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CHAPTER 25

SIR DONALD MANN PROPOSES TO USE DOUBLE-BITTED AXES AS WEAPONS IN A DUEL WITH A RUSSIAN COUNT

I enjoyed Dan Mann all the time. He was as open as a full moon and looked as honest. Our first night together in the big woods was spent like boys who had not seen each other for a long time. That was the way it was with us, for we had never seen each other before except that all real men are always boys and very much alike; it is only when there is something the matter with men that they are queer and different. We talked nearly all night. He told me quite fully the remarkable story of his life—his interesting association with McKenzie, their very modern financing and much of the business minutiae, the mastery of which is by some standards of judging supposed to make men great.

Both McKenzie and Mann had started as poor boys in Canada. Mann did not go to school. He had to work or starve. In the winter he went to the woods as a lumberjack. One winter he spent in Cheboygan County, Michigan, making ties. He became a fine axman and expert in swinging a broad ax.

From the woods and the ranks of a common section laborer he developed in early middle life to be a wizard of industry, and a transcontinental railroad builder. The McKenzie and Mann policy, by which they constructed disconnected portions of railroads across the country, and obtained many small land grants and bonuses without attracting the opposition of the powerful Canadian Pacific and Grand Trunk giants, is a story unexcelled of clever business and political strategy. When they got ready they just connected a lot of blind termini and lo! a transcontinental fabric. When it was too late the enemy awakened. There is room for all of them.

I think it was our second night together in the woods when I
asked him about a duel he had in China, according to a story told me in Tien Tsin by Captain Rich, then American railroad engineer for the Chinese government.

"It was such a fool thing," he said, "and I was scared to death and could not see any humor in it then. A lot of us had gone to China to obtain railroad franchises. The railroad building world was represented: Americans, British, Germans, Belgians, French, Russians and so forth, in Shanghai. We were the only Canadians and the foreigners never knew whether to class us with the British or the Americans. The Chinese government had decided to build railroads. They were determined thus to connect Peking with Canton, via Hankow on the Yangtse. Captain Rich of Minneapolis had charge of things for Li Hung Chang, who was then at his zenith of power, the old rascal. There was much delay. We were making our headquarters at Shanghai.

"Some of us combined our interests and finally there were several pools working, one against the other. In the evening we would gather at a place on Bubbling Well Road, which as you know runs back from the bund to the country near the International Institute.

"Here we would play a stiff game of poker, drink Scotch whiskey and josh each other. I had it in my head all the time that a Russian, with a title, who was always eager to sit in, was crooked. I watched him. One night, near twelve o'clock, when several were woozy with booze, and several were not who pretended to be, I caught Mr. Russian holding out cards. He wasn’t as big as the Slav average, and when I slapped him for calling me a liar he nearly went down. There was some commotion, which soon passed over, and I went to my room in the Astor House. Hotels all over the world were named in those days for the old lower Broadway Astor House of the forties.

"Next day I received a challenge to fight. It made me nervous enough. Not being what is called a natural born gentleman, I was all the more anxious to conduct myself becomingly. I had never had a pistol or a sword in my hands, and I felt squeamish in my abdomen whenever I thought about it. Nothing to do but
to go to a Shanghai friend. He asked me what weapons I knew how to use and told me it was my privilege to choose. I told him I had never had any practice with anything except a pick, shovel and ax.

“My friend advised me to select double-bitted axes as weapons.

“I knew I could easily cut the Russian’s head off with an ax and I fancy he thought so too, because his agent said they would not even consider a fight with such weapons; that they were vulgar and did not come within the code duello.

“My friend told him that in Canada the ax was a weapon of chivalry; that it was classical to speak of burying or digging up the hatchet, meaning a small ax, and that it was the sword that was vulgar, citing that they used it to cut corn with and butcher hogs.

“There was much parleying. We stuck for the ax and the duel was off. As the Russian backed off I got very blood-thirsty, and pictured myself constantly as swinging at his neck just at the collar button with a five-pound, double-edged ax. Perhaps he had a wart on his neck. If so I would split it clean through the center.”

Going over Moose Mountain lands seemed to be a more or less perfunctory work for Mr. Mann. He was large and heavy, and had been riding in a private car too much for the good of his wind. I showed him the biggest outcrop, a veritable mountain of ore it looked, and took him to several exposures I had stripped, and also showed him any diamond drill cores.

“What’s the use?” he puffed. “That first big showing is enough and to spare if we can agree on a price, and all the rest is velvet.”

I did not know that a visitor from Paris that I had entertained at Moose Mountain for some days, and who seemed deeply interested, was really an expert for McKenzie and Mann.

