

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

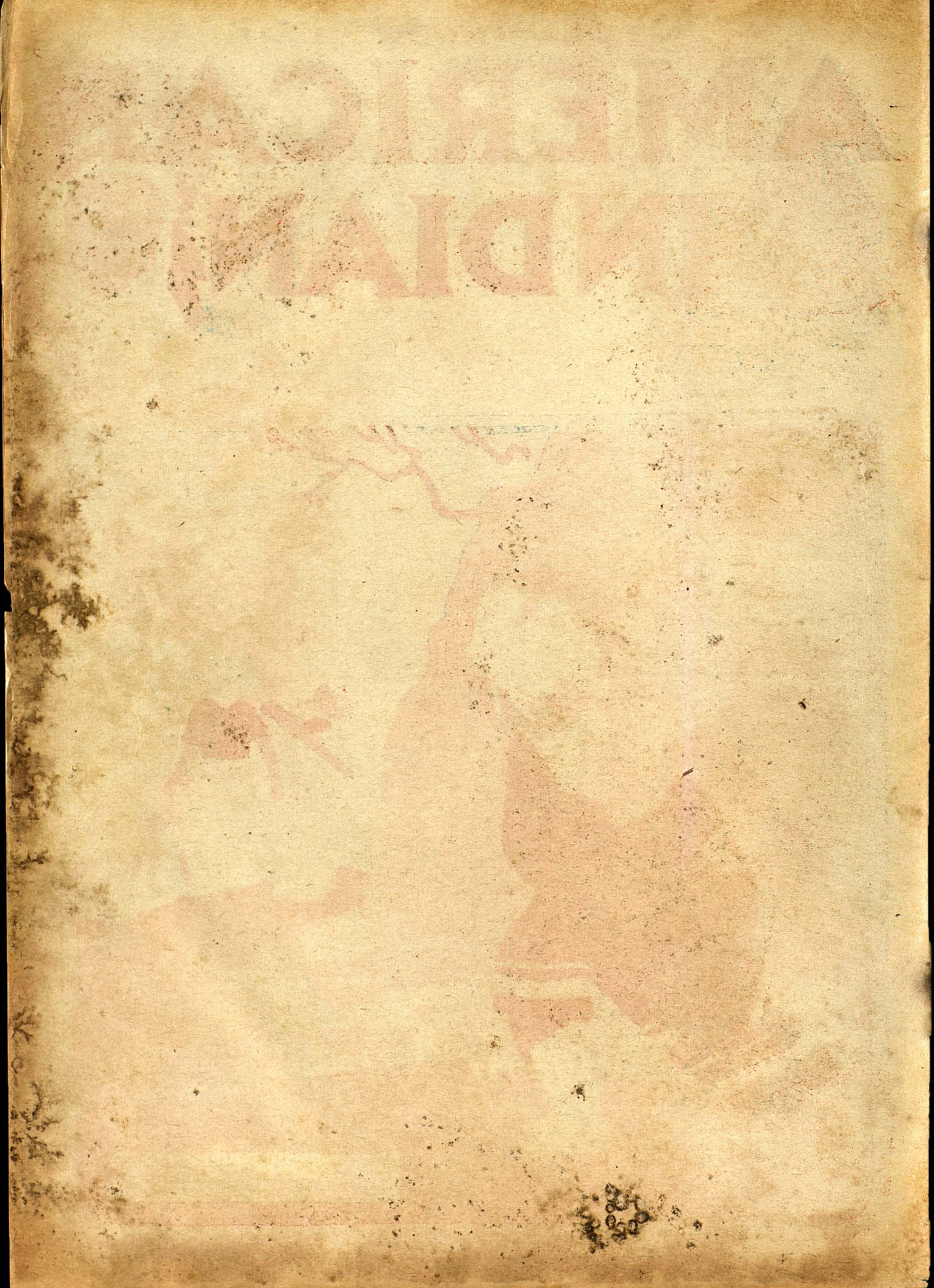
AMERICAN WESTERN INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

RED HAND OF THE NORTH WEST



"I'LL TRAP THEM TO THEIR DOOM." SAID RED HAND.



AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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Red Hand of The Northwest, or The Pirates of Great Bear Lake

By Col. Spencer Dair

CHARACTERS.

ALLAN ASHMORE—Superintendent of the Pequod Copper Mining Company, whose shacks are raided and burned by the Pirates of the North-West.

JED PARKER—Foreman of the Pequod mine, who leads a vain pursuit of the pirates, losing many men in the effort.

BALDY, DEADEYE, TWISTER AND SCALPER—Pirates.

WELLES HERMAN—Messenger, who is murdered by the Red Hand gang.

HENRY DUNSTAN—Detective, who is killed by the leader of the Red Hand.

NED BRISCOE—Chief of Police of Swazey, a most corrupt official.

HUGH BANCROFT—Leader of a band of smugglers.

TONTON—Trapper.

BAPTISTE—Deputy Chief of Police of Swazey.

ISAAC FOREST—Sheriff.

RED HAND—Leader of the pirates.

MOUNTED POLICE, VILLAGERS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE RAID ON THE MINING CAMP.

“Hand’s up—and be lively!”

Like the crack of a whip, these words rang out on the still night air which enveloped the Western shore of Great Bear Lake.

As they heard the command, five men who were threading a trail leading to a plateau some miles to the North, from which several lights twinkled, like distant stars, halted in startled alarm.

“Hands up! I said,” bellowed the voice. “Are you deaf?”

And by way of adding emphasis to his orders, the leader of the hold-up band sent a bullet pinging over the heads of his victims.

Whatever might have been their intentions, the sound of the shot drove all thought of resistance from the minds of the travelers and, without further delay, they hastily thrust their hands high in the air above their heads.

“That’s the way—why didn’t you do that in the first place?” demanded the bandit-chieftain. “If you had you’d have saved me from wasting a bit of good lead. Now just stand quietly while my men relieve you of the trouble of carrying that bag of gold!”

Up to this moment, none of the luckless quintet had seen a sign of a human being. But as the last grim words fell upon their ears, six figures emerged from the brush alongside the trail and made for the men who were standing with their arms in the air.

As the reference of the leader of the outlaws to the

bag of gold reached the travelers, they gazed at one another in dismay, then their spokesman exclaimed: "But we haven't any gold!"

The robbers, however, had seen the hurried interchange of glances and, momentary though they were, they had been sufficient to tell them they were not mistaken in their belief the precious bag was in the care of their captives.

"Now don't start anything like that!" snarled the bandit-chieftain. "How about that sack of coin you received from the Imperial Bank in Winnipeg?"

His answer, however, did not come in words.

As the robbers had come forth from their ambush, three of them had taken positions directly in front of their prisoners, in the trail, while the others stood at one side.

Instantly the traveller, who was carrying the bag of gold, heard the words which told all too plainly that their mission was known, he determined upon a desperate course of action.

Bending his head forward, he leaped at the man nearest him, bowling him over, and then dashed into the underbrush!

So sudden had been the move that the robbers were momentarily caught off their guard—but quickly they recovered and while two of them felled the other prisoners with the butts of their six shooters, the leader and the rest of his gang set out in pursuit of the man who had so defied them.

And because of their familiarity with every foot of the ground, it was but the matter of a few minutes for them to overtake and bring him back.

"You were pretty cunning—but not quite cunning enough!" sneered the chief. "Hurry, boys, and 'frisk' the dub. If he makes another move, drop him with a bullet. I'm going ahead to see what's doing at the camp."

The plateau whence the lights had shone so welcomingly to the five travellers until they had fallen into the hands of the robbers contained the shacks occupied by the score of men who worked the Pequod Copper mine. Three of the shanties there were, a mess house, a bunk house for the miners and a trifle less crude cabin for the superintendent and foreman.

Well aware were the two latter that one of the clerks from the company's offices in Winnipeg was due that day with the pay for the miners—and as darkness fell and the messenger failed to arrive, their anxiety grew apace.

For making their headquarters in the out-of-the-way section of the vast North-West about Great Bear Lake was a band of pirates, desperate and reckless as those who sailed the Spanish Main or the China Sea in days of yore, who plundered now the lumber camps, now the mines and now the prospectors who sought the region, bent on wresting fortunes from the earth.

And the name chosen by these bandits was as awesome as themselves—the Red Hand of the North-West.

Time and again, the superintendent, Allan Ashmore, had gone to the door of his shack and strained his ears, in the hope that he might hear some sound that would announce the approach of the clerk from Winnipeg.

But when, at last, a sound did fall on his ears, it struck consternation to his heart—for it was the report of the shot which the leader of the hold-ups had fired to intimidate his victims!

"Parker, our money has been attacked!" he gasped. "Get out all the men, quickly, and we'll go to the rescue!"

Instantly the foreman routed out the miners and, with their rifles at a ready the men hastened down the trail.

But it was not according to the stars that they should succeed in relieving their friends.

The keen ears of the bandit-chieftain detected the approach of the would-be rescuers.

"Get your men into the bushes!" he whispered, hastening back to his companions. "If any of them make a yip, drill them with lead. Now gag them!"

Hurriedly the bandits obeyed and scarcely had the bushes closed behind them than the squad of miners hove in sight.

"Going to drop them, chief?" queried one of the gang.

"No. We'll let them go past and then strike for the camp. We need grub more than bodies—and now's our time to get it."

Accordingly without molesting them, the pirates allowed the miners to pass down the trail. But no sooner had they disappeared from sight than the robbers, with their prisoners, emerged from their place of concealment and hastened toward the plateau.

Arrived there, the bandits quickly procured all the provisions they could conveniently carry then applied the torch to the dry buildings—and as the flames leaped into the air Red Hand and his band vanished in the forest, taking their prisoners with them.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRUESOME MESSENGER.

In silence, the pirates made their way through the woods, pausing now and again to glance back at the flames which they had kindled.

"You'll pay for this!" gasped the prisoner whom the leader of the outlaws had decided to be the one that carried the money bag he sought, managing to spit out his gag.

"And I suppose *you'll* be the one who makes me pay, eh?" sneered the bandit-chieftain.

But the answer was not what the pirate expected!

Having carefully bided his time, the spokesman of the prisoners had noticed the robbers relax their care as they advanced farther and farther into the woods and when he had uttered his taunt, he had seen the bandit-chieftain turn toward him.

With an agility that was amazing, the clerk launched himself at the leader of the pirates, striking him full in the face with his clenched fists.

Like a drunken man, the robber reeled beneath the force of the blow, then recovered and with a string of terrible oaths, brought the butt of his revolver down upon the cranium of the man who had so defied him.

Sounded a sickening crunch—and then the body toppled to the ground.

"You fiend!" gasped another of the prisoners.

"Keep your tongue in your head—or you'll get the same thing!" snarled the bandit-chieftain. "Baldy, you and Twister and Scalper go down to the canoes with these four dubs—and if they open their faces, hand it to 'em proper."

"But where are you going?" asked the fellow who had been addressed as Baldy.

"Back to the mining camp."

"Now don't be foolish, chief. We're a good three miles from it now—and by the time you reach it, Ashmore and the rest of his men will be there. What's the use of running your head into any such danger?"

"Don't you worry about me, boy," smiled the leader. "I'm going to take Deadeye with me."

"But what's the use, chief?" protested Twister. "If there was anything to be gained by going back, it wouldn't be so bad—but there isn't."

"That's where you're wrong. There's everything to be gained! I want to serve notice on Ashmore and the rest of the Pequod bunch that the Red Hand gang is the whole thing in this region!

"I've made up my mind that every man jack living on the shores of Great Bear Lake shall pay tribute to me—and now's the time to serve the notice!"

"Pay you tribute, what do you mean?" demanded Baldy.

"Just what I say—I'm going to have part of every dollar that's brought to Great Bear Lake or taken from it!"

At this amazing announcement, the members of the gang who had plundered under the leadership of the redoubtable Red Hand stared first at their chief and then at one another in blank astonishment.

"How are you going to do it?" Scalper finally managed to ask.

"Make a torch and I'll show you," returned the bandit-chieftain. And when the flare flared up, the

grim visaged man drew forth a pad of paper and the stub of a pencil from the bosom of his shirt and laboriously began to write.

"Superintendent Pequod mine. sir. mark well what you read!

from this time on, you and your men and mine are subject to a tax of ten cents on evry dolar wot comes to great bare lake!

to show you i mene biznez i burned your shacks an' handed it to your man from winipeg. i return his body to you in case you may want to send it back—but i've kep the gold from the bank, needin' it more than you does. if you'll jest pass the word along, it will save you and others a lot of truble.

I MENE WOT I SAY! *the first of each month, i'll send for my share of the stuff wot comes to the lake. i'll let you know beforehand where to meet me. don't try to fool me—or you'll get wot the clerk from the bank got. goodbye for this time.*

"RED HAND."

As the leader of the pirates finished writing this startling note, he read it aloud to his men and, as they voiced their approval, he pinned it to the front of his victim's shirt with the man's own hunting knife.

"But you haven't got the gold yet, chief, and that's what started all the trouble," declared Baldy, as his pals stared at the terrible man who was their leader.

"No—but I'll have it in a jiffy. Here you," and he turned to the nearest of the living prisoners, "get busy with that stiff and hand out the bag of coin he was carrying."

"How can I when I don't kn—"

"Now cut that, right away!" roared the pirate. "You know where the gold is—and what's more, I know you know! So get busy!"

And to lend haste to the unfortunate prisoner, the bandit-chieftain gave him a vicious jab in the back with his hunting knife, causing the man to yelp with pain.

The action, coupled with the dire words, produced the result the pirate desired, however, and, after fumbling over the body of his dead companion, the fellow drew forth from the legs of the clerk's boots two packages.

"Stung—and by that moth-eaten trick of carrying your stuff in your bootleg!" growled the leader of the Red Hand gang.

Waiting only long enough to place the gold in the legs of his own hip boots, the robber nodded to Deadeye, picked up the corpse which was to be his messenger and started toward the plateau.

Had the other prisoners known the identity of the man who had so boldly determined to levy tribute from the honest men of the region, they would one and all have risked their lives that they might run the chance of reaping some of the thousands of dollars that were offered for his head, dead or alive!

CHAPTER III.

AN AMAZING IDENTIFICATION.

