

THE STROLLERS

By FREDERIC S. ISHAM.

Author of "Under the Rose"

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"You meddlesome fool!" exclaimed Mauglie, lifting a revolver and discharging it in the direction of the voice. Evidently the bullet, passing through the panel of the door, found its mark for the report was followed by a cry of pain.

This plaint was answered from the distance, and soon a number of anti-furriers hastened to the spot. Mauglie, in vicious humor, moved toward the threshold. One of the panels was already broken and an arm thrust into the opening. The land baron bent forward and coolly clipped his weapon to the member, the loud discharge being succeeded by an unguarded quarter, but before he could recover his self-possession his hand was struck heavily, and the revolver fell with a clatter to the floor.

His assailant quickly grasped the weapon, presenting it to the breast of the surprised landowner, who looked not into the face of an unknown assailant, but into the stern, familiar countenance of Saint-Proper.

"You here?" stammered the land baron as he involuntarily recoiled from his own weapon.

The soldier contemptuously thrust the revolver into his pocket. "As you see," he said coldly, "and in a moment they're indicating the door—'will be here!'"

"You think to turn me over to them?" exclaimed the other violently. "But you do not know me! This is no quarrel of yours. Give me my weapon and let me fight it out with them!"

"By heaven, I am half minded to take you at your word! But you shall have one chance, a slender one! There is the window. It opens on the porch!"

"And if I refuse?"

"They have brought a rope with them. Go or hang!"

The heir hesitated, but as he pondered the alternatives were effectively shutting the heavy door.

"The serfs are here! The drawers of water and beavers of wood have arisen! Hang the land baron! Hang the feudal lord!"

A braver man than Mauglie might have been cowed by this chorus, but after pausing irresolutely, weighing the chances of life and death, gaining resolution upon the face of the apprehensive girl and venomously at the intruder, he finally made a virtue of necessity, and he sprang upon the balcony—none too soon, for a moment later the door burst open and an inconspicuous element rushed into the room.

Not until then did the soldier discover that he had overlooked the possible unpleasantness of remaining in the land baron's stead, for the anti-furriers promptly threw themselves upon him. The first to grapple with him was a burlesque, thick ribbed man of extraordinary stature, taller than the soldier if not so well built—a Goliath, indeed, with arms long as windmills.

"Stand back, lad," he roared, "and let me throw him!" And Dick the toll-man rushed at Saint-Proper with furious attack. Soon they were chest to chest, each with his chin on his opponent's shoulder.

"No! I am not the land baron," he interposed.

"You aren't?" growled the disappointed leasholder. "Then who are you? An anti-furrier?" he added suspiciously.

"I am no friend of his," continued the soldier in a firm voice. "You had one purpose in seeking him; I am following him when I met you in the grove."

"Then how came you here—in this room?"

"By the way of a tree, the branch of which reaches to the window."

"The land baron was in this room a moment ago. Where is he now?"

For answer Saint-Proper pointed to the window.

"When you let him?"

"We're waiting time," impatiently shouted the burly borer who had disclaimed the soldier's identity to the patron. "Come!"—with an oath—"do you want to lose him after all? He can't be far away. And this one isn't our man!"

For a second the crowd wavered, then with a vengeance about they shot from the room, disappearing as quickly as they had come. Led by Little Thunder, who, being a man of peace, had discreetly remained without, they had reached the gate in their headlong pursuit when they were met by a body of horsemen about to turn into the yard as the anti-furriers were hurrying out. At the sight of this formidable band the leasholders immediately scattered. Taken equally by surprise, the others made little effort to intercept them, and soon they had vanished over field and down dale. Then the horsemen turned, rode through the avenue of trees and drew up noisily before the porch.

From their window the soldier and his companion observed the abrupt entrance at the entrance of the manor grounds and the dispersion of the leasholders like leaves before the au-

turn guests. Constance, who had breathlessly watched the flight of the erstwhile assailants, felt her doubts reawakened as the horsemen drew up before the door.

"Age they coming back?" she asked, involuntarily clasping the arm of her companion.

