Pierre said nothing. He took the cards from Shon and passed them to and fro in his hand. Mechanically he dealt them out, and as mechanically they took them up and in silence began to play.

The next day there was commotion and excitement at Fort Luke. The Golden Dogs were making preparations for the battle. Pow-wow followed pow-wow, and paint and feathers followed all. The H. B. C. people had little to do but look to their guns and house everything within the walls of the Fort.

At night, Shon, Pierre, and Lazenby were seated about the table in the common-room, the cards lying dealt before them, waiting for the Factor to come. Presently the door opened and the Factor entered, followed by another. Shon and Pierre sprang to their feet.

"The Tall Master," said Shon with a kind of awe; and then stood still.

Their towering visitor slowly unloosed something he carried very carefully and closely beneath his arm, and laid it on the table, dropping his compass-like fingers softly on it. He bowed gravely to each, yet the bow seemed grotesque, his body was so ungainly. With the eyes of all drawn to him absolutely, he spoke in a low sonorous tone: "I have followed the traveller fast"--his hand lifted gently towards Shon--"for there are weighty concerns abroad, and I have things to say and do before I go again to my people--and beyond. . . . I have hungered for the face of a white man these many years, and his was the first I saw; "--again he tossed a long finger towards the Irishman--"and it brought back many things. I remember. . . ." He paused, then sat down; and they all did the same. He looked at them one by one with distant kindness. "I remember," he continued, and his strangely articulated fingers folded about the thing on the table beside him, "when"--here the cards caught

his eye. His face underwent a change. An eager fantastic look shot from his eye, "when I gambled this away at Lucca,"--his hand drew the bundle closer to him--"but I won it back again--at a price!" he gloomily added, glancing sideways as to someone at his elbow.

He remained, eyes hanging upon space for a moment, then he recollected himself and continued: "I became wiser; I never risked it again; but I loved the game always. I was a gamester from the start--the artist is always so when he is greatest,--like nature herself. And once, years after, I played with a mother for her child--and mine. And yet once again at Parma with"--here he paused, throwing that sharp sidelong glance--"with the greatest gamester, for the infinite secret of Art: and I won it; but I paid the price! . . . I should like to play now."

He reached his hand, drew up five cards, and ran his eye through them. "Play!" he said. "The hand is good--very good. . . . Once when I played with the Princess--but it is no matter; and Tuscany is far away! . . . Play!" he repeated.

Pierre instantly picked up the cards, with an air of cool satisfaction. He had either found the perfect gamester or the perfect liar. He knew the remedy for either.

The Chief Factor did not move. Shon and Lazenby followed Pierre's action. By their positions Lazenby became his partner. They played in silence for a minute, the Tall Master taking all. "Napoleon was a wonderful player, but he lost with me," he said slowly as he played a card upon three others and took them.

Lazenby was so taken back by this remark that, presently, he trumped his partner's ace, and was rewarded by a talon-like look from the Tall Master's eye; but it was immediately followed by one of saturnine amusement.

They played on silently.

"Ah, you are a wonderful player!" he presently said to Pierre, with a look of keen scrutiny. "Come, I will play with you--for values--the first time in seventy-five years; then, no more!"

Lazenby and Shon drew away beside the Chief Factor. The two played. Meanwhile Lazenby said to Shon: "The man's mad. He talks about Napoleon as if he'd known him--as if it wasn't three-fourths of a century ago. Does he think we're all born idiots? Why, he's not over sixty years old now. But where the deuce did he come from with that Italian face? And the funniest part of it is, he reminds me of someone. Did you notice how he limped--the awkward beggar!"

Lazenby had unconsciously lifted his voice, and presently the Tall Master turned and said to him: "I ran a nail into my foot at Leyden seventy-odd years ago."

"He's the devil himself," rejoined Lazenby, and he did not lower his

voice.

"Many with angelic gifts are children of His Dark Majesty," said the Tall Master, slowly; and though he appeared closely occupied with the game, a look of vague sadness came into his face.

For a half-hour they played in silence, the slight, delicate-featured half-breed, and the mysterious man who had for so long been a thing of wonder in the North, a weird influence among the Indians.

There was a strange, cold fierceness in the Tall Master's face. He now staked his precious bundle against the one thing Pierre prized--the gold watch received years ago for a deed of heroism on the Chaudiere. The half-breed had always spoken of it as amusing, but Shon at least knew that to Pierre it was worth his right hand.

Both men drew breath slowly, and their eyes were hard. The stillness became painful; all were possessed by the grim spirit of Chance. . . . The Tall Master won. He came to his feet, his shambling body drawn together to a height. Pierre rose also. Their looks clinched. Pierre stretched out his hand. "You are my master at this," he said.

The other smiled sadly. "I have played for the last time. I have not forgotten how to win. If I had lost, uncommon things had happened. This,"--he laid his hand on the bundle and gently undid it,"--"is my oldest friend, since the warm days at Parma . . . all dead . . . all dead." Out of the velvet wrapping, brodered with royal and ducal arms, and rounded by a wreath of violets--which the Chief Factor looked at closely--he drew his violin. He lifted it reverently to his lips.

"My good Garnerius!" he said. "Three masters played you, but I am chief of them all. They had the classic soul, but I the romantic heart--'les grandes caprices.'" His head lifted higher. "I am the master artist of the world. I have found the core of Nature. Here in the North is the wonderful soul of things. Beyond this, far beyond, where the foolish think is only inviolate ice, is the first song of the Ages in a very pleasant land. I am the lost Master, and I shall return, I shall return . . . but not yet . . . not yet."

He fetched the instrument to his chin with a noble pride. The ugliness of his face was almost beautiful now.

The Chief Factor's look was fastened on him with bewilderment; he was trying to remember something: his mind went feeling, he knew not why, for a certain day, a quarter of a century before, when he unpacked a box of books and papers from England. Most of them were still in the Fort. The association of this man with these things fretted him.

The Tall Master swung his bow upward, but at that instant there came a knock, and, in response to a call, Wind Driver and Wine Face entered. Wine Face was certainly a beautiful girl; and Lazenby might well have been pardoned for throwing in his fate with such a heathen, if he despaired of ever seeing England again. The Tall Master did not turn

towards these. The Indians sat gracefully on a bearskin before the fire. The eyes of the girl were cast shyly upon the Man as he stood there unlike an ordinary man; in his face a fine hardness and the cold light of the North. He suddenly tipped his bow upward and brought it down with a most delicate crash upon the strings. Then softly, slowly, he passed into a weird fantasy. The Indians sat breathless. Upon them it acted more impressively than the others: besides, the player's eye was searching them now; he was playing into their very bodies. And they responded with some swift shocks of recognition crossing their faces. Suddenly the old Indian sprang up. He thrust his arms out, and made, as if unconsciously, some fantastic yet solemn motions. The player smiled in a far-off fashion, and presently ran the bow upon the strings in an exquisite cry; and then a beautiful avalanche of sound slid from a distance, growing nearer and nearer, till it swept through the room, and imbedded all in its sweetness.

At this the old Indian threw himself forward at the player's feet. "It is the song of the White Weaver, the maker of the world--the music from the Hills of the Mighty Men. . . . I knew it--I knew it--but never like that. . . . It was lost to the world; the wild cry of the lofty stars. . . ." His face was wet.

The girl too had risen. She came forward as if in a dream and reverently touched the arm of the musician, who paused now, and was looking at them from under his long eyelashes. She said whisperingly: "Are you a spirit? Do you come from the Hills of the Mighty Men?"

He answered gravely: "I am no spirit. But I have journeyed in the Hills of the Mighty Men and along their ancient hunting-grounds. This that I have played is the ancient music of the world--the music of Jubal and his comrades. It comes humming from the Poles; it rides laughing down the planets; it trembles through the snow; it gives joy to the bones of the wind. . . . And I am the voice of it," he added; and he drew up his loose unmanageable body till it looked enormous, firm, and dominant.

The girl's fingers ran softly over to his breast. "I will follow you," she said, "when you go again to the Happy Valleys."

Down from his brow there swept a faint hue of colour, and, for a breath, his eyes closed tenderly with hers. But he straightway gathered back his look again, his body shrank, not rudely, from her fingers, and he absently said: "I am old-in years the father of the world. It is a man's life gone since, at Genoa, she laid her fingers on my breast like that. . . . These things can be no more . . . until the North hath its summer again; and I stand young--the Master--upon the summits of my renown."

The girl drew slowly back. Lazenby was muttering under his breath now; he was overwhelmed by this change in Wine Face. He had been impressed to awe by the Tall Master's music, but he was piqued, and determined not to give in easily. He said sneeringly that Maskelyne and Cooke in music had come to life, and suggested a snake-dance.

