

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

**The Surprising Adventures of
Sir Toady Lion with
Those of General Napoleon...**



Samuel Crockett

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of Sir Toady Lion with Those
of General Napoleon Smith**

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S. R. Crockett
The Surprising Adventures of Sir Toady
Lion with Those of General Napoleon
Smith An Improving History for Old Boys,
Young Boys, Good Boys, Bad Boys, Big
Boys, Little Boys, Cow Boys, and Tom-Boys

CHAPTER I.
PRISSY, HUGH JOHN, AND SIR TOADY LION

IT is always difficult to be great, but it is specially difficult when greatness is thrust upon one, as it were, along with the additional burden of a distinguished historical name. This was the case with General Napoleon Smith. Yet when this story opens he was not a general. That came later, along with the cares of empire and the management of great campaigns.

But already in secret he was Napoleon Smith, though his nurse sometimes still referred to him as Johnnie, and his father – but stay. I will reveal to you the secret of our soldier's life right at the start. Though a Napoleon, our hero was no Buonaparte. No, his name was Smith – plain Smith; his father was the owner of four large farms and a good many smaller ones, near that celebrated Border which separates the two hostile countries of England and Scotland. Neighbours referred to the General's father easily as "Picton Smith of Windy Standard," from the souging, mist-nursing mountain of heather and fir-trees which gave its name to the estate, and to the large farm he had cultivated himself ever since the death of his wife, chiefly as a means of distracting his mind, and keeping at a distance loneliness and sad thoughts.

Hugh John Smith had never mentioned the fact of his Imperial descent to his father, but in a moment of confidence he had told his old nurse, who smiled with a world-weary wisdom, which betrayed her knowledge of the secrets of courts – and said that doubtless it was so. He had also a brother and sister, but they were not, at that time, of the race of the Corporal of Ajaccio. On the contrary, Arthur George, the younger, aged five, was an engine-driver. There was yet another who rode in a mail-cart, and puckered up his face upon being addressed in a strange foreign language, as "Was-it-then? A darling – goo-goo – then it was!" This creature, however, was not owned as a brother by Hugh John and Arthur George, and indeed may at this point be dismissed from the story. The former went so far as stoutly to deny his brother's sex, in the face of such proofs as were daily afforded by Baby's tendency to slap his sister's face wherever they met, and also to seize things and throw them on the floor for the pleasure of seeing them break. Arthur George, however, had secret hopes that Baby would even yet turn out a satisfactory boy whenever he saw him killing flies on the window, and on these occasions hounded him on to yet deadlier exertions. But he dared not mention his anticipations to his soldier brother, that haughty scion of an Imperial race. For reasons afterwards to be given, Arthur George was usually known as Toady Lion.

Then Hugh John had a sister. Her name was Priscilla. Priscilla was distinguished also, though not in a military sense. She was literary, and wrote books "on the sly," as Hugh John said. He considered this secrecy the only respectable part of a very shady business. Specially he objected to being made to serve as the hero of Priscilla's tales, and went so far as to promise to "thump" his

sister if he caught her introducing him as of any military rank under that of either general or colour-sergeant.

"Look here, Pris," he said on one occasion, "if you put me into your beastly girl books all about dolls and love and trumpery, I'll bat you over the head with a wicket!"

"Hum – I dare say, if you could catch me," said Priscilla, with her nose very much in the air.

"Catch you! I'll catch and bat you now if you say much."

"Much, much! Can't, can't! There! 'Fraid cat! Um-m-um!"

"By Jove, then, I just will!"

It is sad to be obliged to state here, in the very beginning of these veracious chronicles, that at this time Prissy and Napoleon Smith were by no means model children, though Prissy afterwards marvellously improved. Even their best friends admitted as much, and as for their enemies – well, their old gardener's remarks when they chased each other over his newly planted beds would be out of place even in a military periodical, and might be the means of preventing a book with Mr. Gordon Browne's nice pictures from being included in some well-conducted Sunday-school libraries.

General Napoleon Smith could not catch Priscilla (as, indeed, he well knew before he started), especially when she picked up her skirts and went right at hedges and ditches like a young colt. Napoleon looked upon this trait in Prissy's character as degrading and unsportsmanlike in the extreme. He regarded long skirts, streaming hair, and flapping, aggravating pinafores as the natural handicap of girls in the race of life, and as particularly useful when they "cheeked" their brothers. It was therefore wicked to neutralise these equalising disadvantages by strings tied round above the knees, or by the still more scientific device of a sash suspended from the belt before, passed between Prissy's legs, and attached to the belt behind.

But, then, as Napoleon admitted even at ten years of age, girls are capable of anything; and to his dying day he has never had any reason to change his opinion – at least, so far as he has yet got.

"All right, then, I will listen to your old stuff if you will say you are sorry, and promise to be my horse, and let me lick you for an hour afterwards – besides giving me a penny."

It was thus that Priscilla, to whom in after times great lights of criticism listened with approval, was compelled to stoop to artifice and bribery in order to secure and hold her first audience. Whereupon the authoress took paper from her pocket, and as she did so, held the manuscript with its back to Napoleon Smith, in order to conceal the suspicious shortness of the lines. But that great soldier instantly detected the subterfuge.

"It's a penny more for listening to poetry!" he said, with sudden alacrity.

"I know it is," replied Prissy sadly, "but you might be nice about it just this once. I'm dreadfully, dreadfully poor this week, Hugh John!"

"So am I," retorted Napoleon Smith sternly; "if I wasn't, do you think I would listen at all to your beastly old poetry? Drive on!"

Thus encouraged, Priscilla meekly began —

"My love he is a soldier bold,
And my love is a knight;
He girds him in a coat of mail,
When he goes forth to fight."

"That's not quite so bad as usual," said Napoleon condescendingly, toying meanwhile with the lash of an old dog-whip he had just "boned" out of the harness-room. Priscilla beamed gratefully upon her critic, and proceeded —

"He rides him forth across the sand— "

"Who rides whom?" cried Napoleon. "Didn't the fool ride a horse?"

"It means himself," said Priscilla meekly.

"Then why doesn't *it* say so?" cried the critic triumphantly, tapping his boot with the "boned" dog-whip just like any ordinary lord of creation in presence of his inferiors.

"It's poetry," explained Priscilla timidly.

"It's silly!" retorted Napoleon, judicially and finally.

Priscilla resumed her reading in a lower and more hurried tone. She knew that she was skating over thin ice.

"He rides him forth across the sand,
Upon a stealthy steed."

"You mean 'stately,' you know," interrupted Napoleon – somewhat rudely, Priscilla thought. Yet he was quite within his rights, for Priscilla had not yet learned that a critic always knows what you mean to say much better than you do yourself.

"No, I don't mean 'stately,'" said Priscilla, "I mean 'stealthy,' the way a horse goes on sand. You go and gallop on the sea-shore and you'll find out."

I've listened quite a pennyworth now."

"He rides him forth across the sand,
Upon a stealthy steed,
And when he sails upon the sea,
He plays upon a reed!"

"Great soft *he* was," cried Napoleon Smith; "and if ever I hear you say that I did such a thing – " Priscilla hurried on more quickly than ever.

"In all the world there's none can do
The deeds that he hath done:
When he hath slain his enemies,
Then he comes back alone."

"That's better!" said Napoleon, nodding encouragement. "At any rate it isn't long. Now, give me my penny."

"Shan't," said Priscilla, the pride of successful achievement swelling in her breast; "besides, it isn't Saturday yet, and you've only listened to three verses anyway. You will have to listen to ever so much more than that before you get a penny."

"Hugh John! Priscilla!" came a voice from a distance.

The great soldier Napoleon Smith instantly effected a retreat in masterly fashion behind a gooseberry bush.

"There's Jane calling us," said Priscilla; "she wants us to go in and be washed for dinner."

"Course she does," sneered Napoleon; "think she's out screeching like that for fun? Well, let her. I am not going in to be towelled till I'm all over red and scurfy, and get no end of soap in my eyes."

"But Jane wants you; she'll be *so* cross if you don't come."

"I don't care for Jane," said Napoleon Smith with dignity, but all the same making himself as small as possible behind his gooseberry bush.

"But if you don't come in, Jane will tell father – "

"I don't care for father – " the prone but gallant General was proceeding to declare in the face of Priscilla's horrified protestations that he mustn't speak so, when a slow heavy step was heard on the other side of the hedge, and a deep voice uttered the single syllable, "*John!*"

"Yes, father," a meek young man standing up behind the gooseberry bush instantly replied: he was trying to brush himself as clean as circumstances would permit. "Yes, father; were you calling me, father?"

Incredible as it seems, the meek and apologetic words were those of that bold enemy of tyrants, General Napoleon Smith.

Priscilla smiled at the General as he emerged from the hands of Jane, "red and scurfy," just as he had said. She smiled meaningly and aggravatingly, so that Napoleon was reduced to shaking his clenched fist covertly at her.

"Wait till I get you out," he said, using the phrase time-honoured by such occasions.

Priscilla Smith only smiled more meaningly still. "First catch your hare!" she said under her breath.

Napoleon Smith stalked in to lunch, the children's dinner at the house of Windy Standard, with an expression of fixed and Byronic gloom on his face, which was only lightened by the sight of his favourite pigeon-pie (with a lovely crust) standing on the side-board.

"Say grace, Hugh John," commanded his father.

And General Napoleon Smith said grace with all the sweet innocence of a budding angel singing in the cherub choir, aiming at the same time a kick at his sister underneath the table, which overturned a footstool and damaged the leg of a chair.