In their ignorance of the identity of the leader of the pirates, however, the prisoners simply stared after the powerful man, who so lightly bore the gruesome messenger, until they could no longer distinguish his figure.

With infinite caution, he and Deadeye retraced their steps toward the plateau, arriving at its edge just as the miners rushed up the trail on the other side and dashed hither and thither in frantic endeavor to find some means of putting out the flames.

But as well might they have tried to stem the advance of a forest fire!

The logs from which the shacks had been built had been so thoroughly seasoned that they burned with amazing persistency, defying all attempts to beat them out and at last, realizing the futility of further effort, the miners gathered in a group and watched the cabins that had been their home, burn.

"I wish I knew whether or not those accursed pirates had a hand in this!" snarled the superintendent, as the roof of his shanty fell in, sending a shower of sparks high into the air.

"What good would it do?" demanded his foreman.

"Simply that if I could be sure it was them, I would engage that the Pequod Copper Mining Company would start a manhunt that would not wind up until the villains had either been captured or sent to the death they so richly merit!"

"Well, I reckon it's a safe enough bet that it was them," returned Parker.

"But we can't be sure," protested Ashmore.

"So long as we ain't got nothing else to do, now our shacks have gone up in smoke and all the tools wot ain't down in the mine, why not let's take it for granted it was the sneaking devils and go after 'em?" demanded one of the miners.

This suggestion met with the ready approval of all the other men who found themselves bereft of home and possessions in the wilderness of Great Bear Lake.

The superintendent, however, was a man more fitted for the counting room than for life in the great North-West.

"Our first duty is to let the officers of the Pequod company in Winnipeg know of the loss to their property," he declared. "When this has been done, if they wish us, or you, to undertake the task of running the villains to their lair, well and good."

"You mean that you're going down to Winnipeg before you even so much as try to find the men who burned up these shacks?" demanded the foreman, in amazement.

"And how about the messenger who was bringing up our pay?" interposed still another.

"I understand how you men feel, perfectly, but duty is duty," retorted Ashmore. "And, under the circumstances, it is our first duty to report what has occurred to the proper officers."

"Well, you can do it—if you want to," growled Parker. "I'm going to set out after the pirates. Any of you men who want to come with me, may."

Instantly there was a shout of approval at the words of the foreman and with one accord, all the miners moved over to where he was standing, leaving the superintendent apparently dazed at the wholesale desertion of himself.

But only a few seconds did he have to think upon the matter.

Having watched the actions of the miners from his place of concealment, the leader of the Red Hand divined the significance of their movement when they went from one superior to another.

"If we're going to deliver this message, it's time we were up and doing, Deadeye," he whispered. "Do you stay right here where you are and cover me with your rifle. If any one tries to get to me, drop 'em!"

In vain the other outlaw begged to be allowed to go in place of his chief—but the latter was obdurate and, finally giving up the attempt, Deadeye grasped the butt of his rifle firmly, holding it ready for instant action.

Slowly, with infinite caution, the leader of the pirates crept from the protecting shadow of the bushes, his gruesome messenger slung across his shoulder.

In such a manner did he advance that he was hidden behind the smoke and flames and, in consequence, having noted carefully the position of the men before he set out on his dangerous errand, he was able to make his way close to them, undetected.

Advanced to where he thought it would be folly to press on, the leader of the Red Hand let the corpse slip from his shoulder to the ground and then took a firm hold of it.

Bracing himself, he put forth all his titanic strength, raised the body in the air—and then hurled it, head-foremost, into the unsuspecting group of men who were in the very act of planning his capture!

But in his confidence that he would be able to deliver his terrible message and make a safe getaway, he had overestimated his ability!

So terrific was the force with which the bandit-chief threw the corpse toward the group of men that he lost his balance and was compelled to take a couple of steps beyond the protection of the fire ere he could recover himself.

And at that very moment, one of the miners, seemingly attracted by some occult power, whirled in his tracks and faced the spot where the leader of the pirates was.

An instant he blinked at the amazing sight of the

body hurtling through the air toward him, then roused himself.

"There he is! There he is!" the miner shouted, as he found his tongue.

Immediately his companions turned—but instead of looking at the pirate, they stared at their companion.

"Who is it? What are you talking about?" demanded Parker.

But ere the other could answer, the gruesome messenger fell almost at the feet of the foreman!

With cries of terrified horror, the rest of the men shrank back.

Their movement, however, seemed to galvanize into action the wits of the miner who had seen the pirate.

"Quick after him—after him!" he yelled, giving chase as he uttered the words. "There are thousands of dollars on his head!"

"Who is it?" cried several of his comrades, almost in the same breath, as they followed their companion.

"Jesse James!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS FOE.

In a loud, shrill voice had the amazing identification been made—but it was to cost the miner dear!

Not only did the notorious outlaw, who had plied his trade as pirate on Great Bear Lake successfully while scores of man-hunters were scouring every state in the Middlewest for him, hear his name but the words carried even to Deadeye.

And as the leader of the Red Hand, giving vent to a terrible outburst of blood-curdling oaths, whipped out his six shooters and began blazing at the luckless miner who had made the serious mistake of recognizing the daredevil bandit, Deadeye's rifle spoke.

With a shriek of agony, the miner threw up his hands, tottered a moment, then fell forward.

And as his comrades gathered about the body from which the blood gushed from a half dozen wounds, the mocking laughter of the notorious outlaw rang in their ears.

But only for an instant were the men of the Pequod camp inactive!

"Get him! Get him!" bellowed Parker. "If it really is Jesse, there'll be enough head money to put us all on easy street! Oh, you men, spread out and beat every foot of the ground as though you expected to pick up diamonds!"

"And stop leaden pills with our bodies!" growled an old miner. "I'd sure like to sit in on the divvy of the head-money pot—but I ain't so anxious about it I'm willing to——"

Ere the poor man could finish his words, there was a sickening "chug" and he, too, pitched forward.

The sight of the second victim of the Red Hand gang roused the miners as nothing else could have, even the superintendent forgetting his idea of duty in the effort to lay low the man who had wrought such havoc in the camp.

But as, in the States, the notorious outlaw seemed to dodge the death-bearing missiles, just as though he bore a charmed life!

All the time the leader of the pirates was effecting his escape, his shooting irons were spitting fire and leaden bullets and before the terrible fusillade, the miners gave ground, their courage weakened by the sight of their two companions who had fallen before their very eyes and the body of the third man which had been hurled at them.

As fast as he could, Deadeye had been pumping his rifle but he had used up all his shells and while he was refilling the magazine, his master gained his side.

"Going to give them another dose? My, but that was great, chief!" he exclaimed, admiringly.

But the notorious outlaw had learned to let well enough alone—unless there was some extraordinary stake for which to play.

"No, don't fire any more, Deadeye," he returned.

"Oh, chief, why not?"

Smiling at the evident disappointment that was in the voice of his pal, the leader of the pirates was silent for several minutes, then exclaimed:

"Because at present, the fools don't know in which direction I actually made my get away—and there's no use of giving them that bit of information."

"But they know who you really are?"

"What of it?"

As he realized the eagerness with which hundreds of men would learn the identity of the man who had so successfully plied the trade of pirate of Great Bear Lake—under the name of Red Hand—Deadeye gasped at the matter-of-fact manner in which the notorious outlaw asked the question.

"What of it? Why, they'll send word to the nearest settlement—and then we'll have every manhunter who's now in the States, camping on what he supposes to be your trail, hotfooting it for this section of the country!"

"Well, I reckon it's big enough to hold the whole kit and boodle of us," smiled the famous desperado.

In silence, his companion gazed at him for several minutes.

"Well, you're the doctor," he finally declared, as though he were arguing with himself, rather than addressing his chief.

"That's what I am, Deadeye, so don't get excited. Jumping snakes! look at that bunch of mutts, now!" he added, as his gaze rested upon the group of men

who had just discovered the note pinned to the breast of the corpse Jesse had selected as his messenger.

Quickly the desperado obeyed—and what he saw caused him to chuckle with delight!

One of the miners had removed the crude scrawl from its resting place, and holding it toward the fast waning flare of the burning embers, was apparently reading it aloud.

As he finished, there was a moment of tense silence, then an outburst of angry protestation, as the miners began to realize the enormity of the insult that had been heaped upon them.

For several moments, the notorious leader of the Red Hand gloated over the consternation he had caused, then, as he noticed that the men were ready to break into small groups, he exclaimed:

"This a mighty good time for you and me to hike out of here, Deadeye."

And without giving his companion time to protest, the notorious outlaw set out at a swinging lope to rejoin the rest of his gang whom he had left guarding the prisoners.

But though he joined them without misadventure, and as he was standing on the edge of the lake, relating to them the incidents which had transpired at the scene of the fire, a jet of water shot into the air right at his very feet!

"Quick, everybody flat on their bellies!" cried the leader of the pirates. And as the men obeyed, he turned his eyes in all directions in the endeavor to learn whence the bullet had come.

Yet no smoke could he see!

"Shall we paddle for our cave?" asked Twister.

Scarcely had the words left the pirate's lips than a second shot tore a hole in the side of one of the canoes!

"No! to the woods, all of you! Whoever it is, is using smokeless powder!"

CHAPTER V.

THE PIRATE CHIEFTAIN'S NARROW ESCAPE.

For a moment the notorious leader of the piratical band was inclined to believe that the man shooting at him with such impunity was one of the miners, then it recurred to him that, did the Pequod outfit have any smokeless powder, it would have been consumed in the fire which laid low the camp, and he realized that he had still another foe with whom to reckon.

Cursing to himself at the thought that he should be a target for a man whose whereabouts he did not know, the leader of the Red Hand cautiously raised himself on his elbow. As he did so he heard the "ping" of a bullet—and his hat was lifted from his head!

Never had the man, who had for so long and so successfully defied the hundreds of man hunters that were raking the states of the middle west, come closer to having his head drilled with lead, and the realization caused an involuntary shudder to run through his body.

Instantly, however, he recovered his nerve, and with a hard, bitter laugh exclaimed:

"That was a close call, boys! Use your peepers! I want to land the devil who has the nerve to take pot shots at me. I'll give a hundred dollars to any of you who'll locate him for me."

Even as the pirate chieftain spoke, he took the rifle from Deadeye's hand, then, picking up his hat again, he forced a stick under it, and raised it slowly, as though he himself were once again reconnoitring.

Not alone were the notorious bandit's companions eager to win the money for discovering the spot whence the shots were fired at him, but even more than the pecuniary reward did they value the good will of their leader, which they knew would be theirs, should they succeed in unmasking the sharpshooter's hiding place.

But it was the notorious desperado, himself, who discovered the whereabouts of the mysterious foe.

As, for the second time, his hat was raised slowly in the air, he beheld a sudden flash of powder as the weapon with which his enemy was striving to take his life, belched forth the death bearing missile.

Past master as he was in the use not only of six shooters but repeating rifles, the leader of the pirates seemed not even to take the time to point the muzzle of his weapon at his mysterious foe, ere his companions heard a sharp staccato bark, not once, but three times—and in such rapid succession that the three reports seemed as one.

And even as the last reverberation died away, there broke on the air an agonized yell!

"You got him, chief, didn't you?" exclaimed Deadeye, excitedly.

"So it seems."

"Who do you suppose he is?" asked Twister.

"Don't waste time asking such fool questions," snapped the notorious bandit. "How can I tell who it is when there are thousands of men would sell their souls for a chance to take a shot at me, but we'll find out. Make one of the canoes ready for me, and Scalper, you and Deadeye will accompany me while we go in search of the fellow."

Realizing from the tone in which the pirate chieftain spoke, despite his seeming indifference, that he was deeply concerned to think some unknown enemy was close enough on his trail to have been able to get a shot at him when he was in ignorance that such a person was ever in existence, the members of the gang whom he had designated lost no time in carrying out his instructions.

No sooner had the canoe been launched than the Indian chief, who had been nicknamed Scalper by his companions, took his place in one end, his sinewy hand poising the paddle, ready to bury it in the deep black waters, while Jesse and Deadeye quickly took their places in the frail craft.

"Where away, chief?" demanded the Indian.

"Dead ahead toward that tall pine you can see."

Instantly the redskin jumped the canoe forward—but even as the craft skimmed over the water, the pirate chieftain realized that he had fallen deliberately into a trap!

CHAPTER VI.

THE ATTACK.

As the canoe, with its three passengers, emerged from the shadows of the brush which lined the shore where the members of the Red Hand band had been hiding with their captives, three rifles barked!

"Tricked, by all that's great!" hissed the notorious leader of the pirates. "Pour your shots into the bushes around that pine, boys!"

And as he shouted his commands to those of his men who were on shore, Jesse again brought his rifle into action, sending the leaden shells with vicious hatred.

But this time no yell of agony greeted the discharge of the weapon!

"Why do you suppose the fellow shouted?" demanded Deadeye, as he waited for a flash of fire from the mysterious foe.

"Just to make me think I'd hit him, curse his blooming soul!" snarled the pirate chieftain.

"But what would be his object?"

"Are you looney?"

"That's not fair—seeing that you, yourself, were deceived," retorted the bandit.

"Never mind if I was. The fellow evidently hoped he would be able to lure us out into the lake, or at least nearer to him than we are, by pretending that my shot had wounded him. And now it's up to us to get him!"

"But why didn't he wait till we were farther out, then?"

"Evidently, his men couldn't hold in. But don't waste any more time—ah! they've hit us! Do any damage, Scalper?" asked the notorious outlaw, changing his tone suddenly as the frail craft seemed to quiver from end to end, after which there came a sound as of ripping.

"Uhuh—worse luck!"

"How badly?"

Ere the Indian could reply, however, Deadeye cried:

"The bullet struck up in my end. Made a hole about six inches long—and the water's coming in fast."

"Stuff something in the hole! Scalper, swing round and paddle back to shore!" demanded the leader of the pirates.

But though the redskin endeavored to obey, he was not quick enough, for the random shots had done more damage than the occupants of the canoe realized.

Instead of one hole, there were four!

As he felt the cold water pouring in about his legs, the head of the Red Hand cursed frightfully.

"Why don't you fellows on shore get busy and nail those devils by the pine tree?" he roared. "Here we're practically sinking in the lake, and you not only don't fire any shots but you don't even try to help us! What's got into you, anyhow?"

