

FOUR CANADIAN HIGHWAYMEN;

—OR—

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

A STORY OF FORTY YEARS AGO.

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CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

On the following morning, Gray, accompanied by his second, rode away towards the place of meeting. The sun had not risen but the eastern arc of the horizon was suffused with deep crimson which terminated in a rosy pink. A small hollow running at right angles to the Don, and known at that time as Sleepy Gulch was the place chosen for the encounter. As the two men reached the mouth of this gulch they perceived the opposite party upon the brow of the hill. A second or two later another horseman appeared in sight. This was the medical gentleman.

The combatants met, and Roland bowed haughtily to Mr. Ham. To Drummond he said simply:

"Good morning, sir." Harland took his friend aside for a moment. There was a look of mingled disgust and merriment in his face.

"Merciful heaven," he said, "look at the size of our friend Ham."

"I have noticed it," replied our hero with a contemptuous curl of his lip.

"I firmly believe he has half the bed-clothes of his establishment wrapped about him," Roland interrupted.

"Proceed with business, Mr. Harland." That gentleman walking up to Mr. Drummond said,

"I wish a word with you—Is your master indisposed?"

"He declares that he took a violent cold, and has been suffering of a fever all night."

"I am very sorry; at the same time I must point out to you the propriety of at once requiring him to unwrap that we may proceed. You are aware, I presume, of the quantity and denomination of the apparel for such an occasion." Drummond joined the bulky Mr. Ham; and it was noticed as he conversed that that gentleman turned from his morning pallor to a positive yellow. He at first seemed to refuse; but at last with a cry much like the low whine of a terrified animal he began to take off his wraps. In doing this he turned his back upon the other party.

"You will pardon me gentlemen," Harland said as he stepped to the front; "but I believe I have the right under such extraordinary circumstances to abridge myself here."

"What do you mean, sir? How dare you come here?" cried Mr. Ham in his fear and impotent rage.

"To see that you are disrobed properly, Mr. Ham. If you will permit it the medical gentleman here will decide whether upon such a windless, sunny morning you require all this raiment. At least you will require all this leather he exclaimed drawing out a huge piece which had fitted as to cover the entire front of the hero's body down to the hips. "You need not consider wraps of this sort necessary for a man with a cold, do you doctor?" Ham asked, turning to the medical gentleman.

"No; I have not during my practice prescribed such remedies for colds," the doctor replied, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

Mr. Ham was a most pitiable specimen of a horse blanket.

Drummond added a few words against added warmth.

"Mr. Drummond," replied Mr. Ham, "I am very sorry, but I am not a man with a cold, do you doctor?"

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"this would be absurd." The thing will be all over in three minutes."

"But it would keep me warm going home."

"For only three minutes longer," however, "Harland" said, addressing the second. "But," he added, "I might be—and here stopped short with the manifest intention of torturing the cowardly wretch. It was noticed by Roland that Ham was constantly casting his eyes up the hollow as if expecting somebody. At last a thought flashed upon him.

"Mr. Harland, I believe that craven has notified the officers of justice, and that he expects them to come and break up the affair. Let us therefore proceed. He may

"My pistol will carry at least a hundred yards; I drove a ball through an inch board with her yesterday. Why not make it, say, eighty paces?"

"Because Mr. Drummond," Harland replied, "ver fifteen paces is 'poltroon distance,' and besides, our pistols do not carry effectively more than twenty paces. We will not, however, under any circumstances fight on 'poltroon distance.'"

"I agree," replied Mr. Drummond.

"Now then, gentlemen, take your places." The doctor whispered to Roland: "Is it fair, quite, to fight him when he says that you are a crack shot, and that he has never fired?"

"He lies, doctor; it is the other way. I learn that from childhood he has been firing at all sorts of things with pistols; and I have never fired a pistol shot in my life."

"Your places, gentlemen," cried Drummond. Roland was already at his post; but his opponent was not yet upon his ground.

"Why this unseemly haste?" he gasped. "I am so unsteadied by my illness, that I am really not in a position yet to take my grog." Harland spoke a word or two to Drummond, and then said in a voice distinct and audible to all:

"If after I call three Mr. Ham is not upon his ground the affair shall be declared off. My other alternative will then be in order. One, two—"

"Hold, hold I'm coming," groaned the coward, as he took his place.



ARRANGING THE DUEL.

keep on the remainder of his wraps. No delay; measure off the ground." The two seconds then measured off fifteen paces, and stopped.

"Not such a short distance as that?" shrieked Mr. Ham.

