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FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 and 36 North Moore Street, New York. Box 2730.

OLD SADDLE-BAGS, THE PREACHER DETECTIVE;

OR,

THE JAMES BOYS IN A FIX.

By D. W. STEVENS.



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Old Saddle-bags, the Preacher Detective;

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THE JAMES BOYS IN A FIX.

By D. W. STEVENS,

Author of "The James Boys as Guerrillas and the Train Robbers," "The Man From Nowhere," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGER IN KEARNEY.

"Woa, thar, ye onregenerated critter. D'ye wanter break a feller's back?"

He was a singular-looking old fellow. Features sharp and cadaverous, white whiskers, long, coming to a peak on his chin. His clothes were of an ancient clerical cut, faded and worn almost thread-bare. His old white plug hat was battered, and his appearance generally what is termed "seedy."

This singular old man was mounted on a horse as sorry appearing as himself. It seemed to possess every chronic disease horseflesh was heir to, from heaves, ring bone, spavin, sweeney to pole evil.

"Thar, Nebuchednezzar, ye'd better pause a leetle an' cool yer parched tongue. We're in the Land of ther Pherlischans now, an' may hev a considerable ermount o' sandy plains ter ride over afore we reach that ar place whar milk an' honey flows."

He rode his sorry-looking beast into the water and allowed him to drink. The stump tail of the horse seemed to have scarce enough hairs upon it to keep away the flies. The hair of the animal was rough and gave him a mangy appearance.

The odd-looking old man on his odd-looking old horse was in a wild wooded region three miles from Kearney, a little town in the State of Missouri.

While his horse was slaking his thirst the sound of hoofs on the road could be heard, and two mounted men galloped down to the creek. On seeing the old man mounted on the sorry horse, on the back of which was an old saddle and an enormous pair of saddle-bags; the horsemen reined in their sleek, well-fed horses, and gazed at the odd figure before them.

"How dy do?"

The two men who drew rein and stared at the odd figure were about thirty-five and forty years of age respectively, with piercing eyes. Their hands went instinctively to their belts as they reined in their horses, and the stoutest of the two asked:

"Who are you?"

"My friends, be ye onregenerated ur within the pale o' salvation I hev no hesitation to tell ye who I am. You behold before you the Right Reverend Daniel Ichabod Penticost, the great world wide, well-known extarminator o' sir. Friends, my onregenerated friends, Satan flies at my approach."

"The old fool is half cracked," said one horseman to the other.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Say, Old Saddle-bags, can't you make yourself a little plainer?"

"Plainer, ye unsanctified descendant o' Adam, fall upon your marrow bones and ask the forgiveness o' one whose callin' is to snatch brands from the burnin', from sich a unholy cognomen as Saddle-bags."

"Well, I think the name is about as appropriate as any."

"Old Saddle-bags, well, my onregenerated son, ef that's the only suggestion my pious face kin impress on yer malleable brain, why Old Saddle-bags it is."

The hands which had been resting for a moment on the polished butts of pistols were now withdrawn, and the horsemen laughed outright.

The old horseman gave the young men a look of rebuke, and in a voice of awful solemnity, said:

"Ah, ye vile and wicked gineration, why re-

vile ye the holy man, think o' the fate o' the forty boys who war et bodaciously up by two b'ars, becase they mocked the good man. You ar but boys but ye mought be et up by forty b'ars."

By this time the two horsemen were completely convulsed with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Frank, he will kill me yet."

"It's too good, Jess—I never saw such an old fellow," laughed Frank.

There was not the least twinkle of humor in the eye of Old Saddle-bags as they had nicknamed the stranger. His face was gravity itself, and yet there was such a peculiar drollery in his very looks that the sight of him was enough to almost burst the horsemen.

As soon the man called Jesse could regain his composure sufficiently to speak, he said:

"Well, Old Saddle-bags, where do you intend to put up to-night?"

"Ask me from whence comes the wind and wither it listeth, and perchance I may answer ye, my onregenerated friend, but ask me not whar I shall pass the night. The foxes hev holes, and the birds o' the air nests, bnt Old Saddle-bags has not whar to lay his head."

With this solemn remark he rode leisurely up the hill toward Kearney, while the two horsemen sat gazing after him.

"Jess, you don't suppose he's another Tull on Witcher?"

"No—why that fellow is sixty or seventy years old."

"But those fellows have a wonderful way of changing their appearance."

"I know it, yet you may depend on it that he is not one of them. Ha, ha, ha! I never saw as good a chance to have fun in my life, Frank. Let's follow him to Kearney."

"I was thinking of that, Jess, but from a far different standpoint."

"Oh, I know what you mean, Frank."

"Yes. It's best to be suspicious, you know."

"Oh, yes."

"You are not suspicious enough, Jess. You take too many risks, and some of these days you will get rubbed out."

Jess laughed as he wheeled his coal-black steed about, and the two cantered leisurely up the hill toward the eccentric old preacher, who was riding toward Kearney.

Those two men whom Old Saddle-bags, as we shall continue to call him, had met, were none others than Frank and Jesse James, the two most noted bandits the world has ever known. They had already made a name and fame as outlaws and murderers, which was known all over the world, and had been hunted by the shrewdest detectives in the land.

But nowhere had yet been found a man who was shrewd enough and bold enough to take, in the desperadoes.

It was only a short time after the Gadshill train robbery, and that incident was fresh in the minds of the public, also in the minds of Frank and Jesse James.

Their pocket-books were still full of the treasure they had taken from the train, and they were anxious and on the lookout for some detective.

"I am not afraid of any common detective," Jesse James said on more than one occasion. "I am more than a match for the ordinary detective, and if ever I am taken in it will be by some greeney, or fellow who developed some extraordinary shrewdness."

Frank seemed to think that the very man whom they had seen at the creek might be that extraordinary detective.

"Well, Frank, we will go to the woods, disguise ourselves again, and ride back to the village, and see what he does."

"That's best, Jess."

The outlaw brothers rode to the wood, where they changed their apparel, and went back to the village of Kearney.

It seemed as if half the town turned out to see the strange, odd-looking figure come in. He was slowly riding up the hill, his horse moving painfully along, while the old man hummed in a wheezy voice:

"I'm a pilgrim,
I'm a stranger,
An' I kin tarry—I kin tarry
But a night;
I'm agoin'
Don't detain me,
Fur I kin tarry—I kin tarry
But a night."

"Ha, ha, ha," roared some young fellows who stood on a corner of the street. "There comes old Coronation."

"Hold on, my onregenerated son o' darkness," said Old Saddle-bags. "Don't christen me with any more names'n ye've already gin me. Back at the pool o' Siloam whar I halted to 'low my pore beast to quench his thirst and cool his parched tongue I war denominated Old Saddle-bags. Now ye've gin me 'nother name. One's ernuff fur the day."

"Old Saddle-bags!" cried the young man, roaring with laughter, as he fixed his eyes on the huge pair of saddle-bags which the old man carried behind him. "That's the name, boys—Old Saddle-bags," and the youngsters roared and hooted as they gathered about the horse, which stood with drooping head and tail, its eyes closed as if the animal had sunk into repose.

"Hush, stranger! Sh—h—hl don't tork so loud, or we'll all be goners, sure!" cried Old Saddle-bags, anxiously. "Don't ye rile the off side of Nebuchednezzar ur ye'll wish ye'd never been born ef ye do. Why, a hurricane an' airtquake 'rastlin' fur keeps ain't a patchin' alongside o'

him when he's roused sudden like. Jest look at them heels, will ye? Gently, now; they are shod with double-plated b'iler iron, and bolted with steel rivets. If he ever lifted one o' them injines o' destruction— Wall, ye'd hev to look through a telescope to find the pieces. Keep away thar, you! Do you want'er git yer 'natomy knocked into infinitesimal nuthin'ness, say? Why, this 'ere hoss is conglomerated force b'iled down to a sliver, an' 'f ye war in fifteen feet o' his tail when he got on ther rampage, why, next thing ye knowed ye'd be a-settin' on the damp edge of a cloud twangin' away on a golden harp, onless ye war one o' the onregenerated sons o' darkness, an' then ye mought be in the land whar they shovel brinstone instead o' snow—"

"Hold on, Old Saddle-bags, do give somebody a chance."

"Hold on, ain't I a holdin' on."

"But stop talkin'."

"Never, while I find one o' Adam's onregenerated sons in danger. Stand from under thar, my onregenerated friend. Git out o' danger o' bein' extarminated an' then I'll listen to ye."

There was a general backing out of the crowd, and when the circle had been considerably widened, he said:

"Now, my friends, if I kin do aught to relieve yer distressed minds I'm yours to command."

"Who are ye?" asked a red-faced boy.

"Old Saddle-bags, the extarminator."

"What d'ye extarminate?"

"Sin."

"Where are you goin'?"

"Ask me to tell ye, ye onregenerated youth, whence the wind bloweth an' whar it listeth, but don't expect me to answer that awfully unsartin question. I go to do not my own will. Wherever sin exists I go to battle it."

"Wall, old man, I reckon you'll find enuff o' it right here to gin ye a right smart tussle."

"My duty, friends o' the onregenerated, is to snatch brands from the burnin'."

"Wall, Old Saddle-bags, ye'll find a hull bonfire here."

"Then, Nebuchednezzar, thar's work here fur us ter do—a power o' work ter do—"

One of the crowd touched another man's elbow and led him aside.

"What d'you think of him now, Frank."

"He's either an old fool, or he's very shrewd."

"I think he's the former."

"Well, he may be."

There are several of the boys here. I wish you would tell Cole Younger and Jim Cummings I want to see them."

"Where?"

"At Latche's."

"Well."

Jesse James went away to the north part of the village, where standing on a slight elevation was a small house built of logs, but weather boarded on the outside, and plastered within.

A man whose face had a sort of a hang dog look about it was sitting on the front door step.

"Jim!" said Jesse James.

The man had not recognized the disguised bandit chief, until he spoke, but now he raised his head, and his eyes lost some of the sullen fire which had blazed from them.

"Oh, come in."

"Didn't know me, did you?"

"No."

Jesse James laughed.

He entered the house and took a seat.

That house of Jim Latche was one of the most peculiarly arranged buildings in all the great West.

It was so accommodated with windows and mirrors that one could sit in any part of it, and see all around on the outside. It was impossi-

ble for any one to approach the house without being seen by those within.

Who the architect was, who designed and planned such a building we cannot say. Some have said it was Jesse James himself, and if it was then he possessed a talent for which he has never been credited.

"Well, Jesse, what is it? Don't you run a great risk coming here?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Kearney is full of friends."

"Well, yes, but strangers—"

"By the way, Latche," interrupted Jesse James, "there is a man in town I want you to keep your eye on."

"Who?"

"Well, you were the shrewd fellow who penetrated the disguise of Witcher, and told us of him in time to kill the hound. It was you who notified us of Tull and the other detectives, and now, Latche, let me give you another job. There is a man in this town called Old Saddle-bags, a kind of a preacher, or at least he claims to be a preacher. I want you to watch him."

"Do you think he's one?"

"No."

"Does Frank?"

"Frank is always suspicious, and it's best always to be on the lookout, you know."

"Yes."

"Well, watch him closely, Latche."

"I'll do it."

"Now the boys are coming here soon."

"Who?"

"Oh, Frank, Jim Cumming, and Clell Miller, and Cole Younger."

"What? goin' to meet here in broad daylight—"

"Don't be alarmed, Jim, we're not going to be taken in. Hello, here they are now."

The tramp of heavy feet could be heard without.

CHAPTER II.

"OH! YE ONREGENERATED SINNERS!"

Jesse James did not rise at the approach of his companions, but sat by a small window watching the crowd gathered about the old crazy preacher, who was haranguing them.

"Well, Jess," said Cole Younger, "what is up now?"

The banditti had all entered the room in which the chief sat.

"Do you see that old fellow down there?" Jesse asked.

"Yes."

"He's odd."

"I thought so."

"Well keep an eye on him."

"That's it, an' let the contract out to Jim Latche. He so successfully done up Witcher that I think we can intrust any ordinary business with him."

"Jim is already on the scent."

"By the way, Jess, I've heard a strange story about you."

"About me?"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cole.

"What?"

"Ah, you sly rogue, you have been at your old tricks," and Cole Younger tipped the wink to his companions, who all joined in the laugh.

Jesse's eyes flashed fire and his cheeks burned, as he with rising indignation demanded:

"What do you mean?"

But Cole Younger was not one to be intimidated. There is no question but that from the earliest days of the meeting between Jesse James and Cole Younger, the latter possessed superior courage and often overawed Jesse.

In his own good time Cole Younger got through laughing and said:

"Jesse, you ought to be ashamed."

"Ashamed of what?"

"You, a married man, flirting with a young girl."

Jesse James started to his feet with a fierce imprecation on his lips.

"When—how did you learn that?" he demanded.

"She's here."

"What?"

"She's here, I say!" repeated Cole.

"How do you know?"

"I have seen her."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And talked with her?"

"I have."

The bandit king paced the floor for a few moments, and then turning toward his companions said:

"Boys, I have played the fool."

"We all know that, and you have got yourself in a bad box," Cole answered. "It all came about while you were teaching a district school over in Southeast, Missouri. The girl is young, and believes you are sincere."

"But she don't know who I am."

"No, she is hunting for Mr. Henry Jackson, whom she thinks the soul of honor. Jesse, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. That girl isn't a day over sixteen."

Jesse paced the floor a moment and said:

"Well, boys, she is a good girl. I never saw a purer or better girl than Della Collins."

"So much the more shame for you, Jesse."

"Well, I'm into it, and now I've got to get rid of her."

"Leave the country," suggested Jim Cummings.

"Go to Europe," added Clell Miller.

"No, I be hanged if I do."

"What will you do then?"

"If she goes to hounding me too closely, I'll forget she's a woman, and serve her as others have been served under like circumstances."

"No, you won't, Jesse," interrupted Cole Younger. "I am not as good as some men, but while I live you don't harm a hair of that girl's head."

Jesse James paused, gave Cole Younger another fiery glance, and then said:

"Then what am I to do? She will be following me like a sleuth-hound everywhere I go?"

"Face her boldly, acknowledge your deception, and tell her that you care nothing for her. That girl's pride will assert itself, and she will shake your acquaintance in a hurry, you may be sure."

"Well, but Cole, who wants such a scene?"

"Better to have ten such scenes, than take the life of a poor girl whose only crime has been to believe you a gentleman."

Jesse James winced, and throwing himself in a chair, said:

"Well, let's get to the business in hand. I brought you all together here to further discuss that mysterious package taken from the Gadshill train robbery."

"Have you made out anything about it?" asked Cole.

"No."

"Where is it?"

"At the well."

"A good place."

"Can it be of any value?" Cole asked.

"I don't know," Jesse answered. "It is of great value to some one, but I don't know that it is worth a cent to us. It seems to be a sort of English medal, will, and codicil, bequeathing

to somebody, the heirs of Sir Dominic Murray, five hundred thousand pounds sterling."

"Five hundred thousand pounds o' what?" asked Jim Cummings, who was not well versed in English terms for currency.

"Money, you blockhead."

"Money—great guns. Why that would load down a train."

Jim was then made to understand that a pound was only between four and five dollars, and not a pound troy weight.

"Well, can't we fix up some way to go to England and claim it?" said Jim Cummings.

"Jim's idea is a good one, if it could only be carried out," said Cole.

"Who was the package consigned to?" asked Cole.

"George Talbot, a Chicago lawyer, who, no doubt, was engaged lookin' up the heirs of the Dominic Murray estate."

"But it can't be done. Who would dare tell how we came in possession of the thing? Better send it on to Talbot," said Frank James, who was the most cautious of any of the band.

"Never," said Jesse.

"Burn it all first," put in Jim Cummings.

"Well, we may find it an elephant on our hands," Cole Younger remarked.

"Why?" asked Jesse.

"They are making a fuss about it!"

"Who?"

"Talbot and Talbot."

"The Chicago lawyers?"

"Yes."

"Well, let 'em."

"I'll bet they stimulate old Pinkerton into puttin' detectives by the dozen on our track."

"Then they will all go like Wicher did," said Jesse.

Darkness came on. The old man called Saddle-bags had passed from the minds of the outlaws and disappeared off the streets.

"Well, boys, let's go up to the saloon, have a drink, and take our leave," Jesse James at last proposed.

"It's a good idea," responded Cole. "Too much hanging about town will give us a bad name."

Every one of the band was known about Kearney under some uom-de-plume he had assumed, and though many persons knew the James Boys personally, they would never admit it to any one.

While all were in the saloon, drinking, a small boy entered, and, going up to Jesse James, said:

"Here, Mr. Jackson, is a note for you," and he handed the bandit king a small, neat envelope addressed in a neat, lady-like hand.

Cole Younger saw it, and realized full well who the writer was.

Jesse's brow grew dark as a thunder cloud as he opened the missive and glanced at it. Cole who sat at his side whispered:

"It has come?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Take my advice and have it over with."

"Yes, and a scene."

"Better have a small breeze now, then two of them after awhile. Keep it from your wife."

Jesse James muttered something low but deep.

"No, no, Jesse—you shall not—you must not think of that—I won't allow it. Tell her to go home, that you are a married man, and she must not bother you more."

It was a hard struggle for the bandit king. Jesse James was always a wilful man, always accustomed to having his own way, and to thus be driven, as it were, to humiliate himself, was galling to his spirit.

But Cole Younger was a power to influence the

bandit king, and Jesse James felt impelled to obey him. They went to the room where the girl—a bashful, timid little creature of sixteen, was sitting.

"Oh, Henry!" she cried, rising and coming toward Jesse the moment he entered. "I was so afraid you wouldn't come."

"Sit down, Miss Collins."

"Miss Collins! You used to call me Della," she said, and her big blue eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, that nonsense is over with," said Jesse James. "Be seated, Miss Collins," and he threw himself on a sofa.

Cole Younger sat down near the bandit captain.

Little did that poor girl dream who those two desperate men were, or she would have trembled for her life in their presence. She only sees before her the man who she trusted, and with whom she had become thoroughly fascinated, for we cannot call it love.

Jesse James was changed from the quiet, brilliant, fascinating Henry Jackson whom she had known as the teacher of the country school. But the bandit king was helpless to extricate himself from the predicament in which he found himself.

He glanced hopelessly at Cole Younger and he, having a firmer sense of honor than Jesse, and more tact in the management of such cases, undertook to steer him out. Cole saw that there was but one way to save the girl, and he determined not to spare Jesse in doing it.

"This man, Mr. Henry Jackson, taught school in your district, did he not?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"He represented himself as a single man."

"Yes, sir."

She grew very pale and trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Did he ask you to become his wife?"

"We are betrothed, sir. Is it not so, Henry?"

"I will do all the talking," Cole interrupted.

"Who are you, sir?"

"Snaggs—Joe Snaggs."

"I didn't come to see you, Snaggs," the girl answered, with spirit, which Cole was glad to see her express. "I came to see Mr. Henry Jackson. I came at his own request. This meeting is one of his own planning."

"Very well, but I will talk with you——"

"No, no; I will talk with Henry alone. You leave the room. You are an intruder."

"Spunky little girl, by Jove, for a farmer's daughter!"

"Go, Mr. Snaggs."

"Beg your pardon, I cannot. The fact is I am to stay here for your own safety."

Indignation had dried the tears from those big blue eyes, and the girl, now too much astonished to speak, stood and stared at Cole Younger or Snaggs, as he called himself.

"Will you listen to me?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"This man has played you false," and he laid his hand on Jesse James.

"I don't believe it."

"He will admit it."

"He won't."

"Wait and see."

She gazed at Jesse James hopelessly, but the bandit took care not to meet her reproachful gaze.

Cole Younger waited a moment, not wishing to shock the poor little country girl by a too sudden announcement, and said:

"Henry Jackson, this man at my side, represented to you, did he not, that he was a single man."

"Yes."

"Well, he has a wife."

"It is false."

"Have you a wife?" Cole asked of Jesse James, who sat unmoved through the trying scene.

It was an awful ordeal. The beautiful girl leaned forward, her eyes almost starting from their sockets, and her whole frame trembling. Her very life seemed to depend on the answer. Oh, man, monster as you are, have pity. But no, he has none, and like a dagger to her heart, came the answer:

"Yes."

Shattered was her idol.

Clasping her hands over her heart, she cried:

"Oh, Heaven help me!" and sinking in her chair covered her face with her hands.

"You have been greatly wronged, Miss Collins, but think it might have been worse."

She continued to sob until Jesse James, losing all patience, started to his feet and cried:

"Enough of this, you little fool! Why do you start gadding all over the country after a man——"

This was the promethean spark to the powder, and like a rocket she bounded to her feet.

Jesse James had faced death on a hundred battlefields, but never had he seen such fire-flashing eyes as those. Her frame trembled with rage as she cried:

"Wretch! monster! villain! Oh, how dare you!"

"Enough! I have heard enough!"

"You have lied to me! You have deceived me when I trusted to you."

"Hush—enough of this!"

"Go it," cried Cole Younger, who was really enjoying the scene. "You got yourself into it, Jesse, now get out of it best you can."

"Jesse, so the villain's name is not Henry? Aha, the monster goes about under aliases!"

"Let me out, Cole!" gasped the bandit king, for Cole Younger had closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"No, not much. You have got to face the music."

"Let me out!"

"Oh, no, this is too much fun."

All the while the girl was giving her deceiver the full benefit of her tongue. She was beautiful even in her indignation. Her eyes were flashing wildly, and her face aflame with indignation.

"Let me out or I will make it worse for you," and Jesse drew his revolvers.

"No. You needn't waste your powder, Jesse. Your pistols have no bullets in them."

Jesse turned on the girl, and seizing her arm with a grasp that made her shriek out with pain, cried:

"Hush, hush! Enough of this, or by all creation I will strangle you."

"No, you won't!" cried Cole Younger, seizing his arm.

"Cole, Cole, keep away from me."

"Beware, Jesse."

At this moment the door slowly opened, and the oddest gaunt figure they had ever beheld, with long white flowing hair and sharp chin whiskers, entered the room.

"Oh, ye onregenerated sinners, why ar' ye wranglin' an' quarrelin' over the things o' this yarth? Man's days are few on earth and full o' sorrier. Listen to the voice as of one cryin' in the wilderness, sayin': Behold the day is at hand. Now ye onregenerated, be ye quickened, fur the great extarminator o' sin is at hand. Behold him, me! Old Saddle-bags!"

Jesse James, although his face was aflame with rage could not repress a smile, and Cole Younger laughed outright.

Only the humiliated, abashed girl with tears of indignation welling up in her eyes, showed no merriment.

The lunatic went on:

"Oh, ye onregenerated—thank the great extarminator o' sin fur comin' ter yer rescue. An' when that great day comes the sheep shall go ter the right an' the goats to the left, but you'll see who'll war the wool that day. An' the wicked shall be cast inter outer darkness whar they shall borrow files an' sot their teeth an edge."

"What do you mean by coming so uncere-moniously into people's rooms?" Jesse James demanded.

"I go everywhar whar extarmination is needed."

"It's not needed here."

"Then, my onregenerated friend, I'll take my departur. I don't wanter stay whar I'm not needed, fur thar's call to work while it's day, for the night comes when no man works."

He turned about as if to go, when the young girl called to him.

"Stop, sir, please."

"Who calls?"

He turned slowly and stiffly about.

"It is I," answered Della, her sweet face deathly white. "Don't leave me alone with these villains."

"Wall, leetle gal, I didn't spose they war sanctified hully, but I didn' know eggsactly how bad they war."

Old Saddle-bags deliberately walked over to the side of the room where the girl stood, and took up his post of duty by her.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jesse James. "You have a brave, youthful protector."

The old man's eyes flashed with an almost insane light, as he cried:

"Ye onregenerated son o' Adam, how dar' ye mock a pilgrim an' stranger in yer midst. Ain't I the great extarminator o' sin?"

"Never mind him," whispered the girl. "They will go away."

"I reckon, leetle gal, it's 'bout time they war goin' now, fur I'm a fightin' parson an' a extarminator o' sin, so th' sooner they gits out o' here the better."

"Go! Leave the room, Henry Jackson—both you and your friend."

Cole Younger saw that it would be a good time to separate Jesse James and the girl, and said:

"Come, Henry, let us go."

"Henry! You called him Jesse but a moment ago!" cried the enraged girl. "Which is it—Jesse or Henry?"

"Both," the quick-witted Cole Younger answered. "We want to get away before that dangerous champion of yours assails us and completely annihilates us."

"Then ye better go, ye onregenerated son o' darkness, fur I'm a-gittin' riled all over, an' when I does git riled I'm not easy to cool down."

With a laugh Cole Younger seized Jesse's arm and dragged him from the room.

"Now, Jess, let that be the last you ever see of the girl."

"But not of him?"

