

JESSE JAMES.

Lord Macaulay, in speaking of the stories concerning the eventful career of Claude Duval, the notorious English highwayman, says—that it would be impossible in the wildest range of fiction to exaggerate the daring and deeds of out-lawry, which thrilled Great Britain during the reign of terror exercised by the reckless robber. The future historian of America will find similar circumstances in the career of Jesse James, the son of a prominent Baptist minister. The subject of this narrative was born in Clay County, Missouri, in 1845, where he led an uneventful life, until the breaking out of the war in 1861. From the district school to the tutelage of Quantrell, the guerilla, the James boys became initiated into the companionship of the most reckless and daring desperadoes of the time, Jesse acting as a spy for the rebel outlaw. The attempted hanging of his father by the Federals, their constant collisions with enemies fired the youthful bandit to deeds of blood and crime. From the brutal murder of Union soldiers in the hospitals of Missouri to bold robberies of banks and railroad trains, was but a step, and in 1868 Jesse James appeared before the public gaze with a band of desperado followers in the role of a border outlaw. His subsequent career, his many escapes and deeds of crime are recounted in this narrative, many inside facts and incidents being given. Taken altogether the career of Jesse James as here depicted forms as startling and strange a romance as was ever written.

I.

THE BANKER AND THE DETECTIVE.

High-noon at Corydon, a beautiful Iowa town, located near the Missouri State line—the month April—the year not so far distant but that the occurrences clustering around that eventful spring day still thrill the inhabitants of the peaceful hamlet with a memory of their details akin to horror and alarm.

A fierce political fight of words between two contending factions made the public square a scene of interest and excitement, elsewhere the slow tedium of rural trade flagged drearily. In one place alone, in the quiet village, outside of the public gathering, were the elements of a sensation present, the First National Bank of the place.

Seated near a window, engaged in earnest conversation, were two men, who, aside from the cashier in the counting-room without, were the only occupants of the bank. The one, a keen-eyed, intelligent-looking man, was listening attentively to the words of his companion, the president of the institution, engaged in discussing a theme of apparent great interest to both.

"Then I am to consider that your warning is based upon tangible grounds," the bank official said, in an inquiring tone of voice.

"Yes. The robbery of the Russellville and Gallatin banks coming so near together, and involving a loss of a faithful cashier and a small fortune in money are sufficient causes for uneasiness, taken in connection with the suspicious I entertain."

"And these are——"

"The singular movement of a body of men ten miles west of the town at an early hour this morning. I came to you as a friend, not in my capacity of detective; for three years I have been on the track of these outlaws, and I speak advisedly. The quest, one of adventure and peril, will end only when I see the head of Jesse James stilled in death, the murder of my bosom friend, Robert Wilson, avenged."

The bank president regarded the impressive face and manner of his visitor with gloomy, apprehensive interest. The features told of his sincerity in his words, of a fiercer, stronger will which would not hesitate to boldly face and combat difficulties standing in the way of the attainment of a cherished object.

"Have you ever met these desperadoes?" he inquired, as the young detective seemed lost in a reverie, abstracted and sombre.

"Never. Close upon their tracks, hunting them from Kansas to Texas, thence to Kentucky, and, finally, here, I have never been able to overtake them. But the memory of the killing of my friend is fresh in my mind. I only ask twenty paces and equal chances with the king of western bandits, the man who, beginning with the diabolical murder of helpless Union soldiers at Centralia, has since that time made himself the dread and scourge of the Missouri valley."

"I admire your determination and pluck, Mr. Wardell, but your task is a venturesome one. Great Heavens! what was that?"

As he spoke there was a loud report, a crashing of glass, and a bullet whizzed past the head of the frightened president and brought both men to their feet. They were at the door communicating with the counting-room at a bound. One quick glance and their vision embraced the scope of a scene as thrilling and startling as ever border romance detailed. Outside the bank, mounted on superb steeds and holding two other horses by the bridles, were two men firing rapidly up and down the street and sweeping the thoroughfare free of people by their reckless fusillade. At his counter, pale and trembling in every limb, was the cashier of the institution, before whom stood a dark-featured man with a revolver presenting a perpetual menace to his heart.