The Tall Master heard these things, and immediately he turned to Lazenby with an angry look on his face. His brows hung heavily over the dull fire of his eyes; his hair itself seemed like Medusa's, just quivering into savage life; the fingers spread out white and claw-like upon the strings as he curved his violin to his chin, whereof it became, as it were, a piece. The bow shot out and down upon the instrument with a great clangour. There eddied into a vast arena of sound the prodigious elements of war. Torture rose from those four immeasurable chords; destruction was afoot upon them; a dreadful dance of death supervened.

Through the Chief Factor's mind there flashed--though mechanically, and only to be remembered afterwards--the words of a schoolday poem. It shuttled in and out of the music:

"Wheel the wild dance,
While lightnings glance,
And thunders rattle loud;
And call the brave to bloody grave,
To sleep without a shroud."

The face of the player grew old and drawn. The skin was wrinkled, but shone, the hair spread white, the nose almost met the chin, the mouth was all malice. It was old age with vast power: conquest volleyed from the fingers.

Shon McGann whispered aves, aching with the sound; the Chief Factor shuddered to his feet; Lazenby winced and drew back to the wall, putting his hand before his face as though the sounds were striking him; the old Indian covered his head with his arms upon the floor. Wine Face knelt, her face all grey, her fingers lacing and interlacing with pain. Only Pierre sat with masterful stillness, his eyes never moving from the face of the player; his arms folded; his feet firmly wedged to the floor. The sound became strangely distressing. It shocked the flesh and angered the nerves. Upon Lazenby it acted singularly. He cowered from it, but presently, with a look of madness in his eyes, rushed forward, arms outstretched, as though to seize this intolerable minstrel. There was a sudden pause in the playing; then the room quaked with noise, buffeting Lazenby into stillness. The sounds changed instantly again, and music of an engaging sweetness and delight fell about them as in silver drops--an enchanting lyric of love. Its exquisite tenderness subdued Lazenby, who, but now, had a heart for slaughter. He dropped on his knees, threw his head into his arms, and sobbed hard. The Tall Master's fingers crept caressingly along one of those heavenly veins of sound, his bow poising softly over it. The farthest star seemed singing.

At dawn the next day the Golden Dogs were gathered for war before the Fort. Immediately after the sun rose, the foe were seen gliding darkly out of the horizon. From another direction came two travellers. These also saw the White Hands bearing upon the Fort, and hurried forward. They reached the gates of the Fort in good time, and were welcomed. One was a chief trader from a fort in the west. He was an old man, and had been many years in the service of the H. B. C.; and, like Lazenby, had spent his early days in London, a connoisseur in all its pleasures; the

other was a voyageur. They had posted on quickly to bring news of this crusade of the White Hands.

The hostile Indians came steadily to within a few hundred yards of the Golden Dogs. Then they sent a brave to say that they had no quarrel with the people of the Fort; and that if the Golden Dogs came on they would battle with them alone; since the time had come for "one to be as both," as their Medicine Men had declared since the days of the Great Race. And this signified that one should destroy the other.

At this all the Golden Dogs ranged into line. The sun shone brightly, the long hedge of pine woods in the distance caught the colour of the sky, the flowers of the plains showed handsomely as a carpet of war. The bodies of the fighters glistened. You could see the rise and fall of their bare, strenuous chests. They stood as their forefathers in battle, almost naked, with crested head, gleaming axe, scalp-knife, and bows and arrows. At first there was the threatening rustle of preparation; then a great stillness came and stayed for a moment; after which, all at once, there sped through the air a big shout of battle, and the innumerable twang of flying arrows; and the opposing hosts ran upon each other.

Pierre and Shon McGann, watching from the Fort, cried out with excitement.

"Divils me darlin'!" called Shon, "are we gluin' our eyes to a chink in the wall, whin the tangle of battle goes on beyand? Bedad, I'll not stand it! Look at them twistin' the neck o' war! Open the gates, open the gates say I, and let us have play with our guns."

"Hush! 'Mon Dieu!" interrupted Pierre. "Look! The Tall Master!"

None at the Fort had seen the Tall Master since the night before. Now he was covering the space between the walls and the battle, his hair streaming behind him.

When he came near to the vortex of fight he raised his violin to his chin, and instantly a piercingly sweet call penetrated the wild uproar. The Call filled it, drained through it, wrapped it, overcame it; so that it sank away at last like the outwash of an exhausted tide: the weft of battle stayed unfinished in the loom.

Then from the Indian lodges came the women and children. They drew near to the unearthly luxury of that Call, now lifting with an unbounded joy. Battleaxes fell to the ground; the warriors quieted even where they stood locked with their foes. The Tall Master now drew away from them, facing the north and west. That ineffable Call drew them after him with grave joy; and they brought their dead and wounded along. The women and children glided in among the men and followed also. Presently one girl ran away from the rest and came close into the great leader's footsteps.

At that instant, Lazenby, from the wall of the Fort, cried out madly, sprang down, opened the gates, and rushed towards the girl, crying: "Wine Face! Wine Face!"

She did not look behind. But he came close to her and caught her by the waist. "Come back! Come back! O my love, come back!" he urged; but she pushed him gently from her.

"Hush! Hush!" she said. "We are going to the Happy Valleys. Don't you hear him calling?" . . . And Lazenby fell back.

The Tall Master was now playing a wonderful thing, half dance, half carnival; but with that Call still beating through it. They were passing the Fort at an angle. All within issued forth to see. Suddenly the old trader who had come that morning started forward with a cry; then stood still. He caught the Factor's arm; but he seemed unable to speak yet; his face was troubled, his eyes were hard upon the player.

The procession passed the empty lodges, leaving the ground strewn with their weapons, and not one of their number stayed behind. They passed away towards the high hills of the north-west-beautiful austere barriers.

Still the trader gazed, and was pale, and trembled. They watched long. The throng of pilgrims grew a vague mass; no longer an army of individuals; and the music came floating back with distant charm. At last the old man found voice. "My God, it is--"

The Factor touched his arm, interrupting him, and drew a picture from his pocket--one but just now taken from that musty pile of books, received so many years before. He showed it to the old man.

"Yes, yes," said the other, "that is he. . . . And the world buried him forty years ago!"

Pierre, standing near, added with soft irony: "There are strange things in the world. He is the gamester of the world. 'Mais' a grand comrade also."

The music came waving back upon them delicately but the pilgrims were fading from view.

Soon the watchers were alone with the glowing day.

THE CRIMSON FLAG

Talk and think as one would, The Woman was striking to see; with marvellous flaxen hair and a joyous violet eye. She was all pulse and dash; but she was as much less beautiful than the manager's wife as Tom Liffey was as nothing beside the manager himself; and one would care little to name the two women in the same breath if the end had been different. When The Woman came to Little Goshen there were others of her

class there, but they were of a commoner sort and degree. She was the queen of a lawless court, though she never, from first to last, spoke to one of those others who were her people; neither did she hold commerce with any of the ordinary miners, save Pretty Pierre, but he was more gambler than miner,--and he went, when the matter was all over, and told her some things that stripped her soul naked before her eyes. Pierre had a wonderful tongue. It was only the gentlemen-diggers--and there were many of them at Little Goshen--who called upon her when the lights were low; and then there was a good deal of muffled mirth in the white house among the pines. The rougher miners made no quarrel with this, for the gentlemen-diggers were popular enough, they were merely sarcastic and humorous, and said things which, coming to The Woman's ears, made her very merry; for she herself had an abundant wit, and had spent wild hours with clever men. She did not resent the playful insolence that sent a dozen miners to her house in the dead of night with a crimson flag, which they quietly screwed to her roof; and paint, with which they deftly put a wide stripe of scarlet round the cornice, and another round the basement. In the morning, when she saw what had been done, she would not have the paint removed nor the flag taken down; for, she said, the stripes looked very well, and the other would show that she was always at home.

Now, the notable thing was that Heldon, the manager, was in The Woman's house on the night this was done. Tom Liffey, the lumpish guide and trapper, saw him go in; and, days afterwards, he said to Pierre: "Divils me own, but this is a bad hour for Heldon's wife--she with a face like a princess and eyes like the fear o' God. Nivir a wan did I see like her, since I came out of Erin with a clatter of hoofs behoid me and a squall on the sea before. There's wimmin there wid cheeks like roses and buttermilk, and a touch that'd make y'r heart pound on y'r ribs; but none that's grander than Heldon's wife. To lave her for that other, standin' hip-high in her shame, is temptin' the fires of Heaven, that basted the sinners o' Sodom."