"Who?"

"Old Saddle-bags."

"What do you mean, Jesse?"

"We had better watch him, Cole. You know I have my suspicions."

"Yes."

They had come to the top of the landing above the stairway, and paused a moment to think before descending.

There was a hall below the stairs the same as above, and a chandelier lighted the hall. A man was seen standing in the door of the hall.

That man had a regular sneak thief face, yet possessed a remarkable amount of cunning in his face and a persistent sleuth hound like tenacity.

"There is Jim Latche, the very man for the business," said Cole Younger.

They hurried down to Jim Latche, who had already set out to watch the mysterious old man calling himself old Saddle-bags, and told him where he would be found.

"Go up, Jim. You know how to walk without noise. Put your ear right against the key-hole, and listen to every word the old fellow says. If there is one breath of suspicion against him he shall go the way of Wicher."

Jim grinned, nodded his head, and took his departure up the stairway to reach his post of duty.

But we will now return to the indignant Della and her singular, new-found friend.

No sooner had the door closed on the departing outlaws than old Saddlebags said:

"Leetle gal, I wanter talk with ye some."

"Oh, I am so glad you came," she sobbed. "I feel sure you are an honorable old man whom I can trust, but I cannot trust those villains."

"Who ar they, leetle gal?"

The old man's manner had undergone a slight change since the departure of the rogues, though he persistently kept up the character he had assumed of the old western preacher.

He had seated himself by chance it seemed with his ear close to the door, and without seeming to do so, he was listening for any sound of any one without.

"One of them is a schoolmaster," the girl answered after a few moments sobbing.

"His name, sis?"

"I knew him as Henry Jackson."

"War it his reel name?"

"I don't know."

"Your pa iz a farmer?"

"Yes."

"How many children's he got?"

"Only one—myself."

"Great cracky! you all?"

"Yes."

"Do they know whar ye ar'."

"No, sir."

"My deer leetle gal, don't yer know it's wrong ter deceive yer parents by er comin' away off hyar alone? Think how oneasy yer poor pap an' mam will be an' you gone away from home, an' they not knowin' about whar ye air!"

"They think I am at the house of a friend in Kansas City," she answered.

"So ye give it cut thet ye war a-goin' to Kansas City when ye left yer home?"

"Yes."

"Wall, 'twar all wrong."

"I know it was but I trusted him. I belived him a man of honor, and promised to meet him here."

"What for?"

"To be married."

"Secretly?"

"Yes."

"Didn't yer pa and ma know it?"

"No."

"Wall, twar all wrong, leetle gal, 'twar all wrong. Ye'd better allers tell yer par an' mar when yer goin' ter do anything ez serious ez that."

"I know I should."

"Now lookee here, gal; don't yer do it agaln; don't yer go ter deceivin' yer pore old pa and mar."

"I never shall."

At this moment Old Saddlebags heard a

CHAPTER III.

THE PREACHER AT NIGHT.

No one with any idea of the ludicrous could refrain from smiling at the odd figure which appeared in the close of last chapter.

stealthy footstep in the hall without, then came suppressed breathing, and he knew that some one was listening to their conversation. Immediately his manner changed the slightest.

"My darter, ar' ye one o' the onregenerated?"

"Sir."

"Are ye unregenerated ur safe within the fold."

The girl only stared at him in amazement, and the old man went on.

"I am Daniel Ichabod Penticost, more commonly known ez old Saddlebags, my leetle friend, an' my business in life is extarminatin' sin of all kinds. I war named arter Dan'l o' old, who was cast in a lion's den. Now, my leetle gal, I've been cast into somethin' of the same kind myself, but I'm jist a-thinkin' that ye war cast inter the wnst den o' lions what ever I seed jist now, an' I war the angel what come an' locked their mouths."

He kept on at this wild, rattling rate for several minutes, until Jim Latche's patience became worn out, and he turned about and left the hallway.

"Now, leetle gal, we'll perceed."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Why, the feller what wuz a-listenin' at the door is gone, an' we'll perceed. What's yer name?"

"Della Collins."

"Della Collins. What's yer father's name?"

"George Collins"

The old man betrayed the first keen excitement he had ever shown. Starting to his feet, he gazed at the girl a moment, who was not a little bewildered at the manner of her singular companion, and then he went to the door.

It was closed, but he pushed it open and glanced out in the hallway.

There was no one in sight or hearing.

The old man turned about and walked to the window, where he looked out for a few moments into the dark streets.

Whether he saw some one on the street, was absent-minded, or merely did that to gain his self control, we cannot say, but certainly when he came back there was a decided change in his manner.

"Say, leetle gal, what yer goin' ter do?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"Hadn't yer better go on ter Kansas City an' make yer visit to yer friend?"

"Yes, I will," she said, with a sudden resolution.

The old man plucked his long, thin, white whiskers for a moment and said:

"Gal, I want yer ter do suthin' fur me."

"What?"

"Take that piece o' paper an' that ar pencil." Where the paper and pencil came from the girl had no idea. "Now write yer pa's name in full an' his post-office, too. Then ye write yer own name an' the place ye'll be in Kansas City."

"Why do you want to know that?" asked the girl.

"Don't yer be afeerd thet I'll ever gin yer away, ur betray yer secret, lee'le gal. I want them p'int's fur yer own good."

"But you won't tell father?"

"Wall, no—not unless it becomes necessary ter tell him."

"It will not."

"Dun know—won't do it unless yer say so. Now write 'em down llike a good gal."

She seemed to have implicit confidence in him, and wrote the names and addresses as he requested. The old man took them, and imparting a blessing on her young head bade her good-night, assuring her he would see her at the train on the next morning.

Old Saddlebags was a guest at the same hotel

where Della Collins was staying. The landlord hesitated about giving such a ragmuffin a room and bed, and it was not until he had raked up some coin from the bottom of his pantaloons pocket, that he would permit him to remain.

Once in his room a decided change came over the old fellow.

He went about, closed every window, pulled down every blind, lit a candle, and took a peep into every closet, and even under the bed, to assure himself no one was around, and then began a wonderful transformation.

The old battered plug hat was removed, and hung on a peg. Then the long white hair and short thin beard came off.

The tattered clothes were removed, and from the saddle-bags he produced another suit of plain gray, yet neat and well fitting.

In fifteen minutes after he entered the room a pile of rags was all that was left of Old Saddlebags, while in his place stood a young fellow not to exceed thirty years of age, smooth shaven and quite handsome.

He was a bold, daring fellow. His blue eyes were sharp and keen as a hawk's.

About his waist was a belt which supported three large revolvers.

"Now while others sleep I must work," said the recently transformed young man. "Old Saddlebags will be here sleeping quietly in his room, and Carl Greene will be out upon the streets."

Old Saddlebags, the pretended preacher, was in reality one of Pinkerton's shrewdest, most daring detectives.

He went to the window and raised the blind a little.

The street was dark and quiet. For a long time he listened to assure himself that no one was astir, and then he went to the rear window which he raised noiselessly, and again listened.

He had taken the precaution before venturing near the windows to extinguish the candle that burned in his room. There was not a sound to be heard without.

The wind was sighing among the distant tree tops, and rustled the loose papers in the back alley. The detective discovered a low porch and sort of lattice work at the rear window which promised him support and he gently sprang out on the porch.

So light and agile was every motion that not a sound was made.

Then he slowly and carefully placed his foot on the lattice work. Not knowing how strong it was, it was with great care that he intrusted his weight to it.

There was a dark yard and a high board fence below. He paused, suspended in mid-air, when about half way below, and listened. Not a sound reached his ear save a slight jingling which he took to be the wind blowing boards and bits of wire.

When only three or four feet from the ground, Carl Greene dropped.

As he did so a dark form sprang at him. It struck him with such force as to knock him backward upon the ground.

There was a low whine, and smothered angry growl, which he instantly discovered to be broken sentences of a bull dog, trying to break his tether chain.

Carl was just beyond reach of the ferocious dog's muzzle, and could feel his hot breath on his face, and hear the wild snap, snap, snapping of his teeth.

"Truly, there is like to be walling and gnashing of teeth here," thought the detective. "If the dog gets hold of me I will do the walling, and he will do the gnashing."

But Carl Greene was not slow at expedients. He was of an inventive mind, and no sooner had

he found himself in this predicament, than he began to fall upon some sort of plan to get out of it.

Taking off his coat he wrapped it about his arm until he had it bundled up beyond the reach of the bulldog's masticators, and drawing a two-edged dirk he advanced upon the bulldog.

The animal did not bark, but merely gave utterance to a low, desperate growl, and when Carl was within reach, made a terrible spring at his throat.

The left arm, with its thick shield, went into his mouth, and the right hand sent the keen dagger to the bull-dog's heart.

A low whine, a shudder, and all was over.

The desperate brute relaxed his hold on the arm of the detective, and lay stiffening in death upon the ground.

The detective now had only to climb the high board fence, and he was in the alley.

But his adventures for the night were not over yet.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. TALBOT'S LOSS AT GADSHILL.

IN order that our readers may more fully understand our strange story it will be necessary for us to go back a few weeks prior to the opening of it.

We ask the reader to accompany us to the office of Mr. Allan Pinkerton, the world renowned detective. Mr. Pinkerton sits at his desk and is busily engaged in looking over some papers, when there comes a tap at the door of his private office.

"Come in," said the great detective without looking up.

The office boy entered and handed Mr. Pinkerton a card.

The detective glanced at it, and read the name of

"GEORGE TALBOT,

"Attorney-at-Law,

"Chicago, Illinois."

A frown was on the face of Mr. Pinkerton, for he did not like to be interrupted in the important testimony he was going over.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"In the front office."

Pinkerton struck a bell, and a moment later a tall young man entered.

"Bennett, can't you attend to Mr. Talbot's business?"

"No, sir."

"What is it?"

"He will not tell me. He says it is business of the most important nature, and he will intrust it to no one but you."

"Very well, then," returned Mr. Pinkerton, impatiently tossing the papers aside. "Show him in."

The great detective chief had met Mr. Talbot on many occasions. In fact there was scarce a business man in Chicago who had not at one time or another met Mr. George Talbot, attorney-at-law.

"Well, Mr. Talbot, you are persistent this morning," said Pinkerton.

"I am always persistent," answered Talbot.

"I am sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I am very busy. In fact, this is my busy day."

"I believe that every day is your busy day."

"But I am particularly engaged to-day, for I was just giving my personal attention to a matter of great importance."

"I will wager five hundred dollars that what you are at this moment puzzling your brains about is not of half so much importance as the matter I have in hand."

"Well, well, state your business," answered Mr. Pinkerton, not venturing to make the bet, however, for he very well knew that it was no ordinary business which brought Mr. Talbot to see him.

"You had better close your doors."

Pinkerton did so.

"You have no prying clerks?"

"No."

"There is no danger of interruption?"

"Not the least; the door is self-locking, and besides it is as much as a clerk's life is worth to euter here while I am engaged."

"Well, Mr. Pinkerton, I have come to get you to send out one of your best men to Missouri."

"After the James Boys and Youngers?"

"That's it."

Pinkerton shook his head.

"I have lost Wicher, Tull and some of the very best men I have by those James Boys, and I don't care for any more of them."

"But I don't want you to send a man to capture the banditti."

"Not capture them?"

"No."

"Then why send one after them at all?"

"Listen and hear me through, Mr. Pinkerton. You remember the Gadshill robbery?"

"Yes."

"It was a train robbed at Gadshill by the James Boys and Younger Brothers."

"I know all about it."

"I lost some property there which I want restored."

"Were you on the train that was robbed at Gadshill?"

"No."

"Then how did you lose your property?"

"The express safe was robbed."

"Oh, yes, I perceive; proceed, please."

"Well, you understand there was a package in that safe consigned to me, and I did not know until recently that it was on the way at the time."

"Where was the package from?"

"From a London legal firm."

"How on earth did it come to be on the Gadshill train?"

"It was a blunder it seems of the express agents in London and New York, for the package was consigned to Chicago, via Kansas City, Missouri, and was on the way there when it was robbed."

"You are sure of that?"

"Of course I am. I have had it traced every inch of the way from London, England, to the last station before Gadshill, and the expressman informs me that the package was in the safe at the time of the robbery."

"Well, that is pretty clear, then, that the package was really on board the train."

"Can be no doubt of it."

"Who was the consignor in London?"

"Dillon & Marsh, attorneys, London, England."

"Very well. Now tell me what the package was worth."

"Five millions."

"What? Great heavens, was so much money taken from the express at Gadshill?"

"No, sir."

"Then what do you mean?"

"It was not money."

"Diamonds?"

"No."

"Costly jewels, precious stones then?"

"Not that either."

"Then what in the name of common sense was it?"

"A medal—a golden medal."

"A golden medal worth five millions."

"Not the medal alone. There was a will, a

title of heirship, and a medal as proof giving to some one living in the great west whose name I do not know, but whose name was engraven on the medal, the sum of five millions dollars, in stocks and bonds in England."

"Well, that is rather curious."

"Not at all—there was not a dollar of money sent to me, but just the means of looking up the last heir, that was all."

"Well, so you have lost the clew?"

"Yes."

"Too bad."

"Now I have come to get you to send one of your ablest men to Missouri to find that package for me."

"You say you don't care to bother about the James Boys?"

"No. All I want is the package."

"Do you know how it was sent?"

"A cablegram says, it was sent in a red cedar box, well wrapped and secure."

"Very well. Do you know that is almost as dangerous to try to recover that box as it is to try to capture Cole Younger or Jesse James."

"Well, I suppose so."

"You will have to pay a man big."

"I expect to."

"It's all one's life's worth."

"I know it."

Then Pinkerton bowed his head for a moment in thought and said:

"I can think of but one man at present who would possibly be suitable, and I don't know that we could get him."

"Why?"

"He may be engaged."

"Find out."

Pinkerton rang a bell, and a moment later the boy euter, the chief rising and opening the door for him.

Pinkerton sat down and wrote a few words on a bit of paper and gave it to the boy, saying:

"Hand that to the chief clerk."

The boy went away with it and the chief, leaning back in his chair, said:

"We will know now in a few minutes all about it."

"About the package?"

"No, but whether he can go. But mark you, Mr. Talbot, somebody will have to foot up the bill and it won't be a small one either."

"I stand ready to do it, let it be one thousand or twenty."

"How do you expect to be remunerated?" asked the detective.

"By the heirs, whoever they may be."

"You are taking some risks."

"No, I am not. My son, who is only twenty, but a bright lad, was in England a few months ago just before the package was sent, and he learned beyond a doubt that the heir lived in Missouri."

"Did he learn the heir's name?"

"Oh, yes, he knew the name, but just now it has slipped my memory."

"Where is your son?"

"In St. Louis, where he will wait ready to act as soon as the red cedar box and medal are recovered."

The boy entered and said:

"Mr. Greene is in, sir, and will be here in a moment."

Mr. Talbot waited with longing impatience for the appearance of the detective. His heart gave a hopeful, joyous bound at the name of Greene, for if the detective was the famous Carl Greene, the greatest detective on Pinkerton's staff, he would feel that the work was fully half accomplished already.

There came a firm, quick, manly step in the hallway and a tap on the door of Allen Pinkerton.

"Come in, Carl."

The door opened and Carl Greene entered.

He was tall, erect, and had eyes of a deep bold blue. He went smooth shaved, with hair close cropped, for it enabled him the better to disguise himself, as his business so frequently required.

The chief rose and carefully closed and bolted the door, then said:

"Mr. Greene, do you know Mr. Talbot, the lawyer?"

"I have heard of him," said Carl, extending his hand.

"And I have heard of Mr. Greene," said Talbot.

"Gentlemen, be seated, and we will begin business at once."

Allen Pinkerton was not a man to beat about the bush very long when there was business to transact.

"Now, Carl Greene, have you any matters on hand?"

"Some two or three."

"Of much consequence?"

"No. There is looking up the Bronson heirs, finding a missing witness in the Long ejectment case, and some evidence in a divorce suit."

"All those matters could be attended to as well by an apprentice, could they not?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well, I will have an apprentice to do the work, then, providing you want this job."

"What is it?"

"Are you afraid of a dangerous bit of work?"

"No; I will go wherever you send me."

"Even to Missouri?"

"Yes, sir, even to Missouri."

"How would you like to try nerve and wits with the James Boys and Younger Brothers?"

"I would like it."

"Are you sure you would?"

"I am."

"You knew Wicher?"

"Yes, sir."

"And know what his fate was?"

"I do."

"He was a brave fellow, but he was ambitious, and he wanted the honor of hunting down the James Boys."

"I know that."

"He did hunt them down to his death."

"I am acquainted with his sad history."

"And Captain Tull's."

"Yes, sir."

"Griggs and Martiu, who tried to storm Castle James."

"I know it all, Mr. Pinkerton."

"Well, with all that fresh on your mind, what do you now say about going?"

"I say I will go."

For a moment both Pinkerton and the lawyer sat and gazed in astonishment at the man before them. The lawyer's heart had beat loud with dread lest the chief had painted the picture so dark that the detective would decline the undertaking.

"Those men who went and lost their lives, Carl Greene, were brave as lions."

"That is all very true, but I have warned Wicher many a time of his indiscretion, and the others were positively rash."

"Would you venture alone?"

"Certainly. If I go at all on an expedition after the James Boys, I want no aid. I will go alone."

"I don't know but what you are right Carl."

"But, Mr. Greene, we do not want you to hunt up and capture the James Boys."

"What—not hunt the James Boys, then why were you talking about them?"

"For the reason that you are simply to recover a box taken by the James Boys and

Younger Brothers from the express car at the Gadsall train robbery."

"Well that might be more difficult than finding the banditti."

"Five million is involved, remember five million!" cried Mr. Talbot, growing nervous and starting to his feet and pacing the floor.

Mr. Pinkerton explained to Carl Greene all he had already learned about the robbery, and valuable papers and medal.

When the detective had heard it all, he studied for a moment, and said:

"I can think of but one plan that would possibly promise success."

"Well, will it?"

"It promises to be successful."

"I wish you could be induced to try it," ventured Mr. Talbot, again entertaining fears that there was danger of Carl Greene backing out.

"There is but one drawback to the undertaking," said Carl Greene.

"What is that?"

"Lack of money."

"Do you mean that on sufficient money you will get the box?"

"No, not exactly that; but for sufficient money I will try to get it, and have a fair show of success."

"You shall have the money. What amount do you require?"

"A thousand dollars bonus, and twenty-five dollars a day for expenses while I am engaged in it. Nothing more if I fail, but an additional ten thousand if I succeed."

"Will you undertake it on those terms?"

"Yes."

"Then, sir, the bargain is struck."

Papers were drawn at once and signed by both parties. The lawyer drew his check for one thousand dollars, payable to Carl Greene, and in addition paid a week's expenses in advance.

Then shaking the hand of the daring young detective, took his departure.

Carl Greene busied himself for a day or two getting ready. No one knew what his plan was.

Some one hinted that he had purchased a very valuable horse, one that had been used in a circus, and shipped him to the West.

On the morning Carl took his departure, he entered the office of his chief, and taking his hand, said:

"Good-bye, Mr. Pinkerton; it may be some time before I return."

"Good-bye, Carl, my brave boy. I wish you luck."

And when Carl was gone, Mr. Pinkerton, remembering similar departures of Wicher, Tull and others, said:

"Ah, poor brave boy, I am very afraid I shall never see him again."

CHAPTER V.

THE LIGHT IN THE CELLAR.

FOR a moment after the detective had alighted in the alley, he remained crouched upon his hands and knees, not daring to rise.

But one had heard him, and no one was to be seen. The coast was clear and Carl rose to his feet.

First he made his way toward a brook that flowed past the village on the south, and there carefully washed his hand and the blade of his knife perfectly free from blood. When he had done this he returned again to the street, and made his way to the house upon the hill.

All was dark.

He went completely around it, but saw no one, nor even a light. There was no opportunity for him to get inside of it in any way.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps came on his ear and he lay down behind some gooseberry bushes.

Two men were coming toward the house, conversing in an undertone.

"We're goin' to the well next," he heard one say.

"How long will we stay there?"

"Can't say."

"Jesse keeps us on the go."

"We got to after the Gadshill affair."

"Seems to have roused the whole country."

"Yes."

"Well, it was a stunner."

"'Tisn't half what we will do yet. Wait till we get a pull at the trains some time carrying specie."

The two men had by this time reached the cottage of Jim Latche, and rapped on the door.

There was no immediate answer, and they continued to talk while they waited.

"Guess Jess and Cole both got satisfied about that old fellow."

"Who?"

"Old Saddle-bags."

"Oh, yes. Did you hear anything about him?"

"Yes, heard all about him."

"Where is he from?"

"Came down from Atchison county."

"And what is he?"

"An old crazy preacher who thinks he is taking the world by storm."

"Well, he is—but I would not suppose his rags and tatters would gain him a respectable audience."

"Oh, he glories in his rags."

"Do you think he is really what he pretends to be?"

"No."

The listener started at this and a fit of fear crept in his heart, but it vanished a moment later.

"What is he?" the brigand asked.

"A fool."

"Ha, ha, ha. I guess we'll all agree to that."

"He professes to be a preacher, but he is a fool."

"Well, why don't Jim Latche come?"

"Rap again."

Once more the door rang with the loud raps upon it. But only the hollow echoes came back.

The listener secreted in the gooseberry bushes at this moment heard the tramp of horses' feet in the lane. A moment later a man drew rein at the gate and blew a whistle. It was only a low, soft signal, but the men heard it and, leaving the door, came to the gate where the horseman sat upon his horse.

"Jim Latche is not there," said the horseman who was Jesse James himself.

"Where is he?"

"He is shadowing that fellow."

"Who?"

"Old Saddle-bags of course."

"I thought he was already satisfied about him and reported to you."

"So he did report to me, but I sent him back. His work wasn't half done."

"What do you mean, Jess?"

"I mean to keep on the track of that old fellow for a week, until we know all about him."

"Where are you going now, Jess?"

"To the well."

"Do we all meet there?"

"Yes. We've got to take some steps about that Gadshill wonder."

"You mean the cedar box?"

"Yes."

Jesse then started away, when the two brigands called after him, and he wheeled his horse about and galloped back to the gate.

"What do you want now, boys? Don't be making such a racket, or you will be heard by everybody in the town."

"Must we come, too, Jesse?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"To-morrow night. Now you needn't be standing there giving Jim Latche away, for he will not be in before morning. There is no one there," and Jesse again galloped away.

As he went thundering up the lane the man concealed in the gooseberry bushes ventured to raise his head and take a peep at the beautiful black horse with skin soft as silk and so glossy it shone in the starlight.

"That must be the wonderful horse Siroc. Well, I may have a chance to test his speed and endurance."

That glance had been taken by the concealed man at the risk of his life. As soon as it was made and he had taken a moment to admire the wonderful steed he again dropped down behind the gooseberry bushes and lay perfectly still while the two men who had come to see Jim Latche watched the bandit king as he galloped away.

"It's no use to wait here any longer!" growled one of the outlaws.

"No, come on!"

They turned about and went away.

The concealed man waited until they were out of sight, then rose slowly, and cautiously crept from the bushes, and began making a detour of the village to the boarding house.

The little village was very dark and quiet. Not a sound could be heard save the impatient stamp of a horse in some distant stall, or the occasional clang of a cow-bell as the drowsy bovine moved in her sleep.

Then the detective made his way toward the hotel from whence he had come.

But as he reached the rear of it he paused, and well he might. Here a new danger beset him.

Standing close by the great wall at the rear of the house, the very wall which he would have to scale, stood a man gazing up at the house.

"I must get rid of him," said the detective to himself.

Then he began a cautious advance toward the man who was standing with his back toward him.

"Wall, I don't see any sense in me a-standin' out here all night a-watchin' fur the feller who won't come out. He's up thar asleep, I know it. Why is Jess so pertickler 'bout that old preacher I'd like to know."

Jim Latche turned about and made his way from the house to another part of the city.

"Guess I've waited 'bout ez long ez I'm a-goin' to," he growled as he went away.

"I wonder if I am rid of him," thought the detective.

But he was too shrewd to be taken unawares, and he resolved to follow him. Down the narrow, dark alley, hedged in with tall boards, the detective pursued Jim Latche.

Now the form is visible, and now it is not, but at last it disappears just where the houses leave off and the trees begin.

Now beware, stranger. Jim Latche is a dangerous man, and ye should be careful how you follow him. There is a strange, peculiar fascination in following one whose actions and designs one wishes to study. It was a matter of life and death with the pursuer of Jim Latche. At last he has reached the dark wood and halts.

There is danger in that, and he is soon to find it out. He does find it out.

With a sudden swish through the air there came a body, something whizzed past his ear, grazing his face. Then came a struggle. Carl turned and grappled with some one. The shing-shot having missed its aim was, of course, useless, and they were too close together to use any weapons.

