

The Red Streak—A Story of Frontier Lawlessness

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THE discovery of gold in Montana and Idaho took place two years subsequent to the rush to Cariboo. It attracted people from all parts of the world and absorbed much of the overflow from British Columbia, where the diggings, though rich, had not proved sufficiently extensive to maintain a large population. The discoveries at Yukon, Nome and Cobalt are still attracting thousands of eager wealth-seekers, and the scenes enacted at the gold fields half a century ago are identical with the scenes at the more recently discovered deposits. The actors only are changed. The dispositions, inclinations and habits of men who played parts in one locality are the same as those who are now in possession of the latest points of attraction. Whether the roles played were honest or dishonest, peaceful or murderous, they were the same in 1849 as they are in 1908. It is the opportunity that is needed to bring out the good or bad points of a man's character. Police a mining district well and there will be a lessening of crime. Remove or restrict the semblance of authority, and crime emerges from its hiding place and takes control. Is the world growing better or worse? Christian teachers say that the moral tone is vastly improved; but criminal statistics do not sustain that opinion. It is opportunity and association that often shape men's lives, and the brand of civilization which carries the Bible in one hand and the whiskey bottle or the opium pipe in the other is a spurious, loathsome thing. Nine-tenths of the world's crime is caused by the immoderate use of stimulants and opiates. The bad men of Montana and Idaho, who left a Red Streak of Blood behind them wherever they went, were invariably hard drinkers and some were dope fiends. The jails yawned for them and the turnkey dogged their steps long before they were given a short shrift by the hangman's noose at the verdict of a People's Court.

A fortnight since reference was made to a desperado named Boone Helm, who was suspected of three murders at Cariboo. He was brought before the magistrate at Victoria in the fall of 1862 and as no proof could be obtained was liberated upon a pledge to leave the country, which he did. Helm was next heard of in Montana, where he joined a band of bandits who ravaged the country and robbed miners and merchants and often murdered them for the fun of seeing them writhe in their death agonies.

The agents of this band of evildoers were in every town and camp, spying out the affairs and movements of honest men, who, mistaking the affected zeal of the agents, confided to them freely their plans. The agents were thus enabled to waylay their victims on lonely trails when on their way out with their treasure. "Dead men tell no tales" was a favorite axiom with the bandits, who often killed a man because he was poor and had nothing else worth taking save his life, or killed him because his loss was so heavy that he would make a row if suffered to live.

Two young English fellows named Barton and Locke played the guitar and concertina in a saloon on Johnson street in this city for several weeks. They performed tolerably well and their music was an attraction to the place. Impressed with the news from Montana, they proceeded there with their instruments. They were dead broke when they stopped one night at a wayside house and played. A collection amounting to about five dollars was taken up and the next morning the minstrels proceeded on their way toward the diggings. An hour or two later their dead bodies, still warm, were found on the trail. They had been shot and robbed for the miserable sum of five dollars.

J. Vedder, who, about 1896, represented one of the lower Fraser constituencies in the British Columbia legislature, resided with his brothers at the town of Nevada City, California, in 1857. One of the brothers had for wife a young and handsome but somewhat giddy Englishwoman. Among the visitors to the Vedder home was Henry Plummer, the town marshal, or chief of police. Plummer was a good-looking young Englishman, almost effeminate in appearance, well connected and quite a ladies' man. Vedder objected to his visits, and one evening encountered him coming out of his back door. Not a word was exchanged by the men; and as a guilty conscience is said to be its own accuser, Plummer, fearing an attack which he knew he merited, shot Vedder dead. Plummer was taken into custody, but was never punished, and the Vedders, disgusted at the way in which the law was administered in California, sold out their business and settled on Fraser river. Plummer fled to Montana, where he organized a band of highwaymen of which Boone Helm, our former Cariboo acquaintance, was second in command. Plummer had himself elected sheriff of one of the Montana counties, and induced the sheriff of an adjoining county to resign, whereupon Plummer became sheriff of both counties and was in a position to know all that was going on in business and mining circles. He appointed his deputies from the criminal class, and with their aid spied into the movements of those who were about to leave the camps with swags of gold. When appeals were made to the sheriff for a guard to see a party safely over the border, he appointed certain of his deputies as the guard and made elaborate pretences for their protection. On the lonely roads and trails the "protected" men were robbed of all they possessed and their bodies left for the delectation of the crows and wolves.