Pierre, pausing between the whiffs of a cigarette, said: "So? But you know more of catching foxes in winter, and climbing mountains in summer, and the grip of the arm of an Injin girl, than of these things. You are young, quite young in the world, Tom Liffey."

"Young I may be with a glint o' grey at me temples from a night o' trouble beyand in the hills; but I'm the man, an' the only man, that's climbed to the glacier-top--God's Playground, as they call it: and nivir a dirty trick have I done to Injin girl or any other; and be damned to you there!"

"Sometimes I think you are as foolish as Shon McGann," compassionately replied the half-breed.

"You have almighty virtue, and you did that brave trick of the glacier; but great men have fallen. You are not dead yet. Still, as you say, Heldon's wife is noble to see. She is grave and cold, and speaks little; but there is something in her which is not of the meek of the earth. Some women say nothing, and suffer and forgive, and take such as Heldon back to their bosoms; but there are others--I remember a woman--bien, it

is no matter, it was long ago; but they two are as if born of one mother; and what comes of this will be mad play--mad play."

"Av coorse his wife may not get to know of it, and--"

"Not get to know it! 'Tsh, you are a child--"

"Faith, I'll say what I think, and that in y'r face! Maybe he'll tire of the handsome rip--for handsome she is, like a yellow lily growin' out o' mud--and go back to his lawful wife, that believes he's at the mines, when he's drinkin' and colloquin' wid a fly-away."

Pierre slowly wheeled till he had the Irishman straight in his eye. Then he said in a low, cutting tone: "I suppose your heart aches for the beautiful lady, eh?" Here he screwed his slight forefinger into Tom's breast; then he added sharply: "'Nom de Dieu,' but you make me angry! You talk too much. Such men get into trouble. And keep down the riot of that heart of yours, Tom Liffey, or you'll walk on the edge of knives one day. And now take an inch of whisky and ease the anxious soul. 'Voila!'" After a moment he added: "Women work these things out for themselves." Then the two left the hut, and amiably strolled together to the centre of the village, where they parted. It was as Pierre had said: the woman would work the thing out for herself. Later that evening Heldon's wife stood cloaked and veiled in the shadows of the pines, facing the house with The Crimson Flag. Her eyes shifted ever from the door to the flag, which was stirred by the light breeze. Once or twice she shivered as with cold, but she instantly stilled again, and watched. It was midnight. Here and there beyond in the village a light showed, and straggling voices floated faintly towards her. For a long time no sound came from the house. But at last she heard a laugh. At that she drew something from her pocket, and held it firmly in her hand. Once she turned and looked at another house far up on the hill, where lights were burning. It was Heldon's house--her home. A sharp sound as of anguish and anger escaped her; then she fastened her eyes on the door in front of her.

At that moment Tom Liffey was standing with his hands on his hips looking at Heldon's home on the hill; and he said some rumbling words, then strode on down the road, and suddenly paused near the wife. He did not see her. He faced the door at which she was looking, and shook his fist at it.

"A murrain on y'r sowl!" said he, "as there's plague in y'r body, and hell in the side of y'r feet, like the trail of the red spider. And out o' that come ye, Heldon, for I know y're there. Out of that, ye beast! . . . But how can ye go back--you that's rolled in that sewer--to the loveliest woman that ever trod the neck o' the world! Damned y' are in every joint o' y'r frame, and damned is y'r sowl, I say, for bringing sorrow to her; and I hate you as much for that, as I could worship her was she not your wife and a lady o' blood, God save her!"

Then shaking his fist once more, he swung away slowly down the road. During this the wife's teeth held together as though they were of a

piece. She looked after Tom Liffey and smiled; but it was a dreadful smile.

"He worships me, that common man--worships me," she said. "This man who was my husband has shamed me, left me. Well--"

The door of the house opened; a man came out. His wife leaned a little forward, and something clicked ominously in her hand. But a voice came up the road towards them through the clear air--the voice of Tom Liffey. The husband paused to listen; the wife mechanically did the same. The husband remembered this afterwards: it was the key to, and the beginning of, a tragedy. These are the words the Irishman sang:

"She was a queen, she stood up there before me,
My blood went roarin' when she touched my hand;
She kissed me on the lips, and then she swore me
To die for her--and happy was the land."

A new and singular look came into her face. It transformed her. "That," she said in a whisper to herself--"that! He knows the way."

As her husband turned towards his home, she turned also. He heard the rustle of garments, and he could just discern the cloaked figure in the shadows. He hurried on; the figure flitted ahead of him. A fear possessed him in spite of his will. He turned back. The figure stood still for a moment, then followed him. He braced himself, faced about, and walked towards it: it stopped and waited. He had not the courage. He went back again swiftly towards the house he had left. Again he looked behind him. The figure was standing, not far, in the pines. He wheeled suddenly towards the house, turned a key in the door, and entered.

Then the wife went to that which had been her home: Heldon did not go thither until the first flush of morning. Pierre, returning from an all-night sitting at cards, met him, and saw the careworn look on his face. The half-breed smiled. He knew that the event was doubling on the man. When Heldon reached his house, he went to his wife's room. It was locked. Then he walked down to his mines with a miserable shame and anger at his heart. He did not pass The Crimson Flag. He went by another way.

That evening, in the dusk, a woman knocked at Tom Liffey's door. He opened it.

"Are you alone?" she said. "I am alone, lady."

"I will come in," she added. "You will--come in?" he faltered.

She drew near him, and reached out and gently caught his hand.

"Ah!" he said, with a sound almost like a sob in its intensity, and the blood flushed to his hair.

He stepped aside, and she entered. In the light of the candle her eye burned into his, but her face wore a shining coldness. She leaned towards him.

"You said you could worship me," she whispered, "and you cursed him. Well--worship me--altogether--and that will curse him, as he has killed me."

"Dear lady!" he said, in an awed, overwhelmed murmur; and he fell back to the wall.

She came towards him. "Am I not beautiful?" she urged. She took his hand. His eye swam with hers. But his look was different from hers, though he could not know that. His was the madness of a man in a dream; hers was a painful thing. The Furies dwelt in her. She softly lifted his hand above his head, and whispered: "Swear." And she kissed him. Her lips were icy, though he did not think so. The blood tossed in his veins. He swore: but, doing so, he could not conceive all that would be required of him. He was hers, body and soul, and she had resolved on a grim thing. . . . In the darkness, they left the hut and passed into the woods, and slowly up through the hills.

Heldon returned to his home that night to find it empty. There were no servants. There was no wife. Her cat and dog lay dead upon the hearthrug. Her clothing was cut into strips. Her wedding-dress was a charred heap on the fireplace. Her jewellery lay molten with it. Her portrait had been torn from its frame.

An intolerable fear possessed him. Drops of sweat hung on his forehead and his hands. He fled towards the town. He bit his finger-nails till they bled as he passed the house in the pines. He lifted his arm as if the flappings of The Crimson Flag were blows in his face.

At last he passed Tom Liffey's hut. He saw Pierre, coming from it. The look on the gambler's face was one, of gloomy wonder. His fingers trembled as he lighted a cigarette, and that was an unusual thing. The form of Heldon edged within the light. Pierre dropped the match and said to him,--"You are looking for your wife?"

Heldon bowed his head. The other threw open the door of the hut. "Come in here," he said. They entered. Pierre pointed to a woman's hat on the table. "Do you know that?" he asked, huskily, for he was moved. But Heldon only nodded dazedly. Pierre continued: "I was to have met Tom Liffey here--to-night. He is not here. You hoped--I suppose--to see your wife in your--home. She is not there. He left a word on paper for me. I have torn it up. Writing is the enemy of man. But I know where he is gone. I know also where your wife has gone."

Heldon's face was of a hateful paleness. . . . They passed out into the night.

"Where are you going?" Heldon said.

"To God's Playground, if we can get there."

"To God's Playground? To the glacier-top? You are mad."

"No, but he and she were mad. Come on." Then he whispered something, and Heldon gave a great cry, and they plunged into the woods.

In the morning the people of Little Goshen, looking towards the glacier, saw a flag (they knew afterwards that it was crimson) flying on it. Near it were two human figures. A miner, looking through a field-glass, said that one figure was crouching by the flag-staff, and that it was a woman. The other figure near was a man. As the morning wore on, they saw upon a crag of ice below the sloping glacier two men looking upwards towards the flag. One of them seemed to shriek out, and threw up his hands, and made as if to rush forward; but the other drew him back.