She who had been so courageous and self-controlled throughout that long, trying day on a sudden felt strangely weak and dependent. He leaned from the narrow casement to command the view below, striving to pierce the gloom, and she, following his example, gazed over his shoulder. Either a gust of air had extinguished the light in the candelabra on the mantle or the tallow dip had burst itself out for the room was now in total darkness, so that they could dimly see without being seen.

"These men are not the ones who just fled," he replied.

"Then who are they?" she half whispered, drawing unconsciously closer at that moment of jeopardy, her face distant but a curl's length.

Below the men were dismounting, tying the horses among the trees. Like a noisy band of troopers, they were talking excitedly, but their words were indistinguishable.

"Why do you suppose they fled from them?" she continued.

Was it a tendril of the vine that touched the cheek of Constance? He started, and she felt toward the lane in the open borderland.

"Clearly these men are not the leasholders. They may be seeking you."

She turned eagerly from the window. In the darkness their hands met. Momentary compunction made her pause, how she had held them—not long—but a moment—yet long enough!

"They're coming in! They're downstairs!" she exclaimed excitedly.

A flickering light below suddenly threw dim moving shadows upon the ceiling of the hall. As she spoke she stepped forward and stumbled over the debris at her feet. His arm was about her almost before she started exclamation had fallen from her lips, for a moment her shapely young figure rested against him. But quickly she extricated herself, and they picked their way cautiously over the bestrewn threshold into the hall.

At the balcony's end they paused. Reconnoitering at the turn, they were afforded full survey of the lower hall, where the latest comers had taken possession. Few in number, the gathering had come to a dead stop, regarding in surprise the broken door and the furniture wantonly demolished.

With unusual pallor of face the young girl stepped from behind the sheltering post. Her hand, resting doubtfully upon the balustrade, sought in unconscious appeal her companion's arm as they descended together the broad steps.

In the partial darkness the men ill-discerned the figures, but the girl's bearing in the relation of outlaws leaning against the obscure background.

"Why," muttered one in surprise, "is not the patron! And here, if I am not mistaken, is the lady Mr. Barnes is so anxious about."

"Mr. Barnes—is he with you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Where is he?"

"We left him a ways down the road and—"

The sound of a horse's hoof beats in front of the manor, breaking in on this explanation, was followed by hurried footsteps upon the porch.

The new-comers raised on the threshold, with an exclamation of joy, Constance rushed to him and in a moment was clasped in the arms of the now jubilant Barnes.

CHAPTER XV.

NEXT morning the sun had made but little progress in the heavens and the dew was not yet off the grass when the party, an imposing cavalcade, issued from the manor on the return journey. Their horse coming was uneventful. The barn burners had disappeared like rabbits in their holes; the manor whose master had fled, deserted even by the faithful Olykooka, was seen for the last time from the brow of the hill, and then, with its gables and extensive vines, vanished from sight.

"Well," remarked Barnes as they sped down the road, "it was a happy coincidence for me that led the anti-furriers to the patron's house last night."

And he proceeded to explain how when he had sought the magistrate he found that official organizing a posse comitatus for the purpose of quelling an anticipated uprising of leasholders. In answer to the manager's complaint the custodian of the law had asserted his first duty was generally to preserve the peace; afterward he would attend to Barnes' particular grievance. Obligated to content himself as best he might with this meager assurance, the manager, at his wife's end, had accompanied the party whose way had led them in the direction of the carriage had taken and whose final destination—an unlooked-for consummation—had proved the ultimate goal of his own desire.

On reaching, that afternoon, the town where they were playing Susan was the first of the company to greet Constance.

"Now that it's all over," she laughed, "nearly every you that you were rescued by a handsome cavalier."

"Really," drawled Kate, "I should have preferred not being rescued. The owner of a coach, a coat of arms, silver harness and the best horses in the country! I could drive on forever!"

But later, alone with Susan, she looked hard at her.

"So you fainted yesterday?"

"Oh, I'm a perfect coward!" returned the other frankly.

Kate's mind rapidly swept the rough and troubled past—the hapless sea upon which they had embarked so long ago.

"Dear me!" she remarked quietly, and Susan turned to conceal a blush.