The murder of Lloyd Magruder and his party of four while on their way out in the summer of 1863, with some \$25,000 in gold dust, is still referred to as one of the most cruel of the many cruel atrocities that were perpetrated by the Plummer gang. Magruder was a man of substance and position, and at the time of his death his address asking the suffrages of the electors as a candidate for congress had been issued. Magruder's intention to leave was known and he engaged four bandits to join his party, under the impression that they were honest men. The second night out, after camp had been reached and the animals turned out to grass, Magruder and his whole party were slain and their bodies thrown over a precipice into a deep ravine. The robbers possessed themselves of the treasure and the animals. One of the guilty men had the assurance to ride Magruder's mule with its saddle and bridle into Virginia City, where it was recognized. In a short while Magruder and his party were missed and their bodies were found at the foot of the precipice.

The wretches were taken into custody, tried and hanged. They died with curses on their lips, and showed not the slightest evidence of repentance or regret. The murder of a prominent citizen like Magruder excited the populace to frenzy. So long as the victims were almost unknown there was no general demand for a vigilance committee; but when a man of note had been removed, the whole community rose in a demand for vengeance. As one of the law-abiding men expressed it, it had become a matter of killing or being killed, and self-preservation being the first law of nature the miners and merchants flew to arms.

The Plummer gang, undeterred by threats and failing to discern the signs of an approaching storm, continued their depredations. A favorite pastime of theirs was to ride into a town and "shoot it up," which means to fire volley after volley along the streets and drive the peaceful inhabitants to seek shelter from a storm of bullets. Liquor saloons and storekeepers were placed under tribute by the desperadoes, who helped themselves to liquor, goods or money, according to their inclinations. A reign of terror prevailed in all the towns, and there were many victims of the wanton cruelty of the wretches. With the destinies of the two most populous counties in the hands of Sheriff Plummer and a weak and cowardly judiciary, nearly every effort that was made to put down the desperate men was defeated. Finally it was decided that there was no recourse open to the good people save a vigilance committee. Meetings were held and money subscribed to pay the expenses of an executive committee, whose duty it was to inflict punishment on culprits whose guilt could be clearly established.

One of the first men who was seized was Boone Helm. He was standing at a bar with a glass of liquor in his hand, anathematizing the vigilance committee.

"I'll like to see a member of the committee try and take me," he said.

"What would you do, Boone?" asked a companion.

"Do? Do? Why, I'd shoot him dead!"

"Helm," said a voice behind, "throw up your hands!"

Helm turned and looked down the barrel of a Colt's six-shooter in the hands of a vigilante. "You've got the drop on me," said Helm. He was speedily disarmed and placed in a room with several of the gang who had been previously secured. After a short trial the whole party were condemned to death.

One of Helm's companions, known as Jack, was condemned to die first, and as he struggled at the end of the rope, Helm exclaimed, "Kick away, Jack, we'll both be in — in five minutes. Three cheers for Jeff Davis! Let her rip!"

It has been a sort of tradition among Caribooites that Helm, when about to be hanged, confessed to the murder of Rousseau, Lewin and Wagner at Cariboo, and that he said he secreted the gold near the scene of the tragedy. I have made diligent inquiry in Montana of people who were in a position to know, and the answer always was that Helm made no confession of any kind.

After Helm's death the gang scattered, but a man named Erastus Yager was seized by the vigilantes and confessed everything. He told the names of the gang, gave their password and explained many mysterious crimes that had been committed, the perpetrators of which were previously unknown. Yager, who was well-educated, expressed contrition for the share he had had in the crimes and informed his captors that he did not wish to live—he wanted to die, but he wanted to see the others hanged too. This satisfaction he did not enjoy, for he was led out to a tree and hanged in the light of the full moon with the thermometer several degrees below zero. His fellow-criminals died later on.

The vigilantes soon found the trail of Plummer and his deputies. The sheriff was caught in a bar, full of drink and defiance, and threatening all who dared dispute his right to kill those who might offend him.