CHAPTER II

THE GOSPEL OF DASHT-MEAN

IT was on the day preceding a great review near the Border town of Edam, that Hugh John Picton Smith first became a soldier and a Napoleon. His father's house was connected by a short avenue with a great main road along which king and beggar had for a thousand years gone posting to town. Now the once celebrated highway lies deserted, for along the heights to the east run certain bars of metal, shining and parallel, over which rush all who can pay the cost of a third-class ticket – a roar like thunder preceding them, white steam and sulphurous reek wreathing after them. The great highway beneath is abandoned to the harmless impecunious bicyclist, and on the North Road the sweeping cloud dust has it all its own way.

But Hugh John loved the great thoroughfare, deserted though it was. To his mind there could be no loneliness upon its eye-taking stretches, for who knew but out of the dust there might come with a clatter Mr. Dick Turpin, late of York and Tyburn; Robert the Bruce, charging south into England with his Galloway garrons, to obtain some fresh English beef wherewithal to feed his scurvy Scots; or (best of all) his Majesty King George's mail-coach Highflyer, the picture of which, coloured and blazoned, hung in his father's workroom.

People told him that all these great folks were long since dead. But Hugh John knew better than to believe any "rot" grown-ups might choose to palm off on him. What did grown-ups know anyway? They were rich, of course. Unlimited shillings were at their command; and as for pennies – well, all the pennies in the world lived in their breeches' pockets. But what use did they make of these god-like gifts? Did you ever meet them at the tuck-shop down in the town buying fourteen cheese-cakes for a shilling, as any sensible person would? Did they play with "real-real trains," drawn by locomotives of shining brass? No! they preferred either one lump of sugar or none at all in their tea. This showed how much they knew about what was good for them.

So if such persons informed him that Robert the Bruce had been dead some time, or showed him the rope with which Turpin was hung, coiled on a pedestal in a horrid dull museum (free on Saturdays, 10 to 4), Hugh John Picton looked and nodded, for he was an intelligent boy. If you didn't nod sometimes as if you were taking it all in, they would explain it all over again to you – with abominable dates and additional particulars, which they would even ask you afterwards if you remembered.

For many years Hugh John had gone every day down to the porter's lodge at the end of the avenue, and though old Betty the rheumatically warder was not allowed to let him out, he stared happily enough through the bars. It was a white gate of strong wood, lovely to swing on if you happened to be there when it was opened for a carriageful of calling-folk in the afternoon, or for Hugh John's father when he went out a-riding.

But you had to hide pretty quick behind the laurels, and rush out in that strictly limited period before old Betty found her key, and yet after the tail of Agincourt, his father's great grey horse, had switched round the corner. If you were the least late, Betty would get ahead of you, and the gates of Paradise would be shut. If you were a moment too soon, it was just as bad – or even worse. For then the voice of "He-whom-it-was-decidedly-most-healthy-to-obey" would sound up the road, commanding instant return to the Sandheap or the High Garden.

So on these occasions Hugh John mostly brought Sir Toady Lion with him – otherwise Arthur George the Sturdy, and at yet other times variously denominated Prince Murat, the Old Guard, the mob that was scattered with the whiff of grapeshot, and (generally) the whole Grand Army of the First Empire. Toady Lion (his own first effort at the name of his favourite hero Richard Cœur-de-Lion) had his orders, and with guile and blandishments held Betty in check till the last frisk of Agincourt's

tail had disappeared round the corner. Then Hugh John developed his plans of assault, and was soon swinging on the gate.

"Out of the way with you, Betty," he would cry, "or you will get hurt – sure."

For the white gate shut of itself, and you had only to push it open, jump on, check it at the proper place on the return journey, and with your foot shove off again to have scores and scores of lovely swings. Then Betty would go up the avenue and shout for her husband, who was the aforesaid crusty old gardener. She would have laid down her life for Toady Lion, but by no means even a part of it for Hugh John, which was unfair. Old Betty had once been upset by the slam of the gate on a windy day, and so was easily intimidated by the shouts of the horseman and the appalling motion of his white five-barred charger.

Such bliss, however, was transient, and might have to be expiated in various ways – at best with a slap from the hand of Betty (which was as good as nothing at all), at worst, by a visit to father's workroom – which could not be thought upon without a certain sense of solemnity, as if Sunday had turned up once too often in the middle of the week.

But upon this great day of which I have to tell, Hugh John had been honourably digging all the morning in the sand-hole. He had on his red coat, which was his most secret pride, and he was devising a still more elaborate system of fortification. Bastion and trench, scarp and counter-scarp, lunette and ravelenta (a good word), Hugh John had made them all, and he was now besieging his own creation with the latest thing in artillery, calling "Boom!" when he fired off his cannon, and "Bang-whack!" as often as the projectile hit the wall and brought down a foot of the noble fortification, lately so laboriously constructed and so tenderly patted into shape.

Suddenly there came a sound which always made the heart of Hugh John beat in his side. It was the low thrilling reverberation of the drum. He had only time to dash for his cap, which he had filled with sand and old nails in order to "be a bomb-shell"; empty it, put it on his head, gird on his London sword-with-the-gold-hilt, and fly.

As he ran down the avenue the shrill fifes kept stinging his ears and making him feel as if needles were running up and down his back. It was at this point that Hugh John had a great struggle with himself. Priscilla and Toady Lion were playing at "House" and "Tea-parties" under the weeping elm on the front lawn. It was a debasing taste, certainly, but after all blood was thicker than water. And – well, he could not bear that they should miss the soldiers. But then, on the other hand, if he went back the troops might be past before he reached the gate, and Betty, he knew well, would not let him out to run after them, and the park wall was high.

In this desperate strait Hugh John called all the resources of religion to his aid.

"It would," he said, "be dasht-mean to go off without telling them."

Hugh John did not know exactly what "dasht-mean" meant. But he had heard his cousin Fred (who was grown up, had been a year at school, and wore a tall hat on Sundays) tell how all the fellows said that it was better to die-and-rot than to be "dasht-mean"; and also how those who in spite of warnings proved themselves "dasht-mean" were sent to a place called Coventry – which from all accounts seemed to be a "dasht-mean" locality.

So Hugh John resolved that he would never get sent there, and whenever a little thing tugged down in his stomach and told him "not to," Hugh John said, "Hang it! I won't be dasht-mean." – And wasn't.

Grown-ups call these things conscience and religion; but this is how it felt to Hugh John, and it answered just as well – or even better.

So when the stinging surge of distant pipes sent the wild blood coursing through his veins, and he felt his face grow cold and prickly all over, Napoleon Smith started to run down the avenue. He could not help it. He must see the soldiers or die. But all the same *Tug-tug* went the little string remorselessly in his stomach.

"I must see them. I must – I must!" he cried, arguing with himself and trying to drown the inner voice.

"*Tug-tug-tug!*" went the string, worse than that which he once put round his toe and hung out of the window, for Tom Cannon the under-keeper to wake him with at five in the morning to go rabbit-ferreting.

Hugh John turned towards the house and the weeping elm.

"It's a blooming shame," he said, "and they won't care anyway. But I *can't* be dasht-mean!"

And so he ran with all his might back to the weeping elm, and with a warning cry set Prissy and Sir Toady Lion on the alert. Then with anxious tumultuous heart, and legs almost as invisible as the twinkling spokes of a bicycle, so quickly did they pass one another, Hugh John fairly flung himself in the direction of the White Gate.

CHAPTER III

HOW HUGH JOHN BECAME GENERAL NAPOLEON

EVEN dull Betty had heard the music. The White Gate was open, and with a wild cry Hugh John sprang through. Betty had a son in the army, and her deaf old ears were quickened by the fife and drum.

"Come back, Master Hugh!" she cried, as he passed through and stood on the roadside, just as the head of the column, marching easily, turned the corner of the White Road and came dancing and undulating towards him. Hugh John's heart danced also. It was still going fast with running so far; but at sight of the soldiers it took a new movement, just like little waves on a lake when they jabble in the wind, so nice and funny when you feel it – tickly too – down at the bottom of your throat.

The first who came were soldiers in a dark uniform with very stern, bearded officers, who attended finely to discipline, for they were about to enter the little town of Edam, which lay just below the white gates of Windy Standard.

So intently they marched that no one cast a glance at Hugh John standing with his drawn sword, giving the salute which his friend Sergeant Steel had taught him as each company passed. Not that Hugh John cared, or even knew that they did not see him. They were the crack volunteer regiment of the Grey City beyond the hills, and their standard of efficiency was something tremendous.

Then came red-coats crowned with helmets, red-coats tipped with Glengarry bonnets, and one or two brass bands of scattering volunteer regiments. Hugh John saluted them all. No one paid the least attention to him. He did not indeed expect any one to notice him – a small dusty boy with a sword too big for him standing at the end of the road under the shadow of the elms. Why should these glorious creations deign to notice him – shining blades, shouldered arms, flashing bayonets, white pipe-clayed belts? Were they not as gods, knowing good and evil?

But all the same he saluted every one of them impartially as they came, and the regiments swung past unregarding, dust-choked, and thirsty.