Owing to the magistrate's zeal in relating the story of the rescue the players' success that night was great.

"The hall was filled to overflowing," says the manager in his date book. "At the end of the second act the little girl was called out, and, much to her inward discomfiture, the magistrate presented her with a bouquet and the audience with a rousing speech. Taking advantage of the occasion, he pointed a political moral from the tale and referred to his own candidacy to the legislature, where he would look after the interests of the rank and file. It was time the landowners were taught their places—not by violence, oh, no; no French methods for Americans—but by ballot, not by bullet. Let the people vote for an amendment to the constitution!"

"As we were preparing to leave the theater the magistrate appeared before the scenes. 'Of course, Mr. Barnes, you will appear against the patron?' he said. 'His prosecution will do much to fortify the issue. 'That is all very fine,' I returned satisfactorily. 'But will the Lord provide while we are trying the case? Shall we have a show trial?'"

"Well, well," he said good naturedly, "it's against your interests I have no wish to press the matter. Whereupon we shook hands heartily and parted. I looked around for Constance, but she had left the hall with Saint-Proper. Have I been wise in asking him to join the chariot? I sometimes half regret we are beholden to him—"

From the Shindenge valley Barnes' company proceeded by easy stages to Ohio, where the roads were more difficult than any the chariot had yet encountered.

The least of the strollers' troubles, however, at this crucial period of their wanderings were the bad roads, the greatest being a temperance orator who thundered forth denunciations of rum and the blithering of the bitterness of a Jovial Investigating prodigate Rome.

Whatever he was, "poet, orator and dramatist, an English Garibaldi," or "mountebank," "bumbug" or "backslider," Mr. Gough was even at that early period an antagonist not to be despised. He had been out of pocket and out at the elbows; indeed, his wardrobe now was mean and scanty. Want and privation had been his companions, and from his grievous experiences he had become a sensational story teller of low life and penury. Certainly Barnes had reason to lament the coincidence which brought players and lecturer into town at the same time, especially as the latter was heretofore a successful and well-to-do man, aided under the auspices of the Band of Hope.

Exceptional inducements could not tempt the villagers to the theater. Even an epilogue gained for them none of Mr. Gough's adherents. "The Temperance Doctor" failed miserably, "Drunkard's Warning" admonished pitifully few, while as for "Drunkard's Doom" no one cared what it might be and left him to it.

After such a disastrous engagement the manager not only found himself at the end of his resources, but hopelessly indebted, and with much reluctance he laid the matter before the soldier, who had already advanced a certain sum after their conversation the night of the country dance and had also come to his assistance on an occasion when the box office receipts and expenses had failed to meet. Moreover, he had been a free, even careless, giver, not looking after his business concerns with the prudent anxiety of a merchant whose ventures are ships at the wide mercy of a troubled sea. To this third applicant, however, he did not answer immediately.

"Is it as bad as that?" he said at length thoughtfully.

"Yes, it's hard to speak about it to you," replied the manager, with some pride, "but at New Orleans."

The soldier encountered his troubled gaze. "See if you can sell my horse," he answered.

"You mean"—began the other, surprised.

"If I had I win!" exclaimed the manager. "But he put out his hand indignantly. 'I beg your pardon. If I had known—but if we're ever out of this mess I may give a better account of my stewardship.'"

In spite of Barnes' refusal the soldier offered to sell his horse to the landlord, but the latter curtly declined.

"I'll have horses enough to 'eat their heads off' during the winter, as he expressed it.

Thus it was that the strollers perforce reached a desperate conclusion when making their way from the theater on the last evening. By remaining longer they would become the more heavily involved; in going—without their hosts' permission—they would be taking the shortest route toward an honorable settlement in the near future—a paradoxical flight from the brunt of their troubles to meet them squarely. This, to Barnes, ample reason for unceremonious departure was heartily approved by the company in council assembled around the town pump.

"Stay and become a county burden, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Adams tragically.

"As well be buried alive as anchored here!" fretfully added Susan.

"The council is dissolved," said the manager promptly, "with no one the wiser—except the town pump."

"An ally of Mr. Gough," suggested Adonis.

