THE FOLLY OF THE HENDRIK HUDSON

BY FRANK MACKENZIE SAVILE.
(KHARE SELIM.)
A TALE OF THE ...

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CHAPTER VIII.

OLD STEFAN'S VODKI—DESMOND CONGRATULATES THE CAPT.

The saloon of the Hendrik Hudson would have been a sore sight to the eyes of Menzies, the Scotch steward, if he had been there to see its terrible disarrangement. Round the table four dirty, sheep skinned soldiers sat and fingered a little pack of cards. In each mouth was stuck an evil smelling cigar, and innumerable stains of jugs and tumblers marked the smooth mahogany. The collared doors had been burst open by the kicks of lusty boots, and books, broken crockery and a heap of little knickknacks strewed the floor. The company had evidently feasted where it slept. The dirty plates and knives of the previous evening meal were tossed carelessly into a corner, unwashed and sticky. The smell of shore and forest was thick on carpets and chairs.

One of the men took a sup from a jug beside him and cursed aloud.

"To call it a thin wash liquor," he complained. "I'd rather have the scourings of a vodki cup whence all had gone but the smell."

"Hog's drink, cut lap," agreed another. "Never a sup of real spirit can I find aboard—nothing but this watery red filth."

Menzies would have been delighted at this. None but he and his master knew the hiding place of the grog—not, by no means a bad plan on board a yacht if you can trust your steward, an exceedingly bad one if you can't.

The chief would have been the delight of a gourmet. Among these savage Tartars nothing short of vitriol—and even vodki is that—deserved an epithet. So, though they continued to sup at the jug perfunctorily, they didn't come to condemn the contents. The irritation born of their unaccustomed swillings made them quarrel hugely over their cards. They handled accusations of cheating freely from one to the other. The atmosphere was thick with noisome smoke and heated words.

A lull came from their comrades on the deck. One of them thrust his head below the raised skylight, summoning them to come quickly. They racked up the companion and stared stupidly round their across sea and shore. One of the men who had been on deck pointed to where a cleft in the ring of peaks showed the cliffs of the farther bay. About 300 yards away a man could be seen digging methodically at the rying foot. Beside him lay a brown object, indistinguishable as that the miner. The fellow was throwing up the sand energetically and looked neither to the right hand nor the left. There was but the one narrow slit in the ringing rocks that gave view upon him at all. It was evident he knew nothing of the nearness of the yacht.

Yaroslaff, the corporal, snapped his fingers in his delight. "What should man bury here?" quoth he. "Why, what we're demanding the want of—liquor, my boys; good liquor. I've always heard this was a bay for the smugglers. He's leaving this for the Lapps without a doubt. Now shall we both preserve the law of the empire and get refreshment fit for gentlemen and soldiers. But quietly, you little pigeons, quietly, and we'll see what the old scoundrel's up to."

They stole silently across the gangway and wormed among the shore rocks till in a circle they stood behind the man. Unconsciously he toiled on at his digging, and the grins grew upon the soldiers' faces. Finally, as he delved away, Vladimir, a young recruit, contained himself no longer. He burst into a peal of laughter and strode forward, holding his sides, nor were the others slow to join in his hilarious heritage. The man started up with a jerk of surprise. He faced round upon them troublingly, his eyes wild and staring. He sank upon the sand and lifted his hands to the corporal appealingly.

"Mercy, captain, mercy! It is but a little I store against the winter."

The corporal smote his shoulder in good humored ferocity.

"Son of a dog!" he shouted. "As if I didn't know you and your ways! Why should Stefan, the forester, store good liquor out here? You want to trade with the Lapps, a thing strictly forbidden, as well you know, you deep one old contrabandist! Now a great fine will be due from you."

"Mercy!" said old Stefan, groveling. "Mercy, sir! It is a little, little barrel, and I am of the poorest. All mine is yours if you but forbear the reporting of me!"

"This," said Yaroslaff, picking up the barrel, "is neither yours nor mine. It belongs to the state, in whose name I confiscate it. But our Little Father, the czar, always judges the laborer worthy of the hire. I have exhausted myself in tracking this foul piece of smugglery. I need a tonic. Here I shall end it. Whose vodki is it, O wicked old man?"

"Ivan's," answered the old jager, trembling, "but"—

"Ivan's!" yelled the corporal. "You waste on filing scum of Lapps the choicest elixir ever distilled! Of a surety, Stefan, you are imbecile as well as particularly evil. I taste to see if you lie."

He raised the keg and took a mouthful. His eyes rolled. He gasped as he set it down and slapped his chest ecstatically.

"Ivan's liquid fire, by all that's holy!" he bawled. "Nay," as the others crowded round, demanding their share, "nay, fools! This must go wasted in no moonshiddical swillings on a forsaken shore. Let us have it in well ordered cups in the comfort of the cabin. The court adjudges Stefan to hard labor as watch on deck so lie we disperse of the spell." And, tucking the keg under his arm, he marched back to the ship, while the soldiers raised their rude attempts at wit on the old forester, who followed them submissively.

