

When Might Was Right

A TRUE INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF THE LATE RICHARD JOHN SEDDON.

(By "AJOR.")

AWAY back in the late Seventies, I found myself a midshipman on H.M.S. B— (I can't give you her full name, for reasons which to particularise would be most indiscreet), with two months' leave ashore. Alick, my favourite brother, was then down in Kumara, in the Union Bank, and of course I went straight for him. When I got there, Alick said to me:—"Dick Seddon has had a big row in the Court to-day. Some thirteen foreigners—with big fighting Mack at their head—had jumped his claim, water-race, and dam, and Dick won't give up his rights." "Good!" said I; "tell us the yarn, Alick."

"Well," replied Alick, looking me all over; "I haven't seen you, Jack, for three years, and you are looking darn'd well."

"Stow that," said I, "and fire ahead; I've heard of Dick Seddon at sea." We were sitting in the cosy parlour of the Bank premises, the Bank being closed for the day, and so Alick, filling his briar, commenced:—

"Before Dick went to publichouse keeping here, he owned a water-race, dam, and claim on the lead, and used to work them, but when he got the Queen's Hotel, Seddon-street, he couldn't attend to both, so big Mack and his party watched their chance. Under the mining regulations, you must work your mining privileges; if you don't they are liable to forfeiture in sixty days from the time you cease representing them. Now, Big Mack and his mates knew this quite well, so after the expiration of the allotted time they made application under the abandonment clauses of the Act for cancellation of Dick's rights. It came before Dr. G—in the Warden's Court to-day and Dick appeared as a mining advocate to defend them. But the foreigners proved their case up to the hilt, so the Goldfields Warden had no option in the matter.

"Quoth Dick to the beak: Your Worship has declared my rights forfeited under the abandonment clauses of the Mining Act; yet, with all due respect to you, I do not intend to give them up. Might, in this case, is right, and I'm going to maintain it."

"Mr Seddon," the kindly Warden replied, "if I could fine you in lieu of forfeiture, I would; but the Act is mandatory. All I can do is to penalise you, and I declare those rights and mining privileges forfeited for non-completion of the labour clauses and those men now applying for them to be grantees, as if the land and privileges had never been held under title from the Crown."

"And so Dick went out of the Court," resumed Alick, "very determined. The foreigners followed, and says Big Mack outside: 'Look here Mister Dick, we've beat ye at last.'"

"No, you haven't," cries Dick. "I'll be at that dam to-morrow morning, and if any of you attempt to put a peg or stick inside my boundaries, I'll put him in the dam and drown him."

"Big Mack was a well-known fighting-man; in fact, he was the terror of the West Coast. His six-feet-four of bone, flesh and muscle had never been licked. When he used to get on the 'razzle dazze,' it took four policemen to take him up. Dick knew all about this."

"What's he going to do?" cried I.

"Oh, Dick's going up early." "Let's go up and see him." And so we went up Seddon-street. When we got to the "Queen's" Dick was behind the bar in his shirt-sleeves.

"Hallo, Alick," cries he, cheerily.

"This is Jack," says Alick, indicating me.

"I've heard of you," says Dick, coming round the counter. "I won't ask you young fellows to have anything, but come into the parlour and have some tea."

Mr Seddon looked me all over, and interrogated me about life in the British Navy, and he let fall that some of his own people belonged to it. Presently tea came, and we all had some.

When I got a chance, I said—"Mr Seddon, Alick has been telling me you had a big fight to-day—"

"Liker to have a bigger one to-morrow," laughed Mr Seddon.

"Who's going with you?"

"Never thought about anyone," answered the man who was to be our great statesman later on.

"But you can't fight the lot yourself," cried I, anxiously.

"Going to try very hard," replied our host.

"Let me go with you."

"You. What the dickens could you do?" grinned Dick, glancing down at my unformed four-foot nothing.

"Oh, I've seen a few real good 'uns in our mess-room," cried I.

"Right you are," answered Dick, admiringly; "stay here to-night."

