

FOUR CANADIAN HIGHWAYMEN;

—OR—

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

A STORY OF FORTY YEARS AGO.

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CHAPTER V.

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

After proceeding a few paces the robber chief tied the horse to a tree and then bidding Roland follow made his way through the dark and silent mazes of the wood.

Several times our hero, despite his experience of forest travel, was tripped up by tree-shores, or a tangle of underbrush; and once his forehead struck a sturdy limb with such force that he became for several seconds stupefied. The voice of the highwayman recalled him.

"Hallo, Master Duellist, are you trying to escape me?"

"I gave my word," replied Roland, "touching that matter. But I am not experienced in such travel as this."

"No," sneered the robber "you great

"Here; let me take your hand. We shall never reach home at this rate." It was with a feeling akin to a shudder that Roland felt the touch of his guide's hand; but the arrangement proved successful, and the two got over the ground at a rapid pace. Every maze and tree in that dismal swamp seemed to be known to the guide; and he swerved to right and left, some times so changing his course that it seemed as if he were retracing his steps—with such astonishing swiftness as completely bewildered our hero.

"I wonder," observed Roland, "that the law does not reach you here by the aid of bloodhounds; they filled the wood with dogs this morning for my benefit."

"They tried that trick, but it didn't go out profitable," replied the robber.

Our hero shuddered at the recital; but the robber heeded not his emotion.

"Then came indisputable proof that only persons living in the jelly swamp could have stolen the girl, taken the money, and cracked the few numb-skulls; so they resolved, in the words of the newspapers of mucky York, to 'clear out the edious nest.'"

A force of twenty constables with about an equal number of citizens turned out and approached the swamp. The force here numbered ten in all. Ah! but we were a sturdy band then. Well, as I said they came the intrusive damned fools, to the swamp and scattered their forces all about. They found nothing; and this is the only fact they ascertained; that when they assembled at Brynol's Inn, of the force of twenty-one that entered the swamp, only nine had returned. They waited till the morrow for their missing comrades, but they came not. Yet no cry was heard, though there was no wind among the leaves, and when murders are done the people say, 'You hear shrill screams.' Neither was a pistol shot heard, or so much as the clang of a dagger. Ah, but it was the sport to see how discreetly the thing was managed! I see young man, you would like to find out the modes. Well, mystery not infrequently repeats itself in this dark wood; and I have little doubt that you will have an opportunity of discovering how we accomplish our ends, and way the silence."

"Strange to say," the robber went on, "the good people of York took this matter fairly enough, and many declared their belief that these men who never came back

a member of our family. He plucked his man to-day in a duel, and was clearing off in a devil of a hurry when I offered him our poor hospitable time."

"Plucked his man, ay!" exclaimed one of the gang, a hideous looking ruffian with small eyes, bushy eye-brows and dragged red hair. "He seems better out out to pink toads."

"If we want your opinion upon such matters we will ask for it," the captain observed, looking sternly upon the insulting ruffian.

"We are to live together, so we may as well commence by getting acquainted with one another, youngster," the captain said. "This fellow whose tongue has just wagged is Joe Murfroy a famous black-guard in his own particular line. You respectable Saxen person," pointing to a villainous looking rascal with a greenish skin, and flaxen hair, and an unsteady, treacherous eye, "give moral tone to our little household. He, on occasion, devotes himself with much ardour to religious exercises. For the sake of being familiar we call him Ned Sykes."

The hateful looking scoundrel bowed and said:

"I am happy to welcome you to our poor abode." And as he drew near: "Ab so young and so fair, to stain his soul with the blood of a fellow creature! O my poor young man, repentance, repentance with us here in nature's sanctuary, where the grandeur of God's works, without any of the disfigurements of man, is all that remains to you now. I welcome you my



"MUDDY YORK" AT THE DATE OF OUR STORY.

heroes of the city and level field, are mighty as travellers only upon the open road."

"Your opinion as to that gives me no concern," our hero replied. "But I have eaten nothing since yesterday save some beech-nuts and a few rowan berries. Besides I have lost much blood."

"Are you wounded?"

"Where?" Roland informed him.

"Is it bleeding still?" He likewise inquired upon that point.

"I am not such a calf after all," our hero replied, "and heard him mutter some words of acquiescence to the band."

"The matter clear enough," our hero said. "This ruffian had not

"because he had shot Ham, but wanted an addition to his force."

"There was a price upon Roland," our hero said. "I believed that he would find

"killing him to his in-

"How did you elude them?"

"Why we simply posted ourselves at convenient points and caught the intruding brutes. Out of a pack of twelve only one got out of the swamp alive."

"Have the constabulary ever sought you here?"

"O, frequently. Once they were permitted to roam about through the swamp without molestation. They found nothing for all their searching but a shed built on the lake's edge, and evidently used by fishing parties. They then returned and declared that the story of the swamp being infested was all fudge. A couple of years passed during which many a bloated butcher and

cattle dealer was relieved of his purse; and a few who were foolish enough to dispute about the coin were relieved of more than the money. A girl also disappeared, a

boxom lass, with yellow hair and blue eyes, about whom half the country bumpkins had gone nearly wild."

must have fallen into shaking bags, or hollow swamps. Ha ha!" the robber chuckled.

"they were not very far away! The 'hollow swamp' was almost like an inspiration. Well, youngster, we have been frequently visited by poachers since; but for the greater part we permit them to roam our labyrinth unmolested. Now and again, however, one or two or three intruders are missing; but considering what a wonderful man-trap the swamp is these small matters do not make very much commotion in the outside world. But we are almost at our journey's end. As he spoke the ruddy glare of a fire could be seen a short way off.

A huge rock lifted itself in the wood and behind this the gang had assembled. Their manner at once became changed upon the approach of the captain; but they could not conceal their astonishment at the sight of our hero; for they had read in their leader's eyes that he was not destined for harm.

"I bring a friend, lads, who is beneath

poor fallen son;" and he stretched out his hand. But our hero simply gave the blasphemous vagabond a look of scorn, and turned away.

"There is one other, the fourth and last of the male members of our humble dwelling, to whom let me also present you. This is a young gentleman of a very meek and unobtrusive disposition. He never raises his voice to a high pitch, or makes a noise when performing any little job that requires skill. It would seem as if his good parents were inspired in bestowing a name upon him. They called him

After. We have slightly varied the name; took a small grammatical liberty with it, as it were. We call him The

After. Let me, Mr. Gray, introduce you to The After." Roland bowed with the same air of haughtiness and disgust. But now that he was among the unholy crew he felt that he must make the best of the situation, conformably, of course, with his sense