Heldon knew what revenge and disgrace may be at their worst. In vain he tried to reach God's Playground. Only one man knew the way, and he was dead upon it--with Heldon's wife: two shameless suicides. . . . When he came down from the mountain the hair upon his face was white, though that upon his head remained black as it had always been. And those frozen figures stayed there like statues with that other crimson flag: until, one day, a great-bodied wind swept out of the north, and, in pity, carried them down a bottomless fissure.

But long before this happened, The Woman had fled from Little Goshen in the night, and her house was burned to the ground.

THE FLOOD

Wendling came to Fort Anne on the day that the Reverend Ezra Badgley and an unknown girl were buried. And that was a notable thing. The man had been found dead at his evening meal; the girl had died on the same day; and they were buried side by side. This caused much scandal, for the man was holy, and the girl, as many women said, was probably evil altogether. At the graves, when the minister's people saw what was being done, they piously protested; but the Factor, to whom Pierre had whispered a word, answered them gravely that the matter should go on: since none knew but the woman was as worthy of heaven as the man. Wendling chanced to stand beside Pretty Pierre.

"Who knows!" he said aloud, looking hard at the graves, "who knows!.... She died before him, but the dead can strike."

Pierre did not answer immediately, for the Factor was calling the earth down on both coffins; but after a moment he added: "Yes, the dead can strike." And then the eyes of the two men caught and stayed, and they knew that they had things to say to each other in the world.

They became friends. And that, perhaps, was not greatly to Wendling's credit; for in the eyes of many Pierre was an outcast as an outlaw. Maybe some of the women disliked this friendship most; since Wendling was a handsome man, and Pierre was never known to seek them, good or bad; and they blamed him for the other's coldness, for his unconcerned yet respectful eye.

"There's Nelly Nolan would dance after him to the world's end," said Shon McGann to Pierre one day; "and the Widdy Jerome herself, wid her flamin' cheeks and the wild fun in her eye, croons like a babe at the breast as he slides out his cash on the bar; and over on Gansonby's Flat there's--"

"There's many a fool, 'voila,'" sharply interjected Pierre, as he pushed the needle through a button he was sewing on his coat.

"Bedad, there's a pair of fools here, anyway, I say; for the women might die without lift at waist or brush of lip, and neither of ye'd say, 'Here's to the joy of us, goddess, me own!'"

Pierre seemed to be intently watching the needlepoint as it pierced up the button-eye, and his reply was given with a slowness corresponding to the sedate passage of the needle. "Wendling, you think, cares nothing for women? Well, men who are like that cared once for one woman, and when that was over--But, pshaw! I will not talk. You are no thinker, Shon McGann. You blunder through the world. And you'll tremble as much to a woman's thumb in fifty years as now."

"By the holy smoke," said Shon, "though I tremble at that, maybe, I'll not tremble, as Wendling, at nothing at all." Here Pierre looked up sharply, then dropped his eyes on his work again. Shon lapsed suddenly into a moodiness.

"Yes," said Pierre, "as Wendling, at nothing at all? Well?"

"Well, this, Pierre, for you that's a thinker from me that's none. I was walking with him in Red Glen yesterday. Sudden he took to shiverin', and snatched me by the arm, and a mad look shot out of his handsome face. 'Hush!' says he. I listened. There was a sound like the hard rattle of a creek over stones, and then another sound behind that. 'Come quick,' says he, the sweat standin' thick on him; and he ran me up the bank--for it was at the beginnin' of the Glen where the sides were low--and there we stood pantin' and starin' flat at each other. 'What's that? and what's got its hand on ye? for y' are cold as death, an' pinched in the face, an' you've bruised my arm,' said I. And he looked round him slow and breathed hard, then drew his fingers through the sweat on his cheek. 'I'm not well, and I thought I heard--you heard it; what was it like?' said he; and he peered close at me. 'Like water,' said I; 'a little creek near, and a flood comin' far off.' 'Yes, just that,' said he; 'it's some trick of wind in the place, but it makes a man foolish, and an inch of brandy would be the right thing.' I didn't say no to that. And on we came, and brandy we had with a wish in the eye of Nelly Nolan that'd warm the heart of a tomb. . . . And there's a cud for your chewin',

Pierre. Think that by the neck and the tail, and the devil absolve ye."

During this, Pierre had finished with the button. He had drawn on his coat and lifted his hat, and now lounged, trying the point of the needle with his forefinger. When Shon ended, he said with a sidelong glance: "But what did you think of all that, Shon?"

"Think! There it was! What's the use of thinkin'? There's many a trick in the world with wind or with spirit, as I've seen often enough in ould Ireland, and it's not to be guessed by me." Here his voice got a little lower and a trifle solemn. "For, Pierre," spoke he, "there's what's more than life or death, and sorra wan can we tell what it is; but we'll know some day whin--"

"When we've taken the leap at the Almighty Ditch," said Pierre, with a grave kind of lightness. "Yes, it is all strange. But even the Almighty Ditch is worth the doing: nearly everything is worth the doing; being young, growing old, fighting, loving--when youth is on--hating, eating, drinking, working, playing big games. All is worth it except two things."

"And what are they, bedad?"

"Thy neighbour's wife and murder. Those are horrible. They double on a man one time or another; always."

Here, as in curiosity, Pierre pierced his finger with the needle, and watched the blood form in a little globule. Looking at it meditatively and sardonically, he said: "There is only one end to these. Blood for blood is a great matter; and I used to wonder if it would not be terrible for a man to see his death coming on him drop by drop, like that." He let the spot of blood fall to the floor. "But now I know that there is a punishment worse than that . . . 'mon Dieu! worse than that," he added.

Into Shon's face a strange look had suddenly come. "Yes, there's something worse than that, Pierre."

"So, 'bien?'"

Shon made the sacred gesture of his creed. "To be punished by the dead. And not see them--only hear them." And his eyes steadied firmly to the other's.

Pierre was about to reply, but there came the sound of footsteps through the open door, and presently Wendling entered slowly. He was pale and worn, and his eyes looked out with a searching anxiousness. But that did not render him less comely. He had always dressed in black and white, and this now added to the easy and yet severe refinement of his person. His birth and breeding had occurred in places unfrequented by such as Shon and Pierre; but plains and wild life level all; and men are friends according to their taste and will, and by no other law. Hence these with Wendling. He stretched out his hand to each without a word. The hand-

shake was unusual; he had little demonstration ever. Shon looked up surprised, but responded. Pierre followed with a swift, inquiring look; then, in the succeeding pause, he offered cigarettes. Wendling took one; and all, silent, sat down. The sun streamed intemperately through the doorway, making a broad ribbon of light straight across the floor to Wendling's feet. After lighting his cigarette, he looked into the sunlight for a moment, still not speaking. Shon meanwhile had started his pipe, and now, as if he found the silence awkward,--"It's a day for God's country, this," he said: "to make man a Christian for little or much, though he play with the Divil betunewhiles." Without looking at them, Wendling said, in a low voice: "It was just such a day, down there in Quebec, when it happened. You could hear the swill of the river, the water licking the piers, and the saws in the Big Mill and the Little Mill as they marched through the timber, flashing their teeth like bayonets. It's a wonderful sound on a hot, clear day--that wild, keen singing of the saws, like the cry of a live thing fighting and conquering. Up from the fresh-cut lumber in the yards there came a smell like the juice of apples, and the sawdust, as you thrust your hand into it, was as cool and soft as the leaves of a clove-flower in the dew. On these days the town was always still. It looked sleeping, and you saw the heat quivering up from the wooden walls and the roofs of cedar shingles as though the houses were breathing."

Here he paused, still intent on the shaking sunshine. Then he turned to the others as if suddenly aware that he had been talking to them. Shon was about to speak, but Pierre threw a restraining glance, and, instead, they all looked through the doorway and beyond. In the settlement below they saw the effect that Wendling had described. The houses breathed. A grasshopper went clacking past, a dog at the door snapped up a fly; but there seemed no other life of day. Wendling nodded his head towards the distance. "It was quiet, like that. I stood and watched the mills and the yards, and listened to the saws, and looked at the great slide, and the logs on the river: and I said ever to myself that it was all mine--all. Then I turned to a big house on the hillock beyond the cedars, whose windows were open, with a cool dusk lying behind them. More than all else, I loved to think I owned that house and what was in it. . . . She was a beautiful woman. And she used to sit in a room facing the mill--though the house fronted another way--thinking of me, I did not doubt, and working at some delicate needle-stuff. There never had been a sharp word between us, save when I quarrelled bitterly with her brother, and he left the mill and went away. But she got over that mostly, though the lad's name was, never mentioned between us. That day I was so hungry for the sight of her that I got my field-glass--used to watch my vessels and rafts making across the bay--and trained it on the window where I knew she sat. I thought, it would amuse her, too, when I went back at night, if I told her what she had been doing. I laughed to myself at the thought of it as I adjusted the glass. . . . I looked. . . . There was no more laughing. . . . I saw her, and in front of her a man, with his back half on me. I could not recognise him, though at the instant I thought he was something familiar. I failed to get his face at all. Hers I found indistinctly. But I saw him catch her playfully by the chin! After a little they rose. He put his arm about her and kissed her, and he ran his fingers through her hair. She had such fine golden

hair--so light, and it lifted to every breath. Something got into my brain. I know now it was the maggot which sent Othello mad. The world in that hour was malicious, awful. . . .