With fingers clutched about each other's throats, they struggled for a moment among the bushes, then fell and rolled over and over on the ground, struggled, grappled with each other and fought.

No word was spoken, and only their labored breathing and the crackling of brush as they rolled over and over upon the ground could be heard.

And then at last Jim Latche began to give in. He was out-winded and exhausted. His fingers relaxed their hold on the stranger and his clutch correspondingly grew tighter. It was a fierce fight yet, but no longer an issue which should win.

In a few moments all was over. Jim Latche lay still and motionless. The stranger rose to his feet and for a long time gazed at him, then stole away a short distance, halted and gazed back at the terrible thing lying there on the ground the blackest of all the black shadows.

Then he stole away.

Next morning Old Saddle-bags was up by the early dawn and standing guard over the door of his young protegee.

"Guess that 'ar little gal didn't git ter sleep till late," he muttered to himself. "'Twar a hard trial fur her, a hard trial, but 'twar all fur the best."

After he had waited for something like ten minutes the door opened timidly, and a white, tearful face appeared.

"Don't be skeered, sis. It ar only me, old Saddlebags, the extarminator o' sin."

"Oh, sir, you here? I am so glad," said the poor girl.

"Are you, gal? Wall, now, that ar nice. I want ax ye a questiou. Will ye answer me?"

"What is it?"

"Will ye answer?"

"I don't know."

"Ar ye on redemption's side?"

She gazed at the old man, whose solemn features, despite his wretched seedy apparel, had a real clerical appearance.

"I—I—I really don't know."

"Gal, don't yer know yer a-rollin' through an unfriendly world, an' the sooner ye git out o' the ranks o' the onregenerated an' turn to extarmination o' sin the better."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it, gal."

A quick nervous glance down the hall-way told her that two or three idle looking men were there listening carefully to what the old preacher was saying.

"Come, leetle gal, breakfas' air ready. That ar' bell hez rung a good long time ago."

"But I am afraid."

"What yer afeerd on, gal?"

"I—I don't know. I am afraid to go down to breakfast."

"Why?"

"There are men down there."

"Don't yer let 'em skeer ye."

"But they all know about the scene last night."

"Now look here, gal, don't yer be skeered o' them men. I air only a rough sort o' old feller I know, but lem me tell ye er word ur two. Ef we fellers want ter hear the very wnst hard shell sermon wot ever war preached on Timber Creek, jist let 'em dar hint a word agin you."

"Oh, thank you."

"No thanks, gal. My main perfeshun is extarminatin sin, but I got two perfeshuns. The second one air lookin' arter pore gals wot needs a pectorator."

She came out and took the arm of the old man.

Trembling, the little hand clutched the tatter-

ed coat sleeve, and they walked down to the breakfast table.

There were but few guests at the table, which made it so much the worse for the poor timid girl. The preacher was so much taken up with trying to reconcile the unsophisticated country girl to things, that he evidently forgot to say grace. At least, that little ceremony which usually precedes the meal of an ecclesiastic, was omitted.

"Now, your jist go ahead an' eat yer breakfast, gal, an' don't yer be one bit backward, because them onregenerated sons o' Adam ar' lookin' at yer. They don't know heans when the bag's open."

Della managed by the old man's persuasion to eat a tolerable fair breakfast.

When she had finished her meal, she rose hastily and asked:

"Will you go with me?"

"Any whar, my leetle gal."

"To the landlord to settle my bill."

"Well, my child, I'd be glad enuff ter settle it fur ye, 'f 'twarn't that I han't got the ducats. Gold and silver I hev none, but sich as I hev I will give onto ye. I kin extarminate sin, and make it fly like shadders o' darkness afore the blazin' sunlight."

He accompanied her to the clerk's desk where from her small but well-filled purse she paid her bill.

Then with her small traveling bag she set out, accompanied by the eccentric Old Saddle-bags to the depot.

"Hello, Bill, look, thar goes that old preecher feller."

"Old Saddle-bags, ber gum."

"Look out, Joey, ur he'll have suthin' at yer. Jist say he's a holy terror back on Timber Branch."

"Did he run the camp meetin'?"

"Yes."

"Golly, ain't he a quar un. Bet them's clothes wot Noah wared in the ark."

"Bet so too."

These and like expressions greeted the ears of the old man as he and the girl wended their way to the depot.

"Oh, do you hear them?" gasped the mortified girl, unable to suppress the tears which rose to her eyes.

"Yes, gal, but don't cher mind 'em one single bit."

"Oh, it's terrible."

"No, tain't, fact, I kinder like it."

"Say, Old Saddle-bags," called out an urchin, growing a little bolder than the others, "warn't ye in the ark. Ain't yer reel name Noah?"

"No, my reel name's Dan'l."

"Oh, yes, ye wur the feller wot war cast in the lion's den."

"Yes."

"Wall, guess then war when ye got yer clothes tored, warn't it?"

"Spect it was, but ye onregenerated son o' Adam, you war under Balaam, warn't ye?"

"Balaam, who wor he, a blg ginerel."

"No, the feller what rode the ass. I thort ye mought be a descendent o' his hoss."

The rude wit of the old preacher made him a favorite with the boys, and they whooped and yelled with joy when he so cleverly turned the laugh on one of their companions.

The depot was at last reached, and he took leave of the girl.

As she went whirling away on the train to Kansas City, the first beam of happiness she had yet shown beamed on her face.

She was rid forever of the villain whom she once thought she loved, but whom she was glad now to know she never had loved.

Old Saddlebags put in the day talking with and haranguing the people.

He was good-natured, and took many liberties which would not have been permitted in others.

He was regarded as a harmless enthusiast to say the least, and no one paid much attention to him save the idlers and small boys, who were always eager for any excitement.

Night came and Old Saddlebags was still wandering about the streets saying:

"Hear ye the voice o' one cryin' in the wilderness prepar ye, an' make the paths straight."

In front of Jim Latche's cottage he paused and gazed up in astonishment. The house had been closed all day, but now from the cellar there came a ray of light.

"A light in ther cellar; hez the onregenerated returned ter life?"

CHAPTER VI.

JESSE IN PERIL.

MR. O'BRIEN was a wealthy farmer of Irish extraction. He was a brave, honest man, and in love with two things. Liberty and Honesty.

On the third night after Jesse James rode away from Kearney, Mr. O'Brien was driving homeward in his wagon. Having been to town that day, and disposed of a heavy load of produce, and received the pay for a car load of stock which he had disposed of the week before, the farmer's pockets were literally bursting with greenbacks, and Mr. O'Brien was as happy and contented as one can be in this world of woes.

But, alas! when we think ourselves most secure, danger is at hand. When we think ourselves most happy, a dark cloud of woe is just ready to fall upon us.

The farmer had reached a lonely part of the road where it wound about through the darkest old romantic wood.

Mr. O'Brien had in his nature just the least bit of superstition, and he occasionally glanced about as if he expected to see the wicked banshee, or some ghost in the lonely wood.

Suddenly there came on his ear a faint far-off sound which gathered in volume and distinctness as it approached nearer and nearer, until he made it out to be the footfall of a horse. The animal was coming at a gallop.

"Begorra, it's meself as thinks Oi'm not the only thraveler on this road," the Irish farmer remarked as he hurried his horses along.

Somehow he did not like to have a horseman riding up behind him, and wished he was out of the wood. But that horseman came nearer and nearer and Mr. O'Brien, discovering that he must be overtaken before he got out of the wood, drew rein on his horses and brought them down to a more moderate gait.

"Hello, there!" called a voice from the darkness, and he saw looming up behind him a powerful man mounted on a dark horse.

Only the outlines of either could be made out in the dark, and quite wraithlike, spooklike, that grim shadow appeared to the lonely traveler. But the voice was not ghostlike, by any means, and the Irishman took courage as soon as he heard it, and cried:

"Hello yersilf, ye spalpane!"

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"You are late."

"So is yersilf."

"Why do you drive so fast?"

"Because Oi'm late, ye sae!" answered the Irishman. "Now tell me why ye roide so loike the divil war afther ye?"

"Because I am late."

The horseman was now alongside the farmer, and Mr. O'Brien was sure he saw a fiery gleam from those cold, basilisk eyes as they gleamed at him through the darkness.

"Where have you been?"

"To town."

"Did well with your cattle and produce?"

The farmer grew uneasy, but not knowing what else to say, answered in the affirmative.

"Must have money."

"S—some!" he answered, trembling with dread and apprehension.

"Much?"

"What the divil is it yer business?"

"I want to know the amount."

"Begorra, ye've the impudence of the divil."

"Have I? Do you see this?"

The horrified farmer now found the dark muzzle of a pistol thrust in his face.

"Och! ye divil, quit that, won't ye!"

"Hand over that money."

"Niver!"

"Your money or your life!"

"Divil a bit. Oi've worrucked fur me money, on no murderin' sphalpane shall have a cint av it, indade ye won't."

"Fool, do you want me to blow your brains out?"

"No."

"Then hand over your money."

The horseman was a no less personage than Jesse James, the bandit king, himself. He had been enabled to learn through some of his many spies in and about Kearney of the old Irish farmer having a large amount of wealth about his person, and determined to rob him on his way homeward.

But Mr. O'Brien was no coward when it came to dealing with men, though a coward when he thought himself confronted by the unnatural.

Quick as a flash he brought his heavy black-snake whip with a backward slash around the outlaw's head stunning him for a moment.

With an exclamation by no means pious Jesse seized the man by the shoulder, fired at him and jerked him from the wagon.

The horses, alarmed at the blinding flash and stunning report, ran away, dragging the wagon after them, until it ran against a tree, which took off a wheel and then upset it, and finally the frightened horses tore loose from the vehicle and ran away into the woods."

The bandit king heard the farmer groaning upon the ground, and dismounting, proceeded to rob him. Mr. O'Brien had been shot in the back, the ball ranging downward into his left hip, leaving him perfectly helpless.

When he had possessed himself of his money, Jesse James once more mounted his horse and rode away.

Scarce was he gone ere a man appeared on the scene, who was wildly clad in rags, and on whose head was a battered plug hat.

"Oh, ye onregenerated son o' wickedness, what yer been a doin'?" he asked, dismounting from his sorry looking horse, and raising the wounded farmer.

"Oh, Oi'm kilt intoirely, I am."

"Who did this wicked deed, my onregenerated friend?"

"Faith, I don't know, but it war a robber divil."

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, that he who taketh up the sword shall perish by the sword."

"'Twasn't a sword, me friend. It was a big pistol," groaned the wounded Irishman.

"It's all the same, my son. Now tell me whar ye whar gwine, whar ye belong, an' Old Saddle-bags 'll be a lookin' out fur some way ter git yer home."

The wounded man replied saying that he lived but a mile or two away on the road.

Old Saddle-bags mounted his sorry looking horse, whispered something in his ear, and instantly a wonderful change came over the animal. He no longer limped. The spavin, rug bone

and polevil seemed to have no effect on him, but with a speed that was remarkable he flew over the ground toward the home of the wounded farmer.

There was not a swifter steed in all the land than that sorry looking animal, despite the many diseases he seemed to possess. Having roused the household, and his quaint odd way made known his discovery of the wounded man, smitten down by some onregenerated robber, while he had come like the good "Samaritan" to bring him home and "pour ile" on his wounds, Old Saddle-bags took his departure.

Whither could he be going on that dark night?

Down one road he galloped, and then away to a cross road up another, until at last he came to a place where the road was not over twelve feet wide. Here in the darkest part of the wood had been arranged, previous to his arrival, the most peculiar net-work of ropes running from tree to tree one ever saw.

They were so arranged with loops and draw-strings that a horseman riding into the trap would find himself and steed tied up and helpless before he knew it.

"Wall, o' all the traps o' Satan, I kinder 'spect that air about the neatest. Now that unregenerated son o' darkness will soon be on this ere road goin' to his stronghold. Lucky I found thar war a nearer way across 'n he goes. But he's got ter go to his friend Cockerell's fur latest news from the James' amnesty bill. Guess I'll see some fun."

Then Old Saddle-bags drew from his pocket a whistle. Where he had got it or how he came by it we will not pretend to say, but it was one of the very whistles used by the Jameses and Youngers, and it was supposed that no other person in all the world had one like it.

Old Saddle-bags blew a shrill blast. It was a peculiar whistle, making a doleful rolling sound, and was the call made by one of the band to the other.

Even as he blew the blast, the sound of horses' hoofs upon the hard turnpike were heard coming toward him.

Two sharp blasts from the direction of the approaching horseman answered the call.

"Now let me see," pondered old Saddle-bags. "Oh, yes, it's three long whistles to indicate come," and he blew that signal.

The approaching horseman answered by a similar sound that he was coming. Old Saddle-bags sat on his sleepy-looking horse, watching the road, and listening.

"The ropes can't be seen very well after night," the old man reflected. "But that ar degenerated son o' Adam hez keen eyes, an' I reckon I'd better bring him in a hurry—rush him right into the trap afore he sees it."

Again placing the whistle to his lips he blew two short quick blasts, which signal meant come in a run.

The approaching horseman was Jesse James, the bandit king, the very person on whom the old man had calculated.

He heard the signal given to come at full speed.

It was a signal seldom given, and always meant danger and death.

The great Missouri banditti had bound themselves by the most solemn oaths and obligations never to be taken alive, or reveal a secret of the band. When the chief heard the signal which meant danger to himself, or perhaps to the comrade giving the signal, or maybe to both, he cried:

"Come, good Siroc, now make the ground tremble."

That wonderful horse did it. With the speed of lightning he dashed forward into the darkness at a rate of speed which made it impossible for

keenest eyes in the world to see an object an inch ahead.

Suddenly there was a halt, a leap, a plunge. Jesse felt himself struck in a dozen places at once.

Ropes clutched his arms and legs and neck.

He was choking, struggling and powerless.

"What devil's trap is this?" he cried, kicking and trying to get free. But the harder he kicked, and the more he struggled, the tighter grew those wonderfully arranged cords.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS IKE.

The Bandit King struggled and swore in the toils of some strange net or snare.

There came over his ear a hollow, mocking laugh, and a voice seemed to say:

"Caught at last."

"Can it be true?" he asked himself. "Is this a reality, or a dream. I who have sworn that I would never be taken alive, caught and held by some infernally arranged trap which I can't see."

As he learned that his struggles only tightened the cords about his throat, he soon began to desist, and swung helplessly in the air. Siroc was still snorting with terror, and trying to break from the meshes of the snare which held him, but the poor beast only became more deeply entangled at every step.

Jesse learned that the ropes were tied among the tree-tops and bushes, and the swaying and bending of these lifted him into the saddle, holding him in mid-air. Never was a poor fly caught more neatly in a spider web than he in this net. His arms were caught in a dozen tightening loops, as many were about his body and legs.

Old Saddle-bags, unseen, was only a short distance away, gazing at the scene which he could only dimly see.

Jesse James struggled no longer to free himself, but strove with might and main to get his revolver with the intention of putting an end to his own life, for it was a rule among the bandits never to be taken alive. Self-destruction was preferred to that.

But just as Jesse gave up in despair, and the man who unseen had been a witness to the whole scene had determined to ride up to him, there came in the distance the thunder of hoofs.

Nearer and nearer they came.

A blast sounds on the air. It is a different whistle from that made by any of the banditti, and Jesse James, pinioned as he is, knows that signal, and utters a cry of joy.

"Ike, Ike," he shouts, in a thick, half-choked voice.

"Jesse, Jesse," calls the new-comer.

"Stop, come no nearer."

We don't know whether Old Saddle-bags was near enough to see the new-comer or not, but he heard him; and whatever were the old fellow's intentions in regard to the imprisoned bandit king they were changed.

He did not go near him. Ike drew rein, and called:

"Jesse, where are you?"

"Here."

"Up in a tree?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"I don't know."

"What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, I am caught in sort of a devil's trap, and slowly choking to death. Don't come too near, Ike, or you will get caught also."

Had Old Saddle-bags been near enough to have seen the new comer he would have discovered a young fellow with a small, slender form, and a dashing, cavalier-like air. He wore a black mask over his face, and his clothes were of the finest dark green velvet.

This was that mysterious Ike who had so often befriended Jesse James, and who had pulled him through so many scrapes. He it was who had for months and years hovered about Jesse James like a dark guardian angel, and yet the bandit king had never seen his face, and had never known who he was. The identity of this mysterious being was a wonder and a puzzle to the world.

"Jesse, I can help you some way," said Ike. "I must!"

"Look out for the ropes!"

An outlaw always has a wholesome dread of ropes.

"I will cut them!"

Ike leaped to the ground. His well-trained steed he knew would stand or come at his call. He drew a long, keen-bladed knife, the only weapon offensive or defensive which he seemed to carry.

"Be careful, Ike, that they don't ierk you up too. There is no knowing how big or how long this infernal trap is."

"I am on the watch. Is any one near, Jesse?" Ike asked.

"I heard old Satan himself laughing when he thought he had me so cleverly trapped," Jesse answered.

Ike was at the wonderful net-work and cutting away right and left with a vengeance. Rope after rope and strand after strand of the most wonderful snare that was ever made was severed.

Jesse James regretted many times afterward that he had not swung in the air until morning, rather than have destroyed a snare which might have been of incalculable value to him.

At last the wonderful invention was destroyed and both rider and horse free.

Then the bandit king took his pocket-lantern from his inside pocket, lighted it, and surveyed the ruins.

"What is it, Jesse?" Ike asked.

"I don't know."

"Who made it?"

"Neither do I know that."

"Well, it is certainly the most wonderful bit of net-work I have ever seen, and was, no doubt, made to entrap you."

"You are right, Ike; but where is the trapper?"

"I can't say. I have seen and heard no one. Doubtless he has not either come, or, alarmed at my approach, gone away."

"It don't make any difference which theory is true, Ike. I am free now, and don't propose to run into any more such abominable snares as that again. Let me see if Siroc is all right."

The horse whinnied at the sound of his master's voice, and rubbed his nose against Jesse's shoulder.

"Is he hurt?" asked Ike.

"No."

"Let us mount and away."

"All right, Ike."

Both leaped in the saddle.

"Wait a moment," said the bandit.

"What, do you hear some one?"

"I am not certain, but I thought I heard just the faintest sound like some one riding away."

"I have been listening, Jesse, and am not quite certain that I did."

"Nor I, yet I am suspicious you know, Ike."

The two rode at a canter down the road keeping a sharp lookout on either side. The tardy moon rose above the eastern hills flooding all the forest with silver light.

The bandit king and his companion were now nearing the banks of the historic Little Blue.

Suddenly Siroc sniffed the air mysteriously, and began to give uneasy glances ahead.

"Something is wrong, Ike."

"It seems so."

Jesse quietly drew a large dragoon revolver, and cocking it, held it down by his leg.

The horse was staring through the trees at some object down near the creek bank under the trees, and by turning their eyes in that direction the horsemen made out a horse standing under a tree, while a dark object was lying on the ground near him.

"What is it?" Ike whispered.

"A dead body. Either some one has shot one of our boys and his horse stands by him, or some of our boys has shot some one and his horse won't desert him, I can't say which."

But on a nearer approach Jesse discovered that he had missed both guesses.

"That horse has no saddle on," said Ike.

"And he is tied."

"I never saw such an old crowbait of a horse. He has a great sore on his head," said Ike, as they came nearer.

"Why, it's that preacher, old Saddle-bags."

"Is he dead?"

"No; asleep."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, only a harmless old fellow who thinks his calling is to preach. See, he sleeps as contentedly there on the ground as if he was on a bed of down."

"Poor fellow," said the mysterious Ike, who was really very kind hearted. "I don't suppose he ever saw a bed of down."

"Don't suppose he did."

"What are you going to do?"

Jesse James dismounted.

"Wake him."

The bandit king went to the sleeping man who lay on a saddle blanket, the saddle itself forming his pillow. There never was a more innocent or inoffensive looking personage than Old Saddle-bags, as he lay there wrapt in peaceful sleep. If he was not asleep he was certainly feigning it to perfection.

"Here, old fellow, wake up—wake up!"

The old man stirred uneasily in his sleep, and rubbed his eyes.

"Saddlebags—Saddlebags."

"Humph!"

"Wake up."

"What did yer say, my brother?"

He sat up and rubbed his eyes as if still half buried in sleep.

"Get up."

"Why, 'tain't mornin'?"

"No, but you will take cold sleeping there on the ground."

"No, no, my onregenerated friend. All things air possible ter one who wants to serve the Master."

"I think you would catch cold, sir; why don't you sleep in a house?" asked Ike.

"Ah, my onregenerated friend, the birds o' the air hev nests, and the foxes hev holes in ther ground, but old Saddlebags has not whar to lay his head."

Ike gazed at him in wonder through the eye-holes of his mask and asked of Jesse:

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes."

"Say, young friend, who art beyond the pale o' redemption, will yer answer some qneschuns which I wanten per pound ter ye?"

"What are they?"

"Ar' ye ugly?"

Ike was nonplused at this. What answer should he make.

"My onregenerated friend, can't yer answer me?"

"I don't think I am."

"Then why d'yer kiver yer face with a black rag fur?"

Ike made no answer, and before the old

preacher could propound any more questions, Jesse James asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"My dear onredeemed friend, I war a-sleepin' here and restin' my pore bones, fur I war weary."

"Where are you going to hold divine services?"

"I'm goin' down ter the camp meetin' on Big Crick. D'ye know whar that is?"

"Yes," Jesse answered. "But why did you stop here?"

"Night came on, me friend o' the world, and ez I war a-goin' ter larn campin', I hed ez well begin right hyar. I hed no money to pay my way at a house, and I stayed here."

"Do you sleep out of doors many nights?" Jesse asked, while a softer light came to those cruel, glittering eyes. Jesse's father had been a minister of the gospel, and he remembered the trials he had to undergo in his journey through an unfriendly world. Here was a zealous old fanatic, but one who seemed in earnest. Old Saddle-bags brushed a gathering moisture from his eyes, and in a tone of voice that trembled despite an effort at steadiness, he said:

"My dear, onregenerated friend, many and many is the night I've lain down hungry, on ther ground ter sleep, with only that thin, tattered old blanket to kiver me. I'm only a plain ole man, sir, but I've been called ter preach ter extarminate sin, an' while I live an' kin crawl I shall do ther will o' Him thet sent me—

"I go thro' hail and cold and snow
Ter call pore sinners here below."

Jesse James felt those better emotions which sometimes moved his soul, and with a sigh said:

"I believe you, Old Saddle-Bags; you have a hard time. Here, take this."

"What is it?"

"Only ten dollars; I wish I had more, but I am short just now."

"Why, my dear onregenerated friend, I ain't hed so much money in ten y'ars."

He still hesitated about taking it.

"Take it," said Jesse.

"Me take it?"

"Yes."

"Keep it?"

"Of course."

"Wall, Nebuchednezzar, yer shall hev a belly full o' oats fur once in yer life, an' I'll hev them sores on yer back cured. Oh, my kind, onregenerated friend, I will never, never forget ye."

"Don't think of it," said Jesse, leaping into the saddle, and, accompanied by Ike, he galloped away.

CHAPTER VIII.

DELLA COLLINS AND THE OUTLAW.

A CUNNING twinkle beamed in the eye of the old man, as he watched the bandit king and his strange companion gallop away.

"That's the fust charity Old Saddle-bags hez hed," he chuckled. "Wall, it's funny, anyway."

Then the old man turning to his horse, mentally soliloquized:

"That thar polevil's er little dry, I must oil it up a little," and he felt the wax knot on his horse's head, and finding it growing a little hard poured some sweet oil on it, and returned the phial to his capacious saddle-bags. Then he carefully examined the artificial lumps which gave his horse the appearance of ring bone, spavin, and all other diseases.

"They're all right, an' would deceive a corneshure," he said.

In the meanwhile Jesse James and his companion were hurrying away commenting on the strange old preacher who had recently come in the community.

"Jesse, I am afraid you have roused the whole community against you," said Ike.

"Why?"

"Because you shot O'Brien, and he is very popular."

"You think I shot him?"

"Yes—he said it was you."

"How did you find it out, Ike?"

"The man who went for the doctor told another man you had shot an robbed O'Brien."

"Isn't he dead?"

"No."

"I supposed he was or I would have made a finish of him then and there, for the blow he gave me on the head."

"Did he strike you?"

"He did, or I would not have shot him."

They halted at the house of a friend and Jesse remained there all night, while Ike took his departure to his mysterious abode, wherever that might be.

Next day Jesse James took the train for Kansas City.

He frequently went to Kansas City and remained several days, for he had warm friends there to shield and protect him in case of pursuit. He usually put up at the hotel, registering as Stoddard or Jackson, and had never yet been detected. If any one of those who knew him saw him, they said nothing about it to any one.

