

A STAGE ADVENTURE.

There were five men of us in one of the old Mariposa stage-coaches before the days of the railroad, and it was 5 o'clock in the afternoon of an August day. We were on our way to Stockton, and of the passengers one was a lieutenant in the regular army, another a tourist in search of health, a third a ranchman, and the other two were prospectors and miners. None of us had met each other previous to the start. Those were perilous times, and the first half hour was spent in sizing each other up. I don't know to what conclusion the others came, but I looked over the four men and said to myself:

"The lieutenant ought to fight in case we are attacked, but he seems too nervous to be gamey. The tourist is ill and has no sand, but the ranchman and prospectors can be depended on."

At that time the coach which was not stopped twice out of five trips was considered very lucky. In some few instances the robbers were driven off, but in most cases the passengers submitted to being "held up," and were glad to get off with nothing worse. I had with me over \$6,000 in bank bills and gold and I was determined not to part with that money without a fight. The ranchman had \$4,000 and the miner about \$3,000, as was afterward learned, and each had determined to fight. We had just forded the Merced river, and had come to a lonely stretch of road, when the ranchman pulled his revolver and examined the caps. It was not yet restored to the holster when we heard a shout, the report of a pistol, and the stage came to a full stop. I reached for my pistol, as did the miner, knowing that robbers were at hand, but before mine was out the lieutenant flung his arms around me and cried out:

"For God's sake make no move or we shall all be murdered! Let them take all we have!"

At the same time the tourist flung himself upon the miner, and neither of us had a weapon out when a robber showed himself at either door. The ranchman was ready however, and he killed the man on his side. He would have also killed the other, but his revolver failed on the second shot, and the robber pushed his revolver in and fired with the muzzle pressed

against the poor fellow's heart. A third robber then came up, and we were covered from either door and called upon to surrender. The jig was up and we climbed out, delivering our pistols butt foremost as we left the stage. There were four of us and only two robbers, but when a man has the drop on you and means business it's no use to kick. We were placed in a row, and while one of the fellows kept us covered the other went through each man in turn. The lieutenant shelled out a watch and \$40, the tourist a watch and \$400, and they got from the other two of us the sums I have previously named. I had my bank bills in my bootlegs, but as we were forced to strip to our shirts, they found every last dollar. While we were dressing the body of the ranchman was pulled from the coach and stripped and robbed.

I have no doubt that the robbers meant to shoot every one of us after securing the plunder in order to avenge the death of their comrade, but the unusually large booty put them in good spirits, and they underwent a change of heart. The one who searched us stepped over the dead body a dozen times without seeming to care whether it was a log or a man. When finally through with us he bent over the body and began robbing it, saying to his companion:

"Bill won't have any more use for money, and we might as well take his dollars along. Poor Bill! We shan't never play poker together again."

When they were ready to go they cut the harness so that the stage would be detained a couple of hours, broke up or carried off every firearm, and drank to our health from a flask the tourist had with him. They made off for the foothills to the east, having so little care for us that neither of them looked back. I was mad and no mistake, and the miner gave utterance to his feelings in curses which almost cracked the stones around us. We had been robbed of our last dollar, and, with the money, our every prospect. The tourist could get more at Stockton, and the lieutenant was out only a few dollars anyway. I was not yet dressed when he began to put on airs over us, claiming that if we had not been so hasty he would have managed the affair to the defeat of the robbers. This added to my anger, and I sailed in and pounded him until he yelled for mercy.