

The Mark of Cain

By Edith G. Bayne

OLD EDWIN HARLEY lay dying. Some men, having come to the end, are permitted peacefully to pass out leaving a gentle smile upon unconvulsed features, leaving, too, a circle of mourners about the bed.

But death to Old Harley seemed slow of approach. People said he had been dying on his feet for weeks past, and that the end, when it did come, would be painful and long drawn out. Their opinion was justified by the fact. Nothing now was keeping the fire of life burning in the feeble old frame, but the indomitable spirit of the man—that spirit that had made him what he was. Success and wealth had been his—solely through his own efforts. Love and affection he had scarcely known, being too busy making his castles-in-Spain materialize. Then, realizing at last when it was too late, that at the grave's edge gold is of no account, the old man's starved heart began to cry out for the only being he had ever loved—his son Gilbert. Self-seeking friends there were a plenty, but these, together with the nurse and the servants, had been banished from his presence. All he wanted now was Gilbert—Gilbert, the scapegrace, who was serving a term of years in the penitentiary, ten miles away. Alice, Gilbert's wife, stole in and out of the room occasionally, but Old Harley would have none of her. "Gilbert—bring me Gilbert!" he would cry, raising himself in bed to point a trembling forefinger at the girl.

Then he would fall to whining and moaning in senile, helpless wrath, demanding to know why his child could not be brought to him, and his claw-like hands would revert to their almost ceaseless fluttering over and clutching of the counterpane—one of the surest harbingers of the approaching dissolution.

Alice Harley, when certain that he could not observe her, would drop into a seat by the fire, where, with bent head, she would moodily watch the flames, as though searching there for a solution of the problem. How to get Gilbert! Could he be brought from the prison by special permission? No, not even rich Edwin Harley could purchase a few hours' respite from a stern sentence such as Gilbert's was. He might start up in bed shrieking—the old man, with a face like a mask of death—with his cavern-like black eyes glowing fiercely, almost as in health and strength; he might cry out maledictions upon all and sundry. There was no use in trying his old masterful methods in a situation such as this. The law is invincible.

Alice had to acknowledge that the law was right in this case. Nevertheless, she had always borne a guilty conscience over that terrible affair of a year ago.

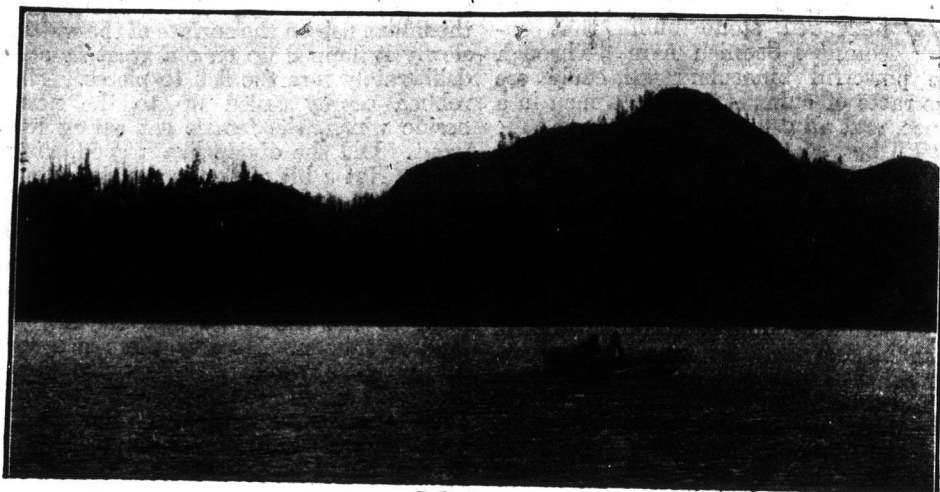
tempered brother, pretending she liked Walter best. How criminally foolish she had been! Yet she had atoned insofar as she could, for she had married Gilbert in prison. Was that not test enough? The world, after that, could not call her a trifle. In her heart she knew that her husband had not intended to kill his brother that dark night. It was Gilbert's temper, and, alas, Gilbert was paying the penalty. So of what use to say more?