"Why, I thought your friend never fired except with a shot-gun at crows," Harland observed. "But it appears that he is a crack-shot. And so generous, too; since the greater distance is intended no doubt for the safety of Mr. Gray." This was said in a tone just loud enough to be heard by all the rest.

"Ask Mr. Ham what distance he would propose—I have no objection to the inquiry."

"What distance would you propose, Mr. Ham?" inquired the second.

"I propose," replied Mr. Ham,

"Now, gentlemen, your backs to each other," said Harland. "I shall count one, two, three, and at the end of the last count each man shall wheel and fire."

"If I fall I shall have you proceeded against, Drummond—you are in a conspiracy to murder a sick man."

"I did not know that Mr. Ham was an Irishman," chimed in Harland.

"One!"

"Oh!" groaned the respectable Mr. Ham.

"Two—three!" Simultaneously with the word "three" there was a pistol shot.

The gentlemanly Mr. Ham had fired. Before he could see the result of his shot, Gray, who had turned promptly at the word, fired; and with a frightful yell Mr. Ham fell to the earth, and lay there. The doctor ran up, and putting the fingers of his

left hand upon the fellow's wrist, with the other made search for the wound.

"Here it is; you have shot him in the left side."

"Do you think it is fatal?" Roland asked composedly.

"I cannot say; but I really have little hope otherwise." It was hard to weigh the value of this statement. It was decidedly an equivocal one.

"I would most certainly advise you to get out of the way, Mr. Gray. He seems to have no pulse. By the way, are you hit?"

"Yes."

"Good God, where?" He pointed to his breast; and to the horror of Harland blood was oozing through his waistcoat.

"Let me attend to you," the doctor, who had the heartiest sympathy for our hero, cried, springing up.

"No; you must attend to him. Besides, as I expected, here come the officers, goodbye."

In a moment he was upon his horse, and galloping across the stubblefields and clearing the make fences that divided field from field, like a bird. The magistrates and two constables, for such were the officials that comprised the interrupting party, no sooner saw Roland in flight, than they turned in pursuit at a rate of speed equal to his own, and called upon him to surrender. He made no reply.

"Then, men, fire upon him," the magistrate shouted. One of the constables raised his carbine and fired.

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE EDGE OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

"Swish-h-h" went the clump, along past Roland's ear. He grasped his revolver; and the recollection of the moment was to stand at bay and fight the churls. But a reflection not occupying the hundredth part of a second showed him that such a course was not to be thought of. His antagonist had fallen; but this was only a *crime of honour*. To shoot the Queen's officers would be a vulgar felony. So he kept upon his course, confident in the settle of his noble horse who with nostrils distended, and neck thrust out, would now lay back one ear and now another, as if to listen to the progress of the pursuers.

At last our hero reached the road, which now lay along a level country skirted on one side by pine groves, and upon the other by the recently harvested fields. Turning in his saddle he perceived that while he had distanced two of his pursuers, the third, the fellow with the blunderbuss was gaining slightly upon him. He noticed also that the officer was engaged as the horse galloped along in putting another charge into his weapon. About fifteen minutes more of fierce riding followed; and although Roland's horse showed no signs of exhaustion the pursuing beast which was taller in limb and more lithe was remorselessly, though slowly, lessening the distance. The road now began to sink into a valley, and thick forest grew upon either side. Roland's pursuer was not more than fifteen paces behind, when the fugitive heard a scuffling sound. He but too well divined what it was; and the next moment his horse fell to the road, struck by the slugs from the pursuer's carbine.

"It is as well," muttered our hero, as he sprang away from the gasping beast. The next moment he had disappeared in the dense, dark wood. Ah! how sheltering, how kindly, seemed that sombre sanctuary, with its dark grey tufts beneath his feet, and the thick, dark green branches of the fir and pine! The gloomy back-ground seemed to invite him further into the heart of its shade and silence. No bird whistled through the glaucous green of this silent, majestic wood; nor was there any treacherous bramble to crackle beneath his feet. For upon this chill, grey carpet no flood of sunshine ever came to coax tiny sprays out of the ground; and the layers of fine needles, or tufts of dank, sunless moss were soft and silent as down under his tread. The stately trees grew far enough apart to allow him to move with considerable speed, and after he had satisfied himself that he was beyond the sight of his pursuers, he changed his course and proceeded in a direction almost opposite to that by which he had come.

He believed that such a move could not fail to elude the stealth hounds who would suppose that he continued his flight directly away from the scene of his offense. In a little while he secured his pace down to a walk; and shortly afterwards he sat down