There was no particular business for the bandit at this time, and Jesse, being quite flush with money, remained in Kansas City, spending it freely and enjoying himself.

On the morning of the third day after his arrival he noticed a gang of boys and loafers gathered about some object on the street, and being curious to know what it could be, went toward the group.

It was a familiar sight that met his gaze when he had made his way through the group. The old battered plug hat, the long, sharp features and white hair, snowy beard coming to a peak below his chin, and seedy clothes.

"Who be I, my onregenerated friends? D'yer ax the all-absorbin' question? Why, I'm the great extarminator o' sin! I'm Old Saddle-bags, the man who's known all over the world as the extarminator o' wickedness."

"Saddle-bags! Ha, ha, ha!" roared one of street urchins. "Three rousin' cheers for Old Saddle-bags!"

"Ye onregenerated son o' darkness, listen ter ther voice o' one cryin' in ther wilderness an' repent ye, fur ther time's at hand."

"Say, Old Saddle-bags, gin us a sermon!" cried a street urchin who had a blacking-box strapped over his shoulder.

"A sarmin? Oh, ye'll git a sarmin one o' these days, ye wicked an' growin' gineration. Don't yer monkey with a buzz sor."

Again there was a roar of laughter.

The little party had gathered in an open lot, and were having an immense amount of fun.

Jesse had just made his way through the crowd when the old man saw him, and with a cry of joy bounded from his horse, which seemed to have gone to sleep.

"Hello, my onregenerated friend!" cried Old Saddle-bags, grasping Jesse's hand. "You're the good Semariehan. When I war hungry ye give me meat, when I war thirsty ye give me drink—"

"War it beer ur whisky?" yelled a street gamblin'.

"Silence, ye mocker, what goes in the way o' the sinner an' sitteth in the seats o' the scornful."

The yelling drowned the voice of Old Saddle-bags, but he clung to Jesse, and as soon as he could speak went on.

"I war naked an' ye clothed—"

"Yes, bought 'em seekand-hand uv a Jew!" cried the street gamblin'.

"I war sick an' in prison, an' ye visited me."

"War ye in the four courts?"

Another yell.

Jesse James found himself too much the center of attraction, and with a pleasant smile assured the old man that he needed not waste all his thanks on him, and in order to get rid of him thrust another ten-dollar greenback in his hand and hurried away.

"Come, come, old feller, ye've struck it rich; come now an' take us all to the bar an' set 'em up."

"Set 'em up?" he asked.

"Yes, set 'em up. Beer, champagne, whisky!"

A look of utter disgust seemed to settle on the old man's face, and facing the crowd he cried:

"Tech not, handle not, taste not the vile unclean thing."

"We don't want a phial; we'll take er whole keg!" cried his chief tormenter.

"Oh, vile and wicked gineration. Oh, ye onholy young mockers. Ye onregenerated, won't yer listen to ther voice o' one-cryin' in the wilderness. Make ye the paths straight, ah! Remember, ah! When that great day comes, ah! The sheep will go ter ther right an' the goats to the left, ah!"

Jesse passed around a corner and failed to hear the remainder of the sermon which was being preached by Old Saddle-bags.

Frequently during the day he saw him, and Jesse always took care to avoid him, for he did not care to have such an eccentric figure hanging about him.

The reader who knows the real character of old Saddle-bags may wonder that he did not arrest Jesse James on the streets of Kansas City, but the reader must bear in mind that it was not the arrest of Jesse James that the detective was attempting, but the recovery of a small red cedar box and contents, captured at Gadshill.

When once Jesse was captured, his mouth would be closed, and the hiding-place of the box, valued at millions, never be known.

On the evening after his adventures on the street with the eccentric old preacher, Jesse James was passing down the hall of the hotel when he chanced to glance in the parlor. There his eyes met a form that seemed familiar to him.

He had seen her before, but where? He waited a moment until she turned partially around so the light fell full on her face, and gave a start.

Was it possible—could it be. Yes, it was none other than Della Collins, the pretty country girl, whom he had professed to love, and who had followed him so many miles to find him a villain.

"Pretty little Della!" sighed the bandit. "You have been a very dangerous beauty to me, but some how you are so enchanting, so bewitching that I can't give you up."

He walked to the far end of the hall.

Jesse's common sense told him to let the girl alone, but he was governed by passions and impulses, much more than common sense, and he found it impossible to give up the pretty girl.

"I will see her and speak with her, if I die for it."

He waited outside the door for some time, but she came not. Then he santered away up the broad stairway determined to see her at all hazards.

It was dark and the gas had been lighted in the hotel. Jesse had gone to his room, and finding it impossible to remain there returned and was on his way down stairs, when he suddenly met her face to face.

"Della!" he cried trying to seize her hand.

She started back, gave him a cold gaze of contempt, and with a sneer asked:

"Are you here?"

"Oh, Della—I can not stay away from you."

"Go on, sir, you were going down I believe."

There was a cold haughty sneer on the face of the girl, and she spoke with biting sarcasm.

"No—no, I was going up."

"Then go on."

"No, no, I want to speak a word to you—Forgive me, Della!"

"I will, good-day."

"Oh, no, one word more."

"Speak."

"Oh, Della, let me explain, I must explain."

"Explain what?"

"What may seem wrong to you."

"Was not what the man said in your presence true?"

"No, not all."

"Then you let me listen to a falsehood, and had not the manhood to deny it."

"Oh, listen! listen!"

"No, I have done with you."

"You have not, Della—"

She passed him, and ran up the stairway to her room.

He waited but a moment, and then with a curse, not loud but deep, he started after her, muttering:

"She shall listen."

Jesse James, the bandit king, knew no law but his own passions, respected nobody's wish but his own.

When he found that the girl was persistent in her desire to avoid him he became determined that she should at least hear what he had to say. It might mean danger to himself, but she should hear him through.

So with one glance about to see that no one was watching him, he bounded swiftly and noiselessly up the stairway after the girl, and reached the door just as she entered her room and closed it.

Not dreaming that he would have the impudence to follow her, Della had not taken the precaution to lock her door.

Her surprise can be better imagined than described when she saw the door open and the man whom she now heartily despised entered.

"Sir, why this intrusion?" she demanded.

"Della, you must listen to me."

"I can, but it will be no use."

"Why?"

"I am not a school girl now, nor a poor little unsophisticated country girl as I was when you first saw me, but a woman—"

"But you will surely believe me, Della?"

"Believe you, no. Having once been deceived by you, base villain, think you that I will ever have confidence in you again?"

"But you have not understood all, Della, you cannot know it all."

"I know enough. I was a simple country girl, a child, and you a man employed as the teacher of the school, and I your pupil believed implicitly every word you told me. When you said you loved me I believed it—"

"And I swear it was true."

"Base monster, at the very time you made the declaration, you had a wife."

"How do you know it?"

"I heard you admit it."

"Might it not be false?"

"Then it was your falsehood, and you are a double-dyed villain?"

"No, no, you do not understand me, Della," said the Bandit King.

"You know there are often mistakes made, lack of opportunities—mistakes about being in love with the one you marry and discovering the affections of your heart afterward—"

"Hush—enough—begone!" she cried, her whole manner dramatic.

"You must hear me through."

"No, no, every word you utter only convinces me you are a baser villain."

"But you must hear me through."

"No—enough."

"Go."

"I will not."

"Then I will have you put out of the hotel. I will scream for help."

His eyes blazing with rage he seized her, and hissed:

"Do it, and I will choke you——"

"Oh, heaven! Help, help! I did not dream you were a demon?"

"Girl, I will strangle you!"

With an insane glitter in his eyes he sprang at her, and was in the act of choking her when the door softly but quickly opened and Old Saddlebags leaped as noiselessly as a shadow into the room, and seizing the arm of the irate bandit said:

"Hold, my onregenerated friend! Don't yer go fur ter murderin' a pore gal."

CHAPTER IX.

"AR' YE ON REDEMPSHUN'S SIDE?"

THERE was something so strange, so awe-inspiring, in the manner of Old Saddlebags, that the Bandit King paused and gazed at him in wonder.

The outlaw chief, who would not have quailed at being faced with a dozen cocked revolvers and muskets, turned pale and trembled at sight of that wonderful old man. He seemed to have some magical power which he exerted over the outlaw, to make him as harmless as a lamb.

"Yer one who's been a friend ter the friendless, a widder ter the orphan, and a father ter the childless; this ere's somethin' one wouldn't expect."

In this wild, rattling manner the detective led the bandit from the room and closed the door.

"Who are you?" asked Jesse James when they were in the hallway.

"I'm Dan'l Ichabod Penticost, a linooal descendant o' the feller what went in the lions' den an' stayed all night, an' it's sed that I inherit some o' the same power o' charmin' wild beasts ez he did."

"I believe you," said Jesse James. "No other living man could have taken my arm thus, and led me out of that room."

"Oh, yer not half ez bad a man ez ye think ye air. The wind is allus tempered ter the shorn lamb, ye know."

"Well, I've not done with her."

"Who?"

"Della."

"Ther leetle gal?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me, my onregenerated friend, what that ar' leetle gal's done ter harm yer? Leave her be. Foolin' arter women critters only gits a feller deeper an' deeper inter trouble, yer know. Better leave 'em be and seek arter truths against which all the powers o' darkniss can't prevail."

"I thank you very much," said Jesse, who having somewhat regained his composure, saw that the reasoning of the old man was good.

"No thanks ter me, but rather thank him that sent me, and ter dq whose will I came."

He followed Jesse down into the rotunda of the hotel; followed him to the street, and down to the corner, haranguing him until the bandit king again handed him ten dollars and shook him off.

"Thirty dollars to go to the account of George Talbot," chuckled the old man, as he wended his way back to the hotel.

A crowd of curious people were in the hotel, and all gazed in wonder at the strange phenomenon, as they called Old Saddlebags, wending

his way up-stairs. He came to Della's door, and finding it ajar, rapped upon it.

No answer.

Fearing she had fainted from the great nervous strain upon her, he entered the apartment, and found her sitting in a chair staring into vacancy.

"Say, leetle gal—Miss Della——"

She started up and asked:

"Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven."

"Ar' ye afeerd o' him?"

"That man will murder me."

"I say, gal, hadn't ye better go home?"

"No, no, I can't do that."

"Why?"

"Father will learn it all then, and, besides, he will kill me there. He will find me if I go home. No, no, I must hide somewhere."

"Whar?"

"I don't know; but I'll hide in some far-out-of-the-way place, for he will kill me. He would have done it then had you not come in."

The old man sat down and buried his face in his hands. There was an expression of deep concern on that aged face, and well there might be, for he knew the real character of Mr. Henry Jackson, the supposed pedagogue, and had seen a dangerous devil's gleam in his eye which meant murder.

One who had been so long accustomed to following the bent of his own inclinations, and who had such little regard for human life, would necessarily prove a dangerous personage.

"Wall, gal, don't cher hev nuthin' ter do with 'im. He hed a bad look in his eye, that's sartin."

"There was murder in his eye," she answered.

"I know there was murder in his eye."

"It looked mighty like it."

"Oh, reverent sir, what must I do?"

"Wall, gal, jist keep out o' his way."

"I will."

That very night Miss Della Collins disappeared.

The old man made inquiry about her, but could not learn how she had taken her departure.

Walking the hall in a meditative manner, his hands clasped behind him, old Saddlebags grunted to himself:

"I'm afeared she ain't been done fair with. Thar's suthin' wrong—suthin' wrong!"

In a moment his resolution was taken.

That evening Old Saddlebags, mounted on his sorry, limping horse, might have been seen making his way from Kansas City.

His mind was busy on events that had transpired and plans to come, and he paid no heed to the shouts of boys and idlers which greeted him from every side.

At last coming to the bridge across the Cam, he found his way utterly blocked with men.

"Oh, ye onregenerated sons o' Adam, why hinderest ye me? Hear yer not ther voice c' one like a voice cryin' in ther wilderness—'Repent ye, fur ther Day o' Judgment is at hand!'"

The bootblacks and street gamins only roared and hooted and threw mud at the old man, until he suddenly gave utterance to a yell, which seemed to have a wonderful effect on his horse.

Like an arrow from a bow the animal shot forward, kicking right and striking left, in a way calculated to strike terror to the hearts of the boys, and they scattered far and wide.

In a second's time that old horse was changed from a sleepy Nebuchadnezzar to a wild-charging Bucephalus. Across the bridge he flew like a demon. Down the road, and was soon lost to sight.

The speed of that animal would have delighted a professional of the turf, and many a sporting man would have been willing to back him with big money.

But a few miles from Kansas City, and the old man spoke a word to the wonderfully well tamed steed, and he immediately slackened his speed to a walk, and his head once more drooped and he seemed to slumber even as he walked down the road, his rider on his back.

Jesse James had gone from Kansas City, and a week later was again in Kearney. This gentleman possessed such a flexible conscience, and such a changeable mind that he seemed to have forgotten that he had ever met Della.

There was a gathering of several of the bandits at Kearney. One or two nearly always loafed about Jim Latche's residence. Jim since his remarkable escape, narrow as it was from death, at the hands of the man who had attacked him on that night, had lived in dread of again meeting him.

He had no idea who the man was, and certainly neither he nor any of his infamous companions for a moment supposed that the old man who was preaching in the neighborhood could have any connection whatever with the person who had made the attack on Jim Latche.

"Well, Jessie, what next?" asked Cole Younger as they were gathered in the apartment of Jim Latche's cabin.

"I don't know. Think we had better lay low for awhile. That Gadshill haul has stirred up the people."

"Yes; old Pinkerton will again flood the whole country with detectives."

"Yes, and we'll dispose of them the same as with Wicher, Allen, Tull and Wright."

"That's the talk, Jess," put in Jim Cummings.

"But our haul at Gadshill is not so big that it won't soon be exhausted," continued Cole Younger. "I've an idea if we just knew how to do it, we could make a pile o' money out of that cedar box."

"What's in it?"

"Nothin' only a medal worth about twenty or thirty dollars, and some curious old papers from London, England. That's all that it is."

"Well, what are they worth to any one?" Frank James asked.

"The papers and medal seem to be a sort of a will of some kind, to a lot o' money in England. Jesse and I counted up the amount, and it was somewhere near five millions."

"It was?"

"Yes, but how is any one to get it."

"I don't know but one plan," Cole answered, "and that's risky."

"What is it?"

"Let me go and claim it."

"Go to England?"

"Yes."

"Pretend to be the lawful heir?"

"Of course, and make the proofs, and get the money."

"How will you make the proofs?"

"Well, there is where you boys must help me. You must all stand ready to swear that I am the person I pretend to be."

Jesse James, who had been sitting in silence, now spoke up:

"It seems to me, Cole, that you are taking a great deal of risk for a small assurance."

"A small amount! Why, Jess, it's five millions."

"Yes, but can you get it?"

"Of course."

"How?"

"Prove I'm the heir."

"It would be ten times more dangerous than robbing a train or bank."

"Why?"

"English courts don't give up five millions very easily. They've got to have proofs beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"Can't we make them?"

"No."

"Why?"

"While we were making those proofs beyond a shadow of a doubt, people would be inquiring into our antecedents, and we would be found out."

"Oh, by the way, Jesse," Cole interrupted.

"There's a girl in that will too, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Can't you substitute that little charmer who followed you so far?"

Jesse James gave a start. The suggestion had come from the recollection of something the codicil contained.

Before any answer could be made the door opened and old Saddlebags boldly entered.

"My onregenerated friends, ar' ye on redemption's side?" he cried as he struck an attitude before the astounded assembly.

CHAPTER X.

IKE AND OLD SADDLEBAGS.

THE banditti were on their feet in a moment and hands went to their pistols, while eyes flashed with vengeance. An intrusion of this kind was something the banditti had never before known, and they were furious.

"Hold, hold, yer lost sons o' Adam, don't yer go ter flyin' into a tantrum, an' all on account o' Old Saddlebags comin' ter ax yer a queschun. Ar' yer on redempshun's side, my onregenerated friends, can't yer answer a plain queschun?"

"Sit down, boys; I know him," put in Jesse.

"I doubt it," growled Clell Miller.

"Saddlebags, how long have you been in this town?" Jesse asked.

"I entered this ere seat o' wickedness jist a leetle arter sundown, my friend, and sat about seein' ef I could find my friend who hez been a widder ter the orphan au' a husban' ter the fatherless. Fur I was au hungered an' yer gin me meat, I war thirsty an' yer gin me drink, I war naked an' yer gin me close, war sick an' in prison, an' yer visited me. Fur verily, verily I say unter ye, even ez much ez ye hev done it onto the least o' one o' these, ye hev done it onto me."

"Who are you?" cried Clell Miller.

"I'm Dan'l Ichabod Pentecost, the only livin' descendant o' Dan'l, the prophet wot wuz cast inter the lion's den an' locked the jaws o' the lion. I'm a lion tamer ez well as my worthy ancestur arter whom I wuz named."

"Well, I should think you were," growled Cole Younger.

"Let him alone. I will manage him," said Jesse.

"Go ahead, Jess."

"Sit down, Saddle-bags."

The old fellow dropped down in a chair, and said:

"Yer must remember, my onregenerated friend, thet I'm a pilgrim an' I'm a stranger, an' I kin tarry but a night."

"Don't begin to talk of staying all night," put in Frank James.

"Let him alone, Frank, I will attend to him."

"Go ahead, Jess."

"Where have you been since I saw you, Saddle-bags?"

"Wanderin' about, roamin' over the country, sir, ez a sort o' a missionary snatchin' brands from the burnin'. Here seemed ter be a pooty good place for a flight."

"D'ye want to flight?" growled Jim Cummings, starting to his feet.

"My onregenerated friend, I am an extarminator o' sin. Wherever I go thar flies the wickedness o' sin before me. Dun yer know who I am? The great extarminator o' wickedness, an' when it comes ter fightin' old Satan, I've allers got my troatin' barners on."

"Have a care, sir!"

"My onregenerated friend," and old Saddlebags rose to his feet with an air of dignity, "Listen yer to the voice o' one cryin' in the wilderness——"

"Sit down, Jim, and let him talk with me."

The dread and consternation which had followed after the abrupt entrance of Old Saddlebags giving way, a feeling of humor began to gather over the faces of the outlaws, and they came to regard the presence of the eccentric old fellow as a huge joke.

"Were you hunting for me?" asked Jesse.

"Wall, my good Samarichan, the sight o' ye iz pleasin' ter the eye. Yer not ez booterful ez ther rose o' Sharon, but yer enuff ter make a feller glad he's come all ther way hyar ter see yer."

"Do you want another fee, old man? if so, say the word and we'll pass around the hat."

"Wall, my onregenerated friend, I allers close my meetin's by takin' up a collecshun, an' ef ye think o' that I'll come ter the noshun that meetin' must be out."

"Let's pass the hat quick," said Clell Miller, who evidently had no desire to prolong the interview.

"All right, my friend. I'll appint yer ter take up the collection, an' now yer kin sing a hyme while ther brother takes up the collectshun."

"We're no singers, we can't sing," said Jesse.

"Then I'll exort——"

He rose quietly, laid aside his battered plug hat, and leaning on the back of the chair, which he placed before him for that purpose, he began:

"Oh, yer wicked an' tryin' ginerashun what seeketh arter a sign—but no sign shell be given yer 'cept that by the Prophet Jonah, who war et up bodaciously by ther whale. Now my unredeemed, unsanctified friends, flee yer from ther wrath ter come while it air yit call ter day, fur the night cometh when no man kin work. But some people love darkness better'n light, bekase ther deeds air evil. But, oh! when that great day comes, oh! the sheep will go ter ther right an' ther goats ter the left, oh! but you'll see who war the wool that day——"

"Collection is taken up!" cried Clell Miller. "No need for any more of that racket."

The hat had been passed, and the banditti had contributed quite liberally, no one giving less than a dollar, and many giving much more.

"Thanks, my friends, thanks. I remember yer in——"

"Never mind remembering us at all!" cried Clell Miller. "We don't want to be remembered."

"Modest—yea! but my onregenerated friend, but remember this air laid up in yer favor. Thar's thirteen dollars and a half laid ter ther credit o' these 'ere men."

"Git out now!"

"Thankee, I'm er goin'. 'Tain't gold nur silver I want."

"We don't care what you want. Go!"

Clell Miller literally pushed the old fellow from the house and slammed the door.

The old man chuckled triumphantly as he slipped the money in his pocket and walked away to the gate.

A horseman at this moment came to the gate.

He was a slender, dapper little fellow, dressed in neat-fitting dark-green velvet, and wearing a black mask over his face.

"My onregenerated friend, I've seen yer before unless I've made a big mistake, which Old Saddlebags don't often do."

"What are you doing here?"

"Preachin'."

"Preaching?"

"That's what I said, young-man-ashamed-ter-be-seen."

"Where were your audience?"

"In thar."

He nodded toward the door.

"Do you mean to say you were preaching to to Jesse, Frank and the boys?"

"Wall, young-man-ashamed-ter-be seen, I dun know what their names war, but they ar' a mighty good audience ter preach ter."

Ike realized now that he had made a blunder in speaking the names of the banditti.

But then what harm could this silly old fanatic do to the banditti. He would doubtless forget inside of an hour that he had ever seen them.

"How many are in there?" Ike asked.

"Oh, 'bout half dozen, dozen, sich a matter, more ur less."

"What are they doing?"

"War listenin' when I war in thar."

"To what?"

"An allfired big sermon from old Saddlebags, the extarminator o' sin."

"Is he there?"

"Who?"

"Je—the man you saw with me on that night. The man who woke you while you were asleep."

"Wall, yas, he war. Dun know his name, though."

"Was he there?"

"Yas; but what's his name? Jess, war that it?"

"Some call him by that name, but he is Henry Taylor."

"Oh, yas, that's nuther name. D'ye b'long in thar."

"No."

"Know him?"

"Who?"

"Je—ur Henry Taylor or Jackson."

"Yes."

"Wall, I think he's a right fine feller, don't you?"

"I do."

"Got badly mixed up in that affair wi' the gal."

"What!"

"It's er pity! Wish I could help him out o' it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, guess yer know all erbout it, durn yer!"

"No, I never heard of it before."

There was an eagerness in Ike's manner that was perfectly wonderful. His eyes blazed with a new intensity and he trembled from head to foot, while his heart beat wildly.

"Speak, what do you mean?" he gasped.

"Wall, Mr. Young-feller-ashamed-ter-be-seen. Parding me for callin' yer that name. I do it 'cos I dun know any other."

"Never mind."

"Wall, I won't."

"What was you going to say about the girl trouble?"

"Dun know ez I orter be a-tellin' tales outer skule, ort I?"

"Tell me this one—just this once tell me."

"Wall, I dun know."

The old man leaned on the gate post, and Ike sprang from his saddle and stood by the side of Old Saddlebags, entreating him to go on.

"I dun know much erbout it," the old fellow said after a moment's hesitation, "but he got inter a racket with a gal."

"What was her name?"

"Della Collins, I believe."

"Where is she?"

"Dun know."

"Where does she live?"

"Southeast Missouri, I believe. Som'ers near Carthage."

"Aha! I understand it now."

"Yer know he taught skule out thar."

"Yes."

"Wall, this whar what come of it."

"Is the girl at her home?"

"No, she war hyar a short time ergo."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Why, he never said a word to me about it."

"She war in Kansas City, too."

"Was he there?"

"Yes."

Then Ike's eyes flashed with fire, and his breathing came hard.

"When was it?"

"Not long ergo; an' they hed a racket, an' orful racket, sich a one ez I never heerd on afore; but I ain't ergoin' ter tell any more erbout it."

"Della Collins—was her name Della Collins?"

"That war it."

"From Carthage?"

"Frum Carthage."

"How old is she?"

"'Bout sixteen."

"Pretty?"

"Yer bet."

"Where did you say she was now?"

"Dun know—fell out—hed a quarrel—hed a flight an' separated. But I must be goin', fur I've gotter preach in the Ronnd Grove skule-house ter-morrer, left au 'pintment an' must fill it."

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE LEAP.

DELLA COLLINS has more to do with this story than the reader, perhaps, at first imagined. There are lives and incidents which become so so strangely woven together as to make us conclude, after all, that fate must have something to do with fashioning our destinies.

Della Collins determined to leave Kansas City. Wither she intended going she hardly knew, but somehow she had a vague idea that her life was in danger by the man whose love she had scorued, and now knew to be a villain. For reasons of her own she determined not to go home, but rather thought to bury herself for awhile in some rural country district and engage in teaching school, for she was well qualified. So she boarded a train leaving Kansas City on the very night Old Saddle-bags had rescued her from Jesse James, and left the city.

She was so frightened that she did not buy a ticket.

When the conductor came along he brought at once to her mind that she had purchased no ticket.

She drew her slender purse and handed him five dollars.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"As far as that will take me."

"Let me see—it is \$4.95 to Rigdon."