Alice rose from time to time and crossed the room to where a cradle stood just inside the door. Here lay Gilbert junior. It was a comfort to the girl this lonely Christmas Eve to have the infant near her, where she could watch it and her other charge at the same time. In the pauses of ministering to her aged father-in-law, she would croon softly to the child who was awakened now and then by the old man's high-pitched querulous voice.

Without, the storm howled fiercely. Swirling snow was whisked momentarily against the windows of the house, and the branches of a bare old thorn tree scraped and creaked against the roof, like an angry spirit. Alice Harley was glad to be indoors upon such a night.

This was one of his lucid moments when he remembered the peculiar significance of a mark on Gilbert's forehead. It was but a small blood-red blemish that was quite hidden under his hair at the top

back now and the flakes did not sting him in the face. Still, it was cold—with a numbing chill—and the brave captain was hungry into the bargain. He hoped fervently that he was approaching a town



B.C. Scenery

of his brow. But a foolish nurse, and many other sensation-loving people, had dubbed it the mark of the first murderer, and so it had clung to him—this annoying, frayed-out bit of superstition. It had bothered him at times when he thought

of village—or, failing these, a hospitable farmstead. When one has been accused for months to the mild air of old England, the piercing keen cold of the Canadian winter strikes right to the centre of one's bones.

The light came on, it grew brighter with every step, and presently he saw other lights. Yes, it was a village, thank heaven.

"I'll stop at this first house, it looks hospitable, and thaw myself out," said the captain to himself. "And I'll tie you up, old pal, in some sheltered nook," he went on, stroking the horse's neck fondly, "and let a little hay for you."

The rider dismounted stiffly and clumsily—for his fingers were half-frozen, tethered his beast to a poplar in the lee of a small shed. Then he approached the house door, stamping his feet to start the circulation. It was a small house and the lower rooms were in darkness. Only one light shone from the upper storey, and it was a dim one.

"The good wife will think I'm Santa Claus," chuckled the captain, as he knocked on the door, after trying to ring. (The bell was muffled for some reason.)

Long moments passed and then after he had knocked again he heard footsteps within. They seemed to halt in their approach, as though their owner dreaded opening the door. It was close upon midnight. But at last fingers fumbled at the lock and the knob turned. A woman's slender form stood faintly outlined in the dark little entry.

"May I have shelter from the storm, please?" spoke the captain. "I've lost my bearings a bit, but if you will allow me to sit near the fire for a few moments and then direct me—"

"Come in," said the woman, opening the door quite wide. "What a night to be abroad."

The captain, looking like a huge polar bear, entered, shaking as much of the snow from his garments as he could. The woman turned to a gas-jet on the wall and turned the tiny blue flame up until the small hall was lighted.

"I have a fire in the kitchen," she said, "if you will just step out."

"Thank you," was the grateful response.

The captain pulled off his fur cap and his riding gauntlets and removed his outer coat, disclosing beneath the uniform of a Canadian soldier. It was at this moment that the woman turning, with one arm holding back the portieres, met his glance, directed steadily upon her.

One long moment each gazed into the eyes of the other.

The woman was first to find voice.

"Walter—my God!" she breathed.

"Alice!"

"Is it you—or am I out of my head?"

She had whitened to the hue of death and stood clutching the door-frame for support.

"Alice—as I live! Where am I—whose house—"

"We moved—just after—"

"And—you live here now?"

"Father is living with us. The big house at N— is closed. He couldn't bear—we couldn't bear it—after the—"

"And whose house is this? Not—"

not Gilbert's?" he asked, quickly, catching at the girl's arm.

She nodded.

"You married him?"



The Giant Douglas Firs of British Columbia

At times it seemed to her that the old tree was possessed of human hands that implored entrance and would not be denied. She had worked herself up to a pitch almost of terror at the sound. "The mark! The mark!" shrieked the old man, suddenly. "It was but a

of it. In later years he had almost forgotten it. Then when he had left Walter, his elder brother, lying there so still and white on the edge of the old swamp, Gilbert had recollected.