Then at last came the pipes and the waving tartans. Something cracked in Hugh John's throat, and he gave a little cry, so that his old nurse, Janet Sheepshanks, anxious for his welfare, came to take him away. But he struck at her – his own dear Janet – and fled from her grasp to the other side of the road, where he was both safer and nearer to the soldiers. Swinging step, waving plumes, all in review order on came the famous regiment, every man stepping out with a trained elasticity which went to the boy's heart. Thus and not otherwise the Black Watch followed their pipers. Hugh John gave a long sigh when they had passed, and the pipes dulled down the dusky glade.

Then came more volunteers, and yet more and more. Would they never end? And ever the sword of Hugh John Picton flashed to the salute, and his small arm waxed weary as it rose and fell.

Then happened the most astonishing thing in the world, the greatest event of Hugh John's life. For there came to his ear a new sound, the clatter of cavalry hoofs. A bugle rang out, and Hugh John's eyes watched with straining eagerness the white dust rise and swirl behind the columns. Perhaps – who knows? – this was his reward for not being dasht-mean! But now Hugh John had forgotten Prissy and Toady Lion, father and nurse alike, heaven, earth – and everything else. There was no past for him. He was the soldier of all time. His dusty red coat and his flashing sword were the salute of the universal spirit of man to the god of war – also other fine things of which I have no time to write.

For the noble grey horses, whose predecessors Napoleon had watched so wistfully at Waterloo, came trampling along, tossing their heads with an obvious sense of their own worth as a spectacle. Hugh John paled to the lips at sight of them, but drew himself more erect than ever. He had seen foot-soldiers and volunteers before, but never anything like this.

On they came, a fine young fellow leading them, sitting carelessly on the noblest charger of all. Perhaps he was kindly by nature. Perhaps he had a letter from his sweetheart in his breastpocket. Perhaps – but it does not matter, at any rate he was young and happy, as he sat erect, leading the "finest troop in the finest regiment in the world." He saw the small dusty boy in the red coat under the elm-trees. He marked his pale twitching face, his flashing eye, his erect carriage, his soldierly port. The fate of Hugh John stood on tiptoe. He had never seen any being so glorious as this. He could scarce command himself to salute. But though he trembled in every limb, and his under lip "wickered" strangely, the hand which held the sword was steady, and went through the beautiful movements of the military salute which Sergeant Steel of the Welsh Fusiliers had taught him, with exactness and decorum.

The young officer smiled. His own hand moved to the response almost involuntarily, as if Hugh John had been one of his own troopers.

The boy's heart stood still. Could this thing be? A real soldier had saluted him!

But there was something more marvellous yet to come. A sweet spring of good deeds welled up in that young officer's breast. Heaven speed him (as doubtless it will) in his wooing, and make him ere his time a general, with the Victoria Cross upon his breast. But though (as I hope) he rise to be Commander-in-Chief, he will never do a prettier action than that day, when the small grimy boy stood under the elm-trees at the end of the avenue of Windy Standard. This is what he did. He turned about in his saddle.

"*Attention, men, draw swords!*" he cried, and his voice rang like a trumpet, so grand it was – at least so Hugh John thought.

There came a glitter of unanimous steel as the swords flashed into line. The horses tossed their heads at the stirring sound, and jingled their accoutrements as the men gathered their bridle reins up in their left hands.

"*Eyes right! Carry swords!*" came again the sharp command.

And every blade made an arc of glittering light as it came to the salute. It could not have been better done for a field-marshal.

No fuller cup of joy was ever drunk by mortal. The tears welled up in Hugh John's eyes as he stood there in the pride of the honour done to him. To be knighted was nothing to this. He had been acknowledged as a soldier by the greatest soldier there. Hugh John did not doubt that this glorious being was he who had led the Greys in the charge at Waterloo. Who else could have done that thing?

He was no longer a little dusty boy. He stood there glorified, ennobled. The world was almost too full.

"*Eyes front! Slope swords!*" rang the words once more.

The pageant passed by. Only the far drum-throb came back as he stood speechless and motionless, till his father rode up on his way home, and seeing the boy asked him what he was doing there. Then for all reply a little clicking hitch came suddenly in his throat. He wanted to laugh, but somehow instead the tears ran down his cheeks, and he gasped out a word or two which sounded like somebody else's voice.

"I'm not hurt, father," he said, "I'm not crying. It was only that the Scots Greys saluted me. And I *can't* help it, father. It goes *tick-tick* in my throat, and I can't keep it back. But I'm not crying, father! I'm not indeed!"

Then the stern man gathered the great soldier up and set him across his saddle – for Hugh John was alone, the others having long ago gone back with Janet Sheepshanks. And his father did not say anything, but let him sit in front with the famous sword in his hands which had brought about such strange things. And even thus rode our hero home – Hugh John Picton no more, but rather General Napoleon Smith; nor shall his rank be questioned on any army roster of strong unblenching hearts.

But late that night Hugh John stole down the hushed avenue, his bare feet pattering through the dust which the dew was making cool. He climbed the gate and stood under the elm, with the wind

flapping his white nightgown like a battle flag. Then clasping his hands, he took the solemn binding oath of his religion, "*The Scots Greys saluted me. May I die-and-rot if ever I am dasht-mean again!*"

CHAPTER IV

CASTLE PERILOUS

IN one corner of the property of Hugh John's father stood an ancient castle – somewhat doubtfully of it, however, for it was claimed as public property by the adjoining abbey town, now much decayed and fallen from its high estate, but desirous of a new lease of life as a tourist and manufacturing centre. The castle and the abbey had for centuries been jealous neighbours, treacherous friends, embattled enemies according to the fluctuating power of those who possessed them. The lord of the castle harried the abbot and his brethren. The abbot promptly retaliated by launching, in the name of the Church, the dread ban of excommunication against the freebooter. The castle represented feudal rights, the abbey popular and ecclesiastical authority.

And so it was still. Mr. Picton Smith had, indeed, only bought the property a few years before the birth of our hero; but, among other encumbrances, he had taken over a lawsuit with the town concerning the castle, which for years had been dragging its slow length along. Edam Abbey was a show-place of world-wide repute, and the shillings of the tourist constituted a very important item in the finances of the overburdened municipality. If the Council and magistrates of the good town of Edam could add the Castle of Windy Standard to their attractions, the resultant additional sixpence a head would go far towards making up the ancient rental of the town parks, which now let for exactly half of their former value.

But Mr. Picton Smith was not minded thus tamely to hand over an ancient fortress, secured to him by deed and charter. He declared at once that he would resist the claims of the town by every means in his power. He would, however, refuse right-of-way to no respectable sightseer. The painter, all unchallenged, might set up his easel there, the poet meditate, even the casual wanderer in search of the picturesque and romantic, have free access to these gloomy and desolate halls. The townspeople would be at liberty to conduct their friends and visitors thither. But Mr. Smith was resolved that the ancient fortalice of the Windy Standard should not be made a vulgar show. Sandwich papers and ginger-beer bottles would not be permitted to profane the green sward of the courtyard, across which had so often ridden all the chivalry of the dead Lorraines.

"Those who want sixpenny shows will find plenty at Edam Fair," was Mr. Picton Smith's ultimatum. And when he had once committed himself, like most of his stalwart name, Mr. Smith had the reputation of being very set in his mind.

But in spite of this the town asserted its right-of-way through the courtyard. A footpath was said to have passed that way by which persons might go to and fro to kirk and market.

"I have no doubt a footpath passed through my dining-room a few centuries ago," said Mr. Smith, "but that does not compel me to keep my front and back doors open for all the rabble of Edam to come and go at their pleasure."

And forthwith he locked his lodge gates and bought the largest mastiff he could obtain. The castle stood on an island rather more than a mile long, a little below the mansion house. A wooden bridge led over the deeper, narrower, and more rapid branch of the Edam River from the direction of the abbey and town. Across the broader and shallower branch there could be traced, from the house of Windy Standard, the remains of an ancient causeway. This, in the place where the stream was to be crossed, had become a series of stepping-stones over which Hugh John and Priscilla could go at a run (without falling in and wetting themselves more than once in three or four times), but which still constituted an impregnable barrier to the short fat legs of Toady Lion – who usually stood on the shore and proclaimed his woes to the world at large till somebody carried him over and deposited him on the castle island.

Affairs were in this unsettled condition when, at twelve years of age, Hugh John ceased to be Hugh John, and became, without, however, losing his usual surname of Smith, one of the august and imperial race of the Buonapartes.

It was a clear June evening, the kind of night when the whole landscape seems to have been newly swept, washed down, and generally spring-cleaned. All nature spoke peace to Janet Sheepshanks, housekeeper, nurse, and general responsible female head of the house of Windy Standard, when a procession came towards her across the stepping-stones over the broad Edam water from the direction of the castle island. Never had such a disreputable sight presented itself to the eyes of Janet Sheepshanks. At once douce and severe, sharp-tongued and covertly affectionate, she represented the authority of a father who was frequently absent from them, and the memory of a dead mother which remained to the three children in widely different degrees. To Priscilla her mother was a loving being, gracious alike by the tender sympathy of her voice and by the magic of a touch which healed all childish troubles with the kiss of peace upon the place "to make it well." To Hugh John she had been a confidant to whom he could rush, eager and dishevelled, with the tale of the glorious defeat of some tin enemy (for even in those prehistoric days Hugh John had been a soldier), and who, smoothing back his ruffled hair, was prepared to join as eagerly as himself in all his tiny triumphs. But to Toady Lion, though he hushed the shrill persistence of his treble to a reverent murmur when he talked of "muvver," she was only an imagination, fostered mostly by Priscilla – his notion of motherhood being taken from his rough-handed loving Janet Sheepshanks; while the tomb in the village churchyard was a place to which he had no desire to accompany his mother, and from whose gloomy precincts he sought to escape as soon as possible.

