

The Men of Forty Mile

Malemute Kid Leaves the Main Question Unanswered

By JACK LONDON

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WHEN Big Jim Beiden ventured the apparently innocuous proposition that much ice was "rather peculiar" he lit the fuse of a quarrel that would lead to the death of Lon McFane when he affirmed that anchor ice was even more so, nor did Bettles as he instantly disagreed, declaring the very existence of such a form to be a bugaboo.

"An' ye'd be tellin' me this," cried Lon, "after the years ye've spent in the land? An' we eatin' out the same pot this many's the day?"

"But the thing's agin reason," insisted Bettles. "Look you, water's warmer than ice."

"An' little difference once ye break through."

"Still it's warmer, because it ain't froze. An' you say it freezes on the bottom?"

"Only the anchor ice, David; only the anchor ice. An' have ye never drifted along the water clear as glass, when sudden, belike a cloud over the sun, the musky ice comes bubblin' up an' up till from bank to bank an' blind to blind it's drapin' the river like a first snowfall?"

"Un' hush, more'n once when I took a doze at the steerin' oar. But it ails me out the inside side channel an' not bubblin' up an' up."

"But with niver a wink at the helm?"

"No, nor you. It's agin reason. I'll leave it to any man."

Bettles appealed to the circle about the stove, but the fight was on between himself and Lon McFane.

"Reason or no reason, it's the truth I'm tellin' ye. Last fall a year gone 'twas Sitka Charley an' meself saw the sight, droppin' down the rifle ye'll remember below Fort Reliance. An' regular fall weather it was—the glint of the sun on the golden larch an' the quakin' aspens, an' the glister of light on ivery ripple, an' beyond the winter an' the blue haze o' the north comin' down hand in hand. It's well ye know the same, with a fringe to the river an' the ice formin' thick in the eddies, an' a snap an' sparkle to the air, an' ye a-feelin' it through all yer blood, a-takin' new lease of life with ivery suck of it. 'Tis then, me boy, the world grows small an' the wand'ring-lust lays ye by the heels."

"But it's meself as wand'ers. As I was sayin', we a-paddlin', with niver a sign of ice, barrin' that by the eddies, when the Injin lifts his paddle an' sings out: 'Lon McFane, look ye below! So have I heard, but niver thought to see!' As ye know, Sitka Charley, like meself, niver drew first breath in the land. So the sight was new. Then we drifted, with a head over yther side, peerin' down through the sparkly water, for the world like the days I spent with the penitents, watchin' the coral banks a-growin' the same as so many gardens under the sea. There it was, the anchor ice, clingin' an' clusterin' to ivery rock, after the manner of the white coral."

"But the best of the sight was to come. Just after clearin' the tail of the riffle the water turns quick the color of milk, an' the top of it in wee circles, as when the graylin' rise in the spring or there's a splatter of wet from the sky. 'Twas the anchor ice comin' up. To the right, to the left, as far as yer a man could see, the water was covered with the same. An' like so much porridge it was, slickin' along the bark of the canoe, stickin' like

meat to the paddles. It's many's the time I shot the selfsame riffle before, an' it's many's the time after, but niver a wink of the same have I seen. 'Twas the sight of a lifetime."

"Do tell!" dryly commented Bettles. "If ye think I'd believe such a yarn? I'd rather say the glister of light'd gone to your eyes an' the snap of the air to your tongue."

"'Twas me own eyes that beheld it, an' if Sitka Charley was here he'd be the lad to back me."

"But facts is facts, an' they ain't no gittin' round 'em. It ain't in the nature of things for the water furthered away from the air to freeze first."

"But me own eyes—"

"Don't git hot up over it," admonished Bettles as the quick Celtic anger began to mount.

"Then yer not after belavin' me?"

"Sense you're so blamed foreheaded about it, no. I'd believe nature first an' my facts."

"Is it the lie ye'd be givin' me?" threatened Lon. "Ye'd better be askin' that Sitka wife of yours. I'll have it to her, for the truth I speak."

Bettles flared up in sudden wrath. The Irishman had unwittingly wounded her, for his wife was the half-breed daughter of a Russian fur trader, married to him in the Greek mission of Nulato, a thousand miles or so down the Yukon, thus being of much higher caste than the common Sitkash, or native, wife.

It was a mere north-hand nuance, which none but the north-hand adventurer may understand.

"I reckon you kin take it that way," was his deliberate affirmation.

The next instant Lon McFane had stretched him on the floor, the circle was broken up, and half a dozen men had stepped between.

Bettles came to his feet, wiping the blood from his mouth. "It ain't new, this takin' an' payin' of blows, an' don't you never think that this will be squared."

