

# Pierre And His People, (Tales of the Far North), Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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Contents:

Shon McGann's Tobogan Ride

Pere Champagne

The Scarlet Hunter

The Stone

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## PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

### TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

SHON MCGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE  
PERE CHAMPAGNE  
THE SCARLET HUNTER  
THE STONE

### SHON McGANN'S TOBOGAN RIDE

"Oh, it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,  
With the knees pressing hard to the saddle, my men;  
With the sparks from the hoofs giving light to the eyes,  
And our hearts beating hard as we rode to the glen!"

"And it's back with the ring of the chain and the spur,  
And it's back with the sun on the hill and the moor,  
And it's back is the thought sets my pulses astir!  
But I'll never go back to Farcalladen more."

Shon McGann was lying on a pile of buffalo robes in a mountain hut,--an Australian would call it a humpey,--singing thus to himself with his pipe between his teeth. In the room, besides Shon, were Pretty Pierre, Jo Gordineer, the Hon. Just Trafford, called by his companions simply "The Honourable," and Prince Levis, the owner of the establishment. Not that Monsieur Levis, the French Canadian, was really a Prince. The name was given to him with a humorous cynicism peculiar to the Rockies. We have little to do with Prince Levis here; but since he may appear elsewhere, this explanation is made.

Jo Gordineer had been telling The Honourable about the ghost of Guidon Mountain, and Pretty Pierre was collaborating with their host in the preparation of what, in the presence of the Law--that is of the North-West Mounted Police--was called ginger-tea, in consideration of the prohibition statute.

Shon McGann had been left to himself--an unusual thing; for everyone had a shot at Shon when opportunity occurred; and never a bull's-eye could they make on him. His wit was like the shield of a certain personage of mythology.

He had wandered on from verse to verse of the song with one eye on the collaborators and an ear open to The Honourable's polite exclamations of wonder. Jo had, however, come to the end of his weird tale--for weird it certainly was, told at the foot of Guidon Mountain itself, and in a region of vast solitudes--the pair of chemists were approaching "the supreme union of unctuous elements," as The Honourable put it, and in the silence that fell for a moment there crept the words of the singer:

"And it's down the long side of Farcalladen Rise,  
And it's swift as an arrow and straight as a spear--"

Jo Gordineer interrupted. "Say, Shon, when'll you be through that tobogan ride of yours? Aint there any end to it?"

But Shon was looking with both eyes now at the collaborators, and he sang softly on:

"And it's keen as the frost when the summer-time dies,  
That we rode to the glen and with never a fear."

Then he added: "The end's cut off, Joey, me boy; but what's a tobogan ride, annyway?"

"Listen to that, Pierre. I'll be eternally shivered if he knows what a tobogan ride is!"

"Hot shivers it'll be for you, Joey, me boy, and no quinine over the bar aither," said Shon.

"Tell him what a tobogan ride is, Pierre."

And Pretty Pierre said: "Eh, well, I will tell you. It is like-no, you have the word precise, Joseph. Eh? What?"

Pierre then added something in French. Shon did not understand it, but he saw The Honourable smile, so with a gentle kind of contempt he went on singing:

"And it's hey for the hedge, and it's hey for the wall!  
And it's over the stream with an echoing cry;  
And there's three fled for ever from old Donegal,  
And there's two that have shown how bold Irishmen die."

The Honourable then said, "What is that all about, Shon? I never heard the song before."

"No more you did. And I wish I could see the lad that wrote that song, livin' or dead. If one of ye's will tell me about your tobogan rides, I'll unfold about Farcalladen Rise."

Prince Levis passed the liquor. Pretty Pierre, seated on a candle-box, with a glass in his delicate fingers, said: "Eh, well, the Honourable has much language. He can speak, precise--this would be better with a little

lemon, just a little,--the Honourable, he, perhaps, will tell. Eh?"

Pretty Pierre was showing his white teeth. At this stage in his career, he did not love the Honourable. The Honourable understood that, but he made clear to Shon's mind what toboganing is.

And Shon, on his part, with fresh and hearty voice, touched here and there by a plaintive modulation, told about that ride on Farcalladen Rise; a tale of broken laws, and fight and fighting, and death and exile; and never a word of hatred in it all.