CHAPTER V

THE DECLARATION OF WAR

BUT, meanwhile, Janet Sheepshanks stands at the end of the stepping-stones, and Janet is hardly a person to keep waiting anywhere near the house of Windy Standard.

Over the stepping-stones came as leader Priscilla Smith, her head thrown back, straining in every nerve with the excitement of carrying Sir Toady Lion, whose scratched legs and shoeless feet dangled over the stream. Immediately beneath her, and wading above the knee in the rush of the water, there staggered through the shallows Hugh John, supporting his sister with voice and hand – or, as he would have said, "boosting her up" whenever she swayed riverward with her burden, pushing her behind when she hesitated, and running before to offer his back as an additional stepping-stone when the spaces were wide between the boulders.

Janet Sheepshanks waited grimly for her charges on the bank, and her eyes seemed to deceive her, words to fail her, as the children came nearer. Never had such a sight been seen near the decent house of Windy Standard. Miss Priscilla and her pinafore were represented by a ragged tinkler's lass with a still more ragged frill about her neck. Her cheeks and hands were as variously scratched as if she had fallen into a whole thicket of brambles. Her face, too, was pale, and the tatooed places showed bright scarlet against the whiteness of her skin. She had lost a shoe, and her dress was ripped to the knee by a great ragged triangular tear, which flapped wet about her ankles as she walked.

Sir Toady Lion was somewhat less damaged, but still showed manifold signs of rough usage. His lace collar, the pride of Janet Sheepshanks' heart, was torn nearly off his shoulders, and now hung jagged and unsightly down his back. Several buttons of his well-ordered tunic were gone, and as to his person he was mud as far above the knees as could be seen without turning him upside down.

But Hugh John – words are vain to describe the plight of Hugh John. One eye was closed, and began to be discoloured, taking on above the cheekbone the shot green and purple of a half-ripe plum. His lip was cut, and a thin thread of scarlet stealing down his brow told of a broken head. What remained of his garments presented a ruin more complete, if less respectable, than the ancient castle of the Windy Standard. Neither shoe nor shoe-string, neither stocking nor collar, remained intact upon him. On his bare legs were the marks of cruel kicks, and for ease of transport he carried the *débris* of his jacket under his arm. He had not the remotest idea where his cap had gone to.

No wonder that Janet Sheepshanks awaited this sorry procession with a grim tightening of the lips, or that her hand quivered with the desire of punishment, even while her kind and motherly heart yearned to be busy repairing damages and binding up the wounded. Of this feeling, however, it was imperative that for the present, in the interests of discipline, she should show nothing.

It was upon Priscilla, as the eldest in years and senior responsible officer in charge, that Janet first turned the vials of her wrath.

"Eh, Priscilla Smith, but ye are a ba-a-ad, bad lassie. Ye should ha'e your bare back slashit wi' nettles! Where ha'e ye been, and what ha'e ye done to these twa bairns? Ye shall be marched straight to your father, and if he doesna gar ye loup when ye wad raither stand still, and claw where ye are no yeuky, he will no be doing his duty to the Almichty, and to your puir mither that's lang syne in her restin' grave in the kirk-yaird o' Edom."

By which fervent address in her native tongue, Janet meant that Mr. Smith would be decidedly spoiling the child if on this occasion he spared the rod. Janet could speak good enough formal English when she chose, for instance to her master on Sabbath, or to the minister on visitation days; but whenever she was excited she returned to that vigorous ancient Early English which some miscall a dialect, and of which she had a noble and efficient command.

To Janet's attack, Priscilla answered not a word either of explanation or apology. She recognised that the case had gone far beyond that. She only set Sir Toady Lion on his feet, and bent down to brush the mud from his tunic with her usual sisterly gesture. Janet Sheepshanks thrust her aside without ceremony.

"My wee man," she said, "what have they done to you?"

Toady Lion began volubly, and in his usual shrill piping voice, to make an accusation against certain bad boys who had "hit him," and "hurted him," and "kicked him." And now when at last he was safely delivered and lodged in the well-proven arms of Janet Sheepshanks his tears flowed apace, and made clean furrows down the woebegone grubbiness of his face.

Priscilla walked by Janet's side, white and silent, nerving herself for the coming interview. At ordinary times Janet Sheepshanks was terrible enough, and her word law in all the precincts of Windy Standard. But Priscilla knew that she must now face the anger of her father; and so, with this in prospect, the railing accusations of her old nurse scarcely so much as reached her ears.

Hugh John, stripped of all military pomp, limped behind – a short, dry, cheerless sob shaking him at intervals. But in reality this was more the protest of ineffectual anger than any concession to unmanly weakness.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST BLOOD

TEN minutes later, and without, as Jane Sheepshanks said, "so muckle as a sponge or a brush-and-comb being laid upon them," the three stood before their father. Silently Janet had introduced them, and now as silently she stood aside to listen to the evidence – and, as she put it, "keep the maister to his duty, and mind him o' his responsibilities to them that's gane."

Janet Sheepshanks never forgot that she had been maid for twenty years to the dead mother of the children, nor that she had received "the bits o' weans" at her hand as a dying charge. She considered herself, with some reason, to be the direct representative of the missing parent, and referred to Priscilla, Toady Lion, and Hugh John as "my bairns," just as, in moments of affection, she would still speak to them of "my bonnie lassie your mither," as if the dead woman were still one of her flock.

For a full minute Mr. Picton Smith gazed speechless at the spectacle before him. He had been writing something that crinkled his brow and compressed his lips, and at the patter of the children's feet in the passage outside his door, as they ceremoniously marshalled themselves to enter, he had turned about on his great office chair with a smile of expectation and anticipation. The door opened, and Janet Sheepshanks pushed in first Sir Toady Lion, still voluble and calling for vengeance on the "bad, bad boys at the castle that had striked him and hurted his dear Prissy." Priscilla herself stood white-lipped and dumb, and through the awful silence pulsed the dry, recurrent, sobbing catch in the throat of Hugh John.

Mr. Picton Smith was a stern man, whose great loss had caused him to shut up the springs of his tenderness from the world. But they flowed the sweeter and the rarer underneath; and though his grave and dignified manner daunted his children on the occasion of any notable evil-doing, they had no reason to be afraid of him.

"Well, what is the meaning of this?" he said, his face falling into a greyer and graver silence at the sound of Hugh John's sobs, and turning to Priscilla for explanation.

Meanwhile Sir Toady Lion was pursuing the subject with his usual shrill alacrity.

"Be quiet, sir," said his father. "I will hear you all one by one, but let Priscilla begin – she is the eldest."

"We went to the castle after dinner, over by the stepping-stones," began Priscilla, fingering nervously the frill of the torn pinafore about her throat, "and when we got to the castle we found out that our pet lamb Donald had come after us by the ford; and he was going everywhere about the castle, trying to rub his bell off his neck on the gate-posts and on the stones at the corners."

"Yes, and I stood on a rock, and Donald he butted me over behind!" came the voice of Sir Toady Lion in shrill explanation of his personal share in the adventure.

"And then we played on the grass in the inside of the castle. Toady Lion and I were plaiting daisy-chains and garlands for Donald, and Hugh John was playing at being the Prisoner of Chillyon: he had tied himself to the gate-post with a rope."

"'Twasn't," muttered Hugh John, who was a stickler for accuracy; "it was a plough-chain!"

"And it rattled," added Sir Toady Lion, not to be out of the running.

"And just when we were playing nicely, a lot of horrid boys from the town came swarming and clambering in. They had run over the bridge and climbed the gate, and then they began calling us names and throwing mud. So Hugh John said he would tell on them."

"Didn't," interrupted Hugh John indignantly. "I said I'd knock the heads off them if they didn't stop and get out; and they only laughed and said things about father. So I hit one of them with a stone."

"Then," continued Priscilla, gaining confidence from a certain curious spark of light which began to burn steadily in her father's eyes, "after Hugh John threw the stone, the horrid boys all came and said that they would kill us, and that we had no business there anyway."

"They frowned me down the well, and I went splash! Yes, indeedy!" interrupted Toady Lion, who had imagination.

"Then Donald, our black pet lamb, that is, came into the court, and they all ran away after him and caught him. First he knocked down one or two of them, and then they put a rope round his neck and began to take rides on his back."

"Yes, and he bleated and 'kye-kyed' just feeiful!" whimpered Toady Lion, beginning to weep all over again at the remembrance.

But the Smith of the imperial race only clenched his torn hands and looked at his bruised knuckles.

"So Hugh John said he would kill them if they did not let Donald go, and that he was a soldier. But they only laughed louder, and one of them struck him across the lip with a stick – I know him, he's the butch – "

"Shut up, Pris!" shouted Hugh John, with sudden fierceness, "it's dasht-mean to tell names."

"Be quiet, sir," said his father severely; "let your sister finish her story in her own way."

But for all that there was a look of some pride on his face. At that moment Mr. Picton Smith was not sorry to have Hugh John for a son.

"Well," said Priscilla, who had no such scruples as to telling on her enemies, "I won't tell if you say not. But that was the boy who hurt Donald the worst."

"Well, I smashed him for that!" muttered Napoleon Smith.

"And then when Hugh John saw them dragging Donald away and heard him bleating – "

"And 'kye-kying' big, big tears, big as cherries!" interjected Toady Lion, who considered every narrative incomplete to which he did not contribute.