"An' niver in me life did I take the lie from mortal man," was the retort courteous. "An' it's an' avil day I'll not be to hand waitin' an' willin' to help ye lift yer debts, barrin' no manner of way."

"Still got that 28-55?"

Lon nodded.

"But you'd better git a more likely caliber. Mine'll rip holes through you the size of walnuts."

"Niver fear. It's me own slugs smell their way with soft noses, an' they'll spread like flapjacks against the comin' out beyond. An' when I'll have the pleasure of waitin' on ye? The water hole's a strikin' locality."

"Tain't bad. Jest be there in an hour, an' you won't set long on my comin'."

Both men mitted and left the post, their ears closed to the remonstrances of their comrades. It was such a little thing, yet with such men little things, nourished by quick tempers and stubborn natures, soon blossomed into big things. Besides, the art of burning to bedrock still lay in the womb of the future, and the men of Forty Mile, shut in by the long arctic winter, grew high stomached with overeating and enforced idleness and became as irritable as do the bees in the fall of the year when the hives are overstocked with honey.

There was no law in the land. The mounted police was also a thing of the future. Each man measured an ofense and meted out the punishment.

inasmuch as it affected himself. Rarely had combined action been necessary, and never in all the dreary history of the camp had the eighth article of the Decalogue been violated.

Big Jim Beiden called an impromptu meeting. Scruff Mackenzie was placed as temporary chairman and a messenger dispatched to solicit Father Roubeau's good offices. Their position was paradoxical, and they knew it. By the right of might could they interfere to prevent the duel, yet such action, while in direct line with their wishes, went counter to their opinions. While their rough laws, obsolete ethics recognized the individual prerogative of wiping out blow with blow, they could not but to think of two good comrades such as Bettles and McFane meeting in deadly battle. Deeming the man who would not fight on provocation a dastard, when brought to the test it seemed wrong that he should fight.

But a scurry of moccasins and loud cries, rounded off with a pistol shot, interrupted the discussion. Then the storm doors opened and Malemute Kid entered, a smoking Colt's in his hand and a merry light in his eye.

"I got him." He replaced the empty shell and added, "Your dog, Scruff."

"Yellow Fang?" Mackenzie asked.

"No, the lop eared one."

"The devil! Nothing the matter with him."

"Come out and take a look."

"That's all right, after all. Guess he's got 'em too. Yellow Fang came back this morning and took a chunk out of him and came near to making a widower of me. Made a rush for Zaraska, but she whisked her skirts in his face and escaped with the loss of the same and a good roll in the

rest of the men manifested their impatience in various suggestive ways.

"But the rope, Kid? It's bran' new, an' sure yer bread's not that heavy it needs raisin' with the like of that?"

Bettles by this time had faced around. Father Roubeau, the humor of the situation just dawning on him, hid a smile behind his mittened hand.

"No, Lon; this rope was made for a man." Malemute Kid could be very impressive on occasion.

"What man?" Bettles was becoming aware of a personal interest.

"The other man."

"An' which is the one ye'd mane by that?"

"Listen, Lon, and you, too, Bettles. We've been talking this trouble of yours over, and we've come to one conclusion. We know we have no right to stop your fightin'."

"True for ye, me lad!"

"—and we're not going to, but this much we can do and shall do—make this the only duel in the history of Forty Mile, set an example for every che-chu-qua that comes up or down the Yukon. The man who escapes killing shall be hanged to the nearest tree. Now, go ahead!"

Lon sniled dubiously; then his face lighted up. "Pace her off, David—fifty paces—wheel an' niver a cease-fir'till a lad's down for good. 'Tis their hearts I'll niver let them do the deed, an' it's well ye should know it for a true Yankee bluff."

He started off with a pleased grin on his face, but Malemute Kid halted him.

"Lon, it's a long while since you first knew me."

"Many's the day."

"And you, Bettles?"

"Five year next June high water."

"And have you once in all that time known me to break my word or heard of me breaking it?"

Both men shook their heads, striving to fathom what lay beyond.

"Well, then, what do you think of a promise made by me?"

"As good as your bond," from Bettles.

"The thing to safely sling yer hopes of heaven by," promptly indorsed Lon McFane.

"Listen. I, Malemute Kid, give you my word—and you know what that means—that the man who is not shot stretches rope within ten minutes after the shooting." He stepped back as Filate might have done after washing his hands.

A pause and a silence came over the men of Forty Mile. The sky drew still closer, sending down a crystal flight

of frost—little geometric designs, perfect, evanescent as a breath, yet destined to exist till the returning sun had covered half its northern journey. Both men had led forlorn hopes in their time—led with a curse or a jest on their tongues and in their souls an unwavering faith in the God of chance. But that merciful deity had been shut out from the present deed. They studied the face of Malemute Kid, but they studied as one might the sphinx. As the quiet minutes passed a feeling that speech was incumbent on them began to grow. At last the howl of a wolf dog cracked the silence from the direction of Forty Mile. The weird sound swelled with all the pathos of a breaking heart, then died away in a long drawn sob.