The six swaggered jovially across the gangway and descended into the cabin. Stefan they bade with many imprecations to stay on deck and summon them if any one appeared. Then shortly from the cabin came sounds of the clink of glass and vociferous toasts and jestings, rising at last to uproar as the hot liquor fumed into their brains.

The turmoil lasted but a short time. The jests grew less frequent, the snatches of song more manifold. Finally both died away into incoherent mutterings. The corporal's head began to nod ominously and suddenly thudded forward upon the table. One of his tipsy comrades solemnly emptied a glass of the spirit over it. The fellow never even moved. The other five were leaden eyed and blinked stupidly one upon the other, drinking still with automatic mastiness, clouding their glasses with nerveless hands. First one and then another yawned, rubbed his eyes, looked round gaplingly and then stared forward still as, too, like his leader, rolled his head upon the table and slept stertorously. Soon as sound came up to the watcher on deck save snores, a round chorus of heavy groans that shook the tumblers on the table and [illegible] the very deck planks tremble.

Cautiously Stefan peered beneath the open skylight and looked down on the six motionless bodies below. Satisfied with his scrutiny, he withdrew his head and descended into the cabin. He examined each man carefully and shook his shoulders, clapping his hand upon them heavily while he [illegible] aloud the name of each in a shout. No answer came to his callings. Not one of them so much as winked an eye. He came on deck again and went forward. Relieving a coil of rope, he took it back with him and very slow, methodical action took out his clasp knife and cut it into short lengths. With these he bound each man securely hand and foot. Then, rousing them in a row upon the cabin floor, he placed a cushion or fender of beneath each head and left them there, right, uncomfortable, lashed up into the similitude of half a dozen green images. Taking the rest of the vodki, he carefully bore it on deck and poured it into the sea. Then, lighting his pipe, he drew a deck chair beside the taffrail and as the evening closed about him sat there, waiting, watching, looking into the night, alert and expectant.

He sat there, waiting, watching, looking into the night.

Five miles away beside the castle moat stood Hiltmar and Desmond. Girt about his waist was a long coil of cord, and sheathed in his belt was his knife, flanked by a file and a brace of pistols. In his hand he held a crowbar. For an instant he stood and looked down at his companion. The moment for the attempt was come.

"Goodby, Hiltmar—dear!" The last word came shyly and haltingly. He looked at her half doubtfully.

She turned her eyes up to his wistfully. They were shining with unshed tears, but her glance was brave and there was no tremor in her voice.

"Goodby, Desmond, dear!" she answered, with a tender inflection on the word that had come so faltringly from him. She pronounced it steadily. Somehow her lips closed over it with a delicious pout. Desmond wavered and looked at her almost inquiringly. Then he stooped and kissed her and met with no repulse.

With the touch of that sweet farewell on his lips and no room in his heart for fear or aught but triumph he turned silently from her and caught at a poplar bough. He swung his legs across it, rose up and gained another, higher. Thus from bough to bough he swung himself till 20 feet above the ground he reached the great limb that shot out above the water, stretching far toward the castle walls. He made his way along it inch by inch, desisting only when its drooping twigs told him that the farthest point of safety was reached. He unslung the cord from his waist, attached to one end his crowbar and silently began to swing it to and fro. Backward and forward it pendulated, widening its reach at every beat, till finally its utmost swing brought it over the barn roof. There was a ring of metal, and the cord quivered and staid taut. Desmond pulled with all his strength. The rope was rigid. Then he lashed the end he held to the bough beside him. The gulf was bridged.

He waited a minute or two to see if any sentry had heard the clang of the grating iron. Firmly up and down the courtyard he could hear the regular beat of steps. These stopped, and the sound of a grating lock came distinctly to him across the silence of the night. A ray of light shot up through the casement in the roof. The man must have heard the faint clatter of the falling bar and was examining his prisoners to see if any one stirred. In some ways it was a fortunate matter. Seeing them safe and still bound, he would be less likely to visit them during the next hour or two. The light snapped out, and the bang of a shuttling door reechoed in the hollow of the yard. There was a jingle of keys as the warder drew them from the lock. Then to and fro the monotonous beat of the sentry was resumed.

Desmond gripped the rope with both hands and swung his knees across it. It ran at a steep angle toward the roof, and it took him all his strength to restrain too swift a descent. Checking his way strenuously with alternate gripings of the cord, he slid down and alighted beside the window grating.

He had to use the utmost caution to prevent dislodging the stone roof slabs. Splinters, the result of many a winter's frost, lay about him in heaps. Fortunately those he displaced fell almost noiselessly into the stream. Any one hearing them might mistake them for the rise of feeding fish. He took from his pocket a little jar of grease and smeared it on the central bar of the grating. Then with his map he began to rub at the iron, eating steadily through the metal, which was rusted by storm and damp to half its original thickness. He kept to his work without ceasing, save to rub now and again more grease into the niche he made, swinging the long file backward and forward, pressing desperately upon the bars, gasping with excitement and the energy of his toil, the perspiration raining from his forehead.