"He was overcome with rage and anger" – at this point Priscilla began to talk by the book, the dignity of the epic tale working on her – "and he rushed upon them fearlessly, though they were ten to one; and they all struck him and kicked him. But Hugh John fought like a lion."

"Yes, like Wichard Toady Lion," cried the namesake of that hero, "and I helped him and bited a bad boy on the leg, and didn't let go though he kicked and hurted feeiful! Yes, indeedy!"

"And I went to their assistance and fought as Hugh John showed me. And – I forget the rest," said Priscilla, her epic style suddenly failing her. Also she felt she must begin to cry very soon, now the strain was over. So she made haste to finish. "But it was dreadful, and they swore, and said they would cut Donald's throat. And one boy took out a great knife and said he knew how to do it. He was the butch – "

"Shut up, Pris! Now don't you dare!" shouted Hugh John, in his most warning tones.

"And when Hugh John rushed in to stop him, he hit him over the head with a stick, and Hugh John fell down. And, oh! I thought he was dead, and I didn't know what to do" (Priscilla was crying in good earnest now); "and I ran to him and tried to lift him up. But I could not – he was so wobbly and soft."

"I bited the boy's leg. It was dood. I bited hard!" interrupted Toady Lion, whose mission had been vengeance.

"And when I looked up again they had taken away p-p-poor Donald," Priscilla went on spasmodically between her tears, "and I think they killed him because he belonged to you, and – they said he had no business there! Oh, they were such horrid cruel boys, and much bigger than us. And I can't bear that Don should have his throat cut. I was promised that he should never be sold for mutton, but only clipped for wool. And he had such a pretty throat to hang daisy-chains on, and was such a dear, dear thing."

"I don't think they would dare to kill him," said Mr. Smith gravely; "besides, they could not lift him over the gate. I will send at once and see. In fact I will go myself!"

There was only anger against the enemy now, and no thought of chastisement of his own in the heart of Mr. Picton Smith. He was rising to reach out his hand to his riding-whip, when General Napoleon Smith, who, like most great makers of history, had taken little part in the telling of it, created a diversion which put all thought of immediate action out of his father's head. He had been standing up, shoulders squared, arms dressed to his side, head erect, as he had seen Sergeant Steel do when he spoke to his Colonel. Once or twice he had swayed slightly, but the heart of the Buonapartes, which beat bravely in his bosom, brought him up again all standing. Nevertheless he grew even whiter and whiter, till, all in a moment, he gave a little lurch forward, checked himself, and again looked straight before him. Then he sobbed out once suddenly and helplessly, said "I couldn't help getting beaten, father – there were too many of them!" and fell over all of a piece on the hearthrug.

At which his father's face grew very still and angry as he gathered the great General gently in his arms and carried him upstairs to his own little white cot.

CHAPTER VII

THE POOR WOUNDED HUSSAR

IT is small wonder that Mr. Picton Smith was full of anger. His castle had been invaded and desecrated, his authority as proprietor defied, his children insulted and abused. As a magistrate he felt bound to take notice both of the outrage and of the theft of his property. As a father he could not easily forget the plight in which his three children had appeared before him.

But in his schemes of vengeance he reckoned without that distinguished military officer, General-Field-Marshal Napoleon Smith. For this soldier had been promoted on his bed of sickness. He had read somewhere that in his profession (as in most others) success quite often bred envy and neglect, but that to the unsuccessful, promotion and honour were sometimes awarded as a sort of consolation sweepstakes. So, having been entirely routed and plundered by the enemy, it came to Hugh John in the watches of the night – when, as he put it, "his head was hurting like fun" that it was time for him to take the final step in his own advancement.

So on the next morning he announced the change in his name and style to his army as it filed in to visit him. The army was on the whole quite agreeable.

"But I'm afraid I shall never remember all that, Mr. General-Field-Marshal Napoleon Smith!" said Priscilla.

"Well, you'd better!" returned the wounded hero, as truculently as he could for the bandages and the sticking-plaster, in which he was swathed after the fashion of an Egyptian mummy partially unwrapped.

"What a funny smell!" piped Toady Lion. "Do field-marshals *all* smell like that?"

"Get out, silly!" retorted the wounded officer. "Don't you know that's the stuff they rub on the wounded when they have fought bravely? That's arnicay!"

"And what do they yub on them when they don't fight bravely?" persisted Toady Lion, who had had enough of fighting, and who in his heart was resolved that the next time he would "yun away" as hard as he could, a state of mind not unusual after the *zip-zip* of bullets is heard for the first time.

"First of all they catch them and kick them for being cowards. Then they shoot at them till they are dead; and may the Lord have mercy on their souls! Amen!" said General Smith, mixing things for the information and encouragement of Sir Toady Lion.

Presently the children were called out to go and play, and the wounded hero was left alone. His head ached so that he could not read. Indeed, in any case he could not, for the room was darkened with the intention of shielding his damaged eyes from the light. General Napoleon could only watch the flies buzzing round and round, and wish in vain that he had a fly-flapper at the end of a pole in order to "plop" them, as he used to do all over the house in the happy days before Janet Sheepshanks discovered what made the walls and windows so horrid with dead and dying insects.

"Yes; the squashy ones *were* rather streaky!" had been the words in which Hugh John admitted his guilt, after the pole and leathern flapper were taken from him and burned in the washhouse fire.

Thus in the semi-darkness Hugh John lay watching the flies with the stealthy intentness of a Red Indian scalper on the trail. It was sad to lie idly in bed, so bewrapped and swathed that (as he mournfully remarked), "if one of the brutes were to settle on your nose, you could only wait for him to crawl up, and then snatch at him with your left eyelid."

Suddenly the disabled hero bethought himself of something. First, after listening intently so as to be quite sure that "the children" were outside the bounds of the house, the wounded general raised himself on his elbow. But the effort hurt him so much that involuntarily he said "Ouch!" and sank back again on the pillow.

"Crikey, but don't I smell just!" he muttered, when, after one breath of purer air, he sank back into the pool of arnica vapour. "I suppose I'll have to howl out for Janet. What a swot!"

"Janet! – Ja-a-a-a-net!" he shouted, and sighed a sigh of relief to find that at least there was one part of him neither bandaged nor drowned in arnica.

"Deil tak' the laddie!" cried Janet, who went about her work all day with one ear cocked toward the chamber of her brave sick soldier; "what service is there in taking the rigging aff the hoose wi' your noise? Did ye think I was doon at Edam Cross? What do ye want, callant, that ye deafen my auld lugs like that? I never heard sic a laddie!"

But General Smith did not answer any of these questions. He well knew Janet's tone of simulated anger when she was "putting it on."

"Go and fetch *it*!" he said darkly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAMILIAR SPIRIT

NOW there was a skeleton in the cupboard of General Napoleon Smith. No distinguished family can be respectable without at least one such. But that of the new field-marshal was particularly dark and disgraceful.

Very obediently Janet Sheepshanks vanished from the sick-room, and presently returned with an oblong parcel, which she handed to the hero of battles.

"Thank you," he said; "are you sure that the children are out?"

"They are sailing paper boats on the mill-dam," said Janet, going to the window to look.

Hugh John sighed a sigh. He wished he could sail boats on the mill-dam.

"I hope every boat will go down the mill lade, and get mashed in the wheel," he said pleasantly.

"For shame, Master Hugh!" replied Janet Sheepshanks, shaking her head at him, but conscious that he was exactly expressing her own mind, if she had been lying sick a-bed and had been compelled to listen to some other housekeeper jingling keys that once were hers, ransacking her sacredst repositories, and keeping in order the menials of the house.

Hugh John proceeded cautiously to unwrap his family skeleton. Presently from the folds of tissue paper a very aged and battered "Sambo" emerged. Now a "Sambo" is a black woolly-haired negro doll of the fashion of many years ago. This specimen was dressed in simple and airy fashion in a single red shell jacket. As to the rest, he was bare and black from head to foot. Janet called him "that horrid object"; but, nevertheless, he was precious in the eyes of Hugh John, and therefore in hers.

Though twelve years of age, he still liked to carry on dark and covert intercourse with his ancient "Sambo." In public, indeed, he preached, in season and out of season, against the folly and wickedness of dolls. No one but a lassie or a "lassie-boy" would do such a thing. He laughed at Priscilla for cleaning up her doll's kitchen once a week, and for organising afternoon tea-parties for her quiet harem. But secretly he would have liked very well to see Sambo sit at that bounteous board.

Nevertheless, he instructed Toady Lion every day with doctrine and reproof that it was "only for girls" to have dolls. And knowing well that none of his common repositories were so remote and sacred as long to escape Priscilla's unsleeping eye, or the more stormy though fitful curiosity of Sir Toady Lion, Hugh John had been compelled to take his ancient nurse and ever faithful friend Janet into his confidence. So Sambo dwelt in the housekeeper's pantry and had two distinct odours. One side of him smelt of paraffin, and the other of soft soap, which, to a skilled detective, might have revealed the secret of his dark abode.

But let us not do our hero an injustice.

It was not exactly as a doll that General Smith considered Sambo. By no means so, indeed. Sometimes he was a distinguished general who came to take orders from his chief, sometimes an awkward private who needed to be drilled, and then knocked spinning across the floor for inattention to orders. For, be it remembered, it was the custom in the army of Field-Marshal-General Smith for the Commander-in-Chief to drill the recruits with his own voice, and in the by no means improbable event of their proving stupid, to knock them endwise with his own august hand.