"Well, I'll be danged!" Bettles turned up the collar of his macinaw jacket and stared about him helplessly.

"It's a sorrow game yer runnin', Kid," cried Lon McFane—"all the percentage to the house an' niver a bit to the man that's buckin'! The devil himself 'd niver tackle such a cinch, and d— if I do!"

There were chuckles, throttled in gurgling throats, and winks brushed away the frost which rimmed the eyelashes as the men climbed the ice notched bank and started across the street to the post. But the long howl had drawn nearer, invested with a new note of menace. A woman screamed round the corner. There was a cry of "Here he comes!" Then an Indian boy, at the head of half a dozen frightened dogs, racing with death, dashed into the crowd, and behind came Yellow Fang, a bristle of hair and a flash of gray. Everybody but the Yankee fled. The Indian boy had tripped and fallen. Bettles stopped long enough to grip him by the sack of his furs, then headed for a pile of cordwood already occupied by a number of his comrades. Yellow Fang, doubling after one of the dogs, came leaping back. The fleeing animal, free of the rabies, but crazed with fright, whipped Bettles off his feet and flashed on the street. Malemute Kid took a flying shot at Yellow Fang. The mad dog whirled a half air spring, came down on his back, then, with a single leap, covered half the distance between himself and Bettles.

But the fatal spring was intercepted. Lon McFane leaped from the woodpile, countering him in midair. Over they rolled, Lon holding him by the throat at arm's length, blinking under the fetid slaver which sprayed his face. Then Bettles, revolver in hand and coolly waiting a chance, settled the combat.

"'Twas a square game, Kid," Lon remarked, rising to his feet and shaking the snow from out his sleeves. "With a fair percentage to meself that bucked it."

That night while Lon McFane sought the forgiving arms of the church, in the direction of Father Roubeau's cabin, Malemute Kid and Scruff Mackenzie talked long to little purpose.

"But would you," persisted Mackenzie, "supposing they had fought?"

"Have I ever broken my word?"

"No, but that isn't the point. Answer the question. Would you?"

Malemute Kid straightened up. "Scruff, I've been asking myself that question ever since, and—"

"Well?"

"Well, as yet I haven't found the answer."

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The German Dye Trade.

American manufacturers not only have met the domestic demand for aniline dyes hitherto supplied exclusively by Germany, but are building a rapidly growing export trade. A statement by the bureau of foreign and domestic commerce says the United States, the only country to accomplish the feat, has succeeded in establishing since the war began a successful industry capable of meeting the color requirements of its own manufacturers of textiles, paper, paints, leather, straw, inks, stains, varnishes and waxes, and of handling orders from abroad. Exports now are being made at the rate of \$4,693,756 annually.



"We'll Establish a Precedent."

snow. Then he took to the woods again. Hope he don't come back. Lost any yourself?"

"One, the best one of the pack—Shookum. Started amuck this morning, but didn't get very far. Ran foul of Sitka Charley's team, and they scattered him all over the street. And now two of them are loose and ragin' mad. So you see he got his work in. The dog census will be small in the spring if we don't do something."

"And the man census too."

"How's that? Whose in trouble now?"

"Oh, Bettles and Lon McFane had an argument, and they'll be down by the water hole in a few minutes to settle it."

The incident was repeated for his benefit, and Malemute Kid, accustomed to an obedience which his fellow men never failed to render, took charge of the affair. His quickly formulated plan was explained, and they promised to follow his lead implicitly.

"So you see," he concluded, "we do not actually take away their privilege of fighting. And yet I don't believe they'll fight when they see the beauty of the scheme. Life's a game and men play the gamblers. They'll stake their whole pile on the one chance in a thousand. Take away that one chance and they won't play."

He turned to the man in charge of the post. "Storekeeper, weigh out three fathoms of your best half inch manila."

"We'll establish a precedent which will last the men of Forty Mile to the end of time," he prophesied. Then he coiled the rope about his arm and led his followers out of doors, just in time to meet the principals.

"What danged right'd he to fetch my wife in?" thundered Bettles to the soothing overtures of a friend.

"'Twa'n't called for," he concluded decisively. "'Twa'n't called for," he reiterated again and again, pacing up and down and waiting for Lon McFane.

And Lon McFane—his face was hot and tongue rapid as he flamed in insurrection in the face of the church. "Then, father," he cried, "it's with an aisy heart I'll roll in me flamy blankets, the broad of me back on a bed of coals. Niver shall it be said Lon McFane took a lie 'twixt the teeth without iver liftin' a hand! An' I'll not ask a blessin'." The years have been wild, but it's the heart was in the right place."