They wanted the property for financing purposes. With it they could make a strong showing of the wealth surely existent in the unknown domain. Cobalt was just beginning to make known its fabulous riches in silver. It would be easy to make an exhibit that would enable them to obtain all the money they desired.
In this way I sold my Moose Mountain interests for enough to insure a modest independence, and to permit me to live such life of study and readiness for public service as I might choose.

McKenzie and Mann built many miles of railroad by way of connecting their transcontinental links, and in doing so they opened this great mining region. A branch to Key Inlet, on Georgian Bay, gave them a harbor and place for ore docks and water shipment.

Mr. Mann volunteered to name for me the town that would grow at Moose Mountain. Mr. Sellwood desired the honor. I did not know this. To me it was a small matter indeed. When Mr. Sellwood broached it to Mr. Mann, the latter remembered his promise to me.

“That’s nothing,” said the former, “let’s play a game of seven-up. You represent Osborn. If I win the town will be given my name; if you win, call it Osborn.”

Sellwood won and I am glad of it. He has a good many monuments and deserves them all.

My first thought when I received the money from Moose Mountain, was of my wife. She had stood by valiantly from twelve dollars a week and wolves, until now we had quite enough to enjoy life with; not that life had not been enjoyable all the time, because it had been.

I made and carried out plans to help all our relatives who needed help. This included the happy privilege of insuring the comfort of my mother for the remainder of her wonderful life of suffering and service. I also made provision for continuing the care of two brothers, who were entirely dependent upon me because of complete invalidism.

There was neither disinclination to do these things, nor self-praise for the performance. It seemed to me to be a clear and pleasing duty. I had been blessed with means and health and they had not. Perhaps God had given me some for them and made me a trustee. I thought He had, and that I owed it to them. Then, too, I could not tell why I was not in their place and they
in mine, so I was determined to treat them as I would have wished to have been treated if our conditions had been reversed.

My youngest brother William, possessing an alert and acute intellect, has been completely bedridden for years and has suffered severe pain. Throughout all of it, and the prospects no better for as long as he lives, he has been a cheerful Christian with the best personal philosophy I have ever known about.

From time to time I have given things to my home town, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, which has always shown me a sympathy and friendship and support that would be a sufficient reward for any man, no matter if his deserts were easily much greater than mine; and an inspiration as well. In return for its attitude I loved the town and all its people, and nurtured always in my heart a desire to do things for it. I could not give it much, but I could do what lay within my power to show my appreciation. Early in my travels I began to select curios for the fine Melville museum in the high school. Once in Japan I procured the first stone torii ever sent to America and also several Shinto memorial lanterns. These artistic things are in the government park at the Sault.

In Bucharest I saw a bronze lupa di Roma, the she wolf that gave mothering care to Romulus and Remus. It was given by the city of Rome to the city of Bucharest to commemorate the conquest of the Dacians by Trojan. I had a duplicate cast at Naples, which now occupies a place in the city hall grounds. It symbolizes the tender relation between animals and mankind, and their interdependence. Italians at Sault Ste. Marie at once particularly sensed its classical bearing. A miniature replica of this wolf in gold was recently given to Mrs. Woodrow Wilson by the city of Rome.

When Etienne Brulé came to Sault Ste. Marie in 1618, he found the majestic river bank flanked by great elms, indigenous here. Long ago almost all of these paid tribute to the axmen, who might easily have spared these noble trees, but did not. To restore them, and also cure a treeless city, I gave a thousand young elms. Several hundred are growing finely and in a few years will change and improve the appearance of the town.
As a tired boy in Milwaukee I often slept on Sunday morning, in a room near St. James Episcopal Church, until the chimes of St. James would awaken me. Then I would lie and listen, and half awake I would dream things. My room was in a cheap tenement, back on Clybourne Street. St. James is on stately Grand Avenue.

It was then the church of Alexander Mitchell and other millionaires. Across from it was the Mitchell mansion, and near to it on the east was the rich home of James Kneeland, with well-kept grounds and swans, and ducks with red mandibles, floating in a miniature mirror lake. It was then all another world, and I felt awed by it. This did not curb my dreams. Some day I would give chimes to some town, and they would be heard by other poor boys whose hearts would be made glad and light by the songs of the bells.

Better chimes than those and better played, and more and larger bells—eleven in all—hang in St. James, of Sault Ste. Marie. That is how I, a Presbyterian, came to give the bells to an Episcopal Church. Not more grand would they peal forth for any name or creed.

How are we moved about like checkers on the board of life. My dear friend, the rector of St. James of Sault Ste. Marie when the bells were hung, is now, as I write, the rector of St. James of Milwaukee. But the pride and power of yesterday are gone for St. James of Milwaukee, and it is a better and more useful church. I love it for those chimes of long ago.