But it was as Familiar Spirit, and in the pursuit of occult divination, that General Napoleon most frequently resorted to Sambo. He had read all he could find in legend and history concerning that gruesomely attractive goblin, clothed all in red, which the wicked Lord Soulis kept in an oaken chest in a castle not so far from his own father's house of Windy Standard.

And Hugh John saw no reason why Sambo should not be the very one. Spirits do not die. It is a known fact that they are fond of their former haunts. What, then, could be clearer? Sambo was evidently Lord Soulis' Red Imp risen from the dead. Was Sambo not black? The devil was black. Did

Sambo not wear a red coat? Was not the demon of the oaken chest attired in flaming scarlet, when all cautiously he lifted the lid at midnight and looked wickedly out upon his master?

Yet the General was conscious that Sambo Soulis was a distinct disappointment in the part of familiar spirit. He would sit silent, with his head hanging idiotically on one side, when he was asked to reveal the deepest secrets of the future, instead of toeing the line and doing it. Nor was it recorded in the chronicles of Soulis that the original demon of the chest had had his nose "bashed flat" by his master, as Hugh John vigorously expressed the damaged appearance of his own familiar.

Worse than all, Hugh John had tried to keep Sambo in his rabbit-box. But not only did he utterly fail to put his "fearful head, crowned with a red night-cap" over the edge of the hutch at the proper time – as, had he been of respectable parentage, he would not have failed to do, but, in addition, he developed in his close quarters an animal odour so pungent and unprofitable that Janet Sheepshanks refused to admit him into the store-cupboard till he had been thoroughly fumigated and disinfected. So for a whole week Sambo Soulis swung ignominiously by the neck from the clothes line, and Hugh John went about in fear of the questioning of the children or of the confiscation by his father of his well-beloved but somewhat unsatisfactory familiar spirit.

It was in order to consult him on a critical point of doctrine and practice that Hugh John had now sent for Sambo Soulis.

He propped him up before him against a pillow, on which he sat bent forward at an acute angle from the hips, as if ready to pounce upon his master and rend him to pieces so soon as the catechism should be over.

"Look here," said General-Field-Marshal Smith to the oracle, "supposing the governor tells me to split on Nipper Donnan, the butcher boy, will it be dasht-mean if I do?"

Sambo Soulis, being disturbed by the delicacy of the question or perhaps by the wriggling of Hugh John upon his pillow, only lurched drivellingly forward.

"Sit up and answer," cried his master, "or else I'll hike you out of that pretty quick, for a silly old owl!"

And with his least bandaged hand he gave Sambo a sound cuff on the side of his venerable battered head, before propping him up at a new angle with his chin on his knees.

"Now speak up, Soulis," said General Smith; "I ask you would it be dasht-mean?"

The oracle was understood to joggle his chin and goggle his eyes. He certainly did the latter.

"I thought so," said Soulis' master, as is usual in such cases, interpreting the reply oracular according to his liking. "But look here, how are we to get back Donald unless we split? Would it not be all right to split just to get Donald back?"

Sambo Soulis wagged his head again. This time his master looked a little more serious.

"I suppose you are right," he said pensively, "but if it would be dasht-mean to split, we must just try to get him back ourselves – that is, if the beasts have not cut his throat, as they said they would."

CHAPTER IX

PUT TO THE QUESTION

IN the chaste retirement of his sick room the Field-Marshal had just reached this conclusion, when he heard a noise in the hall. There was a sound of the gruff unmirthful voices of grown-ups, a scuffling of feet, a planting of whips and walking-sticks on the zinc-bottomed hall-stand, and then, after a pause which meant drinks, heavy footsteps in the passage which led to the hero's chamber.

Hugh John snatched up Sambo Soulis and thrust him deep beneath the bedclothes, where he could readily push him over the end with his toes, if it should chance to be "the doctor-beast" come to uncover him and "fool with the bandages." I have said enough to show that the General was not only frankly savage in sentiment, but resembled his great imperial namesake in being grateful only when it suited him.

Before General Napoleon had his toes fairly settled over the back of Sambo Soulis' neck, so as to be able to remove him out of harm's way on any sudden alarm, the door opened and his father came in, ushering two men, the first of whom came forward to the bedside in an easy, kindly manner, and held out his hand.

"Do you know me?" he said, giving Hugh John's second sorest hand such a squeeze that the wounded hero was glad it was not the very sorest one.

"Yes," replied the hero promptly, "you are Sammy Carter's father. I can jolly well lick –"

"Hugh John," interrupted his father severely, "remember what you are saying to Mr. Davenant Carter."

"Well, anyway, I *can* lick Sammy Carter till he's dumb-sick!" muttered the General between his teeth, as he avoided the three pairs of eyes that were turned upon him.

"Oh, let him say just what he likes!" said Mr. Davenant Carter jovially. "Sammy is the better of being licked, if that is what the boy was going to say. I sometimes try my hand at it myself with some success."

The other man who had come in with Mr. Smith was a thick-set fellow of middle height, with a curious air of being dressed up in somebody else's clothes. Yet they fitted him very well. He wore on his face (in addition to a slight moustache) an expression which somehow made Hugh John think guiltily of all the orchards he had ever visited along with Toady Lion and Sammy Carter's sister Cissy, who was "no end of a nice girl" in Hugh John's estimation.

"This, Hugh," said his father, with a little wave of his hand, "is Mr. Mant, the Chief Constable of the county. Mr. Carter and he have come to ask you a few questions, which you will answer at once."

"I won't be dasht-mean!" muttered Napoleon Smith to himself.

"What's that?" ejaculated Mr. Smith, catching the echo of his son's rumble of dissent.

"Only my leg that hurted," said the hypocritical hero of battles.

"Don't you think we should have the other children here?" said Mr. Chief Constable Mant, speaking for the first time in a gruff, move-on-there voice.

"Certainly," assented Mr. Smith, going to the door. "Janet!"

"Yes, sir!"

The answer came from immediately behind the door.

The Field-Marshal's brow darkened, or rather it would have done so if there had been no white bandages over it. This is the correct expression anyhow – though ordinary brows but seldom behave in this manner.

"Prissy's all right," he thought to himself, "but if that little fool Toady Lion –"

And he clenched his second sorest hand under the clothes, and kicked Sambo Soulis to the foot of the bed in a way which augured but little mercy to Sir Toady Lion if, after all his training, he should turn out "dasht-mean" in the hour of trial.

Presently the other two children were pushed in at the door, Toady Lion trying a bolt at the last moment, which Janet Sheepshanks easily foiled by catching at the slack of his trousers behind, while Prissy stood holding her hands primly as if in Sunday-school class. Both afforded to the critical eye of Hugh John complete evidence that they had only just escaped from the Greater Pain of the comb and soaped flannel-cloth of Janet Sheepshanks. Prissy's curls were still wet and smoothed out, and Toady Lion was trying in vain to rub the yellow soap out of his eyes.

So at the headquarters of its general, the army of Windy Standard formed up. Sir Toady Lion wished to get within supporting distance of Prissy, and accordingly kept snuggling nearer all the time, so that he could get a furtive hold of her skirts at awkward places in the examination. This he could do the more easily that General Field-Marshal Smith was prevented by the bandages over his right eye, and also by the projecting edges of the pillow, from seeing Toady Lion's left hand.

"Now, Priscilla," began her father, "tell Mr. Davenant Carter and Mr. Mant what happened in the castle, and the names of any of the bad boys who stole your pet lamb."

"Wasn't no lamb – Donald was a sheep, and he could fight," began Toady Lion, without relevance, but with his usual eagerness to hear the sound of his own piping voice. In his zeal he took a step forward and so brought himself on the level of the eye of his general, who from the pillow darted upon him a look so freezing that Sir Toady Lion instantly fell back into the ranks, and clutched Prissy's skirt with such energy as almost to stagger her severe deportment.

"Now," said the Chief Constable of Bordershire, "tell me what were the names of the assailants."

He was listening to the tale as told by Prissy with his note-book ready in his hand, occasionally biting at the butt of the pencil, and anon wetting the lead in his mouth, under the mistaken idea that by so doing he improved its writing qualities.

"I think," began Prissy, "that they were –"

"*A-chew!*" came from the bed and from under the bandages with a sudden burst of sound. Field-Marshal Napoleon Smith had sneezed. That was all.

But Prissy started. She knew what it meant. It was the well-known signal not to commit herself under examination.

Her father looked round at the open windows.

"Are you catching cold with the draught, Hugh John?" he asked kindly.

"I think I have a little cold," said the wily General, who did not wish all the windows to be promptly shut.

"Don't know all their names, but the one that hurted me was –" began Toady Lion.

But who the villain was will never be known, for at that moment the bedclothes became violently disturbed immediately in front of Sir Toady Lion's nose. A fearful black countenance nodded once at him and disappeared.

"Black Sambo!" gasped Toady Lion, awed by the terrible appearance, and falling back from the place where the wizard had so suddenly appeared.

"What did I understand you to say, little boy?" said Mr. Mant, with his pencil on his book.

"Ow – it was Black Sambo!" Toady Lion almost screamed. Mr. Mant gravely noted the fact.

"What in the world does he mean?" asked Mr. Mant, casting his eyes searchingly from Prissy to General Napoleon and back again.

"He means 'Black Sambo'!" said Prissy, devoting herself strictly to facts, and leaving the Chief Constable to his proper business of interpreting them.

"What is his other name?" said Mr. Mant.