Roused by the words of their master, the members of the piratical band discharged their rifles blindly in the direction of the tall pine.

And as the echo of the reports died away, a mocking laugh greeted their ears!

"Curse them—the devils have changed their position!" growled Red Hand. "Hold your fire, boys, there's no use wasting any more good lead!"

But how great a change in their position the mysterious foe had made, the pirates were soon to learn!

"The canoe's sinking—we've got to swim for the shore!" gasped Scalper.

And as the three men who had set out so confidently in the frail craft took to the water, and headed for the shore they had just left, there rose a startled shout from the members of the band on land!

"We're being surrounded, boys. Drop back to the lake! Shoot any one who comes near you from the South!" bellowed Baldy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

In blank amazement, the leader of the Red Hand band of Pirates and his companions who were swimming for the shore, in a desperate effort to save their lives, the canoe having literally sunk under them, heard the startling words of the comrade on land.

Fully fifty yards were they from land but the bushes made it so dark that though they strained their eyes, and strove to discover the approach of the enemy which was attacking them, they could see nothing.

But they were soon made aware that their foes were nigh!

After Baldy's excited announcement and order to his companions, there ensued a brief but tense silence while the surprised pirates awaited the move of their

unseen foes—and as they waited, they dropped back slowly but steadily toward the edge of the lake.

As minute after minute went by without any sign of the enemy, he whispered:

“What makes you think there’s some one coming from the South?”

“I don’t think—I know. I heard the bushes——”

But the sentence was never finished!

With a yell that would have done any band of Indians proud, there was a sudden flash of light from the direction in which Baldy had declared their foe was coming!

Too amazed to take advantage of the opportunity it afforded the pirates simply stared, blinking at the sight revealed—half a dozen men, rifles at their shoulders!

But the mysterious men were not inactive!

As the flash-powder flared up, they peered eagerly forward that they might learn the exact whereabouts of the men they sought—and when they had acquired this information, they advanced cautiously.

From the water, the leader of the pirates had seen the startling move.

“Why don’t you shoot, you lunkheads?” he roared at his stupefied men.

But the rebuke came too late!

Even as his voice sounded, the rifles in the hands of the mysterious attackers barked—and the air was rent with yells!

This time, however, it was the unknown men who were deceived!

Baldy had quickly recovered his wits after the first surprise at the flash-powder had subsided, and he readily realized it would be but the matter of seconds ere the men poured a volley of lead at him and his comrades.

And so close were they to his fellows he felt the slaughter would be awful.

Accordingly, leaning forward, he exclaimed, as his master’s voice rang out, opportunely covering his:

“Drop flat on your bellies, boys. Don’t lose a minute—and don’t shoot till I give the word!”

What the reason was for these strange commands, none of his companions knew—yet they were too well trained not to obey, and in the moment before the death-bearing volley was discharged, the members of the piratical band who were on shore sank to the ground!

The luckless travellers who had been captured when Jesse and his precious crew held up the messenger from the Pequod Copper Mining company were not so fortunate, however. None of the bandits had troubled to pass the order to drop to them—and as the report of the volley died away, their cries rent the air!

“Hooray! we’ve got some of them! Give ’em another volley!” shouted the leader of the attacking party.

Again the rifles crashed!

And as the flames belched from their muzzles, Baldy cried to his pals:

“Beat it *now!* Roll into the water and then get away as you can! Watch out and don’t let your guns get wet! We’ll meet at the cave. It’s every man for himself!”

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLEVER RUSE.

As these commands were given by the member of the pirates who was next in authority to the notorious leader, the men lost no time in getting to the lake—and as they did so, Jesse joined them.

The wails and shrieks of the wounded prisoners were so shrill and incessant that the leader of the Red Hand was able to speak to his comrades almost without fear of detection.

“Don’t go into the water,” he admonished. “The cusses will be likely to hear you splashing, and if it’s a possible thing, I don’t want them to have any idea where we have gone. You can get out of range just as well by keeping along the shore of the lake.”

But the plans of the notorious pirate were not to be carried out!

Even as he was uttering his words of advice and command, for a second time there came the blinding flash from the powder.

“We’ve bagged three of the gang!” shouted one of the mysterious strangers, excitedly, as he beheld the wounded prisoners writhing on the ground.

“But the others have got away!” growled a tall, thin man. “And it’s the others we want! Into the woods after them!”

“They haven’t gone to the woods—they’re in the water——”

Bang! went the rifle in the hands of the famous pirate—and the man who had announced the whereabouts of the robbers pitched forward.

“Quick! at them, men!” shouted one of the attackers.

Yet before they could obey, there rang an exultant cheer from the North!

“Who in the world has come along this time?” gasped Twister.

“Keep——” began Baldy. But the answer was taken from his mouth.

With a mighty cheer, the newcomers charged the group of men whose forms loomed against the water.

“Give ’em no quarter, boys! Remember, they’ve destroyed our shacks and ruined the property of the Pequod Copper mine!” shouted an excited voice.

“It’s Parker and a bunch of the miners!” exclaimed Deadeye. “We’re sure done for, now!”

"Don't be a fool!" growled the notorious outlaw, who, though the predicament in which he found himself was serious, had faced crises a thousand times more acute during his mad career in the States.

"But it's all up with us," lamented his minion. "The ones who were after us first know that we're in the lake—and they'll tell Parker. With their combined forces, they'll be able to keep us from getting ashore."

While the leader of the Red Hand and his men had been talking in whispers, the others of the band had gathered about them, eager to hear every word that was uttered—and between the coldness of the lake water and the sudden surprises afforded by the flash-powder, their nerves were sadly shaken, rendering them anything but the desperate men they were reputed to be.

"You fellows give me a royal pain!" snarled the famous outlaw, his voice bitter with contempt. "You're a swell bunch for a man like me to lead. I'd give more for a couple of my boys down in the States than for a whole regiment of such as you!"

This taunt had the effect the astute leader of men had hoped—by rousing the anger of all who heard it.

"And what would you do with your two boys—if you had them?" demanded Baldy.

"Put the kibosh on the miners and the rest of the bunch!"

"How?"

"Get them to fighting one another!"

"Well, tell us how—I 'low we boys of the Northwest are as game as any 'Tad' that walks or rides in the States!"

This retort of Baldy was received with murmurs of approval from the other members of the Red Hand, and eagerly they gathered about the notorious robber-chieftain.

"We must split up into two gangs, one going West along the shore about ten yards, the other East.

"Scalper, you'll take the lads who are going to the West, I'll look out for the others. The idea is to pour our fire from such directions that the poor fools will open on one another.

"Hurry, now—and don't shoot until you hear my pistol speak three times!"

All this had taken much less time in the utterance and performance than it has in the telling, and the miners were still charging the other men when the pirates put the plan of their astute leader into operation.

When he had gained a spot that appeared to him as sufficiently out of line so that his men and those with Scalper could enfilade their luckless victims, the notorious outlaw suddenly emitted a blood-curdling yell—and as the sound reverberated, his six shooter crashed three times!

Instantly his companions poured a hail of lead from their weapons, and as soon as they received the signal, the other division opened fire.

"Let drive! Let drive!" roared Parker, above the rattle of the guns.

No urging did the miners need—and quickly were they emptying the magazines of their rifles into the ranks of the mysterious strangers.

Surprised, the latter instantly rallied, and returned the fire for all they were worth.

"Seems to be working like a charm!" grinned the leader of the Red Hand. "It won't be long before Parker and his crowd will clean out the others and——"

"Then if there are any left, we can wipe them out, eh?" exclaimed Baldy, excitedly, interrupting his chief.

"We can—but we won't!" announced the latter.

"Who's getting cold feet now? If I only had two men——" began the pirate when Deadeye cut him short.

"Have a civil tongue in your head!" he admonished. "Jess evidently has some bug in his bonnet, eh, chief?"

"Sure—the thing for us to do is to make our get-away while the men are at each others' throats. It won't be long before they find out their mistake—I'm thinking!"

CHAPTER IX.

A VICIOUS DEED.

And such proved to be the case!

During a momentary lull after the pirates had resorted to their clever ruse to make the men who were seeking to capture them fall upon and shoot one another down, one of the miners shouted:

"Ashmore! Ashmore!"

At the mention of the mine superintendent, one of the men in the band of the mysterious strangers cried:

"What Ashmore is that?"

"Allan Ashmore—of the Pequod Copper mine!" returned that worthy. "Who are you?"

"Henry Dunstan!"

"Henry Dunstan, from Winnepeg?" demanded the superintendent, incredulously.

"The very same! By thunder! it's lucky we found out before we poured any more lead into one another.

"Quick, boys, set off some more of the flash-powder!"

"And give Red Hand and his men the chance of their lives at us, are you crazy, Dunstan?" exclaimed Parker.

"By St. George! I must be! Forget the powder, boys. Everybody, 'bout face and after the pirates."

"Then you know where they are?" asked Ashmore.

"Yes—that is—I know where they were."

"Well, we ought not to have much trouble in trailing them, hampered as they will be by their prisoners," declared Ashmore. "Lead the way and we'll follow, Dunstan."

But the words of the superintendent had aroused a new line of thought in the other's mind!

"Prisoners?" he gasped. "What are the Red Hand gang doing with any prisoners—and where did they get them?"

"They picked up the Pequod paymaster, Welles Herman," returned the superintendent.

At the statement, the other members of the troop who had accompanied Dunstan cried out in dismay.

"Are you sure?" he demanded.

"Positive!"

"Your proof?"

"Principally the fact that Red Hand threw Welles' body into the crowd while we were standing about one of the burning shanties—and to its breast was pinned a most insulting note!"

Had the information given by the superintendent not been of such grave import, Dunstan would have laughed at the tone of voice in which the prim Ashmore referred to the insult but, under the stress of the moment, it went unnoticed.

"Then the devils got the gold?" he asked.

"Evidently. It wasn't on Herman when we searched the body."

"And to think I almost had Red Hand and his——"

"Say, what makes you keep calling him 'Red Hand'?" interrupted Parker.

"Because that's his name!"

For a moment there was silence as this statement was made with all the impressiveness of one man in authority seeking to squelch another—and then the foreman broke into a mirthless laugh.

"And they call you the best manhunter in the North-West, Dunstan," he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked the detective, piqued at the tone of the foreman.

"I mean that the fellow you think is Red Hand is, in reality, Jesse James!"

Had a bomb dropped from the heavens, no greater commotion could have been produced among the men with the manhunter than Parker produced with his statement as to the identity of the daredevil who had been posing as the leader of the pirates who terrorized the shores and confines of the Great Bear Lake.

"You're dippy, Parker," declared Dunstan. "Jesse is down in Southern California. I know for a fact."

"Saw him there, I suppose?" sneered the foreman.

"No—but my people got a letter from out there saying so."

"Which only goes to show that one of the reasons

he gets by so often is because, as a matter of fact, there aren't more than a score of people who know what Jess really does look like!" growled Parker.

"Now don't get huffy," began the manhunter, soothingly.

But the foreman ignored him, exclaiming:

"However, you don't have to take my word for what I've told you about Red Hand and Jesse being one and the same—you can take it from Pinhead Prouty."

"And who's Pinhead Prouty?" demanded Dunstan, smiling at the name, in spite of his anger at having his opinion questioned by the foreman of the Pequod Copper Mine.

"He's a man who knows the devil we're after!"

"But, using your own words, there are only a few people who know him—and what reason is there to believe that Pinhead is one of the few?"

"Merely that I was born and riz with Jess!" asserted a shrill voice.

"Honest?" demanded the manhunter.

"Cross my heart and hope to die!" protested the fellow.

"Some of you strike a light while I take a look at Pinhead," commanded Dunstan.

Instantly one of his men ignited a match, and then set fire to a pitch torch which he handed to his superior.

But the move was an unfortunate one!

Eager to learn the identity of the men who had come so near to sending him to the reward he so richly deserved, the notorious outlaw had crept close up to the shore behind where the miners and manhunters were standing—and when he heard the statement that Pinhead Prouty was with the former, his face took on a look terrible to behold!

With six shooter ready for instant use, he waited till he could hear the voice of his boyhood friend—and when the torch flared up, disclosing Pinhead's weasel-like features, the finger of the notorious bandit curled round the trigger of his shooting iron, there was a sharp crash! and Pinhead Prouty fell forward, a ribbon of blood coursing down his face!

CHAPTER X.

THE VAIN BOAST.

Even the companions of the notorious pirate gasped as they beheld his deed—for it drove home to them forcefully the fact that he would allow no one or no thing to jeopardize his safety—were it in his power to remove the danger.

"Now do you think the man you and we are after is the devil from the States, or not?" demanded Parker savagely.

sure

"It certainly seems so—poor Pinhead!" exclaimed the manhunter from the metropolis of the Canadian North-West.

"It's a pity you couldn't have been convinced without sacrificing the life of one of my men," returned the foreman, bitterly.

"I'll avenge him—never fear!" retorted Dunstan, stung by the words of the other. "Get busy, men, and run down the bandit! What are you standing there like ninnies for? Why didn't any of you return the shot fired by Jesse?"

"Don't you stir a foot from where you are!" countermanded the former. "If—"

"What's the meaning of your orders, Parker?" thundered Dunstan. "Am I master of my own men or am I not?"

"I don't give a tinker's button whether you are master of them or not—I simply know that while I'm round, you're not going to waste any more human lives by sending your men out blindly after the leader of the pirates when you have no more idea than a hole in the ground where he is. Understand?"

And that his words might have still greater force, the foreman raised his six shooter suggestively.

"Parker's right, Dunstan," declared the superintendent, soothingly. "There's been murder enough to-night without adding to it—just look at these poor fellows at our feet. I can recognize them all."

At the words, the men looked at the forms now lying quiet and still on the ground, their clothes wet with their life blood.

"What do you mean? Are those some of your men?" demanded the manhunter, in awed tone.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because we charged them!"

"And I thought you were a clever man, Dunstan!" exclaimed Ashmore, even his mild and calm nature revolting at the idea these messengers had been shot down by their friends.

"Cut that, Allan, and tell me who they are," commanded the manhunter.

"They happen to be guards employed by the Pequod Copper Mining Company to escort the pay bags back and forth—and any other things of value that the officers may have occasion to send."