When Yager was about to be hanged, he exclaimed, "God bless you, gentlemen. You are doing good work. If I had thought of this a year ago, I would not be here now."

Plummer and two of his deputies were seized near Bannock City. They were told that they had been adjudged worthy of death and that in half an hour they would be hanged. His two companions indulged in horrid oaths till their last moment; but Plummer prayed for mercy. When confronted with death he proved a coward. If the committee would spare his life, he said, he would leave the territory, restore all stolen property and compensate the families of his victims, for he had acquired much money through his evil courses. His pleadings and promises were in vain, and he was hanged from the limb of a tree.

Thus perished Henry Plummer, a gifted and educated man, who, had he chosen a different life, might have risen to a position of eminence in the regard of his fellowmen.

A prototype of Plummer is to be found in the career of Soapy Smith, who headed a gang of desperadoes at Skagway ten years ago. Smith kept a saloon and a mining exchange, into which miners were decoyed and robbed of their dust. Their crimes were many, and it was suspected that numerous victims of the gang were thrown into the harbor and left to drown after they had been deprived of their sacks. Smith "ran" Skagway. On the 4th of July, 1898, he

was elected marshal of the day and headed a loyal procession on the back of a white horse. Six days later the ruffian was dead. Having heard the citizens of Skagway were about to form a vigilance committee, Smith, armed with a Winchester rifle, proceeded toward the wharf on which the citizens were assembled. At the entrance of the wharf he met a man who had been appointed to guard the entrance against him. Both men fired at once. Smith died almost immediately. The guard died the next day. So great was the terror with which Smith was regarded by the men of Skagway that on his approach to the wharf the meeting scattered and some of those who attended it leaped overboard in their panic and hid among the piles. The death of Smith caused the breaking up of his gang, and Skagway has since been an orderly community.

One of the most remarkable men who was hanged in Montana was known as Captain J. A. Slade, a member of a highly respectable family in Illinois, where he bore an excellent character. He first came into public notoriety when he was employed by the Overland Stage Company to protect their passengers and stock from the attacks of desperadoes. The stage company ran a line of stages across the prairies before the Central Pacific railway had been completed, to "close the gap," so to speak.

There was a constant feud between the stage company and the immigrants who then crossed the plains with their teams. Slade, as the agent of the company, supplanted a man named Jules, who was more than suspected of complicity in the thefts of stock. Slade seized a pair of horses as the company's property. These animals were in the possession of Jules. On the arrival of a stage with Slade, Jules fired upon him, wounding him severely. Slade was a long time ill, but at last he got well. Meeting his late antagonist, Slade tied him first to a tree and shot him to death by degrees. He also cut off his ears and carried the hideous reminders in his vest pocket for a long time. If in accordance with Western civilization, as it was understood at the time, Slade was justified in killing Jules, the prolonged agony and mutilation of his enemy was unjustifiable.

Slade's rule was supreme on the overland route. On one occasion he rode to a cabin and killed three immigrants whom he suspected of stealing stock. Stories of his hanging men and innumerable assaults, shootings, robberies and beatings, in which he was the principal actor, form part of the legends of the stage line. Mark Twain, in one of his clever books, speaks of meeting Slade, whom he describes as a brave and determined man with thirty-one notches on the butt of his pistol. Each notch represented a human life that he had taken. Prof. Hinsdale, who wrote the history of the Vigilantes of Montana, describes Slade as the idol of his followers, the terror of his enemies and of all that were not within the charmed circle of his life. In him generosity and destructiveness, brutal lawlessness and courteous kindness, firm friendship and volcanic outbreaks of fury were so mingled that he seemed like one born out of date. He should have lived in feudal times.

Slade was not accused of murder or robbery in Montana, but he was regarded as a dangerous man. He became greatly addicted to drink, and was in the habit of firing his revolver

along the streets, riding his horse into stores, breaking up bars, and beating and insulting the occupants. It had become quite common when Slade was on a spree for the shopkeepers and citizens to put out their lights, being fearful of some outrage at his hands.

His last outrage was the tearing of a sheriff's warrant to pieces and driving the officer away at the point of a pistol. He met a judge on the street, and holding the weapon to the judicial head, threatened to blow out his brains! The vigilance committee decided to arrest Slade, which they did. This action sobered him, and he begged for his life. He repeatedly exclaimed, "My God! My God! Must I die? Oh, my dear wife!"