"Put me off at Rigdon."

"Reach there at daylight."

She had never heard of the town, but anywhere to escape the man who had frightened her almost to death, and whom she knew would take her life.

How she passed the remainder of that eventful night she could never say, only she knew she did not sleep.

Her station was reached and she went to a hotel. It was a small town and the hotels were small and accommodations poor, but she put up there for a few hours, and then went out in the country to find board, and if possible employment as a school teacher.

She was living under the name of Miss Rush at the house of a Farmer Barnes, and hoped that she had shook off her foe forever.

Not even her parents knew of her whereabouts, and the girl in this new life was beginning to enjoy peace once more, but all was blasted in a breath.

The family were at dinner one day, when from down the road came the clatter of horses' feet.

It was nothing uncommon for horsemen to gallop by, and nothing was thought of this man until he drew rein at the front gate, and asked if he could get dinner and horse feed.

"Certainly," answered Farmer Barnes, without rising from the table. "Go, John, put up his hoss, an' tell him to come right in. There's a basin an' towel by the rain-water bar'l 'f he wants to wash."

Poor Della little dreamed that she was soon to lose the sharp appetite which country life had given her.

She did not notice the stranger until he sat opposite her, and then, raising her head, their eyes met.

With a shriek of terror she sprang from the table and fled from the room.

"Why, goodness, what's the matter with the gal? Go, Betsy, an' see," cried the farmer.

In her room Mrs. Barnes found Della sobbing, but she only claimed to be suddenly taken ill and said she would be better soon. It was not suspicioned that she feared the stranger.

That afternoon, as she was wandering in the garden, a man leaped over the fence and seized her hand.

"Della, don't be afraid," he cried. "I'll not hurt you now, the spell is gone. I just want to say don't betray my presence and I won't yours. We must be strangers."

The man was her school-master, whom she had known as Henry Jackson.

"I will not," she answered, and yet she trembled with dread. "What are you doing here?"

"I was not hunting for you," he answered.

"But you are engaged in some helious business—"

"Keep silent about me and all will be well, but if you go to blowing anything then don't hope to escape, for you cannot. This world is not wide enough for you to hide where I canuot find you."

Then he was gone, and she stood alone gazing at the spot where he had stood but a moment before. She almost believed that he had some remarkable power of appearing and disappearing like a supernatural being.

As one in a dream the girl wandered to the house to learn that the stranger who had taken dinner there that day had taken his departure, and was now doubtless far away from the farmer's house.

Then she remembered that he was not gone, for she had seen him hours after he was reported to have taken his departure. Why was he still lingering about the place? A shudder seized the poor girl, but she said nothing.

In the meanwhile where was Jesse?

Mounted on Siroc a dozen miles away, galloping along a wooded road.

The girl was not far from the stronghold of the handitti, and had really run as it were right into their midst.

Suddenly Jesse saw two men mounted on elegant steeds riding toward him. A single glance was enough.

"Frank and Cole," he said.

They galloped up to the Bandit King, who drew rein.

"Well, Jesse," said Frank, "have you been to the house of that man Barnes?"

"Yes."

"What is he?"

"A rich farmer."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"Do you think we can make a good haul there?"

"We might try it."

"How many men?"

"None but himself and one son almost grown. There are two or three other boys about the place, but they will count for nothin'."

"I don't know, Jess; you remember that the Old Guard was made up of boys, and they all fought like heroes, when there was fighting to do."

"By the way, who do you think I found there?"

"I don't know."

"Miss Della Collins."

"What?"

"It's so."

"Better than gold," said Cole Younger. "We must have her."

"Why?"

"Don't you know—the similarity in the names—"

"Oh, yes, I remember. How stupid of me to forget. We will have her to-night."

"We can take her and the gold too."

"Certainly. Come, let's to the well and consult how we are to proceed in the matter."

With this the three men wheeled their horses about and galloped away.

Scarce were they out of sight ere an old white head came wriggling through the bushes, and a moment later a form slightly bent with age appeared.

"Wall, now, it's mighty quar that a pilgrim and stranger in this 'ere land o' sin can't lay down ter take a leetle nap 'thout being interrupted an' disturbed wi' fellers er stoppin' an' a talkin' that er way. If I warn't a exterminator o' sin I mought git riled at sech acts from the onregenerated. But saddle-bags hold yer temper warn't yer? Hold yer temper. Never 'low yerself ter be frustrated."

Those keen eyes looking out from beneath a pair of white shaggy eyebrows showed no signs of ever having been asleep. He glanced up and down the road, and then gave a low, peculiar whistle.

A rustle was heard in the underbrush, and a moment later a horse which had been lying on the ground rose to its feet and came out into the road. He had an old saddle on his back, and an enormous pair of saddle-bags behind him.

"I reckon, Nehuchednazzah, ye ain't got over yer lameness yit, hev ye?"

The only answer the horse gave was a melancholly snort, and Old Saddle-bags mounted on his back, rode slowly down the wooded road for a mile or more, and then starting off along a path at the speed of the wind, soon disappeared.

It was near sundown when Old Saddle-bags appeared at the house of Farmer Barnes, and called for supper for himself and horse.

"My horse is like me, a gittin' old," said the parson. "Feed him ground oats an' hay well salted, then give him some water. Better look arter him myself."

The farmer's boys smiled at the anxiety of the old man about such a sorry-looking animal. His hair was rough, and he had a running sore from polevil on his head.

"If pa had that horse he would knock him on the head, just to get him out of his misery," one boy said to another.

"Of course he would," the brother answered.

The old man carefully surveyed barn and house while he was feeding his horse. A little white face that had been watching him from the window waited until she saw the old man pause by the well, and then hurried down to him.

Old Saddle-bags was alone, and he was not one bit surprised when he saw Della Collins at his side.

"You did not expect to find me here, did you?" she said.

"Yes I did, gal."

"Did you know I was here?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"All things ar' known to him who watches. He thet hez eyes let him see, an' he thet hez ears let him hear, an' he'll find out somethin'."

"You are such a strange man I don't understand you, but you will not betray me here. You will not tell these people who I am?"

"Gal, I'll be a perfect stranger t' yer. Never seed her afore."

"He has been here."

"I knowed that. Go t' the house an' stay thar, 'n all 'll go well, I hope."

"You are a wonderful man," said the girl, and turning about she went to the house. "That man is more than he seems," was the conclusion which she had reached long before she reached the house.

Mr. Barnes insisted that the old man remain all night with him, but he pleaded that he expected "to hev meetin'" somewhere "on the crick," and took his departure.

It is midnight.

The Barnes mansion is wrapped in slumber and gloom. There is not a light about the premises as three men ride to the house from a distant wood.

They draw rein and dismount. At this moment four more men come from another part of the wood, ride up to the barn, dismount, open the gate and join the three on the east side of the house.

One brings a ladder, which he places on the east end of the house, and a man proceeds to scale the ladder.

The man was Jesse James. He reaches the window, opens it and springs lightly in.

A moment later a shriek is heard.

Crash comes a blow against the front door.

"Work quick now!" Cole Younger shouts, and the door falls from its hinges as the farmer, too much terrified to realize what he is doing, leaps from the bed. He is seized by the throat and hurled to the floor.

"Where d'ye keep your money, quick, or you'll die."

"I know, I'll get it," the wife answers, as she springs from her bed and runs up-stairs.

Here a scene meets her gaze that almost freezes her blood. Poor Della insensible is wrapped in some blankets and being lowered from the window by a huge villain wearing a black mask over his face.

But the woman thought only of her husband who was threatened with instantaneous death, and she fastened on to get the money, his own hard earnings, which was now to purchase his life. The money was found and the woman was on her way down when an eighth horseman appeared.

Bang, bang! went a pair of shots and the wonderful steed he rode cleared the big gate at a leap. Two of the robbers lay weltering in their blood in the yard, and three more wheeled about and fired at the new-comer.

Jesse James had just gained his horse with the insensible girl when the wonderful leap was made.

"Shoot him, Frank. Kill him, Cole, or the jig is up with us," cried the bandit king, leaping on the back of Siroc.

CHAPTER XII.

A DAY OF DANGER.

As a meteor shoots from athwart the skies with such rapidity as to leave a trail of fire behind, so shot the strange horseman across lots,

lawns, and fences, clearing them as though they were merely nothing, leaving a trail of dust behind him.

A dozen shots were fired in four seconds at him.

Shots fired by men never known before to miss, but they all fell short, owing to the wonderful speed at which he was going.

Siroc was supposed to be the most wonderful horse for speed and endurance in the world, and until this night had never met his match.

"Who is he?" cried Cole Younger, who left the house without getting the money.

"Don't know. He's a young man riding a black devil. He's killed Cam and Tom Ellis."

So he had—both bandits were dead—but they were more interested about the living.

"Where is Jesse?"

"Gone over the hill."

"With the gal?"

"Yes."

"An' that fellow after him," cried Frank James, starting from the ground where he had been knocked down by the horse.

"Mount, boys!" cried Cole Younger.

"Yes, mount quick," cried Frank, "or he'll kill Jess."

In the meanwhile where were Jesse and his wonderful pursuer?

Away, fully three or four miles away, flying with the speed of the wind went the horsemen. Siroc had found his equal, for though Jesse had put him to the top of his speed, the mysterious pursuer was at his heels and gaining on him every moment.

Besides, Jesse James was encumbered with the weight of the girl.

"Stop, Jesse!" said a cold, hard voice behind.

Jesse tried to draw a pistol, but could not without dropping his burden.

"Shoot, Frank! shoot, Cole!" the flying bandit yelled.

"Oh, they are fully three miles behind. They couldn't," said his relentless pursuer.

Jesse made another effort to draw a pistol.

"Don't try it, Jesse. I could kill you if I wanted to do so, but I don't. Stop, I say!"

"What do you mean?"

"Give up that girl."

"Never."

"Yes, you will."

"We'll see."

The strange horseman was riding by the side of Jesse James, who discovered that, put Siroc to the top of his speed as he might, he was unable to keep out of his way.

Leaning over he seized the Bandit King by the throat.

"Let go," howled Jesse.

"Give up the girl."

"I won't."

"Then I'll be forced to choke you to death."

Jesse James would have given anything at that moment to have had a hand free so he could have drawn a pistol. But to do that he would be compelled to drop the girl.

The fingers of the pursuer tightened about his windpipe until Jesse was forced to take one hand and try to tear him loose. Both horses were running at full speed side by side.

The stranger was not touching the rein of his well-trained steed, but was busy snatching pistols from Jesse's belt and throwing them away.

In this way he disarmed the bandit without his knowing it.

"Let go—let go, curse you, or I'll murder you!"

"Give up the girl!"

"I'll die first!"

It was in reality a horrible struggle. The assault of the bandit king, though not nearly so large a man as Jesse James, seemed to have the

strength of a giant, and his fingers closed with a grip of vise upon the throat.

"Oh, help!" gasped Jesse, who wheezed loudly in his struggle for breath.

But the bandit's friends were far behind, though coming as rapidly as they could. The strange horseman knew that he was master of the situation, and while he clutched Jesse's throat with his right hand, passed the left around the slender waist of the insensible Della.

The outlaw roared like a lassoed bull, but the fingers tightened and he grew momentarily weaker.

At last he made a desperate effort to get his pistols, and for a moment let go the hand that grasped his throat.

That move was fatal.

The freed hand clutched furiously, and Jesse's breath was shut off altogether, and he released the girl, whom the stranger pulled upon his own horse and pushed Jesse from the saddle.

He fell heavily to the ground, and Siroc, loyal to his master, came to a standstill.

Knowing that Jesse was not dead, and that he would regain consciousness soon, the rescuer of Della Collins turned abruptly into the wood with his burden, and went thundering through the forest at a breakneck speed.

In an hour, with Della fully restored to consciousness, he galloped up to Mr. Barnes' house, where were now assembled fully fifty neighbors, all heavily armed.

The two dead bandits lay in the yard where they had fallen, and their horses were still in the barn lot with their saddles on.

Never again would their masters mount them, or dash in the wild ride through the wood, or over the plain.

Mrs. Barnes was overjoyed to find the abducted girl restored. She had feared she would never see her again.

Della was too much bewildered to talk or even give any expression of thanks.

Excitement ran wild, and a party of neighbors fired on another party of neighbors, under the impression they were robbers, and in all the excitement which followed the mysterious rescuer disappeared unnoticed.

When day dawned the two outlaws were buried, and poor Della, who was very weak, was allowed a day of rest.

All was quiet the entire day, and in fact the day of rest was much needed.

She was tempted to tell her sad story to the kind-hearted farmer and have him send her home, for she felt that she would be as free from her persecutors there as anywhere, and have the protection of her father and friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT OF DANGER.

It was late in the afternoon when that old familiar form which of late had been so much in the neighborhood came riding up toward Mr. Barnes' house.

His face was very solemn, and his hair looked as if he had slept all night in the dews. Old Saddle-bags drew up his lame horse at the gate, and, in a voice that was deep and sepulchral, called:

"Hello thar, my onregenerated friends. Kin yer gin a pilgrim what's erbout worn out w' the troubles an' trials o' this vain world er bite ter eat?"

"It's the old preacher," said Farmer Barnes.

"It's the man who was here last night."

Hastening to the gate, he assured the old man that he would be welcome.

"We have had a terrible shock here,"

"Laws a' mussal what war it?" asked Old Saddle-bags.

"Some robbers, supposed to be the James

Boys, attacked the house and robbed it last night. While they were robbing the house and abducting a young lady who lives here, a strange man, mounted on a horse that seemed to possess wings and to fly, suddenly bounded over the fences, shot down two, run down the abductor, and brought back the girl."

"Good Lawd! yer don't say so!"

"Yes. He was a wonder."

"Who was he?"

"There you've got me, stranger; we don't know who he was."

"Wall—wall! that's jist perfectly awful; but it's only a-fulfillin' o' the Scriptures. 'He who taketh the sword shall perish by the sword.'"

"My entire family has been prostrated from the shock, but you shall be welcome, sir. Come in, come in."

Old Saddle-bags dismounted, and went himself to see that his horse was well cared for, and poured some more sweet oil on the wax knot made in imitation of pelevil on the animal's head. Then he went to supper.

After it was over he saw the girl in the garden, and knew by the way she was looking toward him that she wished to speak to him.

He went out of the house into the garden, where he sauntered about, until he and the girl were alone.

"Yer wanted ter see me agin," he remarked, as she stepped alongside of him.

"Yes, sir. I wanted to tell you he has been been here again."

"I know it."

"I was abducted—"

"Know all about it."

"Mr. Barnes told you?"

"Yes."

"But, I have learned something still more about him, which you perhaps don't know," the girl answered with a shudder.

"What air it, gal?"

"He is not Henry Jackson—"

"Never thort it war his reel name, leetle gal," said Old Saddle-bags, with a solemn nod of the head. "He air a onregenerated villain, thar can't be no doubt o' that."

"Yes. I know it, but I have learned now who he really is."

"Hev ye?"

"Yes. I will tell you." After glancing about to see that no one was near, she whispered in his ear: "He is Jesse James, the Bandit King."

"Yer don't say so, gal?"

"Yes, he is. There is no doubt of it at all."

"Wall, I spect he is."

"Now, I am not safe. I want to go home."

The old man looked at her a moment and then at the ground. Finally he said:

"Yer pa an' mar think ye in Kansas City visitin' friends?"

"Yes."

"Ain't oneasy one bit erbout yer?"

"No."

"Wall, then, don't go home."

"Why?"

"Berkaze yer safer right here. Never try ter run from such a villain ez Jesse James, the Bandit King."

"But he may try again to abduct me."

"Ef he does, mayn't thet unknown horseman be near ernuff ter pervent him—"

The first faint suspicion that Old Saddle-bags might be living a double life entered the mind of the girl, and she turned her face to his. Their eyes met, and the old man winked.

She thought there could be little doubt of it now, and having implicit confidence in the eccentric old man, she asked:

"Would you advise me to stay?"

"By all means, gal."

"I'll do it."

No more was said, and an hour later the old preacher, despite all the entreaties on the part of the farmer to accept his hospitality for the night, saddled Nebuchadnezzah, and jogged slowly over the hill.

Again it is midnight at the old farm-house, and the wind gently sighs amid the tree tops, and all the household are once more buried in slumber.

Three horsemen ride up to a large oak tree but a few rods from the house and dismount. All wear black masks over their faces, and from the careful manner in which they reconnoiter, it is evident that they are on mischief bent.

"Jesse, this seems the extreme of rashness," said one of the trio, whom we now recognize by his deep awful voice as Coleman Younger.

"Why, Cole?"

"This coming the first night after that desperate adventure of last night is certainly simply suicide."

"There you are mistaken, Cole," said Jesse James. "This is the very thing to do. Dash right in when they think we will not. Of course nobody will dream of us coming again so soon. Besides, if we delay longer we may miss the girl. She may be sent away."

"Are you certain she is there?"

"Yes."

"What do you base your belief on?"

"Because my spies have been watching all the roads and depots to-day."

"Aha—and she has not been seen to go?"

"No."

"Then she must be here; but, by the way, Jesse, who, where, or what is that wild devil of a horseman who dashed in on us the other night?"

"He is still a mystery."

"I would give much to know who and what he is."

"So would I. We must watch for him."

"I doubt if he will pay us another visit to-night. Frank will guard the horses and be ready to cover our retreat while we make a raid down upon the house."

It was evident that the banditti determined to make a more stealthy move this time than they had before.

They were more dangerous, for each carried a pistol cocked in his hand.

As they approached the house a head was raised from behind a cluster of bushes and lawn shrubs and a pair of keen eyes watched their movements.

Jesse James again brought a ladder.

"Have the chloroform, Jess?"

"Yes."

"All right. Make no noise."

"Trust me for silence, Cole. No house-breaker could do it better."

He placed the ladder and ascended slowly and surely to the window.

Here he halted a moment, and carefully removed the sash, which he handed down to Cole, who was half way up the ladder.

Cole carried the sash noiselessly down the ladder and set it up against the side of the house; then he took up his position to help Jesse.

The man hiding among the gooseberry and rose bushes rose up a little higher and looked about. There was not much of his head exposed to view.

Just enough for him to see over the bushes and note what the desperadoes were about, then he again dropped to the ground and became silent and watchful.

There was a smothered groan from the upper story of the house, and then a moment later

Jesse James appeared bearing the drugged girl in his arms.

The sharp eyes from the bushes gleamed with a dangerous fire.

"Jess," Cole whispered.

"I hear you."

"Did you rouse anybody else?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Oh, I know it. She is insensible, and it's all right. How is it below?"

"Coast is clear."

"See anything of that mysterious horseman—that black rider?"

"No."

"We must get away without disturbing his slumbers."

"You can do it, providing the girl doesn't wake."

Then he slowly descended to the ground. The bandits had no intention at this time of making an assault on the house, for the reason it would delay them in getting away with the girl, whom they regarded by far the most valuable prize.

"Well, all right so far," said Jesse, panting with his exertion and anxiety.

"Are you tired, Jesse?"

"No; open the gate."

It was but a few steps to the gate, and the line of gooseberry bushes and roses extended quite to it.

Cole stood with one hand on the gate, and Jesse, with the insensible girl in his arms, had reached it, when there suddenly rose a dark-faced man between them, seeming to come up from the ground and rising only to one knee, while he leveled a revolver with either hand at the head of each, as he said:

"Stop!"

A thunderclap or the explosion of a bombshell at their feet might not have startled the two bandits, but that terrible apparition, seeming to appear from the bowels of the earth, did.

"Who are you?" gasped Jesse James, who was first to regain his speech.

"Your Nemesis!"

"What do you want?"

"Put down that prisoner!"

"You will get yourself in trouble."

"I am taking my chances, so never fear, my friend."

"What do you want?"

"Lay down the girl!"

"Do you expect to make us prisoners?"

"No, sir."

Jesse and Cole Younger both hesitated, and the stranger with a coolness that was remarkable said:

"Come, gentlemen, I won't hold on you more than four hours. My arms are growing tired, and I feel a sort of a nervous twitching about my fingers. I might grow dangerous."

"Suppose we lay her down on the grass, what then?" asked Jesse.

"I shall make you walk away with your backs covered with my pistols, and shoot you if you attempt to draw on me."

Cole Younger, who was at the gate, saw a sight that made him feel quite easy.

Frank James had noted the fact that they were in trouble, and as noiselessly as a shadow was creeping along the fence, his revolver cocked in his right hand.

Look out, stranger. You are shrewd, and capable of braving ordinary danger, but here you must meet with something the like of which you have never known before. Frank James, the desperado, and a dead shot, halts when within a few feet, and levels his revolver at the head which he sees between his companions.

"Bang!"

The stranger throws up his hands.

"Bang! bang!" go both pistols, but miss, of course, and he falls to the ground.

"Now, Jess, this is your chance," shouts Cole Younger, and he throws the gate wide open.

Jesse James with the insensible burden in his arms leaps through, and all three bandits make a dash for their horses just as the door opens and Farmer Barnes emerges his gun in his hand.

"Another night o' danger," he cries, "whar ar' they—oh, thar they go," and he fires both barrels of his shot-gun in the air, but misses.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD HOUSE IN THE WOOD.

For a few moments the farmer stood in the doorway trying to discover the effect of his shots, but unable to do so on account of the clouds of smoke which rolled up before his eyes.

Then he saw the bandits mount. As they galloped away, they fired a volley of shots at his house, which rattled through the windows and against the house, but fortunately none of the shots were fatal.

"What has happened, Mr. Barnes? Oh, Heaven, tell me what has happened?" cried Mrs. Barnes, awakened by the shots at the house. "Who is killed?"

"Nobody," was the answer.

But at this moment he caught a glimpse of the man who had been shot down by Frank James.

"Hello, what's that?"

"What?" asked the wife, who had crawled under the bed, as she no doubt thought it the safest place about the house.

"Blessed if I know."

The outlaws were gone, and the farmer made so bold as to go down to where a dark object lay on the ground.

"Why, it's a man."

He raised him in his arms, and carried him to the house. The man's head was covered with blood, and the old farmer saw he had been shot in the forehead.

"He's dead as a door nail."

But a groan at this moment seemed to deny the assertion.

"Why, he ain't dead!"

He laid him on the porch, and then the wife, on being assured that the robbers had been run off by her valiant husband, ventured out from under the bed and brought him a basin of water.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"No, he breathes."

"But see, his head is all shot to pieces."

"So it seems, but it's not. See, the bullet just struck the skull and glanced. If he's got no worse hurt 'n this he'll be all right in ten minutes."

Farmer Barnes proved to be correct in his surmises. The wounded man was able to sit up in five minutes.

"D'y'e feel better?" he asked.

"Humph!" answered the stranger.

"Are ye all right?"

"Yes."

"Close shave."

"I guess so."

"If that bullet hadn't a hit a bone that turned it aside, it would have killed you."

"Yes."

Then came a moment's silence, broken by the wounded man asking:

"Where are they?"

"Who?"

"The Ja—— The men who shot me."

"Gone down the road."

"Did they take her?"

"Who?"

"The girl—the young lady."

"Why, what young lady?" good Mrs. Barnes asked, raising her hands in mute amazement.

"That young lady up-stairs"

"What! Is she gone again?"

"They abducted her."

"Run, wife, run up to her room and see."

Mrs. Barnes ran up the narrow stairway as rapidly as she could, and while she was gone the wounded man sprang to his feet and taking a bit of sticking plaster from his pocket applied it to his wound, which he covered with it.

Before he had hardly dressed the wound which he had denominated a mere scratch, the old woman came running down the stairway, her white face whiter still, and gasped:

"It's—it's so."

"What, wife, speak?"

"She's gone."

"The young leddy?"

"Yes."

"She is gone, sir. I saw them bring her down on the ladder."

"Then why did you not stop them?" cried the farmer.

"I tried, but this is what I got," and the stranger pointed to his bandaged head.

"Wall, wall, it's too bad—too bad. I jest wish I'd a known it in time. I'd a——"

"Didn't you see them carrying her on a horse?"

"I saw a bundle—didn't know what it was."

"It was the girl."

The stranger went to the spot where he had fallen, and found his two pistols lying just as he had dropped them. He picked up his weapons and returned them to his belt, and said:

"Good night."

"Where ar ye goin'?" the farmer asked.

"I am going away. Have some business matters to attend to."

"Don't let him go, pa!" cried one of the older boys, who had been awakened and came down at the moment. "He may be one of the robbers."

"Hold on, sir. You mustn't go just yet."

"I beg your pardon, I must. Good-night," and the stranger ran away toward the hedge fence.

"Stop!"

The farmer raised his gun and pulled the trigger.

He forgot in his haste that he had failed to reload it, and only the dull empty click followed when he pulled the trigger.

"Good-night," said the wounded man, clearing the hedge at a bound, and disappeared.