"After a time--it seemed ages, she and everything had receded so far-- I went . . . home. At the door I asked the servant who had been there. She hesitated, confused, and then said the young curate of the parish. I was very cool: for madness is a strange thing; you see everything with an intense aching clearness--that is the trouble. . . . She was more kind than common. I do not think I was unusual. I was playing a part well, my grandmother had Indian blood like yours, Pierre, and I was waiting. I was even nicely critical of her to myself. I balanced the mole on her neck against her general beauty; the curve of her instep, I decided, was a little too emphatic. I passed her backwards and forwards, weighing her at every point; but yet these two things were the only imperfections. I pronounced her an exceeding piece of art--and infamy. I was much interested to see how she could appear perfect in her soul. I encouraged her to talk. I saw with devilish irony that an angel spoke. And, to cap it all, she assumed the fascinating air of the mediator--for her brother; seeking a reconciliation between us. Her amazing art of person and mind so worked upon me that it became unendurable; it was so exquisite--and so shameless. I was sitting where the priest had sat that afternoon; and when she leaned towards me I caught her chin lightly and trailed my fingers through her hair as he had done: and that ended it, for I was cold, and my heart worked with horrible slowness. Just as a wave poises at its height before breaking upon the shore, it hung at every pulse-beat, and then seemed to fall over with a sickening thud. I arose, and acting still, spoke impatiently of her brother. Tears sprang to her eyes. Such divine dissimulation, I thought--too good for earth. She turned to leave the room, and I did not stay her. Yet we were together again that night. . . . I was only waiting."

The cigarette had dropped from his fingers to the floor, and lay there smoking. Shon's face was fixed with anxiety; Pierre's eyes played gravely with the sunshine. Wendling drew a heavy breath, and then went on.

"Again, next day, it was like this--the world draining the heat. . . . I watched from the Big Mill. I saw them again. He leaned over her chair and buried his face in her hair. The proof was absolute now. . . . I started away, going a roundabout, that I might not be seen. It took me some time. I was passing through a clump of cedar when I saw them making towards the trees skirting the river. Their backs were on me. Suddenly they diverted their steps--towards the great slide, shut off from water this last few months, and used as a quarry to deepen it. Some petrified things had been found in the rocks, but I did not think they were going to these. I saw them climb down the rocky steps; and presently they were lost to view. The gates of the slide could be opened by machinery from the Little Mill. A terrible, deliciously malignant thought came to me. I remember how the sunlight crept away from me and left me in the dark. I stole through that darkness to the Little Mill. I went to the machinery for opening the gates. Very gently I set it in motion, facing

the slide as I did so. I could see it through the open sides of the mill. I smiled to think what the tiny creek, always creeping through a faint leak in the gates and falling with a granite rattle on the stones, would now become. I pushed the lever harder--harder. I saw the gates suddenly give, then fly open, and the river sprang roaring massively through them. I heard a shriek through the roar. I shuddered; and a horrible sickness came on me. . . . And as I turned from the machinery, I saw the young priest coming at me through a doorway! . . . It was not the priest and my wife that I had killed; but my wife and her brother. . . ."

He threw his head back as though something clamped his throat. His voice roughened with misery. "The young priest buried them both, and people did not know the truth. They were even sorry for me. But I gave up the mills--all; and I became homeless . . . this."

Now he looked up at the two men, and said: "I have told you because you know something, and because there will, I think, be an end soon." He got up and reached out a trembling hand for a cigarette. Pierre gave him one. "Will you walk with me?" he asked.

Shon shook his head. "God forgive you," he replied, "I can't do it."

But Wendling and Pierre left the hut together. They walked for an hour, scarcely speaking, and not considering where they went. At last Pierre mechanically turned to go down into Red Glen. Wendling stopped short, then, with a sighing laugh, strode on. "Shoo has told you what happened here?" he said.

Pierre nodded.

"And you know what came once when you walked with me.... The dead can strike," he added. Pierre sought his eye. "The minister and the girl buried together that day," he said, "were--"

He stopped, for behind him he heard the sharp, cold trickle of water. Silent they walked on. It followed them. They could not get out of the Glen now until they had compassed its length--the walls were high. The sound grew. The men faced each other.

"Good-bye," said Wendling; and he reached out his hand swiftly. But Pierre heard a mighty flood groaning on them, and he blinded as he stretched his arm in response. He caught at Wendling's shoulder, but felt him lifted and carried away, while he himself stood still in a screeching wind and heard impalpable water rushing over him. In a minute it was gone; and he stood alone in Red Glen.

He gathered himself up and ran. Far down, where the Glen opened to the plain, he found Wendling. The hands were wrinkled; the face was cold; the body was wet: the man was drowned and dead.

IN PIPI VALLEY

"Divils me darlins, it's a memory I have of a time whin luck wasn't foldin' her arms round me, and not so far back aither, and I on the wallaby track hot-foot for the City o' Gold."

Shon McGann said this in the course of a discussion on the prosperity of Pipi Valley. Pretty Pierre remarked nonchalantly in reply,--"The wallaby track--eh--what is that, Shon?"

"It's a bit of a haythen y' are, Pierre. The wallaby track? That's the name in Australia for trampin' west through the plains of the Never-Never Country lookin' for the luck o' the world; as, bedad, it's meself that knows it, and no other, and not by book or tellin' either, but with the grip of thirst at me throat and a reef in me belt every hour to quiet the gnawin'." And Shon proceeded to light his pipe afresh.

"But the City o' Gold--was there much wealth for you there, Shon?"

Shon laughed, and said between the puffs of smoke, "Wealth for me, is it? Oh, mother o' Moses! wealth of work and the pride of livin' in the heart of us, and the grip of an honest hand betunewhiles; and what more do y' want, Pierre?"

The Frenchman's drooping eyelids closed a little more, and he replied, meditatively: "Money? No, that is not Shon McGann. The good fellowship of thirst?--yes, a little. The grip of the honest hand, quite, and the clinch of an honest waist? Well, 'peut-etre.'

"Of the waist which is not honest?--tsh! he is gay--and so!"

The Irishman took his pipe from his mouth, and held it poised before him. He looked inquiringly and a little frowningly at the other for a moment, as if doubtful whether to resent the sneer that accompanied the words just spoken; but at last he good-humouredly said: "Blood o' me bones, but it's much I fear the honest waist hasn't always been me portion--Heaven forgive me!"

"'Nom de pipe,' this Irishman!" replied Pierre. "He is gay; of good heart; he smiles, and the women are at his heels; he laughs, and they are on their knees--Such a fool he is!"

Still Shon McGann laughed.

"A fool I am, Pierre, or I'd be in ould Ireland at this minute, with a roof o' me own over me and the friends o' me youth round me, and brats on me knee, and the fear o' God in me heart."

"'Mais,' Shon," mockingly rejoined the Frenchman, "this is not Ireland, but there is much like that to be done here. There is a roof, and there

is that woman at Ward's Mistake, and the brats--eh, by and by?"

Shon's face clouded. He hesitated, then replied sharply: "That woman, do y' say, Pierre, she that nursed me when the Honourable and meself were taken out o' Sandy Drift, more dead than livin'; she that brought me back to life as good as ever, barrin' this scar on me forehead and a stiffness at me elbow, and the Honourable as right as the sun, more luck to him! which he doesn't need at all, with the wind of fortune in his back and shiftin' neither to right nor left. --That woman! faith, y'd better not cut the words so sharp betune yer teeth, Pierre."

"But I will say more--a little--just the same. She nursed you--well, that is good; but it is good also, I think, you pay her for that, and stop the rest. Women are fools, or else they are worse. This one? She is worse. Yes; you will take my advice, Shon McGann." The Irishman came to his feet with a spring, and his words were angry.

"It doesn't come well from Pretty Pierre, the gambler, to be revilin' a woman; and I throw it in y'r face, though I've slept under the same blanket with ye, an' drunk out of the same cup on many a tramp, that you lie dirty and black when ye spake ill--of my wife."