By the flickering rays of the torch, the miners could see Dunstan bow his head for several moments—then he suddenly raised it!

"I've been the cause of shedding innocent blood to-night," he began, in a low, tense voice, "but by St. George! I'll make that devil from the States pay dearly for it!

"If any of you men care to join with me in my hunt for the accursed murderer, I'll be glad to have you. If you don't it won't make any difference—I shall trail him alone. *And I'll stick on his trail till I get him!*"

The deep shadows of the woods, the gore-covered bodies lying about, the tense-faced men and the fitful flicker of the torch made the scene impressive in the extreme.

But as the men stood silent under its stress, there sounded a mocking laugh—a second time the crack! of a gun rang out, and a second time a body fell forward, blood pouring from a round hole in its forehead!

Henry Dunstan had boasted in vain!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RED HANDBERS THREATEN TO DESERT THEIR LEADER.

A moment there was silence in the ranks of the manhunters, then they broke into cries of rage and fury.

"By thunder! this is too much!" bellowed Parker. "Every man jack of you follow me!"

And, never thinking that he was doing the very thing for which he had chided the murdered manhunter, he leaped forward in the direction whence the shot had come that laid Dunstan low.

Instantly the rest of the men followed him—but scarcely a rod had they advanced before they halted as suddenly as they had started.

Having heard the commands issued by the foreman, the notorious outlaw knew what to expect, and, realizing that the advantage was with him, inasmuch as he knew the direction whence the attack upon him was to be made while his enemies were in ignorance of his whereabouts, he spoke to his companions in a low tense voice.

"Form in a semicircle about me, and when I give the word we'll fire in volleys!"

Quickly his men moved to obey—and as they did so Baldy had the misfortune to step on a dry twig which cracked with a report startling in its loudness.

And it was this noise, indicating as it did the men he was after were preparing an ambush for him, that caused the foreman of the Pequod copper mine to check the advance of his men.

"We're in for it, now," snarled Scalper with an oath.

No time, however, did the pirates have to lament the awkwardness of their confrère!

The snapping of the twig had given Parker, who was by far the best woodsman of any of the men connected with the Pequod Copper Mine, an idea as to the location of the men he sought, and without wasting time for divulging his intention by issuing any commands to his companions, he raised his rifle, and blazed away, pumping the magazine in a manner that would have done credit to the notorious pirate chieftain himself.

For the first time that night fortune favored the manhunters!

Scarcely had the report of the first shot awakened the echoes than one of the bandits uttered a shrill cry of agonized pain.

"Ouch! They've got me!" he gasped, and then collapsed on the edge of the lake where he was standing.

The knowledge that they had at last brought down one of the men who had wrought such havoc threw the miners and the remainder of Dunstan's force into a frenzy of delight.

"Give it to 'em! We've got 'em. They're down there by the lake, just to the left of that clump of bushes. Pour your bullets into them, and we'll see if we can't do what those manhunters down in the States haven't been able to—put a bullet into Jesse James!" cried one of the miners excitedly.

But the last words were audible only to the man who uttered them, for long before he had finished, the guns of the manhunters were barking viciously.

Desperate, indeed, was the predicament in which the members of the Red Hand found themselves!

The random shots of the manhunters had deprived them of their canoes, thus cutting off escape by water, and, seeming to steady under the smell of the powder and the crash of the volleys, the miners and professional manhunters were acting like veteran Indian fighters, spreading out in fan shaped formation in such manner that they were able to enfilade the bushes which Parker had pointed out.

The constant ping and whistle of the shells as they sped through the air also steadied the pirates, however, and with the realization of the dire extremity to which they had been reduced, they no longer waited for the command of their daredevil leader, but each man acted as he thought best.

Flat on their bellies, they rested their rifles on their arms and shot only when a belch of flame from the muzzles of the guns in the hands of the manhunters showed them where they could put a bullet and make it count.

For several minutes the plan of campaign was eminently successful, the shouts and groans that came from the throats of the manhunters proclaiming that the bullets had struck home.

They soon, however, caught onto the fact that the members of the Red Hand were lying on the ground, and accordingly they trained their weapons lower.

"This is no place for us, now they've found out our game," growled the notorious outlaw, with a string of terrible oaths.

"What can we do?" asked Twister. "They outnumber us at least three to one, and they have us practically surrounded. It's me for the water. I'd rather take my chances on drowning than being drilled with lead."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," breathed Jesse, sternly.

"Oh, won't I? Do you think I'm fool enough to stay here and wait for a shell to find me when, by striking out in the lake, I should at least have a chance of getting away?"

"Of course I don't."

"Then what have you got in your head?"

"We'll shoot our way through the lunkheads!"

"Shoot our way through!" repeated Baldy, and the others, as though they did not believe their ears.

"Are you crazy, man? It's sure death."

"Not if you fellows will do as I tell you."

"That depends on what you tell us," exclaimed Scalper. "I'm inclined to agree with Twister that the lake is the only place for us now."

Again, in no pleasant tones, the notorious leader of the Red Hand expressed his desire for the presence of several of his boys from the States—and, as before, the reference to them succeeded in rousing the fighting blood of the men Jesse had with him.

"Come, out with it! What's your plan?" demanded Deadeye.

"Simply to hold our fire after the next volley of the manhunters then, leaping forward, dash through them, shooting as we go."

"It'll never work," opined Twister.

"Very well. Do as you like, but remember this! I wash my hands of the whole bunch of you now and forever—if you mutiny at this time."

A moment there was silence, then without waiting to see what his companions decided, the daredevil Red Hand put his plan into operation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MANHUNTERS ARE PUT TO ROUT.

Running forward in a crouching position, the notorious leader of the pirates suddenly emitted an ear splitting yell, then leaped to his full height, and, with six shooter in each hand belching fire, and a hail of leaden bullets, he bore down upon the amazed and startled manhunters.

"Beat 'em back! The gang is on us!" shouted the foreman of the Pequod Copper mine.

But instead of obeying, the miners and professional manhunters gave ground before the fury of the onslaught.

The leader of the Red Hand, however, never for an instant slackened his pace, and shooting and howling, he had soon broken through the line of his enemies.

Amazed at the ease with which he had accomplished his purpose, the notorious outlaw paused a moment for the double purpose of recovering his breath, and

learning what his companions had decided upon—and this act came near being his undoing!

"Don't lose your nerve, boys!" shouted one of the miners. "That's only Jesse and he's all alone. The rest of his gang didn't have the nerve to try the trick!"

At the words, a howl of rage and humiliation arose from the manhunters to think that they had permitted one lone man to fool them, and, shouting and cursing, they started in pursuit.

"It's now or never," exclaimed the notorious pirate to himself through his clenched teeth. "I've got to give these Canucks a scare or it's all day with me!"

No sooner had he come to this decision than the leader of the Red Hand started to put it into operation.

Yelling and shrieking with blood curdling Indian warwhoops, and changing the tone of his voice with each shout, Jesse again began to pour the deadly fire from his shooting irons into the black mass—which was all that could be seen of the group of manhunters—leaping and bounding, now this way and now that, with one hand first high over his head and then far to one side, that he might give the bullets from his six shooters the effect of coming from the muzzles of many other guns.

The expedient was desperate, but its very lack of probability seemed to accomplish its purpose!

"The whole bunch has broken through our ranks!" lamented Ashmore. "We're done for, we're done for!"

Realizing on the instant that he must do something to counteract the discouraging effect of the superintendent's words, the foreman yelled:

"It's only Jess, so don't get rattled! He's the only pirate that hasn't been killed—and now we're going to get him and the thousands of dollars reward that are offered for him!"

Parker's words rallied the fast waning spirits of the miners and manhunters, and again taking heart, they began to close in around the lone leader of the Red Hand, when the lie was given the foreman's words.

Howling and firing their shooting irons, the other members of the notorious outlaw's band of pirates charged their would-be captors, their action determined by the success with which the pirate chieftain had carried out his plan.

As Jesse heard them, he bellowed:

"Into them men! I'll pay fifty dollars for every scalp you bring me!"

This offer aroused the terrible blood lust of the Indian chieftain, and from having been only luke-warm in the attack upon the manhunters, he now became insane with a desire to earn the head money.

Giving voice to warwhoops that made the cries of the leader of the Red Hand seem like a lullaby, the redskin fell upon the manhunters, beating them down with the butts of his sixshooters.

Deadeye and Twister, having generous strains of Indian blood in their veins, caught the lust from the chief, and joined him in his attack—and before the fury of the blood crazed men Parker and his companions fled precipitately!

CHAPTER XIII.

RED HAND'S PLAN.

Like a pack of bloodhounds in full cry, the pirates set after the fleeing manhunters and miners, but before they had gone far they were halted by the leader of the Red Hand.

"Why not let us get the devils now we have them on the run?" demanded Baldy.

"Because there's no use of taking any unnecessary risk. We shouldn't be able to get every one of them anyway, and I can't afford to lose a man—for I shall need every blessed one of you before many days."

"Need us? What do you mean?" demanded Twister.

"I mean that the Pequod Copper Mining Company, as soon as they hear of the loss of their pay gold, the death of their messenger and the burning of the shanties on the plateau will send out a gang of men to beat every bush for us between Great Bear Lake and the Arctic Circle."

"Aw, you're hedging on your offer for scalps!" growled the Indian chief. "There ain't no more danger of any of the men the Pequod sends out finding us after this little circus than there has been since we began operations."

"That's where you're wrong, Scalper."

"Why?"

"Want to bet?"

"Aw, go on. I told you you were just trying to welch, and that's the truth. If I bet with you I'll only lose what I've won in head money."

For while the redskin had been talking he had been busy with his keen edged scalping knife, and, with a skill that was uncanny, had removed three heavy scalps, which he held up gloatingly before his horri-fied companions.

"There's a hundred and fifty dollars," exclaimed the terrible leader of the Red Hand, as he glanced at the scalps, "and here's your money."

And producing one of the packages of gold which he had taken from the luckless messenger, he counted out the sum and handed it to the Indian.

"Now I'll just bet you three hundred dollars—which gives you a chance to double your money—that within seventy-two hours after the news of our raid reaches any village there will be a man hunt started for us that

will make any one in which you fellows have ever taken part seem like a four o'clock tea in comparison."

During the interchange of opinions, all the other members of the piratical band save Deadeye had gathered about the two men, and as they heard the wager of the notorious outlaw, they urged the Indian to accept.

"Very well, you're on!" exclaimed Scalper. "Now tell us what there is about this hunt that is going to make it such almighty ticklish business for us?"

"Just this, that we'll have every man in the whole force of the Royal North-West Mounted Police stationed in this part of the country on our trail."

The mention of the constabulary to whom was entrusted the policing of the vast wilderness stretching from the provinces to the Arctic circle instantly sobered the members of the Red Hand.

"How do you plan to give 'em the slip? They're worse than judgment to have after you," exclaimed Twister.

Eagerly, all the other members of the band which had been terrorizing the region about Great Bear Lake turned toward Jesse.

"I am going to start a series of raids, striking from one side of the lake to the other so fast that neither the constables nor their officers will know which end their heads are on!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT."

As the band of the Red Hand heard the plan of campaign proposed by the notorious leader, they gasped and looked at one another in amazement, for such a thing as daring to beard the members of the celebrated constabulary by such methods was unheard of in the annals of crime in the North-West.

"I wouldn't try it, if I were you," opined Twister.

"Why not?"

"Oh, because I wouldn't."

"But why?"

The bandit, however, was reluctant to offer any opinion, but at last Jesse forced him to and he blurted:

"Because I don't think you ought to play with fire."

"Meaning?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Sure."

"I mean that you're in so bad in the States and you've managed to get in so bad up here at the Pequod mines that the wisest thing, according to my notion, for you to do is to beat it while you have the chance for some region where you can get into a hole and pull it in after you."

Despite the seriousness of their situation, the other

members of the piratical band could not restrain their smiles at the advice offered to the blood thirsty desperado.

But their mirth was short lived!

"That may be the way you fellows up in this God forsaken region of the world do, but it isn't the way I'm accustomed to doing."

"There isn't a human on two legs or a devil on a dozen that I'm afraid of! I'm going to show these mounted police what it is to have a real live man to deal with! If any of you fellows want to come along you may, but don't think I need you, for I don't. In fact you will probably be more of a bother than an assistance because out of pure decency I shall feel it incumbent upon myself to stand by you if you get in a pinch."

A few moments after the notorious outlaw had delivered himself of this caustic statement, the members of the Red Hand stood in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts—but it soon was made evident that their thoughts ran in the same channel.

"You needn't think you can get us all into such a mess as you have and then try to get out of it by throwing us down," snarled Baldy.

And the murmurs of approval which greeted these words showed clearly that the bandit had voiced the opinion of the others.

"But I'm not trying to get out of anything," flashed the leader of the pirates in return.

"Then why do you say anything about our shifting for ourselves?"

"Because from the evident distaste you have for mixing it up, I thought perhaps you would feel safer if you should go and find one of those holes you spoke about that you could pull in after you."

"There's no yellow in us," growled Scalper, hotly.

"That, of course, is a matter of opinion," sneered the Red Hand chieftain.

Angry were the murmurs which greeted this statement, and after consulting with one another apart, Deadeye, exclaimed:

"We're going to call your bluff."

"Bluff!" snorted the notorious bandit. "I'll have you know that Jesse James makes no bluffs—he never yet has started anything that he couldn't finish, and this won't be the time he does!"

"Bragging never got a man anywhere—not in this part of the country," retorted Twister. "Up here we bank on deeds, not hot air!"

At this belittling of his reputation, the notorious bandit stared at the member of the Red Hand as though he could scarce believe his ears.

Never before had any one accused him of being a braggart to his face—and he was determined that no one ever should again!

During the exciting and desperate events attendant upon the hold-up of the messenger, the firing of the

mine shacks, and the savage encounter with the man-hunters on the shore of the lake with all their acts of carnage, the night had passed and in the place of the darkness had come the flush of dawn—and with its light the members of the piratical band were able to see the face of the desperate criminal for whose capture dead or alive, rewards of thousands of dollars were outstanding.