He ran on into the wood where his sleek, neat, trim horse stood, and vaulting into the saddle rode away at the speed of the wind.

"I wonder where the villains can be found now, and what will be done with the girl," he asked himself.

But some unerring instinct on previous knowledge guided the dark horseman, as he thundered along through the wood for mile after mile.

Suddenly he came to a halt.

There in the distance, but plainly revealed among the tree tops and bushes could be distinctly seen a light.

"It's a light in a window."

"That was just what it proved to be."

The silent horseman drew rein and after a moment dismounted.

Before him buried deep in the wood was an old house, which he had seen before, and which he knew to be deserted;

But now there was a light in it.

"I must investigate this," said the horseman.

He tied his horse to a sapling in the deepest, darkest part of the thicket and then began to advance and reconnoiter at the same time.

From tree to tree, bush to bush, he slowly crept, keeping his eyes constantly on the house, and seeing that no guards were left on his flanks.

Two or three dark forms were seen moving about.

"It is they!" he whispered.

More fully realizing his danger now than he ever had before, the detective drew his revolvers, and, holding one in either hand, he began creeping slowly, slowly forward along the ground.

At last he reached the rear of the house.

It was an old log house, and in places the clinking was loose and liable to fall out.

Through the cracks he heard voices talking, and by bending low heard the following:

"He says it's safer."

"There than here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I don't know. That secret will be found out some day."

"Don't know, Jim, it's the best hiding-place the James Boys have ever had."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course—who would think of finding a hiding-place in a well?"

"Yes, who would, Dick?"

The man called Jim was silent for a few moments, and then he said:

"I don't know so well about that, my friends. I've heard of the queerest kind o' hidin'-places hein' discovered. It is generally thought that the band has a subterranean stronghold somewhere."

"And right they are."

"Yes—but no one would dream of a well."

"Even if they did," put in a new voice, one that had been silent for several minutes, "they would not for a moment think it was that well. There are so many wells in the country."

"Ha, ha, ha, yes, a well for every family."

"And that well in the cornfield would never be suspected."

"Don't know," growled Jim Cummings sulkily.

"The well is purty broad across the top, ye know, and then them big buckets or tubs to let fellows down into it mought give it away."

"Oh, Jim, you've got the blues."

"Yes, Jim is a croaker."

"But he fights when it comes to a scratch."

"By the way, Frank, do you think you laid out that fellow to-night?"

"Of course."

The last speaker was Frank James, and he spoke for the first time.

"Where did you aim?"

"Right at his head, and at that distance I never miss. That silent horseman will never bother us any more."

"Who is he?"

"The cuss who laid out John Pole and Jack Anderson last night."

"Did he?"

"Yes, killed 'em both."

"Glad you fixed him, Frank."

"Don't you be afraid. He'll never bother us again," said Frank James.

A loud whistle sounded on the air.

"There, that's an alarm!" cried one.

"Boys, let's scatter."

They did. Men leaped through windows and out of doors; one man in his blind haste sprang upon the watcher's shoulders. He stumbled and fell.

He got up to run, and fell again to his hands and knees.

Before he could rise, the muzzle of a dark-mouthed pistol was placed close to his ear, and a stern, harsh voice said:

"Surrender, or you are a dead man!"

He was only a young fellow. He had not long been with the banditti, and he surrendered.

"What is your name?" asked the silent man, slipping a pair of handcuffs on the prisoner.

"Wood Hute."

CHAPTER XV.

AMOS TALBOT.

MR. GEORGE TALBOT, the Chicago lawyer, who had employed Carl Greene, Pinkerton's shrewdest detective, to find the red cedar box which had been taken from the train at Gadshill, had a son, as we previously stated, in St. Louis.

Amos Talbot was only a little over twenty-one years of age, but he was a shrewd, daring young fellow, who had shown on more than one occasion that he was amply able to take care of himself every way.

Not wishing to be supported by his father, who was a man of great wealth and amply able to support his son, Amos had gone to St. Louis, and established himself in the practice of the law.

He had studied hard and been admitted to the bar, and became the St. Louis branch of the greatest legal firm in the West.

Well prospered the young man, when the great will case came in the hands of the father. Amos took a trip to Europe and examined all the papers, and the wonderfully singular medal.

"There are two of those medals," said Messrs. Dillon, and Marsh, the London attorneys. "The rightful heirs to this estate have the other."

Then the young attorney came back to his home in St. Louis.

When he reached home, he took a careful search about South-east Missouri, where the last heirs were supposed to be, and found a man who would probably answer to the name, and sent a cablegram to London for the records, determined to wait for them before proceeding farther.

The articles were consigned to his father, as we have seen, and were captured in the Gadshill robbery, but that was not learned for several weeks after.

The young lawyer received the following telegram one day:

"AMOS TALBOT,—

"SIR,—A detective engaged. If he telegraphs you to join him do so at whatever place he may designate. GEORGE COLLINS."

"A detective engaged," reflected the young lawyer, as he sat at his desk, his feet elevated to the top. "Well, father is stirring up matters. The box was captured by the James Boys, and I wonder what detective would be bold enough to come to Missouri to hunt for them after so many have lost their lives at their hands."

He waited.

Day after day passed, and almost three weeks had passed, when the young lawyer one day received a telegram. It was brief and as follows:

"Come to Missouri City at once.

"DETECTIVE."

"Well, that's about the shortest and sweetest bit of business dispatch I ever saw; but I will obey. It's father's instructions, and father always knows what he is about. He never tells one to do anything wrong."

He at once proceeded to pack up his grip-sack, and in an hour the young fellow was ready.

But a thought suddenly entered his mind.

Might he not be running into danger as well as a detective, if he were to go into the neighborhood of the James Boys? But he was a brave young fellow, not to be retarded from duty by danger. He went to a drawer and took therefrom a revolver, which he loaded and placed in his valise.

Had one of the James Boys' band seen the small thirty-eight pistol with which Amos was arming himself, they would have smiled.

That very night Amos took the train for Missouri City.

Next morning as he got off the train at the little town, a stranger about thirty years of age,

who was standing on the platform, came to him and said:

"Mr. Talbot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come with me."

He conducted him to the hotel, they went into a private room, and closing the door, locked it.

"I am glad you came, Mr. Talbot."

"Who are you?" asked Amos. "I know you are the detective about whom my father wrote me, but what is your name?"

"My name is Carl Greene, and I am one of Pinkerton's force," the detective answered.

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"I cannot say yet, but things are coming to a climax rapidly."

"Have they got the box?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"It's in a well."

"Have you seen it?"

"The well?"

"No, the box."

"I have not."

"Where is the well?"

"That I don't know," the detective answered.

"Then how do you know the box is in the well?"

"I have learned that."

"And you don't know where the well is?"

"Yes; it is not far from here. I know that much."

"In this neighborhood?"

"Yes, and within five miles of this place."

"Well, that's something; but I suppose the papers have been ruined?"

"How?"

"By the dampness—the water in the well. Yet this box might be water-tight."

"The box is not near the water. I can't explain all now, young man, but you will be called on for active duty inside of three days. Obey no one save myself and an eccentric old preacher in this neighborhood."

"A preacher?"

"Yes, an old fellow called by everybody Old Saddlebags. Everybody here knows him, and you will have no trouble in identifying him if you see him. Look out for him, and what he tells you believe; what he says do."

Carl Green disappeared some time during the day, and it was some time before Amos Talbot saw him again.

On the evening of the second day after his arrival at the little town, Amos was startled by shouts from the lower part of the village, and saw a crowd of men and boys gathered about an old man, who was riding a lame horse.

The battered plug hat, long, flowing white locks and beard, and seedy clothes, made him an object that would attract the attention of any one. He was trying to urge his horse through the crowd, but they gathered about him, hooted and jeered.

Oh, ye onregenerated friends, listen ye ter the voice o' one cryin' the wilderness sayin', repent ye, fur the day o' judgment iz at hand."

"Ha, Saddle-bags! Say, Old Saddle-bags, gin us a sermon!" cried a loafer.

"Saddle-bags!" said Amos Talbot. "Why, then, this is my man."

"Oh, ye wicked an' adulterous ginerashun what seeketh arter a sign, but no sign shall be given ye, save the voice o' one crying in the wilderness sayin', 'prepare ye fur the comin' o' Old Saddle-bags; make ye his paths straight.'"

Then the loafers and street gamius hooted and yelled.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RACE IN THE CORN FIELD.

The crowd gathered about old Saddle-bags,

shouting and yelling, until he dismounted from his horse, and climbing on a goods box began haranguing them. Tired out with the harangue, Amos turned away into the hotel.

"If I am to depend on that old crazy man for instructions, I had better go back to St. Louis," he said.

An hour or two later, as he sat in the office reading a newspaper, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a deep, solemn voice said:

"My onregenerated friend, ar ye on redemption's side?"

Looking up he was met by the thin cadaverous features of old Saddle-bags.

The old weatherbeaten face had a solemnity about it that was really comical. For a moment the old man gazed at him, and then just the slightest suspicion of a wink was in his eye.

"Oh, yer onregenerated sinner, when the great day comes ye'll be callin' on ther rocks and hills ter fall on yer an' hide yer from the face o' man. Repent ye, fur the Judgment is at hand. Hearken ye ter the voice o' Old Saddle-bags."

"Don't be too hard on a poor fellow like me," said the young lawyer not knowing what else to say.

"Oh, ye onregenerated. How often I would hev gathered ye under my wings ez a hen does her chickens, and yer would not. But hearken ye ter the great day what's comin', when the sheep go ter the right, an' ther Billy goats ter the left. D'ye wish ter escape that orful doom?"

"Yes," he answered, for there seemed to be another twinkle, almost amounting to a wink, in the keen gray eye.

"Then foller me. D'yer hear?—sell all yer effects, gin it to ther pore an' foller me. Oh, ye onregenerated man, foller me—foller me!"

Quite a crowd had gathered about, attracted by the loud talk of the old crazy preacher, and when the command was first given to follow him the young lawyer hardly knew whether to take it as literal or not.

But when it was repeated and emphasized with a third twinkle that had the suspicion of a wink about it, he came to think that there must be some real literal meaning in the command to come. He rose as Old Saddle-bags left the room, and with a wink at the crowd gathered about them, followed the old man through the throng and out of the door, and down the street to a common where some trees grew.

The old man was gesticulating and talking wildly all the while, but had become such a common curiosity, that he attracted but little attention.

The youthful lawyer knew not but that his was a fool's errand, but he was nevertheless impelled to follow after Old Saddle-bags.

At last the old man halted beneath a tree, and sat down, Amos stopped close to him, and stood silently gazing on that phenomenal creature.

No one was near.

From under his great shaggy eye-brows the old man surveyed the trees and streets of the distant hamlet and assuring himself that he and the youth were alone, with no other person within ear-shot he said:

"We nin't sich fools ez they think now, be we?"

"I hope not."

"Well, we ain't."

"Why did you want me to follow you here?"

"Bekase I wanted ter ax ye suthin'."

"I am ready to listen."

"Yer remember yer orders?"

"Yes."

"Ar' ye a coward?"

"No."

"Glad to know it, kase I'm a prophet, ye

know, an' I see by them stairs thet yer goin' ter be put to a sore trial."

"How do you mean?"

"Yer courage 'll be tested."

"When?"

"Soon."

"How soon?"

"Afore to-morrer mornin', mebbe. Ye've got ter hev narve."

"Have you seen him, Ca—"

"Hush—listen ter the voice o' one cryin' in ther wilderness an' sayin' make my paths straight. Den't yer think I kin tell a hawk from a weasel. Why, my onregenerated friend, I could go on an' talk ter ye o' regeneration, and sech blessins an' sanctification by faith, but ye wouldn't be able ter zactly onderstand me, fur my mind's made o' a finer calibre than ordinary mortals. But I say onto ye hearken unto the the voice o' one cryin' in ther wilderness, believe yer in Old Saddle-bags an' answer only sich queschuns as he axes yer an' perpound no new uns."

The harangue of the old man might not have been understood by the youth, had he not at that moment discovered some persons loitering near.

The harangue continued in this meaningless strain until they were out of ear shot, when Old Saddle-bags again said:

"My onregenerated friend, ef ye want yer sins furgiv, an' be made white ez snow go ye at midnight to a field o' corn four and a half miles on the east o' this ere town, and thar ye'll find a man sittin on the fence. He'll see yer, and tell yer jist what ter do ter be saved."

There was a meaning in this—far more than the insane raving of a fanatic. Had the lawyer doubted it, the wink which accompanied the request was enough to convince him that there was no longer any room to doubt it.

"Will yer be thar?"

"Yes."

"I mean it."

"So do I—I understand."

"Mind ye, my onregenerated friend, thar may be danger on the way. Ther path may be strewed wi' lions an' ye'd better arm yerself ter exterminate sin."

Again there was a wink which could by no means be mistaken.

"Now, ye onregenerated friend, listen yer t' my tale o' woe, and be ye ready when the great hour comes ter take part. Get ye hence an' fast an' pray thet yer may be strong."

Amos Talbot went to the hotel knowing full well what would be his next course.

During the day old Saddle-bags delivered one of his wild, senseless harangues on the street corner to a crowd. The eccentric old street-preacher was regarded by everybody as a harmless fanatic, who furnished no end of amusement for the loafers and boys.

All day the lawyer remained in his room resting from trials and adventures of which he had no idea.

At dark he hired a horse from the livery stable, and set out on his journey.

"The old man has given the direction so plainly that there can be no danger of my being lost," he said to himself.

The horse thundered along over the road, and the rider's spirits rose as he met the fresh bracing air blown in his face.

"Halt!"

He thought he had gone about the required distance when the command to halt came.

Yea, there sat the man on the fence.

Drawing rein he said:

"You were expecting me?"

"Yea."

It was Carl Greene, the detective.

He was sitting on the fence that surrounded a large cornfield. A farm-house with barns and stable, were on the hill a quarter of a mile away.

"What have you discovered?" asked Amos.

"A great many things," Carl Greene answered. "Prominent among them was that the well which has been of so much interest to us is in this corn-field."

"What, really?"

"Yes."

"Then our task will soon be over?"

"No, not by a great deal. We have hardly began it. The most dangerous part is to come."

"What?"

"To get down in that well and get the box."

"Why, that's easy."

Carl Greene smiled, as he answered:

"My young friend, you very strongly display your inexperience, and I might almost say ignorance, in the way you express yourself."

"Why, how can there be danger? We can summon a posse, demand the surrender of the banditti, and then bring them up one at a time."

"The banditti have barrels of gun-powder in the well to blow up their cavern and destroy themselves the very box for which we are searching, and an innocent young girl whom they have a captive."

"A girl!"

"Yes."

"Have they a girl prisoner?"

"They have—as beautiful a young lady as one ever set eyes on, and they would certainly take her life if any attempt were made to force them from the well."

"What then?"

"We must try strategy."

"Very well. I admit your knowledge of such things is far superior to my own," the youth answered.

Then Carl Green threw off some of the top rails, and the attorney leaped his horse over the fence into the corn-field.

"Have you a horse?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

Carl Greene whistled, and a horse which had been lying down in the fence corner sprang to his feet and came to his master.

In a moment the detective was in the saddle.

"Come."

Down between two corn rows the young men rode at a gallop.

"Stop!" whispered Carl Greene.

They drew rein, and no sound save the horses sniffing off the green blades of corn could be heard.

"What is it?" asked Amos.

"I hear some one on the road."

"Yes, horsemen."

Then from a distance came a shout.

"Halt! Halt!"

There was the answer in the discharge of a few pistol shots.

On down toward the corn-field came pursued and pursuers.

Smack up against the fence and crash right through it, then on like a thunderbolt or raging storm through the cornfield, toward our two friends, came pursuers and pursued.

The detonations of revolvers was like the shooting off of a string of fire-crackers.

"We must get out of their way!" cried the detective. "Follow me."

Wheeling his horse off at right angles, the two thundered down the corn rows at lightning speed just as the pursuers—a dozen in number—chased the pursued in a mad race across the cornfield.

"What does it mean?" asked the lawyer.

"The handittl are being chased by Sheriff

Timberlake. He is continually spoiling our plans."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ENDLESS CHASE.

THEY rode about a hundred rods from the line of the race and drew rein.

"They have hardly seen us," said Carl Greene. "Wait until they are once more gone, and then we can proceed to hunt for the well."

"Hello! what's that?" asked the lawyer.

"Some one is coming this way."

"Yes."

"Are you armed?"

"I have a pistol."

"Let me see it."

Amos pulled from his hip pocket a small thirty-eight caliber revolver, which he handed to the detective.

"It's too small. Take this."

Meanwhile the runaway horse could be heard running, leaping and dashing toward them.

With cocked pistols the two horsemen had drawn up in a cluster of tall corn.

A loud groan, and the cry:

"Oh, my God!" came from the darkness where the horseman was riding toward them.

Then came a fall, and a horse went dashing madly away.

The other riders thundered on, and all became still save a slight gasping and struggling noise not more than fifteen paces away. The watchers waited a few moments and went to the spot from whence the sound came; dismounting they discovered a man, evidently one of the pursuing posse, lying on a corn hill.

He had been shot through, and was struggling in the last agonies of death.

"Who are you?" asked Carl Greene, raising the dying man part of the way up from the ground.

But the under jaw dropped, and the glassy eyes stared upward at the pale, lambent glow of the stars.

"Speak quick. What is your name?"

A groan, the last death-rattle, and all was still.

The soul of the pursuer had departed.

"Well, we can gain nothing from him," said Carl Greene. "We will go."

"Listen; that's the flight."

Bang—bang—bang! came shots from the other side of the field.

"Ay, they are at it over there," said Carl. "I doubt not but that there will be more than one corpse to hunt up in this cornfield when the morning comes."

They mounted their horses, but had not ridden far before they heard again in the far distance the faint report of fire-arms.

To persons unacquainted with the great West, it is almost impossible to conceive the vastness and extent of farms.

A farm does not mean a few acres, but hundreds of acres. Two hundred acres in one field is regarded as a small farm indeed. Then there are single fields that are miles in extent. It is very seldom that one is less than one mile in circumference.

Central Park, New York, would only be an ordinary sized farm. So the reader can readily see that there might be a chase and a fight going on on one side of the field, while our friends were on the other.

"Where is the well?" asked Amos.

"In the center."

"Let us go to it."

"No—not until the James Boys have left the field."

"Well they have."

"It don't seem so."

"Why?"

"It was as if they were leading them an endless chase dashing around and around the field."

"If that's so they will come this way again."

It was true, for even now they could hear the tramp of horses' feet and the tearing rustling of corn-stalks in the distance.

"They are coming."

"Yes, and we seem to be right in their line."

"Then let us get aside again."

"They seem to be hugging the fence closer than before."

"Yes, we will ride in this time."

The two galloped over the corn-covered hill toward the center of the field, and there waited.

The thunder of pursuers and pursued went thundering along, and there came sharp reports when the pursuers came too close.

Down went a horse and rider crashing several hills of corn in their flight, while the earth drank their blood.

"Again they have gone by," said Carl Greene.

"One would think they would soon run their horses down," said Amos.

"Yes, or that Timberlake would divide up his forces, cut across, and head them off."

"He has fought the James Boys too often to attempt anything of the kind."

"Why?"

"If the James Boys could get his forces divided he would whip them in detail."

"But even if divided he would have more in either force than the outlaws are."

The attorney had been in Missouri long enough to know that the James Boys, even Frank and Jesse, were a match for twenty ordinary men.

Carl Greene, however, was no ordinary man, and was in reality a match for both of the James Boys alone.

"There they go thundering by," said the detective.

"Timberlake don't seem to gain on them."

"No."

"His horsemen are following behind."

"How many of the outlaws are there?"

The question could not be answered until the pursuers and pursued were seen to dash across an open bit of ground.

"Why, there are but two," said Carl Greene.

"Yes."

"But they are splendidly mounted."

"No doubt they intend to run down Timberlake and kill him."

"Perhaps. Their endless chase in a circle is rather mysterious when we know they could at any time they desired leap the fence and ride away into the wood."

While the chase was going on, our two friends resolved to go to the interior and make some search for the well in which in some mysterious way the banditti had a hiding-place.

In the center of the cornfield was a grove of tall black Jack trees, and the detective and lawyer thought they would make a search in this grove.

The corn all over the field was tall enough to conceal a man on a horse, and they rode almost up to the grove before they thought of dismounting.

As they drew rein and dismounted there came the sound of a whisper on their ears.

"I hear something," said a voice.

"What does it sound like?"

"Some one coming."

"I hear nothing."

Of course Carl Greene and Amos became very quiet and listened with all their ears. They knew that the voices were not friends.

"Who is it, Cole?"

"Some of Timberlake's gang. Boys, be ready to give 'em double loads o' buckshot."

Crouching to the ground, our two friends

clutched their pistols. At any minute they were liable to be plunged into a death struggle.

But only the breeze rustled among the blades of waving corn.

"Guess you were mistaken, Cole," said another voice.

"How many are there of them?" the detective asked himself.

He was puzzled to understand what the plan of the James Boys were until the conversation had progressed a little further.

"I may be mistaken," Cole Younger answered to the remark made by some other member of the watchers, "but my ears don't often deceive me."

"It might be Jess or Frank?"

"No."

"Why, it's not impossible!"

"Don't you hear them running around the field and shooting?"

"Yes; but one of them may have been wounded, you know, and be crawling off up here."

"That isn't likely. It's more probable they have unhorsed half a dozen of Timberlake's men."

"Why don't they lead them right?"

"Right here?"

"Yes, where we could pour in a few volleys o' buckshot among 'em, and drive 'em away."

"Why, Jesse's too sharp for that."

"What do you mean, Cole?"

"Do you think he is fool enough to lead 'em right to our stronghold and hiding-place?"

"I hadn't thought o' that."

"He did."

"But, Cole, even if they were brought right here we could lick 'em."

"Of course; but to-morrow we'd have a regiment in the grove."

"Well we could be gone."

"But the well would be there. The box would be there—the girl would be there."

"They wouldn't know it. Ha, ha, ha, why Timberlake might even water his horses from that well and not dream that the James Boys had a strong-hold in it."

"They might, but it isn't our policy to run any risks."

"I know it."

"If we can run 'em down racing about the field, you know, and then turn the horses loose outside, and come back to the well we can hide here in safety."

"That's a good idea, Cole, I hadn't thought of that."

"You can depend on it that Jesse has; he never forgets to think of everything."

"He's a jewel."

"See, the chase goes on."

"Will it never have an end?"

The racing around that vast field continued. Timberlake's men were growing fewer at every round. Horses were exhausted; men disabled.

Some tried lying in wait until the bandit brothers should come around and fire on them, but the James Boys seemed to possess some wonderful instinct which told them of danger, and always rode too far to one side or the other for them to accomplish their design.

"Boys, Jess and Frank have about wore 'em out," said Cole Younger.

"Yes, but some of 'em were pretty well mounted."

"Wonder they don't burn old Todd's house."

All the while Carl Greene and Amos Talbot lay crouched within a few feet of the free-booters, holding a cocked pistol in each hand, and every moment expecting to be discovered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALMOST THERE.

"Boys!" cried Cole Younger at last.

"Well, what, Cole?"

"They have pretty near wore 'em out. Let's make a dash down on 'em, empty shot guns and revolvers like we did in the good old guerrilla days, and drive 'em away."

"That's the idea."

"Let's do it."

"Agreed."

"To horse then."

Their horses were among the Black Jacks, and in a moment five or six desperate men had mounted their horses and went thundering through the fields of waving corn toward the sounds of firing.

Fortunately for our friends they did not ride out of the grove in the direction where they and their horses were.

"Amos!" Carl whispered.

"Ay, ay!" the attorney answered, though his teeth were chattering, and his knees knocking together with excitement.

"I believe we can get there now."

"To the well?"

"Yes. I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"Wait right here until I go and see if they have all gone from the grove."

"I will."

Carl Greene seemed to possess all the skill of an experienced Indian scout.

He could as nearly travel unseen and without noise as anybody who ever lived.

By crawling and creeping through grass and corn and weeds, he finally reached a point on the grove where he had an excellent observation of the grove.

It was deserted. He turned about and went back toward his companion, and said:

"The coast is clear, and I have found it."

"The well?"

"Yes. Now, while they are chasing each other, and fighting down there, I propose that we proceed to explore it."

"But our horses."

"Leave them go."

"But they may find them," said Amos.

"Even if they do they will think they belong to two of their unhorsed pursuers. Turn them loose. I know the nature of horses enough to know they will keep together. Yours will follow mine, and mine is so thoroughly tamed that he will come at my call."

"Then we'll not tie 'em."

"No, it's best not. They will come when we want them, and we do not want to be encumbered with horses."

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Greene; but it does seem to me as if we were running some tremendous risks."

"Detectives always do."

