

The Robber's Loot

A Tale of Leech River—By D. W. Higgins, Author of The Mystic Spring, Etc.



WILLIAM RALPH was a civil engineer, who came to Vancouver Island about 1862, and practiced his profession with much ability until about three years ago, when he died. Mr. Ralph was remarkable for his excellent judgment, his honesty of purpose and the correctness of his work. Much of the land that is now bought and sold in this neighborhood was laid out and platted by him. His most important work was the delimitation of the Island railway belt, comprising some 2,000,000 acres and extending from the Strait of San Juan to Crown Mountain. This work consumed some years in execution, and the correctness of the survey has never been called in question. The country in which the Ralph party prosecuted the survey was wild and trackless, and there were no signs to indicate that it had before been visited by human beings, red or white. Foaming cataracts and swift-running rivers had to be crossed and high mountains scaled, pathways cut through a wilderness of forest growth and tangled brushwood, and the attacks of wild animals guarded against. The party completed the surveys without serious mishap and the maps prepared were duly filed, and are now accepted as unimpeachable authority.

On several occasions, while prosecuting his work, Mr. Ralph had occasion to visit Leech river, which rises in the Goldstream mountains and has an outlet in Sooke river, which in turn empties into Sooke harbor. It was named after Peter Leech, formerly city surveyor here. Leech river in 1864 was the scene of gold mining operations. Some prospectors while crossing the Goldstream range found in Leech river a handsome nugget of gold, weighing three or four ounces. On examining the bars they picked up several other good-sized nuggets. They staked out claims and returned to Victoria, where they spread the news of the discovery.

There were many idle men here at that time who had come back disappointed from Cariboo. These men purchased supplies and hastened into the hills. Soon the river was staked from source to mouth. The mountains on either side of the stream are precipitous and lose themselves in the clouds. Along the sides of those mountains the government cut a bridlepath, over which supplies were packed to the diggings. At the end of the trail there is a small piece of land, which was platted as a townsite under the name of Kennedy Flat, in honor of Governor Kennedy, who had manifested a warm interest in the development of the district. Streets were named and lots were sold to parties who erected buildings of shak (a sort of large shingle) and logs. The only lumber at Leech river was whipsawed and sold for \$150 a thousand. At that price it found ready sale. Soon quite a village, with three or four stores and many miners' cabins, arose on the Flat. The government built an office building and appointed a gold commissioner.

Another townsite, called Sooke City, was platted on Sooke harbor, upon the farm of a Mr. Burnett, and lots were sold readily at fair prices.

A Mr. Hughes was appointed magistrate and was stationed at Sooke City. Although the gold returns were not encouraging, every day or two a nugget would be brought to town, and the sight of it served to revive the flagging hopes of the inhabitants.

One evening a sailor who had run away from a man-o'-war brought in a nugget which, when scaled, was found to weigh \$110. A day or two later Sam Booth, a colored prospector, picked up on his claim a piece of gold that weighed \$70. These finds stimulated public confidence, which had begun to flag, and the excitement continued. But it took only a few weeks to demonstrate to experienced miners that the Leech river diggings were neither extensive nor rich; that there was no depth of gravel, and that huge boulders in the creek and on the benches made mining there unprofitable. There were crevices in the bedrock where it had been washed by the swift-running water that yielded an occasional big nugget; but there was no defined lead. Soon the diggings were pronounced a failure, and the population scuttled out of the mines as rapidly as it had scuttled in, leaving behind houses, stores, provisions, tools and other effects, which were unsalable. The sale of town lots at Sooke City was discontinued, and a blight fell on the district from end to end. The magistrate at Sooke, who was a kindhearted gentleman from London, sharing in the general depression, committed suicide. He discharged five bullets from a small revolver into his side, and died soon after having been brought to Victoria.

Mr. Ralph, who had joined in the rush to the diggings, never lost faith in them. To the day of his death he always maintained that the wealth of the district would be established some day and the whole Island enriched by the development. He held the theory that what seems to be the true bedrock is in reality a false bedrock, and that if it were blasted through, the richest kind of diggings would be found. A discovery of the kind had been made in Australia, and why not here? After most of the early prospectors had abandoned the creek, but a few men remained to search for gold that is not there. They made small wages and were rewarded occasionally by finding a good-sized piece of the metal; but the mines were not remunerative, and gradually the miners dwindled away until today scarce a man remains on the lonely banks of Leech. In the years that followed Mr. Ralph made frequent trips to the

river, and it was while on one of those trips that the incident I am about to relate occurred.

Ralph had spread his blankets for the night on the floor of a deserted building, and had built a little fire at which to cook some bacon and heat his coffee, when he heard a voice as of some one calling for help. The voice sounded far off on the mountain. He went to the door and, after listening awhile, distinctly heard a man's voice calling, "For Heaven's sake, save me!"

Ralph answered with an "Halloo!" and the voice responded with a "Coo-ee, coo-ee!" long-drawn-out with a prolonged emphasis on the last syllable as a herder rounds up his wandering cattle.

"What's the matter?" shouted Ralph. "I've lost my way," rolled a far-distant voice down the side of the steep. "It's dark as blazes here and I can't see the trail."

"Hold on," cried Ralph; "don't move a step till I get a lantern."

"All right," replied the voice; "but please hasten. I'm about starved."

