

Sar' Ann.

By HARRY M. MOORE.
(Rod and Gun in Canada)
(Concluded.)

Leaving Cassidy's immediately after the shooting Bull made straight-way for the valley where as unconcerned as though nothing unusual had happened he threw himself down on his bunk. He slept soundly. As dawn came he got up, ate some bacon and bread, washed down with cold tea, gave Sar' Ann a thorough cleaning and left the shack. Half an hour later with Sar' Ann on the ground before him, Bull lay in the shadow of a huge boulder at the top of a steep wall of rock. Unseen, Bull was in a position to see all parts of the valley and the arrival of those who would be sent to hunt him down.

Bull Heffernon didn't have to wait very long. A glint of the sun on a rifle barrel was his first intimation that the myrmidons of The Law had arrived. They came into view at the top of the cliff opposite. There were seven of them. The large figure in the red shirt was Old Sam Pettigrew, a hard man to outwit, a crack shot and a fighter of the old school.

The posse separated and began a slow encircling movement of Bull Heffernon's shack. Bull chuckled as he pumped a shell from the magazine into the barrel. Just then Old Sam Pettigrew dropped from a shelf of rock on the opposite side of the valley and stood in bold relief against a grey boulder. Bull Heffernon raised Sar' Ann and sighted her on the leader of the posse. The temptation was too strong for him. Unconsciously his finger pressed the trigger—a big white blotch showed where the lead spewed the rock in close proximity to the old constable's head. Nor was that all Bull Heffernon saw. Emitting a whoop, Old Sam Pettigrew dove into a clump of cedars.

Zing-zing—zing—whut! Bull Heffernon hugged the ground and cursed himself for his folly. The posse had discovered his position. The air above him sang with a million devils. Puffs of smoke from different parts of the valley opposite showed where the enemy moving from clump to clump were trying to wing him. Bull dodged lead and shot into the smoke targets. But Bull Heffernon's position became untenable. The air rained lead—lead that tore holes in his clothes, flattened on the rocks all around him and sent his fragments into his face. Bull studied his ground for a chance to escape; if he could only crawl around the boulder he could skirt along the ridge and still be able to give his hunters a battle.

Zing—ping—Bull Heffernon went one way, Sar' Ann with a dinge in her magazine went the other—over the edge of the cliff. With an oath of despair Bull Heffernon flattened out.

The rain of lead continued. It continued until Bull Heffernon's boasted iron nerve cracked under the strain of the thing. Cooped up, shot at and unable to make a reply, there was but one alternative and survive. And life was still dear to Bull Heffernon. He shouted to them to stop their fusillade but they answered him with singing bullets. Bull rolled over on his side and tore a strip from his shirt, fastened the strip on a stick and put it up. A cheer was the answer and then a silence as the posse came up the ridge towards the cliff. Half an hour later Bull Heffernon started out to answer for his sins. And Sar' Ann—Sar' Ann reclaiming from the bottom of that high wall of rock went out with him as a witness of Bull Heffernon's wrong-doing.

Back to the village came to Sar' Ann a battered, bruised veteran of stirring days. Marked "Exhibit A" the rifle was placed in court for Bull Heffernon's trial for the murder of Cassidy and endangering the lives of the posse.

The trial was held in a low frame building with its solid back to the mill-pond of the river. The weather was hot, the court-room was crowded with people from all parts of the upper district, and doors and windows were open wide for comfort. Shackled hand and foot, Bull Heffernon sat in the prisoner's box to the left of the stern-faced, grey-haired judge. Bull was apparently as uninterested in the proceedings as if he had never taken a life. He was defended by a long-nosed young man who sat at his elbow and whispered into his ear. Across the room behind a table upon which rested Sar' Ann the crown prosecutor with his arms on the open window behind him was questioning a witness.

"You say you saw Bull Heffernon standing in the door of Cassidy's place with a rifle in his hand."

"What did he do then?"

"He ducked a bottle thrown at his head and jerked Sar' Ann—"

"Wait a moment—wait a moment," the prosecutor checked him. "You say he jerked Sar' Ann. In the name of common sense what are you talking about? Jerked Sar' Ann? Who is Sar' Ann?"

"The rifle, sir."

The lawyer for the defence was on his feet.

"Your Honour," addressing the judge, "This rifle has been known in the country up there as Sar' Ann—some sentimental reason for calling it that, I suppose. And took his seat."