The bank president, as he saw the fourth member of the party inside the railing coolly help-

ing himself to the contents of the money vault, made an excited spring to gain his side, and prevent the robbery of his treasures.

A blow from the bandit's revolver sent him spinning back to the floor, a senseless, inert mass.

"Jesse James!" cried the detective, as he recognized the bold robber. "At last."

The outlaw had turned at his words, flinging the bags containing the gold of the institution and a portfolio of bank notes upon the counter, and whipping out his ever-ready revolver.

Bravo and assassin that he was he quailed and cowered as he observed that the detective had the drop on him. His swarthy face paled; all the braggart insolence departed from his eyes, as Wardell raised his revolver.

Crack!

But the bandit stood unharmed! the detective sank to the floor wounded in the arm, while Jesse James cast a grateful look at Cole Younger, who had removed his surveillance long enough from the cashier to interpose a friendly arm in behalf of his colleague in crime.

"A close call," muttered James, as he hurried out of the bank. "Quick, Younger, or the town will be aroused."

They secured the plunder in their saddle-bags and put spurs to their horses. The spirit of reckless bravado was aroused, however, within the breast of James by his timely escape.

"Halt!" he commanded, as they reached the public square.

A score or more of men in the crowd, attracted by the unusual sight of a quartette of mounted strangers, gathered around them.

"Talking politics?" inquired James, carelessly.

"Yes."

"I'll give you a theme of more startling interest to discuss."

"What is it?" inquired a curious voice.

"The bank's been robbed!"

"Robbed?"

"Yes," replied the outlaw to the startled throng.

"Who did it?"

"The Jesse James gang, and we're the men; good-bye."

A cloud of dust obscured the daring highwaymen in the far distance ere the amazed spectators could recover themselves sufficiently to recall the exploit as possessing much similarity to the usual reckless deeds of the James boys.

Half a dozen citizens made a quick rush for the bank. They found the cashier paralyzed with terror at the counter; the bank president lying insensible on the floor, and Wardell, the detective, binding up his wounded arm.

"The bank's been robbed," ejaculated the cashier.

"Of how much?"

"Forty thousand dollars!"

They gathered around the insensible president, and finally succeeded in restoring him to consciousness.

His first inquiry was for the detective.

"You warned me," he groaned. "If I had only taken due precautions. These men shall not be allowed to escape."

"They have escaped already," suggested a citizen.

The bank official's face plainly depicted his chagrin and rage.

"Wardell," he said tremulously, earnestly, to the detective, "you told me half an hour since, that you were hunting these men."

"I spoke truly."

"You have a family, an aged father and mother, dependent upon you, and a dangerous, unprofitable mission to execute."

Wardell bowed affirmatively.

"For two years," pursued the banker, "these fiends have pillaged the border, defying the police, intimidating their victims. Go on your mission; I will provide for your family; I will reward you whether you succeed or not."

The detective's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"You promise to care for my family," he said.

"I promise," solemnly replied the banker.

The detective walked from the counting-room straight to the pavement, where his horse was standing.

As he sprang into the saddle, his face was pale but resolute.

The banker, somewhat startled by his abrupt departure, had followed him out.

"You are going away, so soon?" he asked in some surprise.

"Yes."

"And your mission?"

"To avenge the death of my friend—to capture or kill Jesse James and his outlaw band."

Ten days later, a man disguised as a peddler, with the ordinary pack of the craft upon his back, struck out from the East into Clay county, Missouri.

It was Wardell the detective entered upon the most perilous undertaking of his life. Sent upon the first step in the most startling tragedy in outlawry, and keen detective skill known to modern times.

II.

INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

The confederation of crime against which Wardell the detective had decided to proceed was, at the date of our narrative composed of eight men, among them five of the most noted desperadoes the west has ever afforded. Fully organized, superbly equipped and familiar with the country in which they operated, the daring band of outlaws were in the zenith of their notoriety and success.

