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The Vindication of the Law.

An Incident in the Life of the Mounted
Police When the Canadian West
was Young.

By Captain R. G. Mathews, Who Was "The Kid" in the Tale Set Forth.

(Saturday Night Toronto.)

To any one not familiar with the lay of the land in Southern Alberta, the name of "Standoff" will not convey much information or meaning. If a person, however, will examine a map of the Canadian West he will find that there is such a location on the north bank of the Belly River just above where the Belly and the Kootenai, or Waterton rivers come together, about 40 miles north of the Montana Boundary. What, however, the map will not inform him is the fact that this rather peculiar name came into being owing to the fact that it was in this vicinity that "Liver-Eating Johnson" stood off a posse of

the North West Mounted Police in the days when the West was an infant in swaddling clothes. Poses of Mounted Police did not take kindly to such a process, neither was it one which was permitted to occur more than once in a blue moon. Indeed it is doubtful if the entire annals of the Police Force include a single other similar instance, which perhaps explains why those who were concerned in it considered the incident of sufficient importance as to warrant its being perpetuated for ever and ever, or at any rate as long as Southern Alberta has its being.

This being satisfactorily explained, it is proper to state that what follows is not a realistic description of how "Liver-Eating Johnson" stood the Police off, or why, but is merely an introduction to the fact that on a certain morning in the Spring of '88, there at the place which bore the name of "Standoff" on the North bank of the Belly River just above its junction with the Kootenai, were at their wits' end to accommodate all comers, for in addition to the one Sergeant, one Corporal and fourteen Constables who composed the regular strength of the detachment on that date, it had also as temporary guests a four-in-hand teamster with his off-man who had arrived with a load of rations the previous day from the post at Fort Macleod, in addition to a flying patrol of three men and a non-commissioned officer who for the last month or so had been keeping their eagle eyes on the doings of a predatory band of Stoney Indians which had just "blown in" to get washed-up and rested. As the shack consisted merely of four log walls with a mud roof and a board floor, two windows and a door, and as most of the available space was taken up with just enough two-decker bunks to accommodate the permanent residents, the transient visitors piled themselves around in the few odd vacant spots which presented themselves. There were no unnecessary frills inside. No partitions or cupboards or anything of that sort; merely the one room which while remaining outwardly the same, really transformed itself, automatically, into bed-room, dining-room, kitchen, smoking-room, etc., etc., without causing its occupants the inconvenience of having to walk from one to another. A stable with accommodation for 20 horses completed the establishment of the detachment. On the other side of the river stretched the Blood Indian Reservation, a wide expanse of some 400,000 acres inhabited at that time by between four and five thousand Blood Indians. With the exception of a couple of trading posts and three or four scattered ranches along the river, and the officials of the Indian Agency some distance below, there was no undue crowding on the prairie.

On the morning in question two Mounted Policemen were making their way at a jog trot along a trail which skirted the north bank of the Belly River. They were travelling due west towards the blue peaks of the Rockies, some thirty miles away, and as the trail followed the bench-land, the winding river and the wooded bottoms were unfolded from time to time below them, and the acrid smoke of drift-wood fires arising from Indian villages and the incessant barking of Indian dogs were evidence of life otherwise not discernible. Both policemen wore the brown canvas stable-jacket and peaked fore-and-aft caps, the blue-black breeches with the wide yellow stripe and the black riding boots which was the usual prairie uniform in those days; both had their respective Winchester carbines slung across the horns of the saddles and around the waist of each was strapped

a service revolver of the British bulldog pattern. The similarity of the costumes did no tend to the wearers for Rory O'More was an old hand with a record of twelve years' service in the Force, and would never see forty again; while his companion, "The Kid," was a mere boy who had yet to complete a year's service and who less than a year before had been an insignificant city clerk in old London and who had never heard of the N. W. M. P. Fate has an autocratic habit of moving human pawns around so that it almost seems hap-hazard, and fate must have been working overtime this morning when it selected these two Policemen to carry out the little job it had in view. Word had filtered thro' to the Detachment that a certain young Indian had ventured back from across the International Line whither he had executed a strategic retreat a few months previously after having pulled off a successful horse-stealing stunt the details of which had later on been painstakingly gathered up by one of the detachment. The details of the crime together with a description of its perpetrator were subsequently tucked away in a pigeon-hole of a certain cabinet which was to be found in the orderly room at the headquarters of the division, and a police circle setting forth the necessary details was sent to all the outlying Posts, while the force calmly proceeded with its daily round and waited in confidence for what was sure to occur sooner or later, viz: the return of a certain young Indian. They always came back; so had this one; it was a lead-pipe clinch.

What rather took the gift of the gingerbread in this particular instance, however, was the fact that the young Indian happened to belong to the band of Crop-Eared-Wolf, and it was this circumstance that seemed to indicate that fate had deliberately gone out of its way to test the calibre of the two men jogging westward that spring morning. Crop-Eared-Wolf was a minor chief who in accordance with the tribal system prevailing in the Blackfoot Nation (of which the Bloods formed an important part) was the head man in the village or camp which bore his name and was in a large measure responsible for its conduct. These camps occurred every mile or two along the river for a matter of 40 miles or more; Crop-Eared-Wolf's Camp, Running Wolf's, Bull Black Fat's and so on, and some distance up the river was Crop-Eared-Wolf's, in the shelter of which the young man wanted was, it had been reported, to be found. The minor chief himself bore the reputation of a bad Indian, notwithstanding his prominent position, and the members of his band were constantly getting into trouble, knowing well that Crop-Eared-Wolf could always be relied upon to place every possible obstacle in the path of those whose duty it was to carry out the law. Vary-

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ing their progress with an occasional center, the two policemen followed the gradually rising land towards the foothills; discussing as they rode along the probable difficulties which lay ahead of them.