"Well," the crown attorney returned to his witness, "Bull Heffernon jerked Sar' Ann—"

"He jerked Sar' Ann to his shoulder

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like this and Fred Cassidy dropped in his tracks and he was dead before we got to him."

"Never mind that," the lawyer broke in. "Would you recognize that rifle if you ever saw it again?"

"Yes."

"Be careful now. You say Bull Heffernon was standing in the doorway. He must have been at least thirty feet from you and it was not bright in there at that time."

"But I would know it," the witness protested. "I would recognize it anywhere. It is a saw kind of gun and has a white pearl strip in the stock."

The lawyer held Sar' Ann up. "Is this the rifle?"

"It is."

"Be careful now, you're on your oath remember. You swear this is the rifle Sar' Ann that Bull Heffernon had in his hands when he stood that night in Cassidy's door?"

"It's the same rifle."

"That will do."

The witness stepped out of the box. The crown attorney turned and lay Sar' Ann on the window sill behind him.

The trial dragged on into afternoon without a stop. Then the crown having finished, the lawyer for the defence took up the argument. He contended that Cassidy had been shot with a .44 calibre whereas Sar' Ann was a .32.

With the two types of shells in his hands he crossed the floor and asked that the rifle be further examined.

The crown attorney pushed back from his table, stood up and put a hand on the window sill. Next moment he staggered back. Sar' Ann had disappeared.

Sar' Ann's disappearance created a stir. Court was adjourned until this famous firearm was brought back into the trial. It was an important link in the chain of evidence that the crown was forging around Bull Heffernon. Without Sar' Ann to convict him—the crown attorney mopped his brow.

The courtroom was searched high and low, the immediate premises were given a thorough raking, the village took a holiday, every man, woman and child made busy to find Sar' Ann. The millpond was dragged finally. They did not find Sar' Ann there but they brought up a human body that had been caught in the piling below the dam. That body proved to be Pete Lahey who had come down for the trial and had been in attendance at the court in the earlier part of the day.

The doctors said Pete Lahey couldn't have been in the water much more than two hours. How he got there or what he had been doing there no one knew.

Pete Lahey laid out in the undertaker's rooms, the trial of Bull Heffernon resumed. The crown put up a hard fight to have the man hanged, but lacking its main witness, Sar' Ann, the trial was in reality a victory for the defence. Bull Heffernon's crime was changed to manslaughter and the punishment was three years.

For a long time afterwards the big unanswered question was "What became of Sar' Ann?" then the years rolled around and people began to forget. But there was one who never forgot.

Ten years after Sar' Ann had disappeared so mysteriously, Angus Delauche sold his property to an English syndicate who had found a vein of molybdenite. And when Angus Delauche sold out, he came into the village and bought a bungalow. From the day he arrived in the village Angus Delauche spent morning, noon and night in the vicinity of the millpond.

If he wasn't paddling around in his canoe, he would sit by the hour on the old dam and study the waters. People pondered.

"What are you looking for?" they asked Angus many a time.

And Angus always whispered mysteriously, "Sar' Ann."

Which was Greek to them.

Then—then when McLaren decided to build a new dam above the old one, Angus Delauche was one of the first to apply for a job. And this made the people still wonder—Angus Delauche was a rich man. But then, Angus Delauche had no idea where Sar' Ann was and how the old rifle got there, although he had never told anyone.

Nobody knew why Angus Delauche was so keen for a job on the new dam until that morning they found him kneeling in the mud with a slimy, rusty object in his hand. There were tears in Angus Delauche's eyes that morning.

"Boys," he said, as they surrounded him. "This is the rifle that killed Cassidy at the Basin Depot. This is old Sar' Ann that shot my only son—he would have been a man now. There was a day when I would have thrown that rifle into the lake because I blamed it for what happened to my boy. But I was a plain-fool—he straightened up and his jaw muscles stuck out—"Every man is a fool who leaves a loaded rifle where a child can get his hands on it. Had I not quarrelled with Sar' Ann, Bull Heffernon might not have shot Cassidy. Pete Lahey would not have lost his life trying to take the rifle over the plank on the dam the day he stole it from the window in the court-room."

And so—today Sar' Ann cleaned up as well as it can be cleaned, for the rust has pock-marked the forged steel barrel and eaten out the grooves that gave the steel-jacketed bullet so much speed; Sar' Ann hangs up in Angus Delauche's little bungalow—a silent

reminder of days when a man could hunt to his heart's content, untrammelled by convention, unfettered by the Law—a free man in the freest country under the sun.



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