The reins of the bridles were put back over the horns of the saddles, and the horses were allowed to go whither they pleased.

"Now come."

They went from the great wilderness of tall corn just in the roasting ear to the grove of Black Jacks.

Bang—bang—bang—b-b-b-bang! rang out a volley about a mile on their west.

"There the banditti have turned on their pursuers."

Yells and shrieks went up on the air.

"Poor fellows; they are cutting them all to pieces," said Amos, as he heard the loud crack of shotguns and heavy dragoon pistols.

"I suspect they've roused a Tartar, but we must make hay while the sun shines. Come!"

They ran down a narrow path that meandered about in a hundred devious ways, until it would seem that one would probably get lost in attempting to find their way through it.

But Carl Greene possessed more than ordinary

shrewdness, was not easily confused, and made his way to the spot where the well was.

It was a great wide-mouthed, crater-like looking hole in the ground, with a vast, strong circling around it, and two great tubs, such as are used in coal mines at the side of the well, a great windlass and thick strong ropes for lowering them.

When they reached the mouth of the great well, Amos looked down into the great black cavity and shuddered.

"Is this the well?"

"Yes."

"And do you say the box is in it?"

"I do."

"Well, if it were ten times five millions it might stay there before I would venture down in there."

"I think it can be done."

"But you said the thing was a mine."

"So it is."

"And that they had a ton of powder down there ready to blow up the well themselves and whoever attempted to enter it."

"I did."

"And would you try it?"

"I certainly will."

"Are you mad?"

"No."

"That is certain death."

"Not necessarily. The chances are very great there can be no doubt, but there is a chance for one to successfully enter the well and successfully come out of it."

"But the awful risk——"

"Detectives must take risks, and that one who will not take great risks will prove a failure. Besides the risk is not so great here as one might suppose. I don't think there is an outlaw down there in the well, and if there is not I can get down and make an examination of it, find out the mystery before they come back."

"How will you?"

"You must let me down."

"How?"

For answer the detective picked up one of the great tubs and placed it in the well.

"Seize the crank with your hand and hold it tight."

Amos did so. For a young fellow Amos Talbot was strong, but that great bucket with the weight of the detective would try his strength to the utmost.

"Now, Amos, remember there is a big reward awaiting us if we succeed, and we shall have the pleasure of rescuing a young lady from the clutches of a gang of villains."

The detective stepped boldly into the tub, which swung just at the top of the well.

"Now let me down."

"Good-bye," sighed the youth, as he began to unwind the windlass and allow the young detective to sink into that great black hole.

The old windlass creaked as the rope unwound. Down, down, down, until at last a voice seeming to come from the bowels of the earth, cried:

"Stop."

He stayed the windlass with his knee and leaned over.

"Have you found it?" asked Amos.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Here's an iron door, right against the side wall of the well."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Pull me up a little higher."

"Creak, creak," went the windlass.

"No, no, stop," cried the voice again from below.

"What's the matter now?" asked Amos leaning over the wall.

"You are only letting me further down."

"I thought I was winding you up."

"You were not—you were letting me down. Turn the other way."

He did so.

"Hold."

"Why?"

"You are still letting me down."

"Confound the rope and windlass. It seems that any way I turn it it goes down."

"Hold it still then."

"I will."

Carl Greene had not taken the pains to carefully examine the rope and windlass or he would have seen that it made no difference which way it was turned it let the bucket farther down.

He climbed on the top of the great tub and then to the hook and pail above that. There he hung suspended mid air, and examined the iron door in the side of the wall.

Tapping on it with his knuckles it gave forth a hollow sound. Of course it was too dark down there for him to see without the use of a light. He had found the door by feeling the sides of the wall with his fingers.

Standing with one foot on the huge hook and his left arm swung around the rope he stood there in the awful darkness sounding the door and trying to find some lock by which it could be opened. But he had not come wholly unprepared for such an adventure; within his inside pocket he had a dark lantern which he drew out and proceeded to light it.

Thrusting his finger and thumb within his vest pocket, he took out a match, which he struck, and proceeded to light the lantern.

The match flared up a little and then went out.

"Too bad!"

He thrust his finger in his pocket; he sought for another, but in vain. Pocket after pocket was searched, but he had not another match.

"Amos!" he called, in a low tone.

"Yes."

"Have you matches?"

"Some."

"Pull me up."

"I can't. It don't make any difference which way I turn this abominable old crank, it lets the bucket down deeper in the well."

"Hold on; I will climb up the rope."

"May be I can drop you some matches, and you catch them."

"Have you many?"

"A dozen."

"Be sparing of them."

All this was, of course, said in an undertone.

The detective was clinging on the great hook, holding on for dear life, for he did not know but that he might fall a hundred feet should he drop from the hook.

"Here comes one; hold out your hands and catch it."

"All right."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes. Let her drop."

"There."

He felt it brush his right arm, but though he frantically grasped for the match he failed to get it.

"Did you catch it?"

"No."

"I'll drop another."

"I don't think it's any use. It is Plutonian darkness," said Carl Greene. "One could not catch a match dropped in that way—no, not once in a thousand times."

"What are you going to do?"

"Can't you draw me up?"

"No. To turn either way lets it down."

"There's some spring about the windlass, which, if you will turn, will let the bucket be

drawn up. Look and see which way it's to be turned."

"I can't see any."

"Then I will climb up and get it."

"Hold a moment until I brace the crank. The weight is tiring my arm."

"Be careful not to let it slip," said the detective, beginning to feel a little nervous about the rope or windlass slipping.

He tried again to find the opening to the iron door, which he now knew opened into the side wall of the well, by feeling, but failed.

The iron was rough, in imitation of stone with which it was walled, so at the top of the well one could not have told that it was anything else but stone.

Doubtless there was some spring in connection with it, by means of which the door could be opened, if he only knew how to use it.

Again he rapped on the door with his knuckles.

Now he stops and listens.

Ay, what is that he hears, faint and far away, and at the same time distinct enough for him to be assured that it is a human voice. He bends his ear and listens.

"Oh, how long—oh, how long am I to live in this dread, horror and suspense," the voice groans.

"Heavens, it is the girl. I have found her prison-house, and it is maddening to be so near, almost there and unable to get farther."

Had she a guard?

He bent his head close against the iron which was so thick that it was almost impossible for him to hear through it, and yet he heard enough to assure him that she had no guard.

What need would one entombed, as it were, in the bowels of the earth, with a guard? Escape was impossible.

From the small air holes came the sound of the voice, faint and far-off, yet he was enabled to hear them.

"Oh, why don't some one come! Why don't death, if no one else can come and release me from this prison? Better have left a guard with me than left me in this horrible place alone."

"Miss Collins! Miss Collins!" called Carl Greene.

"What! Do my ears deceive me?"

"No—be of good cheer. All will yet be well."

"Who are you?"

"Friends come to rescue you, but say nothing. Be of good cheer."

"I will. Oh, I will. Can't you take me out at once?"

"No, I can't open the door. We will have you out if we have to dig the field up to get you out."

"Heaven be praised and grant that you may soon release me. I will die here soon——"

"Greene, Greene, Carl Greene!" called Amos from above.

"What?"

"They are coming—they are almost on us!"

"Draw me up quick."

In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten that it made no difference which way the windlass turned it lowered him.

Creak—creak! went the old windlass.

"No—no! the other way! You are lowering me!"

Amos reversed the crank, and still he went down.

Now both remembered the peculiarly arranged crank, and Carl cried:

"Hold it tight. I am going to climb the rope."

At the same moment the excited Amos whispered frantically from the top of the well:

"Hurry, for Heaven's sake! They are almost on us."

Carl sprang upward with so much suddenness

the windlass was wrenched from the hand of Amos, and rattle! rattle! rattle! it went thundering downward to the bottom of the well, carrying the detective with it.

"Great Heaven, he is lost!" groaned Amos; but the robbers were so close on him that he could not even call to learn if Carl Greene survived the terrible fall, or was drowned in the bottom of the well.

One glance in that awful black hole and he turned about and fled, just as the voices of the returning bandits could be heard saying:

"What 'n thunder's matter with the well?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"I DECLAR, I'M ALL SHUK UP."

"What did you hear, Cole?" Jesse James asked.

"The windlass running down."

"Guess it was your imagination?"

"No, it wasn't."

"It wouldn't run down on its own account?"

"No."

"Well, who'd be monkeying with that windlass at this time o' the night?"

"I don't know; but I do know that it's the windlass, that's all."

The outlaws had driven off Timberlake's gang, had turned their own horses out in the wood and stampeded them, just as Carl Greene had predicted, and were coming back to the well carrying their saddles on their shoulders, to hide for a few days, until the late tragic event had blown over.

On reaching the well Cole Younger cried:

"It's just as I said, some one has been here."

"How do you know?"

"Don't you see the windlass is down, and the bucket down also."

Then from the awful depths below there came a strange, deep sepulchral voice.

"What's that?" asked Frank James, with a shudder of superstitious dread.

"Oh, sakes alive!" gasped Wood Hite.

"Something is in the well."

"There is—what is it?"

"Listen."

Plain and distinctly from the awful depths below came the deep sepulchral voice of some one seeming to cry out from the very bowels of the earth:

"Harken ye ter the voice o' one cryin' in the wilderness, prepar ye fur the day o' kingdom air at hand."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" groaned Frank James.

"It's a ghost!" gasped Jim Cummins.

"Come away, the well's haunted."

And again from the awful depths that wonderful voice again arose:

"Oh, when that air great day comes the sheep will go ter ther right an' the goats ter ther left, but ye'll see who war the awall that day."

"Let's fire the mine and blow up the well," cried Clell Miller.

"No, hold on. I know him," Jesse James answered.

"What, know him?"

"Yes."

"Then you are acquainted with the devil."

Jesse laughed.

"That not old Nick."

"Then who is it?"

"Old Saddlebags, the old crazy preacher."

"How came he in there?"

"Well, I don't know, but I suspect the old crazy fellow was wandering around, came upon the well, and tumbled in."

"But, Jess, it would break any man's neck to fall in there."

"Any man but a drunk man or crazy man, would have their neck broken, but in their cases

you need not expect them to have their necks broken. Luck is always on their side."

Again the voice could be heard saying:

"Hark ye ter ther voice o' one on ther mount sayin', 'Oh, yer wicked an' adulterous gineration, what seeketh arter a sign, hut no sign shell be given yer save that proclaimed by Old Saddlebags—'"

"There!" cried Jesse, triumphantly; "I told you it was Old Saddlebags!"

"Well, he's rather close to our secret, boys," put in Cole Younger, with a hard, meaning ring in his voice.

"I believe we ought to kill him!" put in Jim Cummins.

"Yes, just for the scare he gave the boys, if for nothing else," added Frank James.

"What! kill an old fool because you block-heads were such cowards as to get a fright at his voice down in the well?" and there was an expression of contempt in Jesse James' voice as he answered his brother.

"Yes, for—for being so near our hiding-place."

"I'll assure you he hasn't got sense enough to know it."

"Maybe he hasn't," put in Cole Younger.

"Draw him up and we will see."

Jesse went to the well, and leaning over it, called:

"Hello—hello, down there!"

There was no answer. After a few moments the murmur of a low voice could be heard as if some one was at prayer.

"Hello, down there!" Jesse James again called, louder than before.

"Hello, up there!" came the answer.

"Who are you?"

"Sperits o' darkness; who air you?"

"I am a wayfaring man, who passing by, heard the voice of one in the well, and halted here to see why you have chosen such a strange abode. What is your name and your business?"

"I'm Dan'l Ichabod Pentecost, commonly known ez Old Saddlebags, the great extarminator."

"Exterminator of what?"

"Extarminator o' sin."

He was recognized now beyond a question of a doubt, and there went up a ripple of laughter from the top of the well.

"How did you get in?" Jesse asked.

"Fell in."

"Do you want to come out?"

"D'yer think I love darkness better'n light? D'yer think I love this 'ere damp, musty air better'n a pure fresh ashure breeze?"

"No—why don't you come out?"

"Wall, my onregenerated friend, ef I could a got out o' this 'ere enormous hole in ther ground alone an' unaided yer wouldn't have found me here. But I'm too old an' feeble ter climb a rope, specially when I'm all shuk up."

"The downward string is on," Cole Younger explained. "Slip it to next notch and draw him up."

Jesse now again poked his head over the well mouth and called:

"Get in the bucket!"

"All right, my ouregenerated friend what's ther good samarichan. I thot I recognized yer voice."

In a few moments he was in the vast bucket, the windlass slowly creaking as he ascended to the top.

It was the same old man with long, flowing locks and snowy beard; his battered plug hat seemed the worse for his plunge into the depths of the well.

He wore the same seedy clothes.

Certainly a lightning change had been worked in the mysterious depths of that old well—a

change which, to other than professionals, would seem an utter impossibility.

"Now, old man, tell me how you came in that well?"

"Fell in."

"How?"

"I was sleepin' in ther wood, near ther corn-field, when all orv a sudden I heerd a racket like hosses runnin' an' somebody er shoutin'. I ran over hyar ter see what it wuz, an' found this ere well, an' ez I war dry, thort I'd git er drink."

"While I was a-lettin' down that big bucket—I don't see why people make buckets so big, less they've got er heap o' stock ter water, I lost my balance an' tumbled in head first, right inter the bucket."

"Rattle, rattle, rattle—down, down she run clar ter ther bottom, an' I didn't know, my onregenerated friend, whether I war dead ur drowned at fust. But thar warn't a drap o' water in that well, an' I couldn't be drowned, an' I soon found I warn't dead. Then I begin ter call like one cryin' in ther wilderness, an' purty soon I heerd yer voices."

"But I have heard that this well is haunted."

"Oh, did yer—Jernsalem Moses, I wouldn't er gone nigh it fur nuthin'!"

"They say strange noises are heard here and strange sights seen. Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"Nor see nothing?"

"No."

Jesse James held a whispered consultation with his companions, and it was decided to let the old man go. As innocent and harmless an old fellow as he could not injure them. He seemed in no hurry to leave them, and in fact was rather inclined to stay with them, but being as they were going away as the hunt was over, he started off with the avowed purpose of finding his horse.

In the meanwhile Amos Talbot had made his way back to the village on foot, having lost his horse. As Carl Greene was dead, and he was unable to continue the search alone, he determined to take the next train for St. Louis.

The next train for St. Louis was due at four p. m., and the four p. m. train was three hours late. He was pacing the platform, his mind filled with horror, when he saw a familiar form with long, white locks, sharp beard and battered plug hat, step up on the platform.

"Oh, my onregenerated friend, I declar I'm all shuk up!"

It was Old Saddlebags.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE CLIFF.

For a moment young Talbot gazed in wild astonishment at the old man, and then said:

"Can this be you?"

"Oh, my onregenerated friend, listen ter the voice o' one cryin' in the wilderness sayin', prepare ye fur the comin' o' the kingdom. Make ye his path straight. D'yer want escape that great conflagration which is ter come soon an' wrap the hull globe in one molten mass o' fire?"

"Yes."

"Foller me—sell all ye've got an' foller me."

Several persons on the platform were attracted by the strange conduct of the old man, and a little knot of people were gathered about them.

"I can't follow you—I have bought my ticket and am on my way to St. Louis."

"Sell it—sell all ye hev, gin it ter the pore an foller me."

Then there was a decided wink in his eye, as the old man walked away to the hotel.

A few moments later the youth followed him.

When they were alone old Saddle-bags said:
 "Don't yer go."
 "Is there a hope yet?"
 "Yes, an' a big un. Things grow brighter and brighter fur us, my ouregenerated friend, every minit; an' soon ye may expect ther sunlight ter dawn, peaceful an' serenè on all. Stay—come while tis call ter-day an' jine the grand army marchin' on ter victory."

A hundred men might have heard the exhortation of old Saddle-bags and not dreamed that it was anything more than idle harangue, but to Amos there was a world of meaning in it all.

He decided to stay. Old Saddle-bags after a moment's hesitation said:

"When the night comes we'll sleep, but for you there must be no sleep my friend. Be up and a movin' will yer?"

"I will."
 "D'yer know where Fiddler's Forks are?"
 "Yes."
 "Wall ye'll meet some 'un them by moonlight. Thar's a revelashun thar 'un yer my friend. Don't yer doubt it."

"What is it?"
 "Go and see when the moon shines."

Then Old Saddle-bags took his departure. He had told enough to assure the young attorney that he should go to the spot he had mentioned.

Amos Talbot waited until the moon rose from the east, which was a little before midnight, and then set out for the famous Fiddler's Forks.

They were not more than half a dozen miles from the hotel, and near the river bluffs, when the Forks were in sight. Amos drew rein so suddenly as to almost draw his horse back upon his haunches.

"A ghost—great Heaven, it must be a ghost."
 "No, it isn't."
 "Is that Carl Greene?"
 "Yes."
 "But I thought I saw you killed in the well?"
 "No, you never. I was not killed——"
 "Can it be possible you escaped?"
 "Yes; but I haven't time to explain all now. You shall know everything in due time. For the present we've got a little matter to attend to."

"Where?"
 "Over the bluff."
 "Yes, we'll send ye over," roared a voice, which sounded as much like the roar of a wild bull as a human voice can, and four men leaped from the bushes.

Quick as a flash revolvers were leveled. The detective and lawyer fired first, and down went two.

Then through the smoke and blinding flashes shot after shot rang out.

The combatants closed in a death struggle and the fight went on.

Revolvers were emptied and they fought hand to hand.

Nearer and nearer to the cliff the struggling, fighting men drew, and on the air came a wild shriek.

"Over with 'em—shove 'em over the cliff, boys!"

A wounded outlaw, his face covered with blood, rose to his feet and sprang to the assistance of the man who struggled with Carl Greene.

With the fury of a demon he threw himself on Carl and hurled him to the very edge of the cliff, where he reeled for a moment almost falling.

CHAPTER XXI.

"PREACHIN' ON BAR CRICK."

BUT just as he was on the eve of falling over, the detective gained his footing, and by a super-

human effort hurled his two burly antagonists backward with such force as to hurl one of them on the ground.

Then he struck the second a blow that stunned him.

Voices could now be heard among the bushes and on the hills above, and there was a general scampering on the part of the banditti to get away, lest the detective should be reinforced.

The wounded men were both taken away.

Long afterward Carl Greene learned that one of the men wounded—and the one most severely wounded in the affray—was Jesse James, the Bandit King.

Both Carl and Amos were so exhausted by the late terrible struggle that they were almost speechless. As they sank panting on the ground the sound of voices could be heard coming toward them.

"Come on, Otis, come on, an' don't yer be so tarnil slow erbout it. Don't yer see we're burnin' daylight, an' I'm er gwine ter see what all that ar' noise iz erbout any way."

"Didn't yer heer shootin', Silas."

"Course I did—d'yer think I am deaf?"

"Wall, we mought run inter a hornet's nest, I'm er thinkin'."

"Not much 'f I knows 'myself—an' 'f we do I reckon we're the boys ez kin clean up them air hornets in no time."

"D'yer reckon it's the James Boys?"

"Dun know—hullo who air you?"

Silas had pushed his way through the bushes and was now in the open spot about the plateau, in full view of the two exhausted men.

"Who are you?" asked Carl in return.

"Wall, I ain't got no cause ter be ashamed o' my name so I reckon I'll tell yer. I'm Silas Dean Buncome, now who are you?"

"I am Philip Christopher Blowhard," Carl answered.

"Oh, yer he be yer—wot cher doin' here?"

"My friend and I were having a quiet wrestle."

"Yer war war yer? Wall, what wuz thet air shootin' about?"

"We scared up a big coon, and both fired our revolvers at it."

"Wall, yer did a orful sight o' shootin' an' a mighty little hittin', I'm er thinkin'—An' great hoe-cake! hyar's blood on ther grass!"

"Yes, we hit the coon."

"Wall, I must say that air coon bled a mighty sight fur a fact."

But the detective managed to keep the suspicions of the farmers partly suppressed, and as soon as they could the detective and lawyer took their departure.

"Our plans for the night are spoiled," said Carl.

"What must we do?"

"You go back."

"To St. Louis?"

"No."

"Where?"

"To your hotel."

"And you?"

"I can't say exactly where I will go, but not there——"

"Then you have not given it up?"

"No, not by a considerable."

"Do you think we will succeed?"

"Yes."

"When will you want me again?"

"I don't know. To-morrow night I should say."

"Well, I hope it will soon be over with. This continuous strain on our nerves is wearing."

"I think we will finish it to-morrow night, anyway."

"How wil' I know if you want me?"

"He will tell you."

"Who?"
 "Old Saddle-bags."
 "Well, I will."

They separated and the lawyer went to his hotel, while the detective disappeared in the wood.

What strange, wild schemes, he was working the attorney of course knew not. The wild adventures he met with, the dangers he encountered will never be known, because Carl Greene was too modest to sound his own praises.

Next day the lawyer sat on the porch in front of the hotel when he observed the old familiar form of the preacher walking slowly down the street leading his horse after him.

The horse was lame and actually did not seem capable of making two miles an hour.

Slowly and painfully he came down the street, and a loafer sitting on a goods box seeing him began at once to sing:

"A little old man came a-ridin' by,
 Says I, old man, yer hoss will die,
 Wall, if he dies I'll tan his skin,
 An' if he lives I'll ride 'im ag'in.
 Clar de kitchen, ole folks,
 Young folks,
 Clar de kitchin, ole Virginia never tire."

"Say, ye onregenerated specimens o' ill-bred humanity, listen ye ter the voice o' one cryin' from the wilderness. D'yer know what on yarth's agwine ter 'come o' ye?"

"No."

"Wall, ef yar keep on er singin' them air songs an' keepin' up uv that levity, why, bless me if yer don't bring up in the penitenchary."

"D'yer think so?"

"I know it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, ye onregenerated sinner. Hearken yer ter the voice o' one a-cryin' from the wilderness——"

"Look like ye'd slept in the hazel brush."

"Oh, yer wicked an' ruined generashun, all-ers a-seekin' outer a sign."

"Ye look like a sign o' hard luck, Old Saddlebags."

"None o' yer levity."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wot cher laughin' at?"

"You."

"Me!"

"Yes."

"Wot's bout me ter make yer larf?"

"Yer so odd."

"Odd?"

"Yes, odd."

"Me odd! Me, Old Saddlebags, the great extarminator o' sin? Oh, my onregenerated friend, ye don't know me, but it's no use standin' here and ercasting pearls a-fore swine. I'm ergoing ter sow my seed on good ground, whar it may sprout, spring up an' yield some thirty, some forty, an' some even a hundredfold."

The old loafer roared with laughter, and Old Saddlebags coming to where the lawyer sat said:

"Thar'll be preechin on Bar Crick."

"When?"

"To-night."

And Old Saddlebags went on.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

OUR story is now drawing to a conclusion, but in order that the finis may not seem too abrupt for the reader, we will endeavor to rapidly, yet clearly, sketch some of the principal incidents.

Bear Creek, where old Saddlebags had announced to preach, was the stream which ran east of the field in which the wonderful well was located.

Mounting his horse, Amos at dusk was gal-

loping toward Bear Creek, and drew rein just as the old man came around a bend in the road.

"Oh, my onregenerated friend, yer on hand."

"Yes."

"Wall, stand ye still an' wituess ther wonder-ful powers o' Old Saddle-bags."

"Are you goin' with me to the well?"

"I air."

"Can we descend it?"

"We air jist ergoin ter do that air very thing; come on."

At a light whistle the horse seemed to get over his lameness and went at a gallop through the wood.

They halted at a fence, tied their horses and went through a field of tall, dark green corn.

Suddenly they came to a dense thicket.

"I don't remember seeing that before," said Amos.

"Mebbe yer didn't."

"But I want to go to the well. Take me to the well."

"I'll do it."

"Where is it?"

"Come right in this ere thicket."

"But it's not there."

"Come an' behold the wonders Old Saddle-bags kin work."

They entered the thicket and found that it was against a bluff, and there was a narrow, low grotto running under the ground.

The lawyer saw the old man light small lantern and nod to him to come on.

On hands and knees, Old Saddle-bags taking the lead, his lantern in his mouth, they crawled through the cavern a long way.

Then they came to where the dirt had been removed.

Through this they crept.

"Now, my onregenerated, we ain't far from the camp o' the Philischuns," said Old Saddle-bags, "and it mought be well ter begin ter buckle on the armor. Here goes fur me."

From beneath his ragged old coat, much to the surprise of the young attorney, the old preacher pulled out a pair of great navy six-shooter revolvers.

"Hev ye got any?"

"Yes."

"Draw, fur we may hev ter slay the Philischans."

Amos Talbot drew his revolvers and followed the old man through the cavern.

They came to where there were some boards standing upright. Evidently they were the boards for a wall to some apartment.

Old Saddle-bags had evidently been working for some time at removing the boards.

Three were loosened.