As Twister made his virtual charge of cowardice, a look of black fury settled upon Jesse's face, his lips narrowed in to purple lines, tight-drawn across his teeth, and in his eyes there shone the light which any of his old pals in the States would have beheld with alarm—the blood-lust which made the notorious bandit a demon rather than a human.

Confident in his enormous bulk, the outlaw who had charged Jesse with being a dispenser of hot air ignored the danger signal exhibited in the face and manner of the leader of the Red Hand and, to make his contempt more conspicuous, he took his eyes from the desperate bandit and looked at his companions gloatingly.

Not long did he exult, however.

“Look out for yourself, you big bag of wind,” hissed Jesse, with a blood curdling volley of oaths. “It's like taking candy from a child to tackle you, but I can't stand such talk as you've handed me from any one, and I won't!”

The words of the leader of the Red Hand caused the fellow to turn his gaze toward him once more, and as soon as he was convinced of the fact, Jesse flew at him as a wild-cat flies at its victim.

For a few minutes the onlookers could see little but legs and arms whirling through the air. Of a sudden there came a pause in the furious fight and then, to their amazement, the members of the Red Hand saw Jesse raise his antagonist from the ground, swing him once round his head and bring him down, his back across a log, with such terrific force, that the snapping of his ribs and bones was audible!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NOTORIOUS OUTLAW QUELLS A MUTINY.

Never before had the members of the Red Hand seen the terrible outlaw in the paroxysm of his blood lust and, as they watched his actions which culminated in the shockingly horrible murder of one of his own men, they shrank from the fiend in human form, aghast!

But the notorious outlaw's fury did not end with the terrible death he inflicted upon the man who had had the temerity to question his daredevil courage!

As he released his hold upon the body, it slipped

from the log and huddled together in a heap which quivered from muscular contraction.

Apparently incensed at this sign of life, Jesse leaped across the tree trunk and rained kick after kick upon his victim.

“Lie still, you fool! Lie still, I say! I will be obeyed! If you don't stop that mocking chuckle, I'll rend you limb from limb!”

And as though he were about to put his awful threat into execution, the fiend, his face hideously distorted, leaned over the luckless man who had dared question his valor, his fingers distended as though he would seize the body once again.

“Mother of mercy, he's mad—stark, staring mad!” breathed Deadeye, in a low, tense voice. “He thinks poor Twister's death throes are the shakings of his body from laughter. Quick, and we'll seize him before he commits any further outrage!”

Believing that their very lives depended upon compliance with their companion's suggestion the other members of the piratical band started toward the human fiend, but scarce a foot had they advanced ere they regretted their move!

The ears of the famous bandit, trained through his years of service under the black flag of the famous guerilla chieftain, Quantrell, and subsequent defiance of all the laws of God and man, had caught the sound of the stealthily advancing bandits and instantly he whirled to face them, whipping out his six shooters as he turned.

“Get back, you curs!” he hissed. “Come so much as a foot nearer, and I'll send your puny little soul to hell along with this other fool—and if you like I'll hurry so you can overtake him.”

The vicious venom of the leader of the Red Hand was a revelation to the other men, and they stopped in their tracks, gazing at him with open eyes and mouths.

“I thought there wasn't one of you who would willingly face powder and lead!” he sneered. “This thing has come to a show-down, and we'll have to settle it once and for all right now.”

“Well you know that it was at your request I came up here to the Great Bear Lake to act as leader of the Red Hand, at the special request of Deadeye and Scalper.

“You promised to obey me implicitly—and how well you have kept your promise the carcass of that carrion, Twister, is evidence.

“But it doesn't look to me as though you were all fools, and for that reason I am giving you a chance for your lives.

“If you will place your right hands on that still warm corpse and swear, as you hope to escape an end similar to that which overtook him your pal, that you will obey my slightest order, I will agree to continue as your leader.”

"And if we don't?" demanded Baldy, in a voice trembling with ill disguised fear.

"I'll get you, one after another!"

"Provided we don't get you first," growled Scalper.

"Which you won't, you know, because you haven't got the heart," jeered Jesse. "Make up your minds whether you'll take my offer or leave it—and be lively. I haven't the time to waste longer on you."

Again the members of the Red Hand drew aside in consultation, and after a few moments Deadeye announced:

"We want you to be our leader."

"Then step up and make your oath."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PIRATE CHIEFTAIN STARTS ON HIS MISSION.

Believing that their very lives depended on their compliance with the order of the notorious desperado, the members of the Red Hand one after another approached the corpse of the man who had so short a time before been one of their number and putting their right hands upon the still warm body, looked expectantly at their chieftain.

"Hold up your left hands!" Jesse hissed.

Instantly the men obeyed.

"Repeat after me—'As I hope to die a natural death, I promise to obey the slightest order of Jesse James so long as he continues leader of the Red Hand Band of Pirates and if I fail, I hope he will strike me down in instant death and that my body may never have a grave!'"

After the terrible outlaw had spoken the awesome oath, his men started to repeat it in unison. But he quickly stopped them.

"You've each of you got to say it separately—I don't intend to have any double cross handed me. Now be lively!" he snarled.

And one after another, in none too steady voices, those who remained of the piratical band swore their unswerving allegiance to the terrible bandit.

When the ceremony was finished, the men looked at their chieftain expectantly.

"What shall we do now?" asked Baldy, when Jesse did not speak.

"Beat it back to the cave and stay in hiding till I join you."

At this command, so different from what they had expected, the members of the Red Hand looked first at one another and then at Jesse in blank amazement.

"What are *you* going to do?" finally demanded Deadeye.

"It's one of the rules upon which I always insist, that none of my men shall ask me questions. When I

care to tell my plans, I will. Just remember that in the future.

"This once, I will tell you that I am going down to Swazey to get a motor boat."

"Motor boat?" gasped the others, in surprise and then, remembering the words just uttered by their capricious chieftain anent asking question, they instantly became silent.

"Yes, motor boat," grinned their leader, amused at the amazement his announcement had aroused in his fellows. "And I'm going to get the motor boat so that I can carry on my proposed raids more easily and quickly than in canoes!"

But Jesse was balked in his purpose!

At this statement which showed that their leader had already made his plans for putting into effect his threat to give the Mounted Police something to think about, the pirates realized if never before his ability as a chief.

"By thunder, it's as much as your life's worth to go into Swazey—but if you're bound to go, why don't you get some opium and bring it back with you? We can get every man in the camps round Great Bear Lake wild with the stuff. They'll give every cent they hope to earn to get hold of some of it!" declared Deadeye.

The suggestion met the hearty approval of the robber-chieftain.

"Is Swazey one end of the 'hop' smuggling business?" he asked.

"It is—and there's sure a heap of it in that town."

"How do they carry it?"

"Wish I knew."

"Who do I go to?"

"Ned Briscoe, chief of police."

At this amazing statement that the man who was supposed to uphold the law and to punish all transgressors was the active agent of the opium smugglers, the notorious bandit stared at his man closely—for it occurred to him that the suggestion might only be a scheme to have him give himself deliberately into the hands of the police.

"Is that straight?" he demanded in a hard, cold voice, looking at the pirate.

"It is."

"Prove it."

"Don't know how I can very well, from here—but I'm willing to go down to Swazey with you, if that'll do any good," returned Deadeye in a voice so sincere that Jesse finally decided the fellow had been speaking the truth, amazing though his statement was.

"You needn't bother to do that. Just give me a note to Briscoe so he'll know I'm all right," commanded the notorious outlaw.

And without delay, Deadeye scrawled:

"Deer Ned: Give the bearer of this anything he wants. He's O. K. DEAD-EYE."

"That ought to do the business," smiled Jesse as he put the piece of paper in his shirt. "Now light out for the cave—and stick to it. If I don't show up for three or four days, don't get excited. When I do come, I'll come in the night and announce my approach by three rockets, so keep a sharp lookout for me. Scalper, I'll put you in command. The rest of you are to obey him as implicitly as you would me—and it'll go hard with any one who doesn't when I get back!

"Now take care of yourselves!"

And while his men set out for the cave, some thirteen miles away, in which the pirates had established their headquarters, their leader started on a peculiar, ground-covering lope for the town of Swazey, which lay twenty-five miles to the South, not far from the shore of the lake.

But little did the notorious outlaw dream, as he started out, of the nerve-racking experience through which he was destined to pass ere he rejoined his band of pirates!

CHAPTER XVI.

"A FRIEND IN NEED."

Unknown to Jesse, two of the miners had travelled the very trail he was following some two hours ahead of him, bound to the same town, Swazey, to enlist the aid of the male members of the population in hunting the bandits, who had committed such brutally wanton atrocities, before the arrival of the constabulary.

But the pirate chieftain was soon to be made aware of their purpose!

Some five miles had he covered when he became suddenly conscious that he was being watched!

The thought that the forsaken stretch of land could hold another mortal than himself had never occurred to him and as he felt the gaze of the eyes that were rivetted upon him, yet which he was unable to discern, he reached for his shooting irons and crouched down under the bank of a brook, each moment expecting to hear the bark of the watcher's gun.

And not long was he kept in suspense!

"Who you?" came a voice, apparently from directly above him.

For a moment, the terrible outlaw was non-plussed as to what reply he should make, then his resourceful mind came to the emergency and he exclaimed:

"I'm lost!"

"Lost?" repeated the voice in amazement. And the next instant, Jesse beheld the head and shoulders

of a man whose garb bespoke him as a hunter, cautiously rise above the edge of the bank. Apparently the appearance of the outlaw was reassuring for the next moment the trapper was beside him.

"How you come get lost?" asked the trapper.

"I was brought out here and left."

"Sacre! I thou't I heered ze pirates, but I did not t'ink it would be a man they carried."

Surprised at this statement, the famous cut-throat exclaimed:

"Do the pirates come here often?"

"Nevair befo'."

"Then how do you know it was they?"

"Me, Tonton, seen them plenty time."

"Where?"

For several minutes the trapper eyed the great detective without making any reply.

"Why you want know?" he finally asked.

Again was Jesse brought face to face with the problem of what he should reply—but this time the hunter solved it for him.

"Pirates they no luff you?" he exclaimed, inquiringly.

"Judging from the forsaken spot where they dumped me, I don't think they have any great amount of affection for me."

"Good, then you and Tonton be friend!"

"That suits me—especially if you've got anything to eat," declared the great detective, heartily. "Any man who doesn't like pirates is a friend of mine."

"No—not all."

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"Plenty trapper, heem hate pirates but eat um yen! When trapper no can get, zey would kill pirates they come roun'. But, sacre, me Tonton, some day will kill them!"

"So the pirates sell you trappers opium, eh?" exclaimed Jesse. "I suppose they take your pelts in payment?"

"Oui! Oui, feefty, hundert dollair wort' for one leettle peell—but no to Tonton!"

"I guess that's straight," commented the famous desperado to himself, though aloud he said, "You certainly don't look like a fellow who hits the pipe—your complexion is altogether too ruddy. T——"

But before he could utter what he intended to say, the trapper seized him by the arm, laid his finger on his lips as a sign to keep silent and then craned his neck to the West, listening intently.

"I can hear wheels coming over the trail!" he announced.

"Is there a road up through here?"

"Uhuh, to ze lef', feefty, hundert feet."

"Much travel up through it?"

"No."

"Then what do you suppose it means?"

"Miners."

"What about them?"

And as the notorious desperado asked the question, he turned his eyes upon the trapper, searchingly.

"Tonton, me seen two miner, Courtenay and Ashmore go down trail byembye ago."

"What do you suppose they went for?"

So innocent was the tone in which the bandit asked this question that the trapper was deceived.

"Get posse trail pirates!"

"How do you know?"

"Asked."

"Huh, that seems straight. Did they tell you why they want a posse?"

"Uhuh."

"Why?"

At this interrogation, the trapper looked about as though he feared to answer, then bending his hand he whispered in the bandit's ear:

"Get heem Jess Jame! Courtenay, heem goin' for Mounted police."

The situation was one that appealed to the daredevil outlaw and he exclaimed:

"This may be some of the posse we hear. You go out to the road and find out who it is. If it's any of the manhunters, sneeze."

Quickly the trapper obeyed, stepping out into the road just as a wagonload of men came along.

"Who are you?" demanded one of the men in the first wagon.

"What's that to you?" retorted the hunter.

"Just this, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head you're likely to get into trouble. Now answer some questions—and do it straight if you don't want to get arrested."

The manner in which the member of the posse, for such the men were, overcome with his importance and authority spoke, was exactly such as would irritate any one, especially a person accustomed to roam the woods without so much as a "by-your-leave," and it brought Tonton's blood to a boil.

"And who are you that I should answer your questions?" he demanded, his anger evident in the light that flashed in his eyes. "You are a crook, a t'ief, a pirate! Bah! I blow my hand at you!"

And the peppery little Frenchman suited his action to his words, backing it up with a movement of his rifle that was significant.

"Who'm I, you little shrimp? I'll tell you!" roared the native of Swazey whose dignity had been given such a rude shock. "I'm a special deputy sworn in by the Chief of Police of Swazey, Ned Briscoe——"

"Why don't you call him Edward?" interrupted another of the members of the posse. "That's his full and legal name, it would give your commission as a deputy much more dignity."

At this sally, the others who were in hearing shouted with laughter for the jeer had brought flushes of shame and anger to the cheeks of the man who had imagined he was of so great consequence.

Standing up, he laid down his rifle and started to get down from the wagon, with the very evident intention of obtaining satisfaction for the fun from the hide of his tormentor when the team bearing Briscoe's first assistant hove in sight.

"Hello, Tonton!" he shouted, as soon as he caught sight of the trapper. "What's the trouble?"

"Hello, Baptiste. One of this canaille has asked me some questions after insulting me, Tonton, by threatening me with arrest! And me, I laugh at heem—and all like heem!"

"There, there, don't get excited, Tonton," returned the deputy chief of police, soothingly. "The fellow didn't know who you were. Which one of them was it?"

"The big, tall one, standing up."

"Hey, Roberts, now just keep cool. This fellow here is one of the best hunters in the whole region. Tonton's his name. I've know him for the last fifteen years—and a straighter chap I never knew.

"If you've insulted him, just apologize. If Tonton wants, he can help us more in running down the murderer better than anyone else, for he knows every path and creek in this country for fifty miles."