Alick wanted to come, too, but Dick said very decidedly "No," as, of course, the bank wouldn't stand it. "It doesn't matter for Jack there; he can do as he likes, but you know, Alick, I don't want you sacked." Mr Seddon was always fond of young fellows in those days, and frequently went out of his way to keep them straight.

So I dosed down on the sofa, and at 4 o'clock next morning Dick shook me, and he and I had a cup of coffee each, and off we went up through the bush track two miles to the dam. When we got there, Mr Seddon showed me by the grey of dawn his boundary pegs, and over the clay of the apron he drew with a stick a line. Beyond this lay a huge barkless rimu tree, parallel with the dam face.

I sat on the stump, from which this huge dead giant of the forest had been cut, and Dick was coolly sketching out his programme for the coming event, when I, chancing to look down the track, called out gleefully, "Well, here they come, Mr Seddon."

We both looked again, and saw coming up that lone bush track in the still morning of a November day, armed with pick and shovel, axe, and hammer, quite a dozen men. Dick stood undaunted on the highest part of his dam protective works, his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat, his chest well forward, and his head set back with all the dogged tenacity of a Briton about to defend for all time his birthplace, home, and nation, and waited.

As the foreign invasion came and took up a position at the foot of the dam apron, Dick bade them pleasantly enough "Good-morning," and then unconcernedly asked what their business might be.

"Oh, Mr. Seddon," replied Big Mack, rather offensively, I thought. "We've come to take possession of our rights—"

"Your rights," laughed Mr. Seddon; "I didn't know you'd got any up this way."

"This dam is ours, and you know it quite well," roared the giant from foreign parts, insolently, "so don't ye give us any of yer lip."

"Lip!" cried Seddon, "well, if you or any of your thieving crew attempts to

put a peg or stick inside this boundary in you go into the dam."

"You don't say so," jeered Mack and several voices.

"I mean it," cried Dick, getting ready for action, a sight which called up in me Charles Beresfords and Condors, and I yelled out from my stump, "Come on, Dick! let's do something."

Dick nodded approvingly, and coming to his chalked boundary called out in unmistakable tones: "I'll fight the lot of you."

"Right!" yelled the crowd in derision. Dick began to peel off, and I sprang upright on the stump, and, pointing with all the supremacy of a commander of any seventy-four, ordered the foreigners down on the fallen trunk. Then I said: "We fight one man to one man. One at a time."

Dick was now stripped, all but his trousers and boots, and in the height of good humour cried out, "Now, boys, I'm going to fight you one at a time. Five minutes go-as-you-please, then one minute spells in between. If I beat the lot, you will have to allow me a renewal of my lost rights; but if anyone of you happens to beat me, why you can have the lot and no ill-will from me."

Big Mack and his mates went apart. Of course they naturally thought that their champion, with such a record, was quite good enough; and, besides, as one afterwards confessed, "we wanted to see the fun just as much as you did"; and so Big Mack lurched forward with his best bullying airs, and sneered, amid applause, "We'll accommodate ye," and soon afterwards stripped to the buff.

On the top of the dam apron was a square of sixteen feet, smooth as a billiard table: "Just my fighting room," cried Dick, gleefully. Dick's crease, before spoken of, ran down the middle thereof, but when both champions were nearly ready for the deadly encounter someone called out, "You've got no time-keeper."

At this both turned to me on the stump, and Dick said, with his deep blue eyes on me, "The young fellow will keep time," to which the other readily assented. Beckoning me up, Dick put a small clock he had in his waistcoat into my hands, saying, "Now, five minutes and then one, you understand." I had taken the time in many a conclusion before, and nodded.