The work had been so carefully done that not one on the other side had known it.

Three boards were loosened, so that they could be pulled down in a moment.

"Listen!" whispered Saddle-bags.

Amos bent his ear and heard the sweetest voice that had ever charmed his ear, saying:

"Oh, do give me my liberty! How long, oh, how long am I to be kept in this fearful dungeon?"

"Oh, stop your racket. I am just growing tired of you always worrying me."

"But give me my liberty. I ask no more."

"Hush! I said."

"I can live but a little longer here."

"Well, you will live but little longer. Don't ye wake up Jesse. He was bad hit in that fight and must sleep and allow his wound to heal."

"Well, let me go."

"Never."

"Then I'll scream."

"I'll kill you."

"Help! help! help!" three wild shrieks went up on the air.

"Curse you, die!"

Crash!

Down came the loose boards, and just as Frank James bounded at the captive maiden with knife upraised to slay her, two men leaped through the breach in the wall with revolvers cocked.

"Hold on thar, my onregenerated friend, ur yer mought find yerself in an infinitessimally short time a sottin' on the damp edge o' a cloud twangin' erway on a golden harp. Ef yer don't want ter climb the golden stair don't make er move."

"Who are you?" demanded Frank.

"Old Saddle-bags, the extarminatur o' sin, an' lem me giv yer er bit o' warnin'—"

"You are a fraud—you have deceived us."

"Wall, my onregenerated friend, I ain't one ter go an' say a thing what mought be true. Ef yer eyes were bhnded 'twarnt my fault, but doan yer go to slashin' erround too much, kase I've got yer kivered with a navy six, an' in all my preechin' I've found a great deel o' convar-tin' power erbout a navy six."

Frank James recoiled from the certain death which confronted him.

Amos saw a pale, sweet young girl standing trembling before the outlaw.

"Surrender!"

Old Saddle-bags' voice rang like a trumpet. Then a curtain parted, and Jesse James, rising up in his bed, with a cocked revolver in each hand, took in the situation in a moment, and leveling both weapons at the fair Della Collins, said:

"Hold, Saddle-bags! We are outwitted, I know, but you shall not have us. A move, and I'll kill the girl."

"Then, in Heaven's name, don't make it," gasped Amos, who had fallen in love with the fair prisoner almost at first sight.

Jesse James said:

"You may take the girl and go if you wish, and will leave us unmolested."

"I'll consent on one more consideration," said Saddle-bags.

"What?"

"Give me the red cedar box and all it contains."

"Let him have it, Frank, for I don't see that that medal and old papers can ever be of value to us."

It was done. Amos and Della went out first with the box and old Saddle-bags followed.

At the hotel that night old Saddle-bags unmasked and appeared in his real character, Carl Greene, the detective.

When the box was opened and the medal fell out, Della cried:

"Father has a medal just like this!"

"He has?" cried Amos.

"Yes, sir."

"Then your father is heir to the great Dominic Murray estate in England."

"Let me see the will," said Carl Greene.

A close examination showed that the heir named bore the same name of Della's father.

Della's father proved to be the real heir, and his heirship was established, and he drew his money in a few months. But in the meanwhile Amos avowed his love for Della and she became his wife.

Carl Greene was invited to the wedding, and at request of the bride appeared as old Saddle-bags, the character in which he had so cleverly outwitted the James Boys.

[THE END.]

A TERRIBLE DEATH;

OR,

The Rising of the River.

By ALEXANDER DOUGLAS.

I WAS enjoying a brief holiday in Brighton very late in the season, and one night I was promenading the West Pier with my three youngsters, wondering how long I should remain there undisturbed, when, turning from the darkening sea, which was dotted all over with the white sails of innumerable pleasure boats, I beheld my better half coming rapidly from the direction of the gates.

"It's all up!" I said to myself; and I found I was perfectly right when I had perused the telegram she brought me from our lodgings. It ran thus:

"Come up to town by the very first available train, no matter what sacrifice you make. A very important case has come in, and I want you to take it in hand."

This was not only imperative, but somewhat complimentary, so I lost no time. In less than two hours I was listening to my chief in his own room.

"You know Sir Dexter Haviland, I think?" he said.

"Well," I replied.

"He died suddenly last night."

I am not easily surprised, but this information brought an exclamation from me which I could not suppress.

"Does that surprise you?" asked my superior, looking up from his note-book.

"It does," I replied. "It seems only last night since I saw him looking as hale and hearty as ever he was in his life."

"Where was that?"

"At the door of the Ship Hotel."

"What was he doing?"

"Oh, nothing of any consequence. I was passing, and I could not help glancing at the handsome old fellow. Now I think of it, he was opening a telegram, and as I passed the door he was saying to his daughter, 'Ah, never mind, child! It is good news, after all, and the business won't detain us in town more than a couple of days.'"

"You noticed the daughter?"

"Yes, I would be no man if I didn't," I replied, "for she was as remarkable a woman as he was a man. Her hair was like burnished gold—her eyes as dark as those of an Italian brunette. She wore a blue serge skirt with a kind of white satin body, resembling a sailor's jumper—the broad collar of which, being thrown back, displayed a neck and bust; but I can't describe anything of that kind. I couldn't help gazing at her—that's all."

"He was always called 'Handsome Haviland' in the army," proceeded my superior, "and his sudden death has come as a terrible blow. Not quite sixty years of age, the doctors say he had a constitution of iron, and now he is dead; but that is not the most peculiar part of the case. He was reputed to be very wealthy, but a few hundreds of pounds were all that could be found in his safe. Altogether, his sudden death and the disappearance of his supposed wealth form a very important case. One of the reasons I have for selecting you is the fact that you have had the opportunity of seeing the general almost daily for some time before his death, and can thus judge of the condition of his health. And now you had better have some tea, and then call upon Mr. Roberts, his solicitor, who is waiting for you, and who will give you further particulars."

I found Mr. Roberts waiting in the palatial offices of his firm—Kingsford, Roberts, and Kingsford, in Victoria street.

From this gentleman I heard that General Haviland had been a director and one of the principal shareholders in the Corean Gold Company (Limited), with which was incorporated the London, Provincial, Indian and Colonial Mutual Finance and Banking Company (Limited), and that upon his advice he had sold out the latter concern, which in his—Mr. Roberts's idea—was far from safe. He had given the necessary instructions, and the sale of the scrip was to be concluded on the Friday before the general's return from Brighton.

"Who was present at the gentleman's death?" I inquired.

"His friend, General Manvers, Dr. Atwell, and his daughter."

"The family doctor?"

"No. A mere passer-by at the time of the alarm."

"Where can I find General Manvers?"

"At (mentioning the number) Park road, and Miss Kate Haviland has taken up her residence there until other arrangements are made?"

"I should like to see the young lady," I said, "but not as a police officer."

"Then you had better call with me to-morrow morning. You can represent one of my clerks."

"I think I can succeed in disguising myself as a gentleman," I replied, with a smile, as I left the solicitor.

Next morning at an early hour I visited Cavendish street, and found the whole block of thirteen imposing mansions in the hands of the builders and decorators. I found out that the General had gone to Brighton until the work had been done, and was compelled to return for a short interval, during which he died. He had returned on Tuesday, and had died that night. I came up on Wednesday; this was Thursday morning, and the funeral was to be held on Saturday. A servant told me that the repairs had been stopped until the following Monday, and I was about to turn away disappointed in obtaining no important information, when my ear caught the quick and uniform click, click of a chisel upon stone.

With my back to the buildings I paused for a moment.

The sounds continued and they came from behind me.

Turning, I looked upward and saw a kind of black box on the scaffolding level with the second floor. It was actually a square framework surrounded by a tarpaulin, and large enough to conceal a workman, I at once concluded that a stonecutter was at work unseen by the neighbors.

Entering the general's house, I intimated that I had come from the solicitor, and was permitted to visit the room in which the gentleman had died. He used to call it his den, and it was decorated with numerous trophies of the battlefield and the jungle; for Sir Dexter was as great a tiger-hunter as he was a cavalry leader. In one corner stood a heavy safe, beside this the Indian chair of wickerwork, in which the general was stricken, and behind this the door communicating with the bed-room behind.

Two French windows opening to the floor lit up the room. Pulling one open, I saw a narrow ledge of masonry, and beyond that a narrow iron balcony, which ran the whole length of the block. Outside this was fixed the builder's scaffolding.

Looking out, I noticed that the concealed workman was engaged carving a stone in front of the next house. I strode over the rail of the

balcony, and approached the man. I expected to find a matter-of-fact mason. I found a strikingly handsome artist attired in a neatly-fitting blouse. He was as dark as an Italian, with large piercing black eyes, long wavy hair falling over his shoulders, and a small black mustache scarcely concealing his full red lips.

"Sharpening up an old stone?" I said, smiling.

"No, cutting a 'coat of arms' in a new one, the other having decayed."

"You're working overtime?" I inquired.

"No," he returned, "I make nothing in that way. I am my own master, and receive so much for every piece I do. No;" and he paused, slightly embarrassed. Then he resumed: "You come from that house?" pointing to Sir Dexter's.

"Yes."

"Are you a friend of the young lady?"—this eagerly.

"No: but I am engaged to look after her interests," I answered.

"In that case we must have some conversation," and after laving his hands in a dish of water, he threw off his blouse and appeared clad in a fashionable morning suit of light tweed. Putting a light-colored hat on, he prepared to accompany me.

When we had reached Portland Place he suggested going into the Langham. "I often dine here," he said. When we were seated and served with some light wine, he said:

"The papers say Sir Dexter died of heart disease. I don't believe it. And yet there will be no autopsy."

"I fear not," I replied. "But you seem interested. May I ask the reason why?"

"I cannot answer that yet. But I am interested because I saw the general die."

"You!" I cried in surprise. "This was not reported."

"Because it was unknown," he went on. "I was at work on a new gargoyle on the window there. The other general came—the coarse one with the red face."

"General Manvers?"

"Yes; they came up to this room, and presently Sir Dexter opened a window for air. He was in a terrible rage, and before I could retire from my post I could hear him shout such words as 'Thieves! Swindlers! Robbers! Brigands!'" and then, after a short delay, he moaned, rather than cried, 'My poor child will be left a beggar!' The next moment I saw the other man hurriedly fill a glass of water, or seltzer, and turn to the chair upon which Sir Dexter had fallen. Then there was a pause. General Manvers went to ring the bell, but left it unpulled. The safe was open, for now I went closer to look. Manvers opened drawer after drawer hurriedly—madly! At last he seized a bundle of slips of blue paper—bills they looked—and a slip of white paper. A cry of triumph rose to his lips. He closed the iron drawers, and finally pushed the door of the safe to, as he concealed the papers and frantically rung the bell. Miss Haviland was the first to run in; then the servants. After this a doctor was sent for; (one was conveniently found passing through the street;) Sir Dexter was carried into the bedroom, and the front room was deserted until the young lady uttered a horrible heart-rending cry, and General Manvers re-entered to dispatch a servant to Park road for Mrs. Manvers."

I became very much interested not only in the narrative, but in the narrator. I could see that he was brave, honorable, and ingenuous, for while he voluntarily disclosed who and what he was, he did not inquire very particularly as to my identity. It was sufficient for him that I was connected with the family solicitor, and he did

me the honor of saying that he thought I would act in the best manner possible with a view of vindicating the honor of the deceased Sir Dexter, and protecting his daughter from the villains and brigands who had hurried the hero to a premature death.

"Are you acquainted with Miss Haviland?" I asked.

He was lighting a cigarette as I spoke, and his answer completely satisfied me.

"Is the flame of this little wax taper acquainted with the dazzling sun? No. I have only seen the young lady and to see her is to respect her with—one's whole soul."

My young friend's name was Ambrose Spencer.

His father had been an artist with a little fortune, but this last was lost in a bank failure, and the son had very sensibly gone in for "carving" after his father's death, and the ready money thus obtained helped him slowly on his artistic career. He lived in Chelsea, but he had a studio in Wells street, Oxford street, where I was invited to call whenever I liked.

When I left him it was time to meet Mr. Roberts. We visited Miss Haviland, and her account so far corroborated Mr. Spencer's tale. I was by no means prepossessed by either Mrs. or General Manvers, and was indeed ready to make use of the information received from young Spencer if Mr. Roberts had not gracefully consented to call in the coroner. This was kept from the poor young girl, who was overcome with grief; but when it was named to General Manvers he first grew pale then purple with anger, and blustered about "the indignity done to the body of his companion-in-arms."

I shall never forget the picture as long as I live. We were standing on well-worn carpet in a somewhat shabby room in the small house the general rented in Park road. The purple-nosed, watery-eyed general, stood between Mr. Roberts and myself, angrily pulling his heavy gray mustache. Mr. Roberts was clean-shaved, and wore a white tie, as became a fashionable lawyer, while I was then forty, but looked about thirty, and was attired in the fashionable morning dress of the period. At the moment when General Manvers was at his worst, I was conscious of something serpent-like stealing behind, and the next moment Mrs. Manvers glided rather than walked in front of her husband, saying softly:

"My dear, you must rest assured—I tell you, rest assured—that nothing the least offensive to poor dead Sir Dexter's feelings—were he alive—can come out of this proposed examination."

The big, rough-looking soldier grew fiercer looking for a moment or two, but as he looked down into the dark, Indian-looking face of his wife, the anger died away, his brow smoothed, and with a kind of sigh he murmured:

"Ah, well, let it be as you will; but when a soldier escapes butchery on the battle-field, it seems hard that he should be submitted to mutilation after dying peacefully in his bed."

The doctors found that General Sir Dexter Haviland died of stoppage of the heart's action, and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict in accordance with this opinion. The general was buried with great pomp on Saturday, and General Manvers and his son—a lieutenant—were among the chief mourners. This young fellow looked more like a Hindoo than his mother, and I gleaned this information from some military men before leaving the cemetery. That Manvers had been riding-master, and afterward adjutant, of the regiment Sir Dexter commanded through the Mutiny; that Manvers married a half-caste Indian, and that since leaving the service the latter had almost lived on Sir Dexter's bounty. In addition to this, it was said that Manvers had got mixed up with some shady characters in the

city, and that he had prevailed upon his benefactor to enter into speculations of the very worst character, all of which I believe to be perfectly true, for I had seen Manvers in very bad company before I knew of his connection with Sir Dexter.

On the Monday after the funeral all England was ringing with the news of the failure of the London, Provincial, Indian and Colonial Mutual, Financial and Banking Company (Limited), and to this announcement the placards of the evening papers added, "Flight of the manager and directors."

PART II.

WHEN all Sir Dexter Haviland's debts were paid there was not a farthing left for his daughter. She, however, stayed on with Mrs. General Manvers, and the easy-going world were in the habit of saying that the surviving general's wife was a good creature in adopting the girl.

My suspicions were never lulled regarding the part Manvers had played on the day of Sir Dexter's death. He never suspected it, but from the hour that his friend was placed under the ground I determined, when other duties would permit me, to dog the footsteps, so to speak, of this man.

A very long time did not elapse before it was rumored that the general's wife had come into money. They soon left the shabby house in Park road, and took one in South Kensington, in the quarter now become so fashionable.

Up till now the general had kept a saddle horse, and his wife was compelled to put up with an old-fashioned Victoria, with a hood which was a source of great merriment to loungers in the Row during the season. Before Sir Dexter Haviland was dead four months the Manvers' stables contained seven horses, and the old Victoria had given place to an elegant laudan and a handsome double-horse brougham.

I now began to ask myself what were those papers that Manvers took from the drawers of his dead comrade's safe. Just as the Gold Dust Robbery was discovered General Manvers put up for Parliament, a vacancy having occurred in the representation of a garrison town. I was hurriedly sent to America after the perpetrators of the robbery just mentioned, but before going I put Lockhart on to watch for me.

It was the end of February when I returned, having gone away in the last week of November, and the first words my friend spoke to me were:

"Miss Haviland disappeared shortly after you left, and we have never been able to trace her."

"You inquired?" I said.

"Yes," he returned. "She left to avoid persecution. Young Manvers wanted to marry her, and his mother led the girl a terrible life for the purpose of forcing the union. One night she went out to post a letter, and never returned. We've tried all we could to trace her, but without success."

There is no occasion for my recounting all the efforts I made after this to find the young lady. As is usual in such cases, what is called chance gives you what no labor or ingenuity can command. One wild March night I was passing along the Strand, when a gust of wind took my hat away with it—as far as the cord by which it was attached would permit. As I replaced my own hat, I saw a lady's broad-brimmed felt hat passing. In an instant my foot was on it. I plucked it up, wiped it clean, and restored it to—Miss Kate Haviland. But oh, how thin, worn, and poorly clad! She thanked me, placed the old hat on her golden head, and hurried away in the direction of Waterloo Bridge.

I followed cautiously, and hurried when I saw her halt and cling to the parapet as she gazed

down upon the black river. I felt relieved as she tottered rather than walked southward.

At the corner of a dingy street I was divided from her for a moment by the appearance of a crowd following two policemen, who were conducting a drunken woman to the lock-up. When I looked again where I expected to see the young lady, she was gone—vanished into thin air.

I walked down the narrow street a little bit, and saw that the houses were old and tall, and mostly let out in rooms. Returning to Waterloo road to make up my mind what next to do, I ran against a young fellow clad in a waterproof. We mutually apologized, and the next instant I cried:

"Mr. Spencer!"

To which he responded:

"Ah, my old friend!"

And then we both shook hands vigorously.

After a brief interval I asked what he was doing there.

"Ah, my friend," proceeded Mr. Spencer, "a few nights ago I ran across some one that reminded me of Miss Haviland, and lost her just about here:"

"To-night," I returned "the same fortune occurred to me;" and I related the episode of the hat.

"Thank heaven, it is no imagination," cried the young fellow, "since it is she herself! I'll search every nook and corner in all these houses but I'll find her."

"Are you, then, acquainted with her?" I asked.

"No, no; but—but——"

We were interrupted by a woman rushing up the narrow street.

"What do you want, my woman?" I asked, stopping her.

"A doctor, for mercy sake! There's a young woman—leastwise, a real lady—a dying down there! Is ere a one of you a doctor?"

"Yes, I am—and my friend is," cried Spencer, recklessly.

But my eye having caught the red lamps of a chemist's shop. I told the woman to stand by my friend until I returned, and I was quickly back with a doctor—for the chemist's shop turned out to be a surgery.

We went to the house and waited at the door until the medical man returned. In answer to my question, he answered:

"A case of starvation—nothing uncommon here. A cold, nearly empty, fireless room. A lady, too—a real lady, or I'm a Dutchman."

"I am looking for a missing lady. Is she light-haired?"

"Pure gold, sir."

"I should like to see her."

"Nothing easier. She's nearly restored now, and seated in the comfortable room of an old man, her next-door neighbor. Come along; I can introduce you."

I went, closely followed by Mr. Spencer. He conducted us into a large wainscoted room, where a fine fire blazed on the hearth, and an old man in a long brown coat was standing over poor Miss Haviland, who had a cup of hot tea in her hand, into which he was pouring cognac, saying:

"A leetle more—just a leetle more, and that'll do you good, missy."

Half a dozen women surrounded the interesting group, but as soon as I said I had business with the lady, the old man began to "Hush" them out of the room as if they were a flock of geese. Then, having closed the door and intimated that he was very deaf, I briefly related all we knew of the affairs of her father and herself. Of course I explained who I was, and hinted my suspicions of the Manvers family. When

I mentioned the London, Colonial, Financial and Banking Company, our deaf host seemed to prick up his ears suspiciously. No matter; we had nothing to conceal.

At this juncture Mr. Spencer broke in with:

"I made one omission in my first statement to you, Mr. Poynter. I told you that after Sir Dexter was carried into his bedroom, the front room was deserted until Miss Haviland shrieked. Well, during that short interval, I entered the room and picked up the white paper taken from the safe by General Manvers. When he put the others in his pocket, this fell to the floor."

"Why did you conceal this from me?" I asked.

"Because, in my turn, I lost it. However, I found it only on last Sunday between the leaves of a book where I placed it for safety."

"And where is it now?"

"At my rooms in Chelsea," returned Spencer.

"Well, Miss Haviland will be my wife's guest until she is quite recovered," said I. "So you can bring the paper down to me early in the morning," and I gave him my private address.

That night the dead general's daughter slept happily under my humble roof.

Next morning Mr. Spencer was with us very early and he handed me this missing document. It was a list of securities lodged with the directors of the London, Provincial, etc., Financial and Banking Company, and amounted altogether to one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. My business now was to find where this amount had gone. At half-past nine I was closeted with the chief. At half-past ten I walked out to the post-office. As I was returning to the headquarters a policeman pointed me out to a commissioner. Saluting, the man presented me with a letter. It was directed in a woman's hand, and ran as follows:

"101 M— STREET, BERMONDSEY.

"DEAR MR. P.,—I found among my father's papers the address of a retired sergeant who acted as his clerk for some time. It is as above. Mrs. P. has come here with me, and the information is so great and good that you should be here to receive it. Please come without delay. If not long we will wait for you.

"Yours very truly,

"KATE HAVILAND."

Although I disliked this as being irregular, I accompanied the man. The cab stopped at the end of a narrow passage leading to the river. At the extreme end of the passage was a public house on one side and a private one on the other. Into the latter I was conducted.

I was no sooner within the door than I was seized by half a dozen men behind. My arms and feet were firmly bound, and then I was placed on a sofa in a small room and left alone.

In about ten minutes the door opened, and Lieutenant Manvers made his appearance, a hideous grin on his Hindoo-looking face.

"You have a paper in your possession belonging to my father. Deliver it up. It belongs to General Manvers."

"I am bound. How can I?"

"Indicate in what pocket it is, and I will get it."

"Never!"

"Then you will die, for possessing it you can never leave here."

"What if I give it up?"

"You must remain here a prisoner for fourteen days, when you will be liberated unharmed."

"I have not got it with me."

"Send for it."

"Never!"

"Then you must die."

"You dare not kill me."

"Indeed! I'd like to kill all your race with one

cut of this," and he drew a semi-circular knife or "crease" from his breast.

"Take him to the lower room," he continued, as the men entered to his call. "He'll cool there, and come to his senses."

I was carried into a cellar lower than the level of the Thames and unbound. The door was closed upon me. I cannot describe that day of horror. I remembered that the tide was a high spring tide, and felt certain that the water would gradually flow in through the open space near the ceiling until the whole apartment was filled, when I should be drowned like a rat. I anathematized my own imprudence a hundred times, and at last made up my mind to die. I felt that even if I gave the paper up the Manvers family would consider I knew too much for them.

I have no time to describe that day. My hair grew gray before the sunset, and then the water came pouring in. I shouted, screamed, laughed in madness, and then cried. The horrid liquid

rose higher and higher around my body—around my neck—up—up—up to my parched lips. Then I heard a maddening noise in my ears, and the rest was silence.

When I recovered consciousness I was in my own bed, and Spencer was by my side. I was rescued only at the last moment—when actually drowning! The old man in the lodging-house, who had been kind to Miss Haviland, was not deaf. At an early hour he set out to Kensington to see General Manvers and get paid for his information. He told the general, his wife, and son where the young lady was, and that suggested the letter written in Miss Haviland's name to trap me. Mrs. Manvers wrote the letter. About four o'clock the old man regretted the evil he had done, and, having heard that I was to be taken to the old house in Bermondsey, he made a clean breast of it to Mr. Spencer, who was still at my home waiting for me. He went to the nearest station and got a dozen consta-

bles, who were only in time to clutch me from the jaws of death.

Mrs. Manvers and her son fled with the bulk of Sir Dexter's wealth. The general himself confessed. The "directions" fled with thirty thousand pounds, leaving him about fifty thousand pounds, the balance having been spent. The papers he stole from Sir Dexter's safe were bills for money he owed his friend and benefactor. By securing these the debt was canceled. His chief confession, however, was that he put a powder prepared by his Indian wife into his friend's drink, and his belief was that that stopped the heart's action. He died in delirium tremens before he could be arrested.

Miss Kate Haviland recovered a few thousand pounds—just enough to make her happy as the wife of the rising artist, Ambrose Spencer. They are my most faithful friends, for they feel that it was on their account that I was "DOOMED TO A TERRIBLE DEATH."

D. W. STEVENS, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE NEW YORK DETECTIVE LIBRARY: No. 368, "The James Boys as Guerrillas and The Train Robbers." No. 364, "The Man From Nowhere and His Adventures With the James Boys." No. 358, "Sam Sixkiller, the Cherokee Detective; or, The James Boys' Most Dangerous Foe." No. 356, "The James Boys; or, The Bandit King's Last Shot." No. 348, "The James Boys and the Detectives." No. 342, "Chasing the James Boys; or, A Detective's Dangerous Case." No. 339, "The Dumb Boy Detective; or, The Shadow on the Felon's Path."

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