Purposely had the deputy chief of police mentioned the murder, because he knew if there were one thing of which Tonton were more fond than of hunting and attending to his traps, it was listening to stories about murderers and he had hoped that by mentioning the idea, that, one had been committed not far away he might cause the excitable little trapper to forget his grievance against the member of the posse who had roused his ire in particular, and all the others in general.

And that his idea was not vain was evident by the excitement expressed in the hunter's voice as he exclaimed:

"Murder? What murder? Is there a murder around here?"

"There's certainly been a murder!" returned Baptiste. "Several of the Pequods men have been killed by Jesse James."

"Sacre! Let me at heem! Where is the fiend?"

"That's what we have come up here to find out."

At this statement, Tonton suddenly remembered the presence of the man whom he had discovered at the brook, and as he did so he gave an involuntary start.

Noting this, Baptiste exclaimed:

"What is it? Have you seen any one around here this morning?"

"Maybe I have, maybe I haven't."

"Come, don't quibble. Speak up. Yes or no. Did you see any one here near the lake this morning?"

"When?"

"About four hours ago."

"Uhuh!"

"What did he look like?"

"What did the murderer look like?" countered Tonton.

"Oh, rats, what's the use of wasting any more time with this Frenchman?" interrupted one of the members of the party. "He's batty, just like any other backwoodsman, over the subject of murder, and Jesse James, and if you give his imagination a chance to play, he would swear he had seen any and every one of a hundred men you might chance to describe. Let's go ahead. We're still about six miles from the plateau where the shanties stood."

The deputy chief, however, paid no heed to this comment, and turning to the hunter, commanded in a tone of austere authority:

"Tell me what the man you saw looked like?"

A moment the trapper hesitated, then in the evident fear that he might be denied further participation in the hunt for the murderer, he thought better of his determination not to answer, and said:

"He was small and short."

"Huh! About as much like the man we're after as Tonton is like a mountain," growled the man who had objected to wasting time in talking to the excitable little French trapper.

"I don't know that his information has done any harm," returned Baptiste, slowly. "In fact, it strikes me that it is very important."

"How?" chorused three or four of the manhunters.

"Because it shows that there are two men prowling about."

"Yes, and by the time we get there there'll be fifty-two," mocked the scoffer. "Certainly anybody who wants to go to such a God-forsaken spot has the right to."

"It's no wonder you fellows couldn't catch a crook when you don't understand things better," retorted Baptiste, haughtily. "Can't you understand that Tonton's saying he saw a little man means that Jesse has a pal with him, and because he has only one it proves he's running away!"

So impressed were the other members of the posse at this wonderful deduction made by the assistant chief of police, that they all made no more jesting comment, while Tonton asked:

"Tell me what your man looked like?"

As Ashmore before him, Baptiste gave an almost photographic description of the great desperado, so detailed was it, and before he had half finished, the trapper's eyes nearly popped from his head.

"What is it? What's the matter?" demanded Baptiste.

"There's no use of your trying to deny it. I know you've seen this man!" exclaimed the deputy chief sternly, determined to try the effect of a good sized bluff.

"Mebbe——"

"Do you mean to say that you've seen this man we're after? Whereabouts? Quick, out with it. Don't waste so much time!" exclaimed several members of the posse, almost in unison.

Tonton, however, was not to be forced into making any admissions. He did not care to, and he diplomatically avoided a direct answer by exclaiming:

"I said mebbe. I t'ink I seen him t'ree or four times."

"When? Where?" interrupted the manhunters eagerly.

"Oh, up and down ze lake. He told me he was a miner."

"By Jickey! It would be a joke if Ashmore had mistaken one of his own men for Jesse," exclaimed the assistant chief of police, disgustedly.

This suggestion brought various exclamations and comments from the other members of the posse, and several of them were plying the trapper with questions as to how and when and where he had met the alleged miner, when they were amazed to hear a voice exclaim:

"You men are all wrong. I had no more to do with the murdering of Ashmore's men than any of you."

No heed, however, did Baptiste pay to these words.

The moment he had recovered his surprise at the sight of the man who tallied so closely with the description he had been repeating to the trapper, the assistant chief of police shouted:

"Surrender, my man! You are under arrest! Boys, train your shooting irons on him!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE THE MUZZLES OF SCORES OF GUNS.

In vain the great bandit protested, but he might as well have tried to dam the mighty lake with a feather, as to turn the determination of the members of the posse to arrest him.

"Now just cut out your talking," snapped Baptiste finally. "You're the man Ashmore saw, and you're the man who killed his miners, and you're the man we're going to take back to Swazey to stand trial for the murder!"

"What nonsense! You haven't a particle of evidence against me," protested the pirate chieftain.

"No evidence against you?" repeated the assistant. "Ain't we found you near the plateau?"

"No, you haven't. I just heard some of the rest of you say it was six miles from the plateau."

"Aw, don't get too smart, or I'll hit you over the head. I don't think a beating would do the fellow who would commit murder, any harm."

This suggestion brought a response of angry mutterings from the other members of the posse, and fearing that, should they become excited in any greater degree, they might set upon him and do bodily harm, the famous outlaw decided it would be the part of wisdom to submit to the arrest, confident that as soon as he reached the town he could prove his identity and instantly obtain his release through Deadeye's letter to Briscoe.

"Very well. I will submit to being taken to Swazey under guard—but after we arrive there it will only be a matter of a short time before everything is cleared up."

"Then drop your guns," commanded Baptiste.

"Surely you won't insist upon that, when I tell you I am absolutely innocent of murdering the Pequod miners."

"We ain't such fools as we look," returned the assistant chief of police. "Either you'll drop them guns before I count three, or we'll drill you full of holes. Have your guns ready, boys!"

As the scores of gun muzzles of all sorts and descriptions pointed at him, he realized from the excited state of manhunters, that at any minute one of the posse might lose control of himself, and snap the trigger of the weapon, sending a bullet tearing its way into him, he hurriedly shouted:

"All right! I'll drop them."

And suiting his action to his words, he let his revolvers fall to the ground at his feet.

As they saw their captive thus rendered harmless, the members of the posse closed in upon him, and soon they had him bound so tight with ropes and straps that he looked more like a monster clothes reel than a human being.

Vigorously he had protested against such treatment, but the more he had objected, the tighter his captives made his bonds, until he decided that if he were ever to have the use of his limbs again, it would be necessary for him to keep silent.

After this binding had been accomplished, there arose a wrangle among the manhunters as to which team should have the honor of taking the prisoner back to the village, the man who had first seen Tonton claiming the right as his, upon the ground that had he not accosted the excitable little trapper, they never would have learned about the presence of the supposed murderer.

Baptiste, however, put a sudden end to the argument by declaring that, as the assistant chief of police, it was incumbent upon him to carry the man in his team,

and without more ado Jesse, for the first time in his life bound until he was as stiff as a poker, was thrown into the springless wagon and was soon bumping over the hard road on the return to Swazey.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NOTORIOUS OUTLAW'S IDENTITY IS DENIED.

No sooner had Ned Briscoe, the chief of police of Swazey, learned from Ashmore and Courtenay that the terrible Jesse James had allied himself with the Pirates of the North-West than instead of turning heaven and earth to capture him and reap the fortune in rewards, his shrewd mind conceived the idea that the notorious outlaw could be made to be worth more to him if he would undertake the distribution of opium not only throughout Canada but in the States as well.

With this thought in mind, as soon as he had responded to the mine superintendent's demand that he gather a posse, he sent his deputy, Baptiste, in charge while he, himself, hastened to the leader of the band of smugglers, whom he knew to be within a few miles of Swazey awaiting an opportune moment to bring a great quantity of the drug into the town, to acquaint him with his idea in regard to using the celebrated outlaw.

Readily the smuggler agreed, and together the men drove back to Swazey, post-haste, and by one of those strange tricks which Fate so delights to play, they came across the posse returning in triumph.

"What are you coming back for?" demanded the chief, as soon as he was within hailing distance of the men in the rear wagon.

"Because we've got Jesse!" shouted one of the men.

In dismay, the smugglers looked at one another, then Briscoe exclaimed:

"Toby, just whip up your horses and pass these other fellows. I want to get a look at the man you've caught."

"By heck, Ned! Why don't you have him put into this wagon!" exclaimed one of the other occupants. "You'd ought to, seeing you're chief."

"Who's got him now?" asked Briscoe.

"Baptiste. He said he belonged to him because he was next in rank to you, though one of the other fellows really found the murderer."

The thought that there had been such sharp rivalry between the different members of the posse for the distinction of conveying the prisoner into the village sent the two smugglers into peals of laughter.

"Ned, I reckon you'd better take him, and that'll stop all heartache," grinned his pal.

Thoroughly delighted at the prospect, the man at the

reins whipped up his horses, shouting to the teams ahead of him to get out of the way and let him pass.

As the familiar figure and features of the chief of police were recognized, the excitement spread throughout all members of the posse, and they were loath to surrender their advantage in the line of advance.

The only part of Jesse's body that his captor's hadn't covered with straps and ropes, was his head, and when he heard the commotion behind him, he demanded of one of the four men acting as guards, who sat with rifles across their knees, to know its cause.

"The chief and Bancroft are coming," returned one of the men.

"Thank Heaven! Now, I'll get out of this cheerful mess," exclaimed the famous outlaw. "I'll make you fellows wish you'd shown me a little more decency."

But the bandit was doomed to receive one of the greatest shocks that had ever come to him during his exciting career!

Realizing that it would be best for him to await the arrival of the chief of police, Baptiste drew rein, though in his heart he would have liked nothing better than to have urged his horses to the limit, that he might have carried the prisoner into Swazey.

But his disappointment at not being allowed so to do was partially assured by the congratulations which both his chief and Bancroft showered upon him, and which he believed sincere.

"Great work, Bap!" exclaimed Briscoe. "Here I got fooled on my trip and you've got the Jesse while I was chasing around. Zeke says he fits my description to a dot."

"Hey, you fellows! Pull your prisoner out and let's have a look at him."

Ere the guards who were sitting over the captive, rifles across their knees, could obey, however, the notorious desperado shouted:

"I say, Briscoe! Your men have made a mistake."

"Who's that spoke?" demanded the chief.

"It's this fellow we've got tied up," replied Baptiste. "He's been putting up the devil and all of a holler about being arrested, and said that he was a friend of yours and you knew who he was, and he'd have us all broke when he got a chance to talk to you."

"Ain't it funny how these guys always hand out that same line of con talk, Dell?" exclaimed the chief of police, as his assistant finished speaking. "It don't make any difference whether the fellow is a little crook who's stolen a pound of nails, or a desperate fellow like Jesse James. They all have to hand it out that they're in cahoots with the chief, and that if they can once get to talk with him, the doors will open for them without their being obliged even to turn the knobs."

In blank amazement, not untinged with despair, the famous outlaw heard these remarkable words as they fell from the lips of the local chief of police.

But he still had faith in Deadeye's note and shouted:

"I say, Briscoe, this being tied up with ropes is confounded uncomfortable! Hurry up and take a look at me, and then cut these bonds."

Ignorant of what the interchange of glances meant, but judging that they were merely mute expressions of enjoyment at the prisoner's discomfiture, all the members of the posse round them, took up the laughter.

No move, however, did Briscoe make to comply with the request of the great outlaw.

Even members of the posse at last noticed that he did not exhibit any great desire to look at the prisoner, despite his previous words to the effect that he wished so to do, and as they could not understand such a lack of curiosity, one of them exclaimed:

"I thought you were so all-fired anxious to put your peepers on him, Ned?"

The chief of police was about to utter an objection, when his companion interrupted him, exclaiming:

"Yes, I guess we'd better look at him. Of course, you see so many of these crooks, and they don't interest you, Ned, but I've always had a desire to set my eyes on Jesse James!"

An increasing feeling of fear had come over the famous outlaw as he listened to these words which denoted such a strange attitude on the part of the police official, whom he had thought to find his friend, and as the danger of his predicament came over him, in view of this unexpected development, he was too absorbed in trying to devise some method of extricating himself to speak when the local chief of police, and the leader of the smugglers stepped to the side of the wagon, and gazed down into his face.

"By thunder! But he's an ugly looking guy!" exclaimed Bancroft. "One of the toughest nuts I've ever seen in my life! I'd actually be afraid to meet him in the day-time!"

"I bet he gave you fellows a good tussle before you got him bound."

With that inexplicable desire to make themselves appear as heroes and to distort the simplest facts in order to accomplish this end which possesses the majority of mankind, when they heard the suggestion that their prisoner must have put up a desperate fight, several of them smirked asininely and exclaimed:

"Well, we did have some trouble, that's a fact."

This statement aroused Tonton, who had been one of the guards to accompany Jesse from the spot where he was taken prisoner, and he snorted:

"Can't you fellows tell the truth? Honest, chief, there weren't so much of a struggle arresting that man as there would have been in cutting the head off a chicken!"

"The whole bunch of these townfolk trained their guns on him, and Baptiste told him to drop his revolvers, that's all there was to it, and they treated him

like a dog, too, though he said he had a message for you!"

Not alone did this frank statement of the fiery little trapper bring discomfiture to the guards who had sought to make themselves out heroes, but it was not pleasing to the chief and his companion, and Briscoe, quickly snarled:

"Well, I don't know him! I never saw him before in my life and I have seen Jesse!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

RELIEF IS PROMISED THE PIRATE-CHIEFTAIN.

As the famous bandit heard his identity denied, he could have shouted for joy—for he realized that the chief of police had caught the meaning of the innocent Tonton's statement that the prisoner had a note for him, and had decided to learn its contents.

But his joy soon gave place to deep anxiety again as he heard the discussion which broke out among the members of the posse.

Close to the outskirts of the town were they, when one of the farmers asked:

"What you going to do with the fellow Ned?"

"Take him to my house, and then turn him loose—after I've questioned him!"

"But he ought to be held until Ashmore and Courtenay can have a look at him."

"Why?"

"They, having seen Jess last night, would be more likely to know him than you! When did you see him, anyhow?"

"Two years ago—but I reckon I haven't forgotten. Besides, I'm chief of police—and what I say goes!"

"Oh, no it doesn't. I'm the sheriff, and as Jess is from the States, my authority is higher than yours. I'm going to take the prisoner to my house, put him in the dungeon, and then send to the States for a description of Jesse. There's enough rewards offered for him to make it worth while to take a little trouble, and make right sure we ain't got the bird!"