"Soulis!" said General Smith from the bed.

The three gentlemen looked at each other, smiled, and shook their heads.

"What did I tell you?" said Mr. Davenant Carter. "Try as I will, I cannot get the simplest thing out of my Sammy and Cissy if they don't choose to tell."

Nevertheless Mr. Smith, being a sanguine man and with little experience of children, tried again.

"There is no black boy in the neighbourhood," said Mr. Smith severely; "now tell the truth, children – at once, when I bid you!"

He uttered the last words in a loud and commanding tone.

"Us is telling the troof, father dear," said Toady Lion, in the "coaxy-woaxy" voice which he used when he wanted marmalade from Janet or a ride on the saddle from Mr. Picton Smith.

"Perhaps the boy had blackened his face to deceive the eye," suggested Mr. Mant, with the air of one familiar from infancy with the tricks and devices of the evil-minded of all ages.

"Was the ringleader's face blackened? – Answer at once!" said Mr. Smith sternly.

The General extracted his bruised and battered right hand from under the clothes and looked at it.

"I think so," he said, "leastways some has come off on my knuckles!"

Mr. Davenant Carter burst into a peal of jovial mirth.

"Didn't I tell you? – It isn't a bit of use badgering children when they don't want to tell. Let's go over to the castle."

And with that the three gentlemen went out, while Napoleon Smith, Prissy, and Sir Toady Lion were left alone.

The General beckoned them to his bedside with his nose – quite an easy thing to do if you have the right kind of nose, which Hugh John had.

"Now look here," he said, "if you'd told, I'd have jolly well flattened you when I got up. 'Tisn't our business to tell p'leecemen things."

"That wasn't a p'leeceman," said Sir Toady Lion, "hadn't no shiny buttons."

"That's the worst kind," said the General in a low, hissing whisper; "all the same you stood to it like bricks, and now I'm going to get well and begin on the campaign at once."

"Don't you be greedy-teeth and eat it all yourself!" interjected Toady Lion, who thought that the campaign was something to eat, and that it sounded good.

"What are you going to do?" said Prissy, who had a great belief in the executive ability of her brother.

"I know their secret hold," said General-Field-Marshal Smith grandly, "and in the hour of their fancied security we will fall upon them and –"

"And what?" gasped Prissy and Toady Lion together, awaiting the revelation of the horror.

"Destroy them!" said General Smith, in a tone which was felt by all parties to be final.

He laid himself back on his pillow and motioned them haughtily away. Prissy and Sir Toady Lion retreated on tiptoe, lest Janet should catch them and send them to the parlour – Prissy to read her chapter, and her brother along with her to keep him out of mischief.

And so the great soldier was left to his meditations in the darkened hospital chamber.

CHAPTER X

A SCOUTING ADVENTURE

GENERAL SMITH, having now partially recovered, was mustering his forces and arranging his plans of campaign. He had spoken no hasty word when he boasted that he knew the secret haunt of the robbers. For, some time before, during a brief but glorious career as a pirate, he had been brought into connection with Nipper Donnan, the strongest butcher's boy of the town, and the ringleader in all mischief, together with Joe Craig, Nosie Cuthbertson, and Billy M'Robert, his ready followers.

Hugh John had once been a member of the Comanche Cowboys, as Nipper Donnan's band was styled; but a disagreement about the objects of attack had hastened a rupture, and the affair of the castle was but the last act in a hostility long latent. In fact the war was always simmering, and was ready to boil over on the slightest provocation. For when Hugh John found that his father's orchards, his father's covers and hencoops were to be the chief prey (being safer than the farmers' yards, where there were big dogs always loose, and the town streets, where "bobbies" mostly congregated), he struck. He reflected that one day all these things would belong to himself. He would share with Prissy and Sir Toady Lion, of course; but still mainly they would belong to him. Why then plunder them now? The argument was utilitarian but sufficient.

Though he did not mention the fact to Prissy or Sir Toady Lion, Hugh John was perfectly well acquainted with the leaders in the fray at the castle. He knew also that there were motives for the enmity of the Comanche Cowboys other and deeper than the town rights to the possession of the Castle of Windy Standard.

It was night when Hugh John cautiously pushed up the sash of his window and looked out. A few stars were high up aloft wandering through the grey-blue fields of the summer night, as it were listlessly and with their hands in their pockets. A corn-crake cried in the meadow down below, steadily, remorselessly, like the aching of a tooth. A white owl passed the window with an almost noiseless whiff of fluffy feathers. Hugh John sniffed the cool pungent night smell of the dew on the near wet leaves and the distant mown grass. It always went to his head a little, and was the only thing which made him regret that he was to be a soldier. Whenever he smelt it, he wanted to be an explorer of far-off lands, or an honest poacher – even a gamekeeper might do, in case the other vocations proved unattainable.

Hugh John got out of the window slowly, leaving Sir Toady Lion asleep and the door into Prissy's room wide open. He dropped easily and lightly upon the roof of the wash-house, and, steadying himself upon the tiles, he slid down till he heard Cæsar, the black Newfoundland, stir in his kennel. Then he called him softly, so that he might not bark. He could not take him with him to-night, for though Cæsar was little more than a puppy his step was like that of a cow, and when released he went blundering end on through the woods like a festive avalanche. Hugh John's father, for reasons of his own, persisted in calling him "The Potwalloping Elephant."

So, having assured himself that Cæsar would not bark, the boy dropped to the ground, taking the roof of the dog-kennel on the way. Cæsar stirred, rolled himself round, and came out breathing hard, and thump-thumping Hugh John's legs with his thick tail, with distinctly audible blows.

Then when he understood that he was not to be taken, he sat down at the extremity of his chain and regarded his master wistfully through the gloom with his head upon one side; and as Hugh John took his way down the avenue, Cæsar moaned a little, intoning his sense of injury and disappointment as the parson does a litany.

At the first turn of the road Hugh John had just time to dart aside into the green, acrid-scented, leathery-leaved shrubbery, where he lay crouched with his hands on his knees and his head thrust forward, while Tom the keeper went slowly by with his arm about Jane Housemaid's waist.

"Aha!" chuckled Hugh John; "wait till the next time you won't lend me the ferret, Tom Cannon! O-ho, Jane Housemaid, will you tell my father the next time I take your dust scoop out to the sand-hole to help dig trenches? I think not!"

And Hugh John hugged himself in his pleasure at having a new weapon so admirably double-barrelled. He looked upon the follies of love, as manifested in the servants' hall and upon the outskirts of the village, as so much excellent material by which a wise man would not fail to profit. Janet Sheepshanks was very severe on such delinquencies, and his father – well, Hugh John felt that Tom Cannon would not wish to appear before his master in such a connection. He had a vague remembrance of a certain look he had once seen on his father's face when Allan Chestney, the head-keeper, came out from Mr. Picton Smith's workroom with these words ringing in his ear, "Now, sir, you will do as I tell you, or I will give you a character —*but*, such a character as you will carry through the world with you, and which will be buried with you when you die."

Allan was now married to Jemima, who had once been cook at the house of Windy Standard. Hugh John went over to their cottage often to eat her delicious cakes; and when Allan came in from the woods, his wife ordered him to take off his dirty boots before he entered her clean kitchen. Then Allan Chestney would re-enter and play submissively and furtively with Patty Pans, their two-year-old child, shifting his chair obediently whenever Cook Jemima told him. But all the same, Hugh John felt dimly that these things would not have happened, save for the look on his father's face when Allan Chestney went in to see him that day in the grim pine-boarded workroom.

So, much lightened in his mind by his discovery, Hugh John took his way down the avenue. At the foot of it, and before he came to the locked white gate and the cottage of Betty, he turned aside through a copse, over a little green patch of sward on which his feet slid smooth as velvet. A hare sat on the edge of this, with her fore-feet in the air. She was for the moment so astonished at Hugh John's appearance that it was an appreciable period of time before she turned, and with a quick, sidelong rush disappeared into the wood. He could hear the sighing rush of the river below him, which took different keys according to the thickness of the tree copses which were folded about it; now singing gaily through the thin birches and rowans; anon humming more hoarsely through the alders; again rustling and whispering mysteriously through the grey shivery poplars; and, last of all, coming up, dull and sullen, through the heavy oak woods, whose broad leaves cover all noises underneath them as a blanket muffles speech.

Hugh John skirted the river till he came to the stepping-stones, which he crossed with easy confidence. He knew them – high, low, Jack, and game, like the roofs of his father's outhouses. He could just as easily have gone across blindfold.

Then he made his way over the wide, yellowish-grey spaces of the castle island, avoiding the copses of willow and dwarf birch, and the sandy-bottomed "bunkers," which ever and anon gleamed up before him like big tawny eyes out of the dusky grey-green of the short grass. After a little the walls of the old castle rose grimly before him, and he could hear the starlings scolding one another sleepily high up in the crevices. A black-cap piped wistfully among the sedges of the watermarsh. Hugh John had often heard that the ruin was haunted, and certainly he always held his breath as he passed it. But now he was on duty, and, if need had been, he would that night have descended to the deepest dungeon, and faced a full Banquo-board of blood-boltered ghosts.

CHAPTER XI

ENEMY'S COUNTRY

HE presently came to the wooden bridge and crossed it. He was now on the outskirts of the town, and in enemy's country. So, more from etiquette than precaution, he took the shelter of a wall, glided through a plantation, among the withy roots of which his foot presently caught in a brass "grin," or rabbit's snare. Hugh John grubbed it up gratefully and pocketed it. He had no objections whatever to spoiling the Egyptians.

