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A Round Robin

It Proved to Be a Boomerang to Its Signers

By DWIGHT NORWOOD

Reforms are seldom accomplished all at once, and when they are they rarely hold good. The citizens of Jimtown found their efforts to dispense with the vigilance committee and establish a regular court of law attended with difficulty. As one of them expressed it: "We were between fire and water. We was burned up if we kept still, and if we jumped we'd be drowned."

Jimtown—now Jamestown—has developed into a beautiful city, with schools and churches innumerable, but in the days when gun law had become unbearable the principal buildings in the town were devoted to gambling houses, in which an apology for liquor was sold at 25 cents a drink. In these places every man was armed, and whenever a dispute arose the only question was which disputant was the quicker on the trigger. This state of affairs attracted desperate characters, and the town was rapidly going from bad to worse. A secret meeting was held among the best citizens, at which twelve men were selected as a vigilance committee to clear the town of rascals. By a vigorous course of lynching and shooting it got rid of all the bad characters except one, but four of the twelve had been eliminated.

The bad character left, Pete Hollister, was not to be intimidated. The only way to get rid of him was to kill him, and the vigilance committee had found that method demanding its own ranks. Four of the remaining vigilantes had been killed, leaving four men who had become tired of the work.

Meanwhile a court had been organized and brought to a state of tolerable efficiency. It was easy enough to convict a person guilty of breaking the law on sufficient evidence, but it was not easy to get the party into court if he would not come willingly. It certainly was not easy to get Pete Hollister there, because he would not go willingly, and any one trying to take him by force was sure to get killed. The four men remaining on the vigilance committee held a meeting to consider means of eliminating the desperado. It was agreed that if Pete could be got out of the way there was only Bill Cundiff remaining, and Bill was not considered a very hard case. It was even thought that he might be converted to a supporter of good order. In some way Cundiff got wind of the movement to get rid of Hollister, and one day he asked one of the committee how much would be given for the desperado's scalp. The other members were consulted, and each man subscribed \$50 for the purpose. Cundiff said that to do the job was worth more than that, but if they would take the responsibility jointly with himself he would consider the proposition. He said he didn't wish to be tried for murder in the newfangled court that had been organized and must have some guaranty. The best guaranty he could have would be an order to do the job signed and sealed by the committee.

After a good deal of deliberation the four men remaining on the committee signed a round robin instructing him to "make away with" Peter Hollister and agreeing to pay him the sum of \$200 for the job. At the time the arrangement was made the intended victim had gone to an army post near by to look, as he expressed it, "for scabs among some of them sojers." Before Cundiff started on his errand of mercy—such it was considered by the citizens of Jimtown—the committee offered to pay him in advance the money that had been subscribed for the job. But Cundiff said he wasn't sure he could "get him" and his conscience wouldn't permit him to take pay for a job he hadn't done.

The committee was much pleased at this, feeling encouraged to hope that after Hollister had been put out of the way Cundiff would make an excellent citizen. An election for mayor had been called, and some were in favor of running Cundiff for the office. The rumor that he might be a candidate reached his ears, and he stated definitely that he proposed to reform and didn't consider any man reformed who had anything to do with politics. This added to the growing confidence that was being built up in the man who was to do for Jimtown what Charlotte Corday did for France.

When Cundiff covered all over with knives, pistols and Winchester rifles, rode out of Jimtown on his errand in behalf of law and order he was given an ovation. There were by this time many respectable women in the place, and they, their husbands and their children turned out to wish the re-

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formed man success. Handkerchiefs were waved to him by the women, while the men fired salutes from their revolvers. Cundiff was seen to draw his shirt sleeve across his eyes, which was considered evidence of those intense emotions that are usually a part of the reformation of a wicked person. They were destined to meet with a surprise. Not two hours after Cundiff's departure he returned, and riding beside him, still in the fesh, was Pete Hollister. A chill passed over the citizens of Jimtown, most of whom saw the entry from their windows and did not go out to welcome back the man they had sent off with such enthusiasm. Hollister reined up before a small group on the street and said: "I have business with four prominent citizens of this town: Martin Shaw, Nathan Parker, Thomas Warren and George Urner. I would like to confer with 'em and would be obliged to any citizen to tell 'em that I'll wait for 'em at O'Neill's tavern. Say that it's not a question of shootin', but of law."