It was in 1873. The deliberate robbery of the ticket office at the Kansas City fair grounds, in full sight of a horrified multitude, the fatal attack upon the Kentucky Bank at Columbia, and scores of similar robberies, had aroused the country. Night and day village bankers sat quaking in their offices, not knowing what hour a descent would be made upon their treasures, while detectives by the score were traversing the country on various clues anxious apparently to share the fate of Wicker and Lull, shot down while endeavoring to apprehend the band which had inaugurated a reign of terror in Missouri and neighboring States.

The band was under the leadership of Jesse James, his lieutenant and brother Frank, and was comprised of the three Younger brothers, Cole, Bob and Jim, and three others. Each one of these men had served an apprenticeship to the devil's taskmaster, Quantrell, the guerilla, during the war of the rebellion, and neither asked nor gave quarter. Terrorizing over the public and exercising precautions of safety, when in hiding, as when in full operation, the lawless eight defied the authority of the police, and week by week added new crimes to the long list already scored to their charge.

It was against this formidable league of crime that Wardell had pitted his ingenuity and life, starting out upon his perilous quest at a time when the band were lying low, preparing for new schemes of pillage in their familiar haunts in Clay county.

The most dangerous element in the case against efficient detective work, was the fact that the band had so many hiding-places, that it was difficult to locate them and were surrounded by friends on every side. Fear impelled many to tacitly protect them, and money banded around them a safe-guard composed of men almost as desperate and unscrupulous as themselves.

The shades of night were just beginning to appear in the eastern horizon when at the close of a beautiful day in June, 1873, a pedestrian traversed a rarely-used highway, leading into a section of the county abounding in dense, thick forests and heavy undergrowth, sparsely settled. The stranger seemed not a little pained as towards dusk he reached a clearing, at the edge of which he discovered a low dilapidated structure, before which swung the welcome sign:

BUCHER HOTEL.

Entertainment for
Man and Beast,
By JACOB BUCHER.

There were but few evidences of thrift about the place. The well-curb was broken, the windows of the old place patched, the veranda on a pitch which predicted rapid dissolution of its frame work, at no very distant day. No urbane host stood at the front of the place to welcome the tired pedestrian, but on the contrary, as the man with the pack on his back entered the bar of the hotel, the tavern-keeper turned from his task of rubbing a few old bottles, and scowled disagreeably at his tired guest.

The man unbuckled his pack and approached the bar.

"Are you the landlord?" he asked.

The tavern-keeper directed a suspicious look at his prospective guest and made a guttural sound, which was probably meant to express assent.

"Can I stay here all night?"

"Who be you?" demanded the landlord.

"A peddler."

"You've struck a mouty poor streak o' kentry."

"I agree with you there. Can I stay?"

"I reckon ye'd better turn back to Forrester, stranger."

"You don't seem to be overcrowded," suggested the new comer.

"Praps not, but my company gin'rally comes about dark. They're a tough crowd, given to fightin' and drinkin' an' I reckon ye'd be an aggravation to 'em."

"I'll risk it," said the stranger, and the landlord rather reluctantly ushered him to a room on the first floor, where he could stay, he intimated, if "he wasn't afraid of stray bullets and aithquakes."

The stranger once in the rough apartment apportioned to him, arranged his toilet and strolled out upon the porch of the hotel. Beneath the close-fitting beard and low-drawn hat must have been a face somewhat dissimilar to what a casual glance revealed of his features, for the eyes were those of a keen-sighted, intelligent man, and his general make-up indicated quite the reverse.

He started slightly and seemed somewhat flustered, as coming down the road and entering the lawn in front of the tavern, a tidy female form greeted his vision. The next moment a sun-browned, handsome-faced girl, shyly swinging a basket of garden-truck, walked upon the porch.

The peddler bowed pleasantly, the girl returned the salutation, but accompanied the courtesy with such an entreating significant look that the man was haunted by its possible meaning long after she had disappeared within the house.