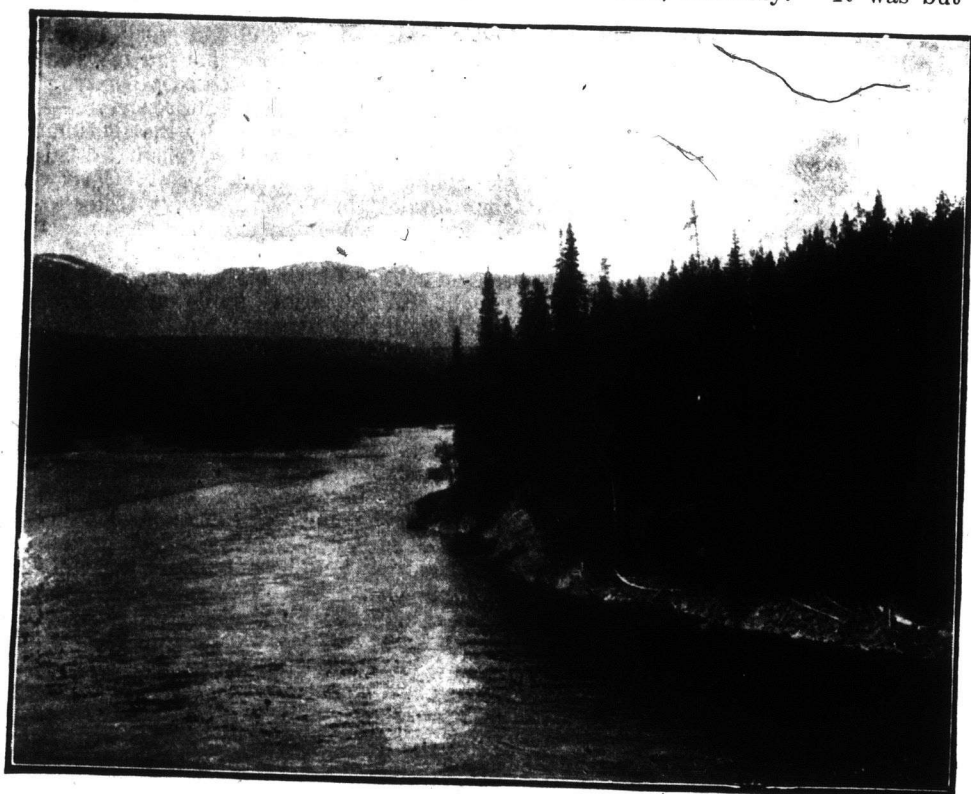
But to do him justice, he had given himself up. The police had not been obliged to hound him down.

Out in the storm this Christmas Eve a solitary traveller was making but poor headway against the elements. Like a great white wall, the seething blizzard seemed to shut out the world and everything therein from the pathway of man. Every moment or two the rider would halt his plunging horse in the drifts to listen for sound of human feet or voices. Nothing could be heard but the wind and the gusty breathing of himself and his mount. They had been travelling since noon and the early December darkness had closed down at four o'clock, while they were still on the open prairie.

Now, having entirely lost his bearings, the rider was, to say the least, nonplussed. Alarm he did not yet feel. Was he not a soldier and a captain of soldiers? Since noon he had rounded up and enrolled fifty recruits for the new company which was to refill the ranks of the slain in the gallant 90th Regiment. So what wonder that there was room for little else than exultation in the rider's heart? But this getting lost in a prairie blizzard—he that was prairie-born and prairie-bred—savored somewhat of the ludicrous.

"Ha, a light!" Drawing up the reins again he pressed his beast forward. So many times this night he had fancied he saw a light and always he had missed it.

The starry gleam was but a faint nebulous sort of speck off to the right. He drew sharply on the right-hand rein and the horse swerved aside and started bravely away for this promising point on the horizon. The snow still came thickly down, but the wind was on his



Where the lordly salmon are caught

Gilbert had gotten off with a much lighter sentence than would have been the case had all the evidence been forthcoming. She had never really loved Walter. She had always enjoyed taunting and teasing the younger and more passionate and hot-

birthmark and meant nothing. I tell you my son is no murderer!"

Alice winced. She shut her eyes, shuddering at the appearance of Old Harley, sitting up there in bed in denunciatory attitude, his white lips shaking.