"But it's not the heart, Lon," interposed Father Roubeau; "it's pride that bids you forth to slay your fellow man."

"Yer Frinch," Lon replied, and then, turning to leave him, "An' will ye say a mass if the luck is against me?"

But the priest smiled, thrust his moccasined feet to the fore and went out upon the white breast of the silent river. A packed trail the width of a sixteen inch sled led out to the water hole. On either side lay the deep, soft snow. The men trod in single file without conversation, and the black stoled priest in their midst gave to the function the solemn aspect of a funeral. It was a warm winter's day for Forty Mile—a day in which the sky, filled with heaviness, drew closer to the earth, and the mercury sought the unwonted level of 20 below. But there



The Next Instant Lon McFane Stretched Him on the Floor.



Took a Flying Shot at Yellow Fang.

SILAGE IS SUPERIOR WINTER COW FEED



SPLENDID TYPE OF JERSEY COW FOR DAIRY.

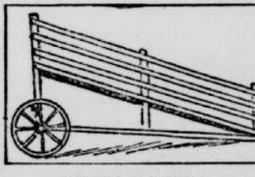
(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Silage is a splendid winter feed particularly adapted for dairy cows. In many sections silage has come to be the dairy farm's main reliance for cows, for it is the best and cheapest substitute for fresh grass. While the real food and nutritive value of silage is not great, about three-fourths of its total weight being water, it is succulent and palatable. It contains a large amount of carbohydrates in proportion to the protein and will give best results when fed with some other feed richer in dry matter and in protein. As a feed containing a large amount of water in the form of natural plant juices, it is easily digested and serves the useful purpose of keeping the whole system of the animal in good condition. A silage-fed animal is rarely troubled with digestive disturbances, the coat is noticeably sleek and soft, and the skin is pliable. No rough feed is more palatable than good corn silage, which is of great importance in feeding dairy cattle as it induces a large consumption and stimulates the secretion of digestive juices.

USEFUL WHEELED PIG CHUTE

Handy Loading Device Can Be Put Together by Aid of Pair of Old Mower Wheels.

Get a couple of old mower wheels or other strong wheels that will stand up under the load of the weight of a few hundred pounds of live hogs. On



Wheeled Pig Chute.

these wheels build a hog chute, such as is shown here, and you will always have a handy loading device and one that can be pulled around over the place wherever it is needed. This is better than building a permanent loading chute near the hog lots, as the permanent chute may be some distance from the pens where the hogs are to be loaded. If so, the wheeled chute can be pulled over and set in place and the wagons backed into place to receive the load.

FEED FOWLS SPROUTED OATS

Enables Farmer to Reduce Grain Ration About One-Third—Influences Laying of Hens.

Giving the hens once a day all the sprouted oats they want to eat, which is about a square inch of sprouts, grain and roots, enables one to reduce the grain ration about one-third and thereby effecting a saving in high-price grain. Out sprouts can be produced as about 20 to 25 cents per bushel, while the price of wheat is about \$2.20 per bushel. It is also remarkable how sprouted oats influence the laying of the hens. A change in this respect can be noticed within a few days after sprouted oats have been fed.

INDICATES GOOD LAYING HEN

Large Bright Red Comb is Characteristic of Best Producers—Notice the Black Minorcas.

One of the characteristics of a good laying hen is a large comb. The old-timers used to say, "the bigger the comb, the better the layer," and there is a great deal of truth in it. Notice the large comb of the Black Minorca, one of our very best layers, and the lower of the largest eggs of any breed. Notice the large combs of the Leghorns, the best of egg-layers. Put it down as an axiom of truth that a hen with a large comb, and a bright red comb, is a good layer.

CULL OUT UNDESIRABLE COWS

Increased Cost of Production Points Out Advantages of Weeding Out All Boarders.

With the increased cost of production this seems to be the time to weed out the boarder cows in the herd. The meat value of the dairy animal now is closer to the dairy value than ever before, and consequently it is possible to weed out the poor cows and replace them with profitable producers with less cash outlay than ever before.

AVOID POORLY KEPT SILAGE

Sheep Are Peculiarly Susceptible to Moldy Feed—Oats and Bran Are Excellent.

Sheep are peculiarly susceptible to injury from moldy feed. Poorly kept silage is therefore to be avoided. A ration of oats and bran makes an excellent feed for ewes with lambs at their side. The flock should have access to water and salt at all times.

PROGRESS IN LIVE STOCK

Wonderful progress could be made in live stock improvement if the increase which undoubtedly will be made could be obtained from purebred sire.

SHORTAGE IN LIVE STOCK

There has not been such a great shortage in the live stock population in proportion to the human population in many years.