Half an hour of unceasing toil, and the bar broke. Rising to his feet, he sought a sure foothold and then seized the severed end and tore it slowly back. The metal, softened by exposure, gave under his strenuous tugs. Unfortunately as he bent and pled it back the far end snapped at the angle of the bend. With a clatter that seemed out with horrible distinctness he fell prone upon the roof. He lay still, his heart throbbing in great bests that seemed to suffocate him. The steps of the sentry ceased in the courtyard. He could but have heard the clatter, and his suspicions were aroused. Then a desperate idea came into Desmond's head. "Yee-ow, yee-ow!" he wailed, the tenor of his voice giving a particularly fellon ring to the sounds. "Yee-ow, fee-ar!" And he spat and scrabbled at an imaginary rival, dislodging one or two bits of shale recklessly.

"Tight!" grunted the sentry and picking up a pebble, cast it at the cat, and resumed his walk down the center of the courtyard. The stone fell within a yard of Desmond's face and, rebounding, struck him over the eye. If he could have found it, he felt he should like to preserve it as a precious relic.

He resumed his work at the next bar with greater caution, and, though it was sturdier than the first, an hour's work saw it, too, broken. He twisted it aside and fastened his remaining rope to the side of the grating. Then, swinging his body feet first through the opening, he caught the loose end between his hands and slid down into the darkness of the barn.

The prisoners must have heard his operations on the roof, but no sound came up to him. He landed gently on the floor, let go the rope and began to feel round him with groping hands. For a yard or two he crept about in the darkness, finding nothing. He gave a slight whisper. No answer came. With beating heart he strode forward, playing out his hands before him. Nothing met his touch but a blank wall. With sickening disappointment at his heart he crawled round the walls, feeling, stretching, grasping at emptiness. He crossed and recrossed the floor aimlessly. The result was everywhere the same. His adventure was vain. The barn was empty, the floor smooth and void as when Hiltmar played in it in the days of long ago.

As this was borne upon him he turned despairingly to the rope to climb forth again and renew his search elsewhere. He clutched the rope and began to haul himself up hand by hand. There were a quiver and a grate from above. The iron framework stirred and began to move. He drew himself up with quick, desperate jerks. Too late! With a crash and a clang the bars came away from the walls and fell clattering to the hard stone pavement. A corner struck him, and, bleeding and half stunned, he rolled upon the floor, a prisoner indeed.

[To be continued.]

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Horseshoes are an important branch of industry in Norway. About 4000 tons are exported every year. Great Britain and France, where horseshoes are used not only for horses, but also for donkeys and even employed as beasts of burden, divide almost the whole Norwegian exportation between them in about equal quantities.

In Consistent Lee.

Teacher—Now, boys, which letter of the alphabet do we use most frequently?

Little Willie—I know—E.

Teacher—That's right. How did you know it, Willie?

Willie—'Cause there's two of 'em in "theyey," an' ain't everybody lettin' about him?—Philadelphia Record.

Fifth Avenue.

"Don't leave the table," said the landlady as her new boarder rose from his scanty breakfast.

"I must, madam. It's hard wood, and my teeth are not what they used to be."—Tit-Bits.

Explained.

Biggs—That man over there is quite a poet.

Boggs—He looks too prosperous for that.

Biggs—Oh, he's in the ice business too!

Heartless.

"Why are you cussing that man?"

"I ast him for a nickel to pay me way home."

"Well, wouldn't he help you out?"

"Naw. He wanted to put me on de car and pay de money to de conductor."

An Honest Pair.

First Jockey—Go ahead! I've bet 500 louis against my horse!

Second Jockey—And I'm to get 1,000 if I'm beaten.—Polichinelle.

Good Time For Sorrow.

"Hi, fellers, come along and feel sorry for Willie! He's goin ter de dentist!"—New York Journal.

Accounted For.

"Excuse me. Your face seems familiar. Are you not a brother or some other relative of the Hofrath Dippel?"

"Why, professor, I am Hofrath Dippel!"

"Exactly! That explains the very striking resemblance!"—Der Floh.

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Justice Will a Vengeance.

A foreigner of distinction who visited Venice during the last century, having had his pocket picked, indulged in some harsh expressions against the police. Some days afterward he was quitting Venice, when his gondola was stopped and he was requested to step into another.

"Monsieur," said a grave personage, "are you not the Prince de Craon?"

"Yes."

"Were you not robbed last Friday?"

"Yes."

"Of what sum?"

"Five hundred ducats."

"Where were they?"

"In a green purse."

"And do you suspect any one of this robbery?"

"A valet de place."

"Should you recognize him?"

"Without doubt."

Then the interrogator pushed aside a dirty cloak, discovered a dead man holding a green purse in his hand and added: "You see, sir, that justice has been done. There is your money; take it, and remember that a prudent man never sets foot again in a country where he has underrated the wisdom of the government."—San Francisco Argonaut.

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