Thus more merrily than could have been expected, with such a distasteful enterprise before them, they resumed their way. It was disagreeable underfoot, and they presented an odd appearance, each one with a light. Mrs. Adams, old campaigner that she was, led the way for the ladies, elastic and chatty as though promenade down Broadway on a spring morning. With their lanterns and the purpose they had in view they likened themselves to a band of conspirators. As Barnes marched ahead with his light Susan playfully called him Guy Fawkes of gunpowder fame, whereupon his mind almost misgave him concerning the grave adventure upon which they were embarked.

The wind was blowing furiously, doors and windows creaked, and all the demons of unrest were moaning that night in the hubbub of sounds. Save for a flickering candle in the hall the tavern was dark, and landlord and maids had long since retired to rest. Amid the noise of the rain and the sobbing of the wind trunks were lowered from the window, the chariot and property wagon were drawn from the stable yard and the horses led from their stalls. In a trice they were ready and the ladies, wrapped in their cloaks, were in the coach. But the clatter of boots, the neighing of a horse or some other untoward circumstance aroused the landlord. A window in the second story was up and out popped a head in a nightgown.

"Here! What are you about?" cried the man.

"Leaving!" said the manager ironically.

The landlord threw up his arms like Shylock at the loss of his money bags.

"The reckoning!" he exclaimed.

"What about the reckoning?"

"One pound of flesh, sir!" replied Barnes.

"My score! My score!" shouted the other. "You would not leave without settling it!"

"Go to bed, sir," was the answer, "and let honest people depart without hindrance. You will be paid out of our first profits."

To be Continued.

SINGLE TAX ADDRESSES.

The religious and social reform lecture before the auspices of the Single Tax Association at the Grand Opera House on Sunday afternoon last was delivered by four young members of the association, namely, Lewis A. Kerwin, Charles Kerr, Alan G. Thompson and Walter H. Roebuck. Mr. Lewis A. Kerwin claimed that by and through the private ownership of land labor is robbed, the landlord under the right of law commits robbery, every effort to raise the price of land, and in spite of the advancement through the advent of electricity and other inventions our civilization remains almost stationary.

Mr. Alan G. Thompson began by telling a story of a missionary, who suggested a converted chief to charge for water that was situated within his vicinity, in-"

stead of fighting those who wanted it, the apostle and modern pagan worshippers claimed that the missionary was not right. The Single Tax doctrine does not hold that those who use the land, but the holder, then he will be compelled to use it, or sell it. Single Tax will destroy slums, give men good wages and plenty of employment. It is repealing the laws which legislate, the Single Tax is class legislation, for our policy is to prevent one class from trading upon another, for greater than charity is justice.

Mr. Walter Roebuck allowed that while other associations were doing good work, their objects were but mediums. Land is absolutely necessary to live upon, and as no labor produced it, taking it was an injustice to man. When we have laws that permit men to acquire land upon which others want to live, then we strike at the natural laws, hence the injustice. We should not consider for one moment whom it affects annually, but we have a right to consider whom it affects socially and morally. A society must become just before it becomes benevolent.

We claim natural opportunities for all men for that which God gave to supply all man's wants.

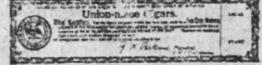
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No Lack of Mechanics

Editor Toller:—In the Mail and Empire of January 21 I noticed a report that Algoma farmers had petitioned the Government, through the Hon. Clifford Sifton, to bring out more immigrants to overrun the labor market of Ontario, and also denying the statements of fact, made by the recent labor deputations before that gentleman.

Now, Mr. Editor, what are we to consider the facts in this case.

First, we know that there is beyond a doubt, that the centres are already overcrowded with labor, both skilled and unskilled, as the recent public meeting of 500 unemployed held in Toronto proves beyond a doubt.