This conversation had occurred in a quiet corner of the bar-room of the Saints' Repose. The first few sentences had not been heard by the others present; but Shon's last speech, delivered in a ringing tone, drew the miners to their feet, in expectation of seeing shots exchanged at once. The code required satisfaction, immediate and decisive. Shon was not armed, and some one thrust a pistol towards him; but he did not take it. Pierre rose, and coming slowly to him, laid a slender finger on his chest, and said:

"So! I did not know that she was your wife. That is a surprise."

The miners nodded assent. He continued:

"Lucy Rives your wife! Hola, Shon McGann, that is such a joke."

"It's no joke, but God's truth, and the lie is with you, Pierre."

Murmurs of anticipation ran round the room; but the half-breed said:

"There will be satisfaction altogether; but it is my whim to prove what I say first; then"--fondling his revolver--"then we shall settle. But, see: you will meet me here at ten o'clock to-night, and I will make it, I swear to you, so clear, that the woman is vile."

The Irishman suddenly clutched the gambler, shook him like a dog, and threw him against the farther wall. Pierre's pistol was levelled from the instant Shon moved; but he did not use it. He rose on one knee after the violent fall, and pointing it at the other's head, said coolly: "I could kill you, my friend, so easy! But it is not my whim. Till ten o'clock is not long to wait, and then, just here, one of us shall die. Is it not so?" The Irishman did not flinch before the pistol. He said with low fierceness, "At ten o'clock, or now, or any time, or at any

place, y'll find me ready to break the back of the lies y've spoken, or be broken meself. Lucy Rives is my wife, and she's true and straight as the sun in the sky. I'll be here at ten o'clock, and as ye say, Pierre, one of us makes the long reckoning for this." And he opened the door and went out.

The half-breed moved to the bar, and, throwing down a handful of silver, said: "It is good we drink after so much heat. Come on, come on, comrades."

The miners responded to the invitation. Their sympathy was mostly with Shon McGann; their admiration was about equally divided; for Pretty Pierre had the quality of courage in as active a degree as the Irishman, and they knew that some extraordinary motive, promising greater excitement, was behind the Frenchman's refusal to send a bullet through Shon's head a moment before.

King Kinkley, the best shot in the Valley next to Pierre, had watched the unusual development of the incident with interest; and when his glass had been filled he said, thoughtfully: "This thing isn't according to Hoyle. There's never been any trouble just like it in the Valley before. What's that McGann said about the lady being his wife? If it's the case, where hev we been in the show? Where was we when the license was around? It isn't good citizenship, and I hev my doubts."

Another miner, known as the Presbyterian, added: "There's some skulduggery in it, I guess. The lady has had as much protection as if she was the sister of every citizen of the place, just as much as Lady Jane here (Lady Jane, the daughter of the proprietor of the Saints' Repose, administered drinks), and she's played this stacked hand on us, has gone one better on the sly."

"Pierre," said King Kinkley, "you're on the track of the secret, and appear to hev the advantage of the lady: blaze it--blaze it out."

Pierre rejoined, "I know something; but it is good we wait until ten o'clock. Then I will show you all the cards in the pack. Yes, so, 'bien sur.'"

And though there was some grumbling, Pierre had his way. The spirit of adventure and mutual interest had thrown the French half-breed, the Irishman, and the Hon. Just Trafford together on the cold side of the Canadian Rockies; and they had journeyed to this other side, where the warm breath from the Pacific passed to its congealing in the ranges. They had come to the Pipi field when it was languishing. From the moment of their coming its luck changed; it became prosperous. They conquered the Valley each after his kind. The Honourable--he was always called that--mastered its resources by a series of "great lucks," as Pierre termed it, had achieved a fortune, and made no enemies; and but two months before the day whose incidents are here recorded, had gone to the coast on business. Shon had won the reputation of being a "white man," to say nothing of his victories in the region of gallantry. He made no wealth; he only got that he might spend. Irishman-like he would barter

the chances of fortune for the lilt of a voice or the clatter of a pretty foot.

Pierre was different. "Women, ah, no!" he would say, "they make men fools or devils."

His temptation lay not that way. When the three first came to the Papi, Pierre was a miner, simply; but nearly all his life he had been something else, as many a devastated pocket on the east of the Rockies could bear witness; and his new career was alien to his soul. Temptation grew greatly on him at the Papi, and in the days before he yielded to it he might have been seen at midnight in his but playing solitaire. Why he abstained at first from practising his real profession is accounted for in two ways: he had tasted some of the sweets of honest companionship with the Honourable and Shon, and then he had a memory of an ugly night at Pardon's Drive a year before, when he stood over his own brother's body, shot to death by accident in a gambling row having its origin with himself. These things had held him back for a time; but he was weaker than his ruling passion.

The Papi was a young and comparatively virgin field; the quarry was at his hand. He did not love money for its own sake; it was the game that enthralled him. He would have played his life against the treasury of a kingdom, and, winning it with loaded double sixes, have handed back the spoil as an unredeemable national debt.

He fell at last, and in falling conquered the Papi Valley; at the same time he was considered a fearless and liberal citizen, who could shoot as straight as he played well. He made an excursion to another field, however, at an opportune time, and it was during this interval that the accident to Shon and the Honourable had happened. He returned but a few hours before this quarrel with Shon occurred, and in the Saints' Repose, whither he had at once gone, he was told of the accident. While his informant related the incident and the romantic sequence of Shon's infatuation, the woman passed the tavern and was pointed out to Pierre. The half-breed had not much excitableness in his nature, but when he saw this beautiful woman with a touch of the Indian in her contour, his pale face flushed, and he showed his set teeth under his slight moustache. He watched her until she entered a shop, on the signboard of which was written--written since he had left a few months ago--Lucy Rives, Tobacconist.

Shon had then entered the Saints' Repose; and we know the rest. A couple of hours after this nervous episode, Pierre might have been seen standing in the shadow of the pines not far from the house at Ward's Mistake, where, he had been told, Lucy Rives lived with an old Indian woman. He stood, scarcely moving, and smoking cigarettes, until the door opened. Shon came out and walked down the hillside to the town. Then Pierre went to the door, and without knocking, opened it, and entered. A woman started up from a seat where she was sewing, and turned towards him. As she did so, the work, Shon's coat, dropped from her hands, her face paled, and her eyes grew big with fear. She leaned against a chair for support--this man's presence had weakened her so. She stood silent, save

for a slight moan that broke from her lips, as Pierre lighted a cigarette coolly, and then said to an old Indian woman who sat upon the floor braiding a basket: "Get up, Ikni, and go away."

Ikni rose, came over, and peered into the face of the half-breed. Then she muttered: "I know you--I know you. The dead has come back again." She caught his arm with her bony fingers as if to satisfy herself that he was flesh and blood, and shaking her head dolefully, went from the room. When the door closed behind her there was silence, broken only by an exclamation from the man.

The other drew her hand across her eyes, and dropped it with a motion of despair. Then Pierre said, sharply: "Bien?"

"Francois," she replied, "you are alive!"

"Yes, I am alive, Lucy."

She shuddered, then grew still again and whispered: "Why did you let it be thought that you were drowned? Why? Oh, why?" she moaned.

He raised his eyebrows slightly, and between the puffs of smoke, said:

"Ah yes, my Lucy, why? It was so long ago. Let me see: so--so--ten years. Ten years is a long time to remember, eh?"

He came towards her. She drew back; but her hand remained on the chair. He touched the plain gold ring on her finger, and said:

"You still wear it. To think of that--so loyal for a woman! How she remembers, holy Mother! . . . But shall I not kiss you, yes, just once after eight years--my wife?"

She breathed hard and drew back against the wall, dazed and frightened, and said:

"No, no, do not come near me; do not speak to me--ah, please, stand back, for a moment--please!"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and continued, with mock tenderness:

"To think that things come round so! And here you have a home. But that is good. I am tired of much travel and life all alone. The prodigal goes not to the home, the home comes to the prodigal." He stretched up his arms as if with a feeling of content.

"Do you--do you not know," she said, "that--that--"

He interrupted her:

"Do I not know, Lucy, that this is your home? Yes. But is it not all the same? I gave you a home ten years ago--to think, ten years ago! We quarrelled one night, and I left you. Next morning my boat was found

below the White Cascade--yes, but that was so stale a trick! It was not worthy of Francois Rives. He would do it so much better now; but he was young then; just a boy, and foolish. Well, sit down, Lucy, it is a long story, and you have much to tell, how much--who knows?" She came slowly forward and said with a painful effort:

"You did a great wrong, Francois. You have killed me.