After saying this the speaker and his attendant rode on to the tavern, where they dismounted. The gentlemen mentioned—the four members of the vigilance committee who had signed the round robin—were informed of the invitation and after consultation concluded to accept it, having been assured that they were wanted not on a matter of gun practice, but of law.

"Gents," said Hollister, drawing a paper from under his shirt, "I have here evidence of a conspiracy on your part, with Bill Cundiff, to murder me. Bill, havin' shown signs of reformation lately, instead of committin' the deed, comes to me repentant and with tears in his eyes hands me this yere agreement to pay him \$200 for my scalp. He finds me likewise repentant for my many sins and disposed to abandon gun law and leave these yere questions to the courts. Therefore it is my painful duty to swear a warrant agin you four gents, to be dealt with by the courts in the regular way."

There was a grim silence on the part of the men who in trying to be saviors of Jimtown had walked into a trap and, according to law, would be punished by death or imprisonment by the courts they had taken so much pains to establish.

"Owin' to the tenderness of my heart," the desperado continued, "and the reformation goin' on in my bosom, I don't want to be hard on you. My duty as a reformed citizen is plainly to let the law take its course. But you gents bein' disposed to help us who are tryin' to turn from our wicked ways—Bill Cundiff kin testify to that—and some of you havin' families, I wouldn't mind a pecuniary consideration instead of seein' you suffer. In the first place, Bill, who was too conscientious to take the price of my blood, should be rewarded for right doin'. Five hundred dollars would be a small sum for so much resistance to temptation. In the second place, if your scheme had worked I would now be sleepin' in the valley, with the long grass wavin' over me and coyotes scratchin' for my bones. All these should be paid for. But, rememberin' that there's no great wealth in the town, I'll make the figures reasonable. Call my share \$1,500."

The signers of the round robin asked how long they would have to accept or decline this generous proposition and to raise the money if they accepted it and were given three days, at the end of which time the warrant would be sworn out. Then they retired for consultation.

Advancing civilization brings many problems. Here was a problem with a paradox. A villain was about to use a court of justice as an instrument for the condemnation of men who were working to eradicate crime. What was to be done? After consultation the round robbers sent a message to ask the two reformed men if, on the payment of the sum demanded, they would leave the town, never to return. The reply was that, having reformed, they would prefer to remain and Cundiff had decided to run for mayor.

While the deliberations were going on it happened that a young man who had served an enlistment as an elec-

trician passed through the town on his way to a large mining center that had acquired civilization, where he was to be employed putting in electric lights and different devices made practicable by electricity. Hearing of the dilemma that confronted the citizens of Jimtown and especially the round robbers, he volunteered to show them a method by which they might get rid of the two villains without danger to themselves. They offered to pay him liberally for any device that would bring about that end, but he declined to receive money for such a purpose or to work it himself.

During the three days that the round robbers had been given to come to a decision and raise funds the electrician worked nights, and no one saw what he did. He was engaged in laying wires from an empty cabin to the house of one of the remnants of the vigilance committee, Martin Shaw. When the time was up, after explaining his device to Mr. Shaw, he withdrew from all participation in the scheme.

On the third day after the return of Hollister and Cundiff they were invited to the deserted cabin in which the electrician had been at work to receive the first installment of the ransom that had been levied on the town. The four citizens most interested were in the cabin, at the other end of the wires, where they could see plainly the place to which the rascals had been invited. Citizens were warned to keep away from the cabin and regarded the warning. Hollister and Cundiff went into the cabin prepared for them and found a bottle and two glasses on a table. They poured out a tumbler of liquor each, raised their glasses and were drinking when the floor rose up, they were tossed a hundred feet in the air, and when they came down they had ceased to be terrorists to Jimtown. The cabin had been undermined and a charge of dynamite ignited by electricity.

That ended the reign of terror with which Jimtown had been afflicted since its settlement. The courts became effective, schools were opened, and civilization grew rapidly. But few of the citizens who witnessed the explosion by which the last of the gun men were eliminated remain, and they don't care to give the story.

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