Secondly, we would ask these farmers what remuneration they are offering this particular class of labor which they claim is so very, very scarce. This is a vital point in this case, for if they are not willing to pay their labor a fair living wage, but expect to obtain their farm help under the old conditions, that have existed in the past, it is any wonder that they cannot obtain sufficient help. To sum the matter up I would quote you a few facts: I recently learned in a visit up through Northern Ontario, and I think they will clearly demonstrate that they cannot obtain sufficient help. To sum the matter up I would quote you a few facts: I recently learned in a visit up through Northern Ontario, and I think they will clearly demonstrate that they cannot obtain sufficient help. To sum the matter up I would quote you a few facts: I recently learned in a visit up through Northern Ontario, and I think they will clearly demonstrate that they cannot obtain sufficient help.

Now, is it any wonder their help is gradually leaving and drifting to the centres when they are only paid this meagrely pitiful rate?

Now I contend that the farmers are entirely wrong in this case, and are looking to the wrong solution of the problem. The fact is that labor is past that stage when they have a most anxious phase of the question that strikes me were compelled to accept a mere existence out of what we produced. But we now ask and demand a fair day's wage for every fair day's work. Another phase of the question that strikes me is this, and it cannot be disputed: Farm labor is compelled to work long hours, in fact, any old hours that Mr. Farmer sees fit. Is it any wonder their help is forsaking them for the more attractive and better financial offerings, the short hours, etc., which hold out an inducement to them in our towns and cities.

Regarding that part of the protest relating to skilled mechanics, these farmers are simply talking through their hats, excuse me for the slang expression; we can afford to partly overlook their statements in this respect. As their over-zealousness has simply led them on to make this very wild statement, they are simply speaking here through sheer ignorance, and we would respectfully ask them to investigate the conditions existing in our towns and cities, and they can rest assured as long as they stick right to the facts and are truthful, we will not bother them.

In conclusion, I contend that the farmers' attitude in asking for more immigrants is not going to assist them any as they will find out that history will only repeat itself, and if we succeed in their efforts they will still find that farm help is as scarce as ever. The solution lies in wages and general conditions.

The farmer will be slowly but surely educated to the fact that they will be obliged to use a fair day's wage and a fair day's work, and until they do this farm labor will be at a premium.

The organized workers must put up a solid front against these bribed and wily attacks. Let them present the facts in the case and I have no doubt they will be successful in their endeavors to maintain the present living conditions, and if they open their eyes to the balance box they will most assuredly reap whereof they sow. But let them close their eyes to these facts and not raise any protest against these things

and there is no telling what this agitation for immigration will result in, but it will not be improved conditions.

Thomas Sweet,
One of the Mechanics of Berlin, Ont.

THE GRAND TRUNK EXHIBIT AT THE WORLD'S FAIR.

By Louis Larive.

St. Louis, Jan. 21.—Mr. H. R. Charlton, advertising agent for the Grand Trunk System of Canada, has just completed arrangements for an allotment in the Forestry, Fish and Game Building.

The Grand Trunk Company will have a very extensive display at the World's Fair and intends to show the game and fishery products of the famous resorts crossed by the pioneer Canadian line.

Mr. Charlton has just given out the contract for the construction of the Grand Trunk's booth, which will be most elaborate, he will return to St. Louis in ten days to supervise the work of decoration and preliminary installation.

Among the securities which the Grand Trunk will reproduce in the Forestry, Fish and Game Building are the following:

Paranorm of the City of Quebec, the Gibraltar of America; views and fish products of the Maine seacoast; among the New England hills; views and specimens of game and fish of the White Mountains, N.H.; the Grand Trunk Victoria Jubilee Bridge, of Montreal; the shooting of the Lachine Rapids; views of Kingston, Toronto and Niagara Falls, where the Grand Trunk has now constructed a continuous double track extending as far east as Quebec and Portland, Me.

The Highlands of Ontario will also be reproduced by specimens which will prove indeed the sportsman's paradise.

Muskoka Lakes, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful regions in America, with their red deer, wild ducks, partridges and hares, will have a most ambitious representation here during the World's Fair. Thousands of American tourists have visited the Muskoka Lakes during the past season, hence the pretentious scale which it is to give them in the Grand Trunk's representative exhibit.

Mr. Charlton is authority for the statement that the exhibit of the Grand Trunk at the Universal Exhibition of 1904 will be second to none, and far beyond anything presented at previous exhibitions.

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