"Killed you, Lucy, my wife! Pardon! Never in those days did you look so charming as now--never. But the great surprise of seeing your husband, it has made you shy, quite shy. There will be much time now for you to change all that. It is quite pleasant to think on, Lucy. . . . You remember the song we used to sing on the Chaudiere at St. Antoine? See, I have not forgotten it--

"Nos amants sont en guerre,
Vole, mon coeur, vole."

He hummed the lines over and over, watching through his half-shut eyes the torture he was inflicting.

"Oh, Mother of God," she whispered, "have mercy! Can you not see, do you not know? I am not as you left me."

"Yes, my wife, you are just the same; not an hour older. I am glad that you have come to me. But how they will envy Pretty Pierre!"

"Envy--Pretty-Pierre," she repeated, in distress; "are you Pretty Pierre? Ah, I might have known, I might have known!"

"Yes, and so! Is not Pretty Pierre as good a name as Francois Rives? Is it not as good as Shon McGann?"

"Oh, I see it all, I see it all now!" she said mournfully. "It was with you he quarrelled, and about me. He would not tell me what it was. You know, then, that I am--that I am married--to him?"

"Quite. I know all that; but it is no marriage." He rose to his feet slowly, dropping the cigarette from his lips as he did so. "Yes," he continued, "and I know that you prefer Shon McGann to Pretty Pierre."

She spread out her hands appealingly.

"But you are my wife, not his. Listen: do you know what I shall do? I will tell you in two hours. It is now eight o'clock. At ten o'clock Shon McGann will meet me at the Saints' Repose. Then you shall know.... Ah, it is a pity! Shon was my good friend, but this spoils all that. Wine--it has danger; cards--there is peril in that sport; women--they make trouble most of all."

"O God," she piteously said, "what did I do? There was no sin in me. I was your faithful wife, though you were cruel to me. You left me, cheated me, brought this upon me. It is you that has done this

wickedness, not I." She buried her face in her hands, falling on her knees beside the chair.

He bent above her: "You loved the young avocat better, eight years ago."

She sprang to her feet. "Ah, now I understand," she said. "That was why you quarrelled with me; why you deserted me. You were not man enough to say what made you so much the--so wicked and hard, so--"

"Be thankful, Lucy, that I did not kill you then," he interjected.

"But it is a lie," she cried; "a lie!"

She went to the door and called the Indian woman. "Ikni," she said. "He dares to say evil of Andre and me. Think--of Andre!"

Ikni came to him, put her wrinkled face close to his, and said: "She was yours, only yours; but the spirits gave you a devil. Andre, oh, oh, Andre! The father of Andre was her father--ah, that makes your sulky eyes to open. Ikni knows how to speak. Ikni nursed them both. If you had waited you should have known. But you ran away like a wolf from a coal of fire; you shammed death like a fox; you come back like the snake to crawl into the house and strike with poison tooth, when you should be with the worms in the ground. But Ikni knows--you shall be struck with poison too, the Spirit of the Red Knife waits for you. Andre was her brother."

He pushed her aside savagely: "Be still!" he said. "Get out-quick. 'Sacre'--quick!"

When they were alone again he continued with no anger in his tone: "So, Andre the avocat and you--that, eh? Well, you see how much trouble has come; and now this other--a secret too. When were you married to Shon McGann?"

"Last night," she bitterly replied; "a priest came over from the Indian village."

"Last night," he musingly repeated. "Last night I lost two thousand dollars at the Little Goshen field. I did not play well last night; I was nervous. In ten years I had not lost so much at one game as I did last night. It was a punishment for playing too honest, or something; eh, what do you think, Lucy--or something, 'hein?'"

She said nothing, but rocked her body to and fro.

"Why did you not make known the marriage with Shon?"

"He was to have told it to-night," she said.

There was silence for a moment, then a thought flashed into his eyes, and he rejoined with a jarring laugh, "Well, I will play a game to-night, Lucy Rives; such a game that Pretty Pierre will never be forgotten in the

Pipi Valley--a beautiful game, just for two. And the other who will play--the wife of Francois Rives shall see if she will wait; but she must be patient, more patient than her husband was ten years ago."

"What will you do--tell me, what will you do?"

"I will play a game of cards--just one magnificent game; and the cards shall settle it. All shall be quite fair, as when you and I played in the little house by the Chaudiere--at first, Lucy,--before I was a devil."

Was this peculiar softness to his last tones assumed or real? She looked at him inquiringly; but he moved away to the window, and stood gazing down the hillside towards the town below. His eyes smarted.

"I will die," she said to herself in whispers--"I will die." A minute passed, and then Pierre turned and said to her: "Lucy, he is coming up the hill. Listen. If you tell him that I have seen you, I will shoot him on sight, dead. You would save him, for a little, for an hour or two--or more? Well, do as I say; for these things must be according to the rules of the game, and I myself will tell him all at the Saints' Repose. He gave me the lie there, and I will tell him the truth before them all there. Will you do as I say?"

She hesitated an instant, and then replied: "I will not tell him."

"There is only one way, then," he continued. "You must go at once from here into the woods behind there, and not see him at all. Then at ten o'clock you will come to the Saints' Repose, if you choose, to know how the game has ended."

She was trembling, moaning, no longer. A set look had come into her face; her eyes were steady and hard. She quietly replied: "Yes, I shall be there."

He came to her, took her hand, and drew from her finger the wedding-ring which last night Shon McGann had placed there. She submitted passively. Then, with an upward wave of his fingers, he spoke in a mocking lightness, but without any of the malice which had first appeared in his tones, words from an old French song:

"I say no more, my lady
Miron-ton, Miron-ton, Miron-taine!
I say no more, my lady,
As nought more can be said."

He opened the door, motioned to the Indian woman, and, in a few moments, the broken-hearted Lucy Rives and her companion were hidden in the pines; and Pretty Pierre also disappeared into the shadow of the woods as Shon McGann appeared on the crest of the hill.

The Irishman walked slowly to the door, and pausing, said to himself: "I couldn't run the big risk, me darlin', without seein' you again, God

help me! There's danger ahead which little I'd care for if it wasn't for you."

Then he stepped inside the house--the place was silent; he called, but no one answered; he threw open the doors of the rooms, but they were empty; he went outside and called again, but no reply came, except the flutter of a night-hawk's wings and the cry of a whippoorwill. He went back into the house and sat down with his head between his hands. So, for a moment, and then he raised his head, and said with a sad smile: "Faith, Shon, me boy, this takes the life out of you! the empty house where she ought to be, and the smile of her so swate, and the hand of her that falls on y'r shoulder like a dove on the blessed altar-gone, and lavin' a chill on y'r heart like a touch of the dead. Sure, niver a wan of me saw any that could stand wid her for goodness, barrin' the angel that kissed me good-bye with one foot in the stirrup an' the troopers behind me, now twelve years gone, in ould Donegal, and that I'll niver see again, she lyin' where the hate of the world will vex the heart of her no more, and the masses gone up for her soul. Twice, twice in y'r life, Shon McGann, has the cup of God's joy been at y'r lips, and is it both times that it's to spill?--Pretty Pierre shoots straight and sudden, and maybe it's aisy to see the end of it; but as the just God is above us, I'll give him the lie in his throat betimes for the word he said agin me darlin'. What's the avil thing that he has to say? What's the devil's proof he would bring? And where is she now? Where are you, Lucy? I know the proof I've got in me heart that the wreck of the world couldn't shake, while that light, born of Heaven, swims up to your eyes whin you look at me!"

He rose to his feet again and walked to and fro; he went once more to the doors; he looked here and there through the growing dusk, but to no purpose. She had said that she would not go to her shop this night; but if not, then where could she have gone and lkni, too? He felt there was more awry in his life than he cared to put into thought or speech. He picked up the sewing she had dropped and looked at it as one would regard a relic of the dead; he lifted her handkerchief, kissed it, and put it in his breast. He took a revolver from his pocket and examined it closely, looked round the room as though to fasten it in his memory, and then passed out, closing the door behind him. He walked down the hillside and went to her shop in the one street of the town, but she was not there, nor had the lad in charge seen her.

Meanwhile, Pretty Pierre had made his way to the Saints' Repose, and was sitting among the miners indolently smoking. In vain he was asked to play cards. His one reply was, "No, pardon, no! I play one game only to-night, the biggest game ever played in Pipi Valley." In vain, also, was he asked to drink. He refused the hospitality, defying the danger that such lack of good-fellowship might bring forth. He hummed in patches to himself the words of a song that the 'brules' were wont to sing when they hunted the buffalo:

"Voila! it is the sport to ride--
Ah, ah the brave hunter!