He was placed on a box and a rope put about his neck. The box was then kicked from his feet and he died almost instantaneously, just as his wife, who had been sent for, rode into camp at headlong speed to save him. She arrived too late.

The committee continued its work of purification until twenty-four desperadoes had been disposed of and the rest driven from the country.

On the 13th of July, 1864, the Overland coach running from Virginia to Salt Lake City, was driven into an ambush in the gloom of a deep canyon. Four of the passengers were killed outright and the treasure, amounting to \$65,000, stolen. The highwaymen, who numbered eight, got away with the gold and were never apprehended. The stolen gold, it was said, was brought to Vancouver Island and buried on the banks of Leech river, a most improbable story. How the treasure was sought for and by whom will be told next week. After some months it was ascertained that the driver of the coach belonged to the gang and had arranged the massacre and robbery. He was hanged by the vigilance committee.

When an attempt was made to arrest Jo Piganthia, otherwise "The Greaser," he killed one of the committee. His cabin was bombarded with a mountain howitzer and riddled with shot, whereupon Jo surrendered. He was tried and hanged from a convenient tree. The body was then taken to his hut, which was fired and the remains reduced to ashes. In the morning a number of women were observed panning out the ashes to see whether the desperado had any gold in his possession! When Long John, another desperado, was captured he asked the committee to cut off his arms and legs and let him go. "You know," he remarked, "I could do nothing then." The committee declined to accede to the request.

A favorite pastime with the Montana roughs was shooting up a town, after the manner of the Brownsville negro soldiers, who were dismissed from the service by President Roosevelt. A desperado would fill himself with liquor and entering a barroom with revolver and bowie-knife in full sight, would call for drinks for the house. When served he would refuse to pay. When pressed he would draw his weapons and deliver himself in something like this strain: "Whoopie! I'm from Pike county, Wisconsin! I'm ten feet high! I can jump further, run faster and eat more than any other man living. My home is in a wolf's den, and I'm second cousin to a bear. My parlor is the Rocky Mountains. When I drink water I drain the Mississippi, and I use the tallest pine for a toothpick. Whoopie!" The ruffian would then leap as high as possible and cracking his heels together declare that he was going to turn loose and clean out the town, etc.

One of these gentry turned up at Yale one night, and having delivered himself of the boastful harangue, he was seized by the nape of the neck and the slack of his unmentionables by Pat Cassin, who kept a bar there, and run out into a snowdrift. After having been relieved of his weapon, he was left in the drift to cool off. Before morning he became penitent and apologized and was allowed to lie down before a fire to thaw out. The next day he left the camp, taking his whoopie, etc., with him; but Pat kept the weapons.

One Brady when about to be hanged by the Montana vigilance committee made his will, leaving everything to his daughter, and wrote to her the following pathetic farewell letter:

"My dear Daughter—You will never see me again. In an evil hour, being under the control and influence of whiskey, I tried to take the life of my fellow-man. I tried to shoot him through a window. He will, in all probability, die—and that at my hands. I have been arrested, tried and sentenced to be hanged by the vigilance committee. In one short hour I will have gone to eternity. It is an awful thought, but it is my own fault. By the love I feel for you in this, my dying hour, I treat you to be a good girl. Walk in the ways of the Lord. Keep Heaven, God and the interest of your soul before your eyes. I commend and commit you to the keeping of God. Pray for my soul. Farewell forever."

"Your father, JAMES BRADY."

The purification of Montana and Idaho having been effected by the quick punishments of the criminals who roamed through those territories leaving a record of murder and rapine in their wake, the committee finally disbanded, and allowed the lawful authorities to resume their functions. It is a matter for congratulation that British Columbia has been free from such scenes, but once for a brief period such an organization seemed necessary, and was only averted by the timely arrival of Chief Justice Begbie and a corps of sappers and miners, whose presence awed the lawbreakers into obedience.

The Tragic Side of Glasgow Life



MOST tragic side of Glasgow life has been revealed by a committee of the Glasgow Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which has been inquiring into the common lodging houses and farm-out houses of Glasgow.