Crop-Eared-Wolf's camp was much as usual that morning. Seen from a distance it was beautiful, with its back-ground of green cottonwoods and grey buck brush, the river winding and sparkling in the sunshine, and the mountains towering behind. Blue wisps of smoke curled upward from the open tops of the tipis scattered about in picturesque disorder, while a few old squaws poked around attending to the chores of the camp—gathering fire-wood, fetching water from the river, etc. The beauty of the distance ceased abruptly as actual contact with the camp was made, for rags and decaying bones and refuse of every description littered the ground in all directions and poisoned the atmosphere. The return of "The man-who-never-ties-his-moccasins" from across the Line, where he had been visiting some relatives on the Blackfoot Reservation waiting the time when the details of a certain horse-stealing escapade might reasonably be expected to have become dulled in the recollections of those concerned, had been looked forward to by his relatives and friends and he had received a warm welcome on his arrival. He had been quite an ordinary mission-bred youth previous to his hasty Southern trip, but he had come to be regarded since as more or less of a hero who was entitled to take his place amongst the warriors of the tribe. The fact that he had flouted the Police and stolen a bunch of horses being looked upon in much the same light as though he had successfully passed through the ordeal of the sun dance. There were, of course, these same police to be reckoned with, but the exercise of a reasonable amount of caution and the assistance of his admiring friends, should trouble arise, would doubtless smooth over any unpleasantness along that line, and anyway they had probably forgotten the whole affair. So the returned hero smoked his Kin-kin-kin and preened himself before the young maidens and swaggered around amongst the young bucks—and Crop-Eared-Wolf gathered around him some of his cronies and spat and smoked over his lodge fire and talked of many things. Forging the river half a mile below came riding along the two men from the Standoff Detachment.

A medium sizer man with a bristling black moustache and heavy beetling eyebrows, Constable Rory O'More was far too experienced in Indian wiles and ways to underestimate the danger of the job on hand. Approaching the camp at a hand gallop, the two policemen rapidly threaded their way to the Chief's tent, scattering the yapping dogs right and left in their progress. "Don't get off your horse, and don't for the love of Mike pull your gun, no matter what happens," were Rory's last instructions to The Kid, "Just sit tight and hold my horse, and keep your eyes skinned, while I handle this crop-eared devil." and he was down and pushing his way through the hanging curtain formed the tent door, almost before the horse had come to a stop. The conversation inside commenced in an every day tone of voice, but soon gave signs of animation until the Chief's loud guttural tones could be heard all over the camp and Indians of all ages and both sexes soon came pouring out of the other tipis and gathered round the Chief's. When Constable O'More emerged from the tent he was followed up closely by Crop-Eared-Wolf loudly denying that the wanted man was in the camp or that he ever had

been and it was just at this moment that "The Kid" observed a man creep out from a tepee in the rear and hold away into the adjoining brush, word of which was duly passed along to his companion. Very deliberately O'More unclasped a pair of hand-cuffs from his belt and dangling them before the Chief, he bluntly told him that he was a liar, and that if the man wanted was not forthcoming within five minutes then Crop-Eared-Wolf himself should go in his place and answer to the charge of interfering with the police while in the performance of their duty. Paying scant attention to the angry mob which crowded around him, he pulled out his watch and calmly waited results. The Chief, black with wrath, harangued and gesticulated amongst a number of the older men while the rest buzzed like a swarm of angry bees. Discretion finally won out and the fear of the consequences overcoming the desire to help the culprit, some of the young men were despatched into the brush, soon returning with the cause of all the trouble.

The snap of the steel bracelets round the young man's wrists let loose a torrent of shrill abuse from the squaws and sullen mutterings from the men and the slightest false move by either of the policemen would have fanned the smouldering wrath of the band into a conflagration which might have had disastrous results. But there was no false move; and any hope that The man-who-never-ties-his-moccasins may have been hanging to himself that the Chief and his friends would never let him be taken, must have been finally even up when he found himself astride of a cayouse with his ankles securely coupled together beneath the pony's belly, and a rope around the cayouse's neck with an end stretched from either side and made fast to the horns of his escorts' saddles. As they moved quietly off the young Indian took his last look at the beautiful river and the mountains beyond and at the faces of his friends, for he never came back, drying some two years later in the Penitentiary before the completion of his subsequent sentence.

So the law was vindicated and the reputation of the N. W. M. P. for handling fearlessly and tactfully whatever situation might arise was once more upheld and that without the assistance of the Winchester carbines, which never left their slings, or of the revolvers, which remained snugly in their holsters. Nor was there even the glamour of a red coat cast over the scene, for red coats in those days were worn for show and not for work. Just two isolated members of the force extricated themselves from a position of extreme delicacy while successfully accomplishing what they had been sent out to perform.

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