To thrust the arrow in his hide,
To send the bullet through his side
'Ici,' the buffalo, 'joli!
Ah, ah the buffalo!"

He nodded here and there as men entered; but he did not stir from his seat. He smoked incessantly, and his eyes faced the door of the bar-room that entered upon the street. There was no doubt in the minds of any present that the promised excitement would occur. Shon McGann was as fearless as he was gay. And Pipi Valley remembered the day in which he had twice risked his life to save two women from a burning building--Lady Jane and another. And Lady Jane this evening was agitated, and once or twice furtively looked at something under the bar-counter; in fact, a close observer would have noticed anger or anxiety in the eyes of the daughter of Dick Waldron, the keeper of the Saints' Repose. Pierre would certainly have seen it had he been looking that way. An unusual influence was working upon the frequenters of the busy tavern. Planned, premeditated excitement was out of their line. Unexpectedness was the salt of their existence. This thing had an air of system not in accord with the suddenness of the Pipi mind. The half-breed was the only one entirely at his ease; he was languid and nonchalant; the long lashes of his half-shut eyelids gave his face a pensive look. At last King Kinkley walked over to him and said: "There's an almighty mysteriousness about this event which isn't joyful, Pretty Pierre. We want to see the muss cleared up, of course; we want Shon McGann to act like a high-toned citizen, and there's a general prejudice in favour of things bein' on the flat of your palm, as it were. Now this thing hangs fire, and there's a lack of animation about it, isn't there?"

To this, Pretty Pierre replied: "What can I do? This is not like other things; one had to wait; great things take time. To shoot is easy; but to shoot is not all, as you shall see if you have a little patience. Ah, my friend, where there is a woman, things are different. I throw a glass in your face, we shoot, someone dies, and there it is quite plain of reason; you play a card which was dealt just now, I call you-- something, and the swiftest finger does the trick; but in such as this, one must wait for the sport."

It was at this point that Shon McGann entered, looked round, nodded to all, and then came forward to the table where Pretty Pierre sat. As the other took out his watch, Shon said firmly but quietly: "Pierre, I gave you the lie to-day concerning me wife, and I'm here, as I said I'd be, to stand by the word I passed then."

Pierre waved his fingers lightly towards the other, and slowly rose. Then he said in sharp tones: "Yes, Shon McGann, you gave me the lie. There is but one thing for that in Pipi Valley. You choked me; I would not take that from a saint of heaven; but there was another thing to do first. Well, I have done it; I said I would bring proofs--I have them." He paused, and now there might have been seen a shining moisture on his forehead, and his words came menacingly from between his teeth, while the room became breathlessly still, save that in the silence a sleeping dog sighed heavily: "Shon McGann," he added, "you are living with my wife."

Twenty men drew in a sharp breath of excitement, and Shon came a step nearer the other, and said in a strange voice: "I--am--living--with--your--wife?"

"As I say, with my wife, Lucy Rives. Francois Rives was my name ten years ago. We quarrelled. I left her, and I never saw her again until to-night. You went to see her two hours ago. You did not find her. Why? She was gone because her husband, Pierre, told her to go. You want a proof? You shall have it. Here is the wedding-ring you gave her last night."

He handed it over, and Shon saw inside it his own name and hers.

"My God!" he said. "Did she know? Tell me she didn't know, Pierre?"

"No, she did not know. I have truth to speak to night. I was jealous, mad, and foolish, and I left her. My boat was found upset. They believed I was drowned. 'Bien,' she waited until yesterday, and then she took you--but she was my wife; she is my wife--and so you see!"

The Irishman was deadly pale.

"It's an avil heart y' had in y' then, Pretty Pierre, and it's an avil day that brought this thing to pass, and there's only wan way to the end of it."

"So, that is true. There is only one way," was the reply; "but what shall that way be? Someone must go: there must be no mistake. I have to propose. Here on this table we lay a revolver. We will give up these which we have in our pockets. Then we will play a game of euchre, and the winner of the game shall have the revolver. We will play for a life. That is fair, eh--that is fair?" he said to those around.

King Kinkley, speaking for the rest, replied: "That's about fair. It gives both a chance, and leaves only two when it's over. While the woman lives, one of you is naturally in the way. Pierre left her in a way that isn't handsome; but a wife's a wife, and though Shon was all in the glum about the thing, and though the woman isn't to be blamed either, there's one too many of you, and there's got to be a vacation for somebody. Isn't that so?"

The rest nodded assent. They had been so engaged that they did not see a woman enter the bar from behind, and crouch down beside Lady Jane, a woman whom the latter touched affectionately on the shoulder and whispered to once or twice, while she watched the preparations for the game.

The two men sat down, Shon facing the bar and Pierre with his back to it.

The game began, neither man showing a sign of nervousness, though Shon was very pale. The game was to finish for ten points. Men crowded about the tables silent but keenly excited; cigars were chewed instead of

smoked, and liquor was left undrunk. At the first deal Pierre made a march, securing two. At the next Shon made a point, and at the next also a march. The half-breed was playing a straight game. He could have stacked the cards, but he did not do so; deft as he was he might have cheated even the vigilant eyes about him, but it was not so; he played as squarely as a novice. At the third, at the fourth, deal he made a march; at the fifth, sixth, and seventh deals, Shon made a march, a point, and a march. Both now had eight points. At the next deal both got a point, and both stood at nine!

Now came the crucial play.

During the progress of the game nothing had been heard save the sound of a knuckle on the table, the flip flip of the pasteboard, or the rasp of a heel on the floor. There was a set smile on Shon's face--a forgotten smile, for the rest of the face was stern and tragic. Pierre smoked cigarettes, pausing, while his opponent was shuffling and dealing, to light them.

Behind the bar as the game proceeded the woman who knelt beside Lady Jane listened to every sound. Her eyes grew more agonised as the numbers, whispered to her by her companion, climbed to the fatal ten.

The last deal was Shon's; there was that much to his advantage. As he slowly dealt, the woman--Lucy Rives--rose to her feet behind Lady Jane. So absorbed were all that none saw her. Her eyes passed from Pierre to Shon, and stayed.

When the cards were dealt, with but one point for either to gain, and so win and save his life, there was a slight pause before the two took them up. They did not look at one another; but each glanced at the revolver, then at the men nearest them, and lastly, for an instant, at the cards themselves, with their pasteboard faces of life and death turned downward. As the players picked them up at last and spread them out fan-like, Lady Jane slipped something into the hand of Lucy Rives.

Those who stood behind Shon McGann stared with anxious astonishment at his hand; it contained only nine and ten spots. It was easy to see the direction of the sympathy of Pipi Valley. The Irishman's face turned a slight shade paler, but he did not tremble or appear disturbed.

Pierre played his biggest card and took the point. He coolly counted one, and said, "Game. I win." The crowd drew back. Both rose to their feet. In the painful silence the half-breed's hand was gently laid on the revolver. He lifted it, and paused slightly, his eyes fixed to the steady look in those of Shon McGann. He raised the revolver again, till it was level with Shon's forehead, till it was even with his hair! Then there was a shot, and someone fell--not Shon, but Pierre, saying, as they caught him, "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! From behind!"

Instantly there was another shot, and someone crashed against the bottles in the bar. The other factor in the game, the wife, had shot at Pierre, and then sent a bullet through her own lungs.

Shon stood for a moment as if he was turned to stone, and then his head dropped in his arms upon the table. He had seen both shots fired, but could not speak in time.

Pierre was severely but not dangerously wounded in the neck.

But the woman--? They brought her out from behind the counter. She still breathed; but on her eyes was the film of coming death. She turned to where Shon sat. Her lips framed his name, but no voice came forth. Someone touched him on the shoulder. He looked up and caught her last glance. He came and stooped beside her; but she had died with that one glance from him, bringing a faint smile to her lips. And the smile stayed when the life of her had fled--fled through the cloud over her eyes, from the tide-beat of her pulse. It swept out from the smoke and reeking air into the open world, and beyond, into those untried paths where all must walk alone, and in what bitterness, known only to the Master of the World who sees these piteous things, and orders in what fashion distorted lives shall be made straight and wholesome in the Places of Readjustment.

Shon stood silent above the dead body.

One by one the miners went out quietly. Presently Pierre nodded towards the door, and King Kinkley and another lifted him and carried him towards it. Before they passed into the street he made them turn him so that he could see Shon. He waved his hand towards her that had been his wife, and said: "She should have shot but once and straight, Shon McGann, and then!--Eh, 'bien!'"

The door closed, and Shon McGann was left alone with the dead.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Irishmen have gifts for only two things--words and women
More idle than wicked
Reconciling the preacher and the sinner, as many another has

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE, V4, PARKER ***

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