He was now in butcher Donnan's pastures, where many fore-doomed sheep, in all the bliss of ignorance, waited their turns to be made into mutton. Very anxiously Hugh John scrutinised each one. He wandered round and round till he had made certain that Donald was not there.

At the foot of the pasture were certain black-pitched wooden sheds set in a square, with a little yard like a church pew in the midst. Somewhere here, he knew, slept Donnan's slaughterman, and it was possible that in this place Donald might be held in captivity.

Now it was an accomplishment of our hero's that he could bleat like any kind of sheep – except perhaps an old tup, for which his voice was as yet too shrill. In happy, idle days he had elaborated a code of signals with Donald, and was well accustomed to communicating with him from his bedroom window. So now he crouched in the dusk of the hedge, and said "Maa-aaa!" in a tone of reproach.

Instantly a little answering bleat came from the black sheds, a sound which made Hugh's heart beat faster. Still he could not be quite sure. He therefore bleated again more pleadingly, and again there came back the answer, choked and feeble indeed, but quite obviously the voice of his own dear Donald. Hugh John cast prudence to the winds. He raced round and climbed the bars into the enclosure, calling loudly, "Donald! Donald!"

But hardly had his feet touched the ground when a couple of dogs flew at him from the corner of the yard, and he had scarcely time to get on the top of a stone wall before they were clamouring and yelping beneath him. Hugh John crouched on his "hunkers" (as he called the posture in which one sits on a wall when hostile dogs are leaping below), and seizing a large coping-stone he dropped it as heavily as he could on the head of the nearer and more dangerous. A howl most lamentable immediately followed. Then a man's voice cried, "Down, Towser! What's the matter, Grip? Sic' them! Good dogs!"

It was the voice of the slaughterman, roused from his slumbers, and in fear of tramps or other midnight marauders upon his master's premises.

Hugh ran on all fours along the wall to the nearest point of the woods, dropped over, and with a leaping, anxious heart sped in the direction of home. He crossed the bridge in safety, but as he ran across the island he could hear the dogs upon the trail and the encouraging shouts of his pursuer. The black looming castle fell swiftly behind him. Now he was at the stepping-stones, over which he seemed to float rather than leap, so completely had fear added to his usual strength wings of swiftness.

But at the farther side the dogs were close upon him. He was obliged to climb a certain low tree, where he had often sat dangling his legs and swinging in the branches while he allowed Prissy to read to him.

The dogs were soon underneath, and he could see them leaping upward with snapping white teeth which gleamed unpleasantly through the darkness. But their furious barking was promptly answered. Hugh John could hear a heavy tread approaching among the dense foliage of the trees. A dark form suddenly appeared in the glade and poised something at its shoulder. – Flash! There came a deafening report, the thresh of leaden drops, a howl of pain from the dogs, and both of them took their way back towards the town with not a few bird shot in their flanks.

Hugh John's heart stood still as the dark figure advanced. He feared it might prove to be his father. Instead it was Tom Cannon, and the brave scout on the tree heaved a sigh of relief.

"Who's up there?" cried the under-keeper gruffly; "come down this moment and show yourself, you dirty poacher, or by Heaven I'll shoot you sitting!"

"All right, Tom, I'm coming as fast as I can," said Hugh John, beginning to clamber down.

"Heavens and earth, Master Hugh – what be you doing here? Whatever will master say?"

"He won't say anything, for he won't know, Tom Cannon," said Hugh John confidently.

"Oh yes, he will," said the keeper. "I won't have you bringing a pack of dogs into my covers at twelve of the clock – blow me if I will!"

"Well, you won't tell my father, anyway!" said Hugh John calmly, dusting himself as well as he could.

"And why not?" asked the keeper indignantly.

"'Cause if you do, I'll tell where I saw you kissing Jane Housemaid an hour ago!"

Now this was at once a guess and an exaggeration. Hugh John had not seen all this, but he felt rather than knew that the permitted arm about Jane Housemaid's waist could have no other culmination. Also he had a vague sense that this was the most irritating thing he could say in the circumstances.

At any rate Tom Cannon fairly gasped with astonishment. A double-jointed word slipped between his teeth, which sounded like "Hang that boy!" At last his seething thoughts found utterance.

"You young imp of Satan – it ain't true, anyway."

"All right, you can tell my father that!" said Hugh John coolly, feeling the strength of his position.

Tom Cannon was not much frightened for himself, but he did not wish to get Jane Housemaid into any trouble, for, as he well knew, that young woman had omitted to ask for leave of absence. So he only said, "All right, it's none of my business if you wander over every acre, and break your neck off every tree on the blame estate. But you'd better be getting home before master comes out and catches you himself! Then you'd eat strap, my lad!"

So having remade the peace, Tom escorted Hugh John back to the dog kennel with great good nature, and even gave him a leg up to the roof above the palace of Cæsar.

Hugh John paused as he put one foot into the bedroom, heavy and yet homelike with the night smell of a sleeping house. Toady Lion had fallen out of bed and lay, still with his blanket wrapped round him like a martial cloak, half under his cot and half on the floor. But this he did every other night. Prissy was breathing quietly in the next room. All was safe.

Hugh John called softly down, "Tom, Tom!"

"What now?" returned the keeper, who had been spying along the top windows to distinguish a certain one dear to his heart.

"I say, Tom – I'll tell Jane Housemaid to-morrow that you're a proper brick."

"Thank'ee, sir!" said Tom, saluting gravely and turning off across the lawn towards the "bothy," where among the pine woods he kept his owl-haunted bachelor quarters.

CHAPTER XII

MOBILISATION

GENERALLY speaking, Hugh John despised Sammy Carter – first, because he could lick him with one hand, and, secondly, because Sammy Carter was a clever boy and could discover ways of getting even without licking him. Clever boys are all cheeky and need hammering. Besides, Sammy Carter was in love with Prissy, and every one knew what that meant. But then Sammy Carter had a sister, Cissy by name, and she was quite a different row of beans.

Furthermore, Sammy Carter read books – a degrading pursuit, unless they had to do with soldiering, and especially with the wars of Napoleon, Hugh John's great ancestor. In addition, Sammy knew every date that was, and would put you right in a minute if you said that Bannockburn happened after Waterloo, or any little thing like that. A disposition so perverse as this could only be cured with a wicket or with Hugh John's foot, and our hero frequently applied both corrections.

But Cissy Carter – ah! now there was a girl if you like. She never troubled about such things. She could not run so fast as Prissy, but then she had a perfect colt's mane of hair, black and glossy, which flew out behind her when she did. Moreover, she habitually did what Hugh John told her, and burned much incense at his shrine, so that modest youth approved of her. It was of her he first thought when he set about organising his army for the assault upon the Black Sheds, where, like Hofer at Mantua, the gallant Donald lay in chains.

But it was written in the chronicles of Oaklands that Cissy Carter could not be allowed over the river without Sammy, so Sammy would have to be permitted to join too. Hugh John resolved that he would keep his eye very sharply upon Prissy and Sammy Carter, for the abandoned pair had been known to compose poetry in the heat of an engagement, and even to read their compositions to one another on the sly. For this misdemeanour Prissy would certainly have been court-martialled, only that her superior officer could not catch her at the time. But the wicked did not wholly escape, for Hugh John tugged her hair afterwards till she cried; whereat Janet Sheepshanks, coming suddenly upon him and cornering him, spanked him till *he* cried. He cried solely as a measure of military necessity, because it was the readiest way of getting Janet to stop, and also because that day Janet wore a new pair of slippers, with heels upon which Hugh John had not been counting. So he cried till he got out of Janet's reach, when he put out his tongue at her and said, "Hum-m! Thought you hurt, didn't you? Well, it just didn't a bit!"

And Sir Toady Lion, who was feeding his second-best wooden horses with wild sand-oats gathered green, remarked, "When I have childwens I sail beat them wif a big boot and tackets in the heel."

Which voiced with great precision Janet Sheepshanks' mood at that moment.

The army of Windy Standard, then, when fully mustered, consisted of General-Field-Marshal Napoleon Smith, Commander-in-Chief and regimental Sergeant-Major (also, on occasions of parade, Big Big-Drummer); Adjutant-General Cissy Carter, promoted to her present high position for always agreeing with her superior officer – a safe rule in military politics; Commissariat-Sergeant Sir Toady Lion, who declined any other post than the care of the provisions, and had to be conciliated; together with Privates Sammy Carter and Prissy Smith. Sammy Carter had formerly been Adjutant, because he had a pony, but gallantly resigned in order to be of the same rank as Prissy, who was the sole member of the force wholly without military ambition.

At the imposing review which was held on the plains of Windy Standard, the Commander-in-Chief insisted on carrying the blue banner himself, as well as the big-big drum, till Sammy Carter, who had not yet resigned, offered him his pony to ride upon. This he did with guile and malice

aforethought, for on the drum being elevated in front of the mounted officer, Polo promptly ran away, and deposited General-Field-Marshal Smith in the horse pond.

But this force, though officered with consummate ability, was manifestly insufficient for the attack upon the Black Sheds. This was well shown by Sammy Carter, who also pointed out that the armies of all ages had never been exclusively composed of those of noble birth. There were, for example, at Bannockburn, the knights, the esquires, the sturdy yeomanry, the spearmen, the bowmen, and the camp-followers. He advised that the stable boys, Mike and Peter, should be approached.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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