Vigorously was the corrupt chief of police about to protest, when the smuggler gave him a significant kick.

"Oh, very well, if you feel that way about it, sheriff, go ahead," exclaimed Briscoe. "I say he isn't Jesse James—but of course, if you want to run the risk of being sued for false arrest that's your business, not mine.

"Go ahead and take him to your house! To tell you the truth, I'm glad, all-fired glad, to be relieved of any further responsibility in the case."

"That's where your head's level!" commented Bancroft, with a wink at the chief.

These words caused the sheriff bitterly to regret his hastiness in announcing that he would claim the prisoner. But his pride would not allow him to show his fear.

"Oh, I guess I've got money enough to pay for any suit this fellow can bring against me for false arrest, especially as I know for a fact—I'd be willin' to swear to it on a bible—that he's Jesse James, so don't give yourself no anxiety about me, Briscoe, nor you, Mr. Bancroft."

The persistence of the sheriff in declaring that the prisoner was, indeed, the notorious outlaw, alarmed the chief of police, and his friend the smuggler, yet neither of them dared show the fact, and, that they might hold a consultation as to what was the best course for them to pursue, Briscoe lashed his horses into a terrific trot.

As the animals, dripping with lather, dashed into the yard of Sheriff Forest's homestead, and came to a stop at the side door, all the neighbors came flocking over to learn what success had attended the effort to capture the notorious bandit.

"We've got him!" shouted one of the guards, standing up and pointing down to the roped figure which lay in the bottom of the wagon. "He gave us a terrible fight—but we got him!"

"Then what are you bringing him here for? Why don't you take him to the calaboose?" cried several of the villagers.

"Too dangerous. There's only one place in Swazey strong enough to hold him—and that's Sheriff Forest's dungeon!"

So eager had the guard been to impart the news of the capture that neither the sheriff nor Briscoe had been able to get a word in, but as the fellow paused for breath, in his excitement, Forest shouted:

"I don't know as my dungeon will be strong enough to hold the critter. He's pretty slick! But I'm willin' to do all I can to help along the cause of the law and order!"

These words brought high cheer to Jesse, the chief of police, and the leader of the smugglers for they told them that the sheriff had become alarmed at the thought he had made a mistake in the identity of the prisoner, and was paving the way to protect himself from a damage suit by suggesting that Jesse might be able to break out of the dungeon.

"Bet he lets him loose!" grinned Bancroft, bending toward the chief of police until his lips touched the latter's ear, as the sheriff descended from the wagon.

"Looks like it," returned Briscoe. "Still, it won't do to take any chances. We'd better make our plans to liberate him."

"First, hadn't you better make sure he really has a message for you?" suggested Bancroft.

"Righto! This may be some trick—I've had a

hunch that something was going to happen to us before long."

And without losing any time, the corrupt police official crawled over into the body of the wagon where the notorious outlaw lay bound hand and foot, and stooped over him.

"Have you got a message for me—on the level?" he asked in a low voice.

"Surest thing you know!"

"What is it?"

"That I'm all right and can be trusted."

"Who's it from?"

"Deadeye!"

At the mention of the name of the pirate, Briscoe turned a searching eye upon the prisoner.

"Got any proof?"

"The note."

"What note?"

"The one Deadeye wrote."

"So he wrote me, eh? That's good. Where is it?"

"Under my shirt, on the right hand side."

"Good. After we get you in the dungeon, I'll insist that the sheriff let me search you. If the note says what you say it does, my friend and I'll see that you get out of this all right. What does Deadeye want?"

"Dope—and a motor boat!"

"Motor boat? What for?"

"You'll know soon enough."

"But——"

Further conversation between the two conspirators was interrupted, however, by the approach of the sheriff and two of the guards who reached into the wagon, and started to draw the tightly bound prisoner from the wagon.

Willingly Briscoe and Bancroft lent their aid, and in due course the leader of the Red Hand was placed in the dungeon in the cellar of Forest's house.

True to his word, the corrupt chief of police suggested that a search of the prisoner's person be made, and without waiting for the sheriff to give or refuse his consent, Briscoe instituted one, finding the note where the notorious bandit had stated that it was.

Too clever, however, was the chief to let any of the

others know of the find, and, palming the piece of paper, he waited until he had an opportunity to slip out of the steel lined room, which the sheriff had used for the safekeeping of his records, and such sums of money as the townsfolk brought to him from time to time—and when he returned, the expression on his face told both the pirate-chieftain, and the leader of the smugglers that the contents of the note were satisfactory to Briscoe.

"We'll find a way to help you before midnight," he whispered, reassuringly.

But Jesse was not obliged to wait upon the smugglers for his release!

"I suppose you'll station a guard outside the dungeon?" asked one of the villagers, who had watched the unwinding of the bonds with great interest.

"Not much!" snorted the sheriff. "If this dungeon ain't strong enough to hold any man, I'll be mighty mistaken!"

"But you said a few minutes ago that perhaps it wouldn't hold this fellow, he's so desperate!" protested the native.

"I was just talking, that's all!" grinned the sheriff. "Now clear out of this cellar, the whole kit and boodle of you."

And, much to this disappointment, the townsfolk who had managed to crowd their way down to the dungeon were compelled to betake themselves upstairs again.

But as they mounted the steps, they had the satisfaction of hearing the steel door clang shut, and the bolts slip into place as Forest turned the massive key upon his prisoner.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHERIFF MAKES A DEAL.

Though the sheriff had succeeded in driving his too inquisitive neighbors from the cellar he was powerless to make them leave his home, and, fuming and gnashing his teeth, he was compelled to see them stroll about through the house as though they owned it.

At last his anger got the best of him—and without even deigning to return a civil answer to the numberless questions that were hurled at him by the villagers, he suddenly rushed to a door leading into the front parlor, opened it, passed through, and then locked it behind him.

The action caused no end of speculation among the townsfolk, and finally they made a rush for outdoors, in the evident thought that they would be better able to see what was transpiring were they in the yard than cooped up in the house.

Just such action had the shrewd old sheriff counted on—and when he heard the rush of feet on the porch, he lost no time in coming from the parlor, and with a second dash, he gained the outside door, closed it and turned the key in the lock!

Deeply chagrined were the men and women of the village when they realized the trick that had been played upon them and many were the ones who sought to regain admittance.

But once the door was shut, they might as well have tried to raise the dead as to rouse Forest or any of his family—and finally they gave up their attempts.

The sheriff, however, was not idle!

Making his way down to the dungeon, he cautiously unlocked the heavy steel door and opening it a crack, exclaimed:

“There’s a shutter opens up toward the top of the dungeon on the left hand side, when you stand with your back to the door.

“It’s against a window in the cellar and if you should happen to be able to open the steel shutter and work your way through the window, I don’t believe there would be any one outside who would try to stop you.”

The words brought an exclamation of joy to the lips of the notorious bandit who found himself in the most desperate predicament of his exciting career—but he wisely refrained from giving vent to it.

“Aw, whatcher giving us? I’d have a swell chance to get away, wouldn’t I? There are more than a dozen old maids hanging round every corner of this house! Whatcher want to do, get me shot?”

“Say, you must think I’m a fool! Why should I try to escape when I ain’t done nothing in the first place—but not mentioning that, why, I ask you, should I try to escape when by just staying here I’ll

not only force you to let me out but will have grounds for a damage suit against you. And take it from me, I’m no piker. You’ll be sued for one hundred thousand dollars and I won’t give you the chance to compromise!”

The threat to make the sheriff pay for the supposedly false arrest—and more particularly the mention of the specific sum for which the suit would be brought—struck terror to the heart of the guardian of the law and he began to wring his hands in despair.

“But I’m a poor man—I haven’t got a hundred thousand dollars—nor half a hundred thousand.”

“Why Isaac Forest, what a lie!” cried a shrill voice.

And while Jesse chuckled audibly at the interruption, the sheriff whirled on his heel and bellowed:

“Angie, you just keep your tongue in your head. You ain’t got no business standing there at the head of the stairs listening to what I’m saying. Now go long about your housework!”

“But I ain’t agoing to stand quiet and hear the richest man in Swazey say he ain’t got a hundred thousand dollars!” retorted the woman with acerbity. And with the rustle of silk and an angry founce, she turned on her heel and disappeared from the head of the stairway.

With a wisdom that proved his wonderful understanding of human nature, the notorious bandit refrained from making any comment upon this interchange of conjugal opinions—thereby winning the good will of the sheriff.

“I wasn’t saying as how you had to leave right away!” announced that official, after he had tiptoed up to the head of the stairs and found that his wife had really betaken herself from the vicinity. “‘Course, it wouldn’t do for you—or for me—to have you start out before dark but if you should kinder feel a hankering for the air and the woods then, and say fifty dollars to put in your pocket, I wouldn’t be a bit surprised but it could be fixed up.”

“Fifty dollars ain’t nothing compared to a hundred thousand,” commented Jesse, seemingly more to himself than for the benefit of the sheriff. “Don’t see how’s anything under a hundred dollars *possibly* could interest me—especially as it’s sort of warm and comfortable down here!”

“Will you promise to go—and not bring suit against me—if I give you a hundred dollars?” demanded For-

est with an eagerness that brought a broad smile to the face of the pirate.

"I'd sure *think* about it!"

"Then I'll go upstairs and get it—and while I'm gone, you might hunt round and see if you can find that trap door in the wall, understand?"

With difficulty restraining himself from dancing up and down in wildest glee, the leader of the Red Hand heard this statement of the sheriff—and no sooner had the officer started up the stairs than Jesse began to search for the trap which opened on the cellar window.

Mounting a chair, he tapped the wall carefully with his fingers, coming at last to a spot which sounded more or less hollow, and after he had found it, it was but the matter of a few minutes before he had discovered the lines in the steel which marked the shutter.

But he found it was one thing to locate the trap door and quite another to open it—for, try as he would, he could not stir the shutter.

"You'll have to give me some help," he announced to the sheriff when the man returned.

"Why?"

"Because I can't stir that trap door."

"Then I won't be able to give you more than fifty dollars!" declared the official, with true New England thrift.

"If that's the way you feel about it, then I guess I won't leave here. As I said before, it's a mighty comfortable place!"

The thought of having the prisoner remain drove all idea of bargaining from Forest's mind and with an alacrity that was amusing, he brought a crow bar with which the trap door was finally pried open.

CHAPTER XX.

DANGER AGAIN THREATENS THE OUTLAW.

When this task had been accomplished, the sheriff uttered a sigh of relief.

"Now you'll be able to get out of here," he declared, looking at his prisoner.

"After I've received the hundred dollars and darkness has come," smiled Jesse.

"I wish I could make the sun set right this very minute!" exclaimed the sheriff, sincerely. "I can't though—but I'll do all I can. Here's your hundred dollars." And he handed the notorious outlaw two fifty dollar bills.

After examining them closely, the leader of the Red Hand exclaimed:

"In order that there won't be any hitch connected with my going away, don't you think it would be a good plan for you to go out doors and make sure I shall be able to push out the cellar window without making any unnecessary noise?"

"Oh, don't worry about that."

"Then you know it'll drop out?"

"No."

"Why take any chances?"

"How?"

"By leaving things so it may be necessary for me to make a noise in order to effect my escape. There's bound to be some one of your nosey neighbors hanging around and if any one should hear the smashing of glass, the alarm would be raised in a jiffy—and then you'd be obliged to stand suit!"

"By heck! you're sure right, boy!" declared the sheriff, cordially. "I'd never have thought of that part of it. I'll go right up and fix things."

"And while you're about it, take this crow-bar out of the dungeon and then lock the door. You don't want to give the people any chance to suspect that there was anything 'phony about my breaking out of my jail."

"Say, but you're the cute one."

"Now don't try to jolly me—or I'll quit the proposition right here and now," returned the notorious desperado. "As soon as you've fixed the cellar window—and mind you, I shall stand on this chair so I can see you're not giving me the double cross—just go about your business as though nothing out of the ordinary was going to happen.

"If you just act natural, I'll guarantee you won't even know when I light out!"

Not a word did the sheriff say in reply to this statement—but the look he bestowed upon the dare devil pirate was eloquent of appreciation!

Quickly he picked up the crowbar and, almost directly he began to putter about the cellar window, even going so far as pry it open with a stick.

Hugging himself to think that all was going so well and that he was getting out of the desperate predicament into which he had allowed himself to fall, the leader of the Red Hand, who, during all the startling reign of terror he had carried out in the States had never been subjected to such humiliation in the form of imprisonment, waited for the coming of night with what patience he could muster.

And at last it came.

Without mishap, the notorious bandit lifted the steel shutter and then crawled through the opening and from the cellar window.

But scarcely had he gained his freedom, than he was again threatened!

Keeping in the shadow as much as he could, he made a circuit of the town and then, approaching from the North, he asked the way to the home of the chief of police.

As Briscoe beheld Jesse, when he opened the door in response to the outlaw's knock, he gasped in amazement!

"How in the world—" he began, only to be cut short by the other.

"This is no time for palaver. Have you got the motor boat and the dope ready for me?"

"The dope's already—but it'll be an hour before the boat is."

"What's the matter?"

"Motor's out of kilter."

"Where is it?"

"Down at the lake, at Bancroft's landing, of course."

"And where's the dope?"

"At the same place."

"How can I find it?"

"I'll show you the way—if you really must go but I think it would be safer for you to wait here."

"Not on your life—give me the woods where I can have a chance for my money if things take a bad turn. If I staid here in town, I might get penned in like a rat in a trap—and I've had one experience down in Forest's dungeon that I don't care to repeat."

"How'd you get out?"

"Never mind. By heaven, what's that?"

As he spoke the chief listened and both men distinctly caught the whirr as of a mighty bird.

"Must be thunder!" declared Briscoe.

"Thunder your grand——"

But the notorious outlaw never got any further with his remark.

Literally from the sky, a huge black monster swooped down to the ground, ran along over the grass in front of the house of the chief of police for several yards and then came to a stop!

"An aeroplane!" gasped Jesse to himself. Then, turning hurriedly to the chief, he whispered: "Where can I find the boat?"

"Straight road, three miles, then turn to right, hundred yards. Dock runs well out into the lake. But I'll go with you."