"Am I in peril?" he murmured as he looked quickly and searchingly around. "The girl don't look as if she'd betray me, yet I fancied her glance conveyed a silent warning to me. I will try to see her and talk with her."

He had reason for apprehension. A mile down the road preparatory to making his advent among strangers he had removed and re-arranged his

disguise, and this girl coming suddenly upon him had seen him *in propria persona*—Wardell the detective.

Would she betray him? had he made a mistake in coming? for only too well did he realize that he was in the very den of the James gang, and that here at night they came to carouse, afforded a harboring place by the tavern-keeper Bucher. He fancied that the girl's bright eyes conveyed a friendly sentiment towards him, but he was in doubt as to how far he could count on her fidelity.

He was somewhat uneasy, when at his solitary meal as she brought him a cup of tea, she whispered, unobserved by her father:

"Do not stay here to-night;" but the presence of the wife of Bucher immediately afterwards, prevented any explanation on her part, of the mystery of her words.

"I'll keep out of the way and watch without being seen," he decided, and after the meal he repaired to the little compartment apportioned to him, and throwing himself on the rude couch it contained, ordered Bucher to call him early in the morning.

The apartment was nothing better than a stall partitioned off, and he lay there knowing that by standing on his bed he could look out into the bar-room when so inclined.

But his efforts at wakefulness succumbed to the demands of exhausted nature, and falling unconsciously into a heavy slumber he was insensible to all that occurred outside, until the loud babel of noises in the bar awoke him.

The air was foul with the taint of liquor and tobacco smoke, and in addition to the loud-voiced wrangling of several parties engaged at playing cards, he could discern voices in more moderate conversation in the partitioned-off apartment next to where he was.

His quick hearing was not a little startled when he heard a familiar voice, familiar because having heard it once, he never forgot it, speak the words, "train-robbery."

Squeezing his body close to the partition, he peered through a crack. There were two men in the stall, and he recognized both at a glance. Jesse James and Bob Younger.

The latter was speaking; the bottle of liquor before them affording frequent interruptions to their confab.

"It's a dangerous business, Jesse."

"No more so than robbing a bank."

"How will the gang like it?"

"They have to or get out. We could get a hundred recruits anxious to join us in an hour's time."

"What line will you take?"

"The Rock Island."

"The express train?"

"Yes."

"Signal it?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Wreck it."

"It may be a heavy train."

"What of it. One determined man can scare a legion. We'll make it to-morrow and start at midnight."

In his anxiety to hear all they said, Wardell crowded still closer to the partition.

Fatal movement! The bed upon which the detective lay was on a par with the general ensemble of the rickety old tavern. The unusual strain sent it crashing to the floor.

An ejaculation of alarm in the next apartment told the detective that the untoward accident had aroused the conspirators. His first impulse was to run, for discovery would prove fatal to him. He lay quiet, however, awaiting developments, when he heard James call out:

"Bucher."

The landlord came to where they were.

"Who's in the next room?" asked the outlaw.

Bucher stammered confusedly, but finally said:

"A stranger."

"You're a fine man to take in lodgers when we ordered and paid you not to do it," said Younger, angrily.

"Who is he?" inquired James.

"A peddler."

"A detective more like; I'll have him out and see who he is."

The next minute the outlaw kicked in the door, and Wardell, arising to his feet, was clasped in the bandit's arms and dragged out into the bar-room.

"Who are you?" demanded James, as he drew his revolver.

"A peddler."

"You lie!"

As he spoke he caught at the false beard on the detective's face, and tore it from its place.

A cry of rage went up from the bandits who had crowded around him.

The outlaw stepped back and raised his revolver.

Wardell gave up all for lost, but at that moment a fairy form darted in front of him.

"Escape!" she exclaimed, and drawing a revolver, and covering his retreat, she levelled it at the head of James.

"Stand back," she cried in thrilling tones, as Wardell disappeared through the doorway. "I will kill the man who fires!"

(To be continued.)

THE United States Treasury agent at New York has seized a finger ring valued at \$12,000, said to have originally belonged to Queen Isabella of Spain.