"The report stated," says the Glasgow Herald, "that the committee had collected evidence from the most trustworthy sources, and their inquiries convinced them that the lodging houses in Glasgow, and especially the farm-out houses, constituted a grave social problem and a social danger. Dealing first with the lodging houses, they found that the larger ones were in a more satisfactory condition than the smaller ones, many of the latter being simply disgraceful. The corporation undoubtedly raised the standard of lodging houses when they erected theirs, but private enterprise in some cases had now gone beyond the corporation. In the majority of lodging houses there was a lack of moral supervision, of social uplift, of refining and restraining influences."

"The great and saddening impression one received from a visit to the average common lodging house was the awful degradation and wastage of human life. Yet the lodging house seemed to be a necessity of modern civilization. In so far as it supplied a felt want they did not complain, but it was notorious that even our model lodging houses were being abused and taken advantage of by certain classes of men for whom they were not built—among them some earning 50s and 60s a week, who ought to have homes of their own and pay rates, instead of wasting their money on drink. These houses were also the resort of the 'ins and outs,' who lived there when they were not in the poorhouse hospital recruiting after a debauch. The committee thought that the 'ins and outs' and wastrels generally should be shut up for a period of at least two years. No power of detention existed at present, and until the streets were cleared of these unclean undesirable little could be done in the way of genuine social reform."

"A very objectionable feature of the men's lodging houses was the number of boys who frequented them. There they rapidly qualified for a career of vice and crime. In six lodging houses no fewer than 120 boys were found from fourteen to eighteen years of age. The committee strongly recommended that it should be an offence for any lodging house keeper to admit a boy under eighteen or twenty years of age. They regretted that the evidence showed some of the women's lodging houses to be in a shocking condition—centres of corruption and the means of ruining many young women. Farm servants, domestic servants, and others who came to the city-seeking situations missed their train, got stranded, and were taken to one of these vile places by some degraded woman and introduced to a life of infamy. Many of these poor girls found their way afterwards to the Church's Rescue Home, and many of them, from sixteen to eighteen years of age, were walking the streets today. This appalling sacrifice of young womanhood was a horrible fact which should rouse the church and the municipality. Surely something could be done to prevent it, and it should be done soon, for the condition of matters was serious in the extreme."

"As to the farm-out houses, out of which it was said enormous profits were made, these seemed specially designed for the encouragement of vice. There was no separation of the sexes. They presented an even greater problem than the lodging houses. They vastly increased the labors and anxieties of the sanitary, police and poor-law authorities. The evidence led before the Glasgow housing commission showed the farm-out houses as a general rule to be haunts of prostitution and cesspools of iniquity, and this was corroborated by the evidence heard by the committee. They were again reminded of the great fundamental fact of human sin, for were it not for drunkenness and prostitution, it was almost certain that farm-out houses would be non-existent. And neither of these sins was a crime or an offence

in the eye of the law. Importuning was an offence, but some day it might be found necessary for the individual and general well-being to make drunkenness and prostitution in themselves police offences. These places were also centres of physical disease and danger."

"During the half-year ending November 15, 113 men and women, suffering in many cases from loathsome and contagious diseases, were sent to the poor-law hospitals. Farm-out houses were therefore a menace to the health of the community, a still greater moral danger, the means of ruining young men and women, and offered a highway to the prison cell. The committee recommended that the definition of a farm-out house should be extended so as to include houses of any size similarly used, that farm-out houses should be licensed, the license to be renewed annually. The owner would then have to appear in person and produce a certificate of character. When the owner was convicted of keeping a disorderly house imprisonment should be substituted for a fine, and persons found making immoral use of a farm-out house should be proceeded against as well as the owner."

"They also suggested that the corporation should carry out their own resolution arrived at after the housing commission reported, and erect a municipal model block where families thrown out of a home through misfortune or their own fault might be housed on reasonable terms under proper supervision and in sanitary and morally safe surroundings. Meanwhile, the existing bylaws, excellent so far as they go, should be vigorously enforced. With regard to the lodging house, it did not appear that further legislation was required. The problem was how to improve them, and at bottom it was a moral problem. The churches must unitedly grapple with it."

"The committee recommended that a chaplain or chaplains should be appointed to look after the moral and spiritual interests of the inmates of the lodging houses."