Scarcely had the words left the chief's mouth, however, than a voice cried:

"Who's that talking?"

But never a sound did the two men utter in response!

"In the name of the King, I command you to speak!" exclaimed the voice.

Yet the only answer was the same silence as before.

CHAPTER XXI.

NARROW LEEWAY.

For several moments, the man by the airship made no move, then he suddenly cried:

"I know there is some one on the lawn—and I know just about where you are. Speak—before it is too late. In the name of the King, I command it!"

An instant all was still, then a pistol barked!

Like a flash, the notorious outlaw dropped to the ground, dragging the chief of police with him.

Again the revolver spoke—and as the report died away, the door of the house was thrown open and a woman's voice demanded:

"What is the matter? Who is shooting?"

"I am Captain Paul, of the Royal North-Western Mounted Police," announced a voice. "I have come in my aeroplane to arrest Jesse James—and I wish to see Chief of Police Briscoe."

"I'm sorry, but he's not at home. I am Mrs. Briscoe."

"Where is he?"

"Gone to search for the very man you are after!"

"Huh! Who is on your lawn?"

"No one—that I know of. What do you mean by shooting—if you are an officer?"

"I heard voices and the people will not declare themselves. Can you tell me where I may be able to find Chief Briscoe?"

"At the dock on the lake owned by Mr. Bancroft!"

As the leader of the Red Hand heard this reply, he cursed long and violently to himself for he realized that in all probability the officer of the Mounted Police would betake himself to the lake shore without delay and he feared that the sight of the motor boat would either arouse his suspicion or cause him to commandeer it, leaving him to make his way back to his companions at the cave on foot.

"How far is that?" asked the captain.

"Three miles."

"Is the road straight?"

"Yes, follow the one which runs right in front of the house. You can't miss the place because there are some men working at the dock."

"Thank you very much."

And without delay, the officer set out for the lake.

Waiting until he could no longer hear him, Jesse crept cautiously up to the airship.

But just as he started to put his hand on it, he heard a voice exclaim:

"What is it?"

Like a shot, the outlaw sent his fist crashing into the jaw of the speaker—and he was rewarded by hearing the body go down with a thud!

Never stopping to see who it might be that he had hit, Jesse felt his way to the engine, hurriedly disconnected the feed pipe and then, finding Briscoe, dashed from the grounds.

The chief of police was in a blue funk, however, and so frightened was he that he could scarcely run!

"Oh, buck up!" growled the leader of the Red Hand. "We've got to reach the lake before that captain does. Now show me a short cut!"

"But he's one of His Majesty's soldiers!" protested Briscoe.

"Never mind if he is—I'm going to save myself, so get a move on. I don't care if it's the King, himself, I'm not going to be caught!"

"But he'll break me!"

"Nonsense! He won't know anything about it—and besides, if you hurry, we can reach the dock first and then you'll have an alibi."

This suggestion seemed to put heart into the chief and he quickly led the notorious bandit through the brush to the spot where Bancroft was busy tinkering over the motor of his launch.

"What in the world have you got the tub filled with potatoes for?" demanded Jesse, as he caught sight of the boat.

"Because you'll need them!" returned the other, a queer smile playing about his lips.

"But I don't want them—I haven't any earthly use for them! Besides they'll make this old tub a great deal slower."

And without more words, the leader of the Red Hand grabbed several of the objects and was on the point of throwing them into the lake when his arm was seized by Bancroft.

"They're not potatoes, man, they're imitation potatoes made from dope!"

As he realized the cleverness of the trick by which the opium smugglers were able to ship the contraband about the country, apparently without detection, Jesse gasped.

"I sure take off my hat to you fellows!" he exclaimed. "That's some stunt! Will the engine work?"

"Sure."

"Then cast off—I haven't a minute to lose." And briefly the notorious outlaw announced the arrival of the captain.

"By thunder! Swazey won't be a very safe place for

either you or me, Ned!" declared Bancroft, as Jesse finished speaking. "I say we just take a trip with our friend, here!"

And without giving the chief of police time to protest, the leader of the smugglers pushed his accomplice into the boat, cast off, gave her a shove and then sprang in himself, instantly starting the motor!

"Stop that boat—in the name of the King!" shouted a voice, as the craft was about fifty yards from the shore.

But no attention did the men aboard pay!

"By thunder! that was a mighty narrow escape!" muttered Bancroft.

Yet the defiers of the law were soon to learn that they had not escaped!

CHAPTER XXII.

A DESPERATE ESCAPE.

Being unwilling to trust to the efforts of the people of Swazey to capture the notorious outlaw and his band of pirates who had wrought such havoc with the lives and property of the Pequod Copper Mining Company, Ashmore and Courtenay had pushed on to the next town of Petersham whence they had sent appeals to all the surrounding villages for aid in running down the outlaws.

As a result, not only had the Mounted Police been brought into action but posses had been started from every town in the neighborhood of the plateau where the mining property was located.

And that there might be some one on hand competent to handle any problems that might arise in connection with the manhunt, Captain Paul had been hurried on his aeroplane from the nearest Police post while police launches had been also sent out.

In ignorance of this latter fact, the leader of the Red Hand and his companions drove their motor boat at full speed, straight toward the cave where the rest of the band was supposed to be in hiding.

Confident that they had eluded all pursuit, the fugitives were laughing as they tried to depict the scenes attendant upon the discovery of Jesse's escape from the dungeon when they were thrown into consternation by a shot fired across their bow, followed by the command:

"Surrender—or be sunk!"

From which direction the boat containing their foes was coming, the outlaws were unable to tell for the reason that the engine of the motor boat made no sound.

"Douse our lights!" breathed Jesse.

"But that won't save us!" declared Briscoe.

"No—but it'll help some. As soon as you've put out the glims, Bancroft, you back her. We may be able to fool the cusses! Anyhow, we'll try. I only wish I had a rifle here—in case I should get a line on where the devils are!"

But fortune was not smiling on the miscreants and, though they backed their boat and finally turned about, their pursuers quickly discovered their change in direction by the use of a powerful search light!

"It's all up with us now!" wailed Briscoe.

"Not until we're too dead to shoot!" retorted the notorious desperado. "Bancroft, the last flash of that light showed we weren't more than an eighth of a mile or so from the shore. You've got to drive your boat aground before those manhunters overhaul us!"

Not even taking the time to reply, the leader of the smugglers bent himself to the task of getting every possible ounce of power out of his boat—but try as he would, it was quickly evident that the police boat was gaining on them.

"There's only one thing that will save us—we've got to chuck this dope overboard!" announced the leader of the Red Hand.

"But it's worth ten thousand dollars!" whined Briscoe.

"What if it is, isn't your liberty worth more than that?" snapped Jesse. "If yours isn't, mine is!"

And without delay he began to hurl the costly potatoes into the water.

The lightening of her load was quickly responded to by the boat with increased speed and where despair had held the two men from Swazey a few seconds before, they were now highly elated.

"Why not make a big circle and cut behind their stern again, heading again for the cave?" suggested the pirate chieftain.

Readily the others agreed—and while the police boat held to its course, in the thought that it was in the wake of the one it was chasing, Jesse and his companions gained the cave.

But to his dismay, he found not one of his band inside!

Wondering as to the cause, he searched all about, without learning anything, however! And it was not until dawn came that he discovered the reason for their absence—less than half a mile from the cave, his companions were held at bay by a squad of Mounted Police.

But as Jesse gazed at his men and their foes, in amazement, the men in the motor boat discovered him through their marine glasses—and the notorious bandit was made aware of the fact by the striking of a shell from the four-pounder carried by the launch, within less than ten yards of him!

The shot also had the effect of attracting the attention of the constables to the fact that the leader of the Red Hand had returned to the cave—and quickly a heavy force of men was sent back to lay siege to the man whom so many thousands of dollars were offered in reward.

But Jesse saw their action!

"Oh, no! You're a pretty wise bunch—but if I can keep out of the clutches of the manhunters down in the States, I'm surely not going to be caught by any Canuck!"

And dashing into the cave, the leader of the Red Hand snatched up some grub, a rifle and ammunition

for all his shooting irons, then rejoined the corrupt chief of police and the opium smuggler.

"What you going to do?" they gasped, in chorus.

"Beat it! Come along!"

And leaping into the bushes, the notorious desperado led the way to a spot where he could ambush his pursuers and there he took up his position.

After stationing his companions where they would be able to rake the trail with their fire, Jesse reconnoitered—and to his dismay beheld a scout creeping down upon him, less than a rod away.

Quickly joining his companions, he waited the coming of his enemy.

The Red Hand, grasping a keen Bowie knife, was ready to dart its way into the heart of the foe!

"Why not shoot, you're not so likely to get hurt?" exclaimed Bancroft.

"Because I don't want the others to know I have discovered the scout," returned the leader of the Red Hand.

And even as he spoke, he leaped from his ambush, there sounded a sickening "chug" and the terrible bandit rejoined his companions, blood dripping from his knife!

"Come on, we must run for it now!" he breathed, setting into a dog trot, the pirate chieftain led his companions through the forest for two days before he finally managed to break through the cordon thrown out by the manhunters—and when they heard that the leader of the Red Hand had escaped them, there was gnashing of teeth and wailing among the constabulary.

With rare skill, Deadeye and the other members of the band evaded the traps set for them, being finally reunited to their leader by his daredevil courage, in accordance with his promise to the outlaws when they swore allegiance to him.

Fearing to return to Swazey, Briscoe and Bancroft passed several months with the bandits and then moved their families to another section of the country.

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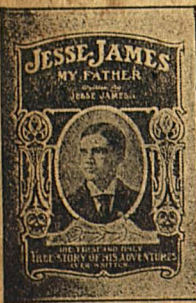
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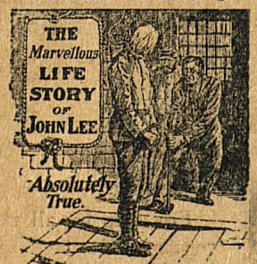
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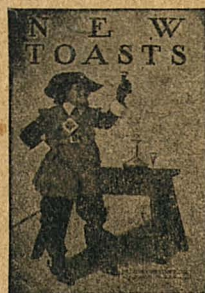
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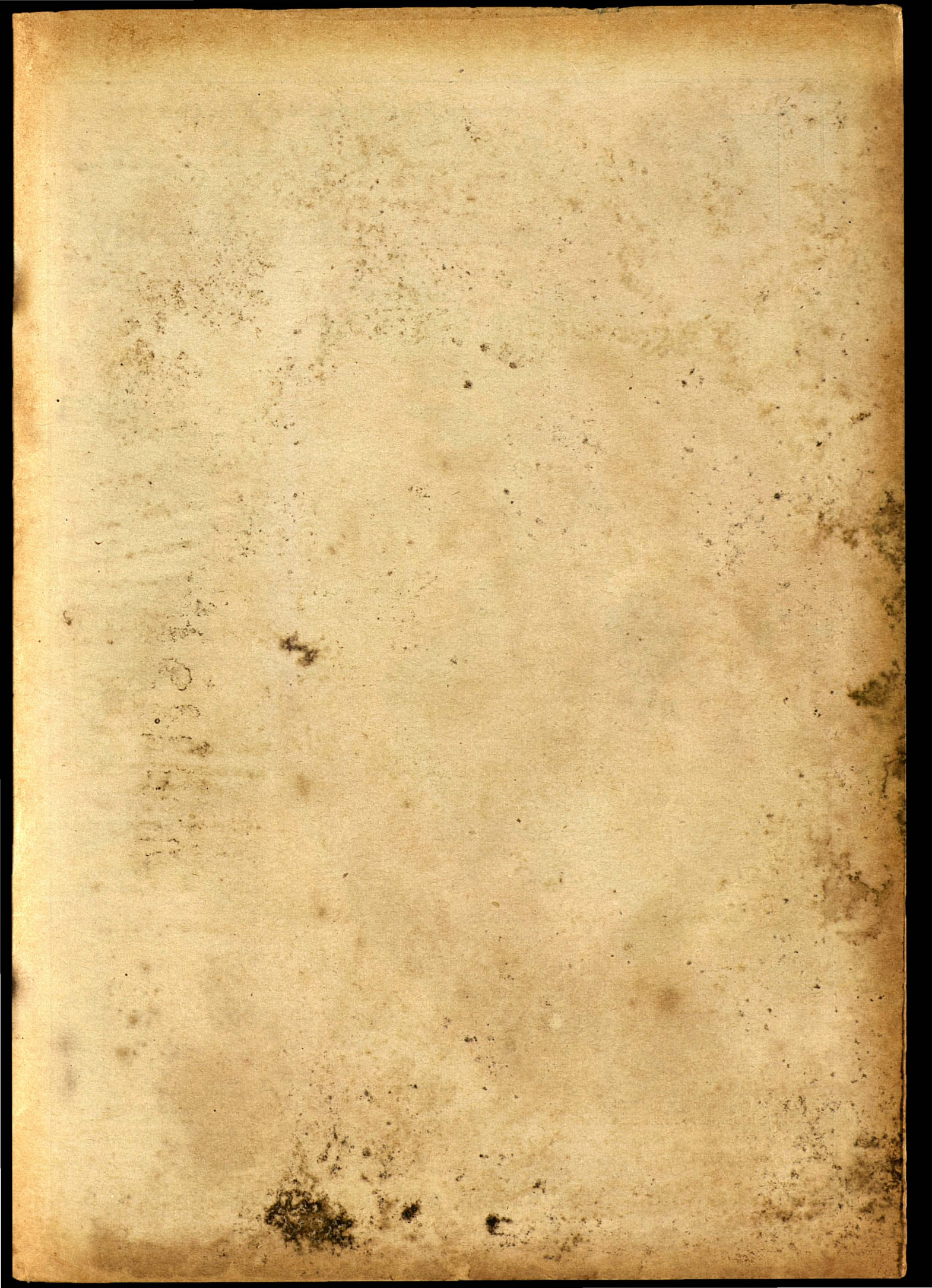
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June 8—No. 28. THE DOOM OF THE BANDED BROTHERS.....or The Demon Renegades
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June 29—No. 31. THE WRECKERS OF CARIBOU REEF.....or Border Bandits at Bay
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