"And the writer of the song, who was he?" asked the Honourable.

"A gentleman after God's own heart. Heaven rest his soul, if he's dead, which I'm thinkin' is so, and give him the luck of the world if he's livin', say I. But it's little I know what's come to him. In the heart of Australia I saw him last; and mates we were together after gold. And little gold did we get but what was in the heart of him. And we parted one day, I carryin' the song that he wrote for me of Farcalladen Rise, and the memory of him; and him givin' me the word, 'I'll not forget you, Shon, me boy, whatever comes; remember that. And a short pull of the Three-Star together for the partin' salute,' says he. And the Three-Star in one sup each we took, as solemn as the Mass, and he went away towards Cloncurry and I to the coast; and that's the last that I saw of him, now three years gone. And here I am, and I wish I was with him wherever he is."

"What was his name"? said the Honourable.

"Lawless."

The fingers of the Honourable trembled on his cigar. "Very interesting, Shon," he said, as he rose, puffing hard till his face was in a cloud of smoke. "You had many adventures together, I suppose," he continued.

"Adventures we had and sufferin' bewhiles, and fun, too, to the neck and flowin' over."

"You'll spin us a long yarn about them another night, Shon"? said the Honourable.

"I'll do it now--a yarn as long as the lies of the Government; and proud of the chance."

"Not to-night, Shon" (there was a kind of huskiness in the voice of the Honourable); "it's time to turn in. We've a long tramp over the glacier to-morrow, and we must start at sunrise."

The Honourable was in command of the party, though Jo Gordineer was the guide, and all were, for the moment, miners, making for the little Goshen Field over in Pipi Valley.--At least Pretty Pierre said he was a miner.

No one thought of disputing the authority of the Honourable, and they all rose.

In a few minutes there was silence in the hut, save for the oracular breathing of Prince Levis and the sparks from the fire. But the Honourable did not sleep well; he lay and watched the fire through most of the night.

The day was clear, glowing, decisive. Not a cloud in the curve of azure, not a shiver of wind down the canon, not a frown in Nature, if we except the lowering shadows from the shoulders of the giants of the range. Crownings the shadows was a splendid helmet of light, rich with the dyes of the morning; the pines were touched with a brilliant if austere warmth. The pride of lofty lineage and severe isolation was regnant over all. And up through the splendour, and the shadows, and the loneliness, and the austere warmth, must our travellers go. Must go? Scarcely that, but the Honourable had made up his mind to cross the glacier and none sought to dissuade him from his choice; the more so, because there was something of danger in the business. Pretty Pierre had merely shrugged his shoulders at the suggestion, and had said:

"Nom de Dieu,' the higher we go the faster we live, that is something."

"Sometimes we live ourselves to death too quickly. In my schooldays I watched a mouse in a jar of oxygen do that;" said the Honourable.

"That is the best way to die," remarked the halfbreed--"much."

Jo Gordineer had been over the path before. He was confident of the way, and proud of his office of guide.

"Climb Mont Blanc, if you will," said the Honourable, "but leave me these white bastions of the Selkirks."

Even so. They have not seen the snowy hills of God who have yet to look upon the Rocky Mountains, absolute, stupendous, sublimely grave.

Jo Gordineer and Pretty Pierre strode on together. They being well away from the other two, the Honourable turned and said to Shon: "What was the name of the man who wrote that song of yours, again, Shon?"

"Lawless."

"Yes, but his first name?"

"Duke--Duke Lawless."

There was a pause, in which the other seemed to be intently studying the glacier above them. Then he said: "What was he like?--in appearance, I mean."

"A trifle more than your six feet, about your colour of hair and eyes, and with a trick of smilin' that would melt the heart of an exciseman, and O'Connell's own at a joke, barrin' a time or two that he got hold of a pile of papers from the ould country. By the grave of St. Shon! thin he was as dry of fun as a piece of blotting paper. And he said at last, before he was aisy and free again, 'Shon,' says he, 'it's better to burn your ships behind ye, isn't it?'

"And I, havin' thought of a glen in ould Ireland that I'll never see again,

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