"One minute," cried Dick; "lend me your knife and your handkerchief." Then he cut all the brace buttons off his breeches and knotted my handkerchief to his own. Passing one end through the loop of his breeches strap, he tied this soft improvised belt round his waist and so stood ready. But whilst he was doing this I had time to note the magnificent proportions of the two who would be immediately locked in deadly combat. Let me describe each: Big Mack, as he stands upright in his boots and moleskins, appears a perfect gladiator in height, build and muscle—six foot four if he is an inch. Good he appears to be for anything in the way of boxing or fistieuffs—his thighs and sinews bunching out and knotted like steel cords, whilst his skin shines like mahogany—but I note that he is "groggy" from the hips down. Dick, on the other hand, is a born athlete from top to toe, and sound in wind and limb. I look with pride as I note his clean, powerful limbs and great chest. His clear eye and good-humoured countenance meet the somewhat scowling visage of his much more powerful looking opponent with an easy and confident mien. "And, by the Lord Harry, he wants it all, too," mutter I, as I return to my post on the stump, open watch in hand.

The minute hand of the watch is at half-time, and as I wait for the second pointer to come up, I have time to glance at the gladiators on the bank, at the still forest all round us, at the summer sky growing brighter, into the calm unruffled waters of the dam, and at the eager line of the twelve faces of the spectators on the fallen tree. Presently a bell-bird swells the forest with his glorious melody to the new-born day; Dick smiles blandly and on everybody, and

I ruthlessly cry: "Shake hands"; and "Go," and they are at it.

Big Mack leads straight at his opponent, as if he intended carrying all before him at the first onslaught, and his sledge-hammer blows rain on Dick's body like those of any steam hammer pressed for time. Some of them appear to me to be taking dire effect, as Lancashire is sent several times to the boundary line, at which the foreigners yell with delight.

The round is more than half over, and Dick has been getting all the worst of it. But he is as cool as a cucumber, and actually smiling too. I can't make it out; but nevertheless shout defiance to the crowd on the trunk. I note with no little satisfaction that a puzzled expression fits at times over Big Mack's face; but suddenly he makes a rush and lets fly a sickening thud, at striking distance too. Dick takes it full on the chest and, horror of horrors, gone down, but he is up again in an eye-wink, and next instant he has hopped backwards quite eight feet, so that Mack's next blow falls wildly in the air. The boys whoop encouragingly to Mack, who has lost his temper, Dick shouts with good-humoured laughter, and time's up.

Mack floundered down to his friends, who received him with confident shouts, and Dick comes over to me and says "Don't look so glum"; then he whispered, "He can't strike a blow. I just wanted to feel him. But Lancashire's on the job this time"; and back he trips to his corner. Mack soon joined him, and Dick, knowing they have half a minute to spare, chats good-naturedly about the ball to be held in Kumara that night and ventures to hope Mack will be there.

Then I call warningly. "Get ready," and "Go," marvelling the while at Seddon's wonderful nerve. Lord! what a revelation that round was to us all. Lancashire hit out everywhere. It was a Lancashire fist propping Mack under the right jaw; it was the next instant another Lancashire two hundred-pounder smashing the opposite jaw; the next, Mack would go spinning round like any teetotum; he'd go backwards with knock-out uppercuts; he'd go down sideways

ASK FOR BONNINGTON'S.

Unscrupulous firms wishing to trade on the great reputation of Bonnington's Irish Moss, prepare an imitation of the genuine article, and, so that you may be deceived, follow the design of our package as near as possible.

The value of such a remedy is best gauged by the methods its makers employ, and you take a big risk if you purchase it.

BONNINGTON'S CABRAGEEN IRISH MOSS

the standard Cough and Cold Remedy that has stood the test for forty-five years.

Stand for fair honest trading, and insist on getting BONNINGTON'S.

REFUSE SUBSTITUTES.

The "just as good as Bonnington's" is not good enough for you, and, if a retailer tries to sell you an imitation or a substitute, tell him you want BONNINGTON'S IRISH MOSS, ask for it again, and insist on getting it.

"HYGENO" AS A DISINFECTANT. It is unequalled for the Prevention of Sickness, particularly contagious diseases, such as arise from damp or ill ventilated apartments, odorous sinks, drains, stables cess-pools, cellars, closets, etc.

FOR PARTICULARS APPLY

THE ATLANTIC REFINING COMPANY, 3 HUNTER STREET, WELLINGTON.