Ralph lighted a candle and placing it within a tin lantern, sallied forth into the night. The feeble rays of the candle lighted the way, and in a short time by frequent calls Ralph reached a huge rock on which reclined a tired, tattered and half-famished stranger. He had, indeed, lost his way, for a few steps in the direction he had chosen would have precipitated him over a precipice into the deep gulch below.

The man was guided to the hut, where he was made happy by a feast of bacon, washed down by delicious coffee, which those who have shared in Ralph's hospitality in the bush will remember he knew how to brew.

As the stranger ate and drank and talked, he thanked Ralph for the relief he had afforded him. "The idea of passing the night in the wilderness unmanned me, and I was scared out of my wits," said he.

The man told Ralph that his name was Curtis. He said he came last from Montana, and having heard that there were good diggings on Leech river had decided to try his luck there. Ralph was pleased to learn that some one besides himself had confidence in the river, and invited Curtis to share his quarters for the night.

The two men lay down on the blankets. The stranger tossed and sighed and moaned constantly. Three or four times he got up and walked to the door to gaze into the blue-vaulted heaven and watch the stars as they twinkled and glinted in their azure setting. Towards morning he replenished the fire and sat down by its side, with his head buried in his hands. He remained motionless for a good while. At the first peep of day, when Ralph arose to prepare breakfast, the man still sat at the fire-side. The sky had become overcast, dark clouds scurried across the face of the rising sun and the wind moaned and wailed up the narrow canyon and tore through the tall pines, shaking the miserable hut on Kennedy Flat, until the occupants entertained keen apprehensions of its stability.

In the daylight Ralph had a good look at the stranger. He seemed to be about 25 years of age, tall and lean, but wiry and supple in his movements. He was not at all bad-looking, but what impressed his host most was his restlessness. He had a habit of starting at the least sound. The flapping of a loose shingle, agitated by the wind, the rattling of a door or window, the distant howl of a lonely wolf or the plaintive wail of a lovelorn panther caused him to start and shiver like a man with the ague. He always sat facing the door, as if to preclude the possibility of a surprise. His pistol was worn in true highwayman style. It was in a leathern sheath and depending from a body-belt hung in front instead of at his side, ready for instant use.

"This man's a criminal," said Ralph to himself. "Somewhere he has committed a crime, and fears arrest. He has come here to hide."

At this moment a loose shingle flapped against the side of the building with a loud clatter.

"What's that?" said the stranger, starting up. "God! I thought it was someone coming in!" he said, as he resumed his seat.

"Say," asked Ralph in the blunt, direct manner so peculiar to him, "what's the matter with you? What have you done to make you so cowardly? You seem to be afraid of every stirring leaf. I'd like to know who and what you are before I let you stay here any longer."

The color came and went in the visitor's face, and his hands shook in spite of a strong effort to compose himself. Again a rude blast tore through the canyon, and the grinding sweep of a distant avalanche as it forced its way down the mountain to the river, carrying forest trees and boulders on its crest, broke on the ear and shut out other sounds. Curtis doubled up with fear. As the noise of the avalanche died away, the man pulled himself together and after a brief while said:

"You wouldn't turn me out in such weather? I wouldn't treat a mangy dog like that."

"I want to treat you white," returned Ralph, "but you must first show me that you're an honest fellow. How do I know who and what you are? You may be an escaped convict for all that I know. I don't like your actions, and I tell you that plain and straight."

The man stared at Ralph with a pleading look in his eyes for a few moments, and then said: "Forgive me, stranger, but I'm not well. If I had a little whiskey to straighten me up, I'd satisfy you I'm all right."

Ralph handed him a black bottle. When he set it down it was one-half empty.

"Ah!" said he, as he returned the bottle to the table, and wiped his lips. "That's good. It has quite revived me. Now I feel like talking business. First, I want you to understand that I'm a miner—an honest one, and I've come here in search of treasure—stolen treasure. There's \$65,000 in gold dust buried almost at our feet. I know the spot. It was taken from a stage in Montana by eight highwaymen, who first killed a whole stagecoach of passengers. They escaped to the mountains with the gold and being hard-pressed by the constables packed it out of the country. They brought it to Vancouver Island and buried it on the bank of this river. Some time afterward I was a nurse in a hospital in California and a sick man was brought in. When his case was pronounced hopeless, he told me that he was one of the robbers of the Montana stage, and gave me a rude map of the place where the gold is buried. That was two years since, and it was only a few weeks ago that I raised sufficient money to prosecute the search. I'll show you the sketch, and if you'll agree to go halves with me we'll dig for the gold."

Ralph considered for a few moments. He had heard of the Cocos Island fraud and Capt. Kidd's buried treasure, and he was suspicious and wary of all such stories. But this was different. In any case the outlay would be small, and it would require only a few days' work to determine the truth or falsity of the man's story. At last he said that he did not feel like sharing in stolen treasure, although he would aid in bringing this lot to the surface if it was really there, with the understanding that he was at liberty to turn his half over to the government, while Curtis might do as he liked with his share.

With this understanding the man produced a sheet of foolscap, which Ralph found contained a tolerably accurate sketch of the country that lies between Victoria and Leech river. The trail was marked out distinctly and ended at a point not far from the floor of the hut.

"Here," said Curtis, as he placed his finger on the spot, "is the location of the gold. I've followed the directions, and everything is as the dying man told me. The stolen gold is near us—almost at our feet."

"I don't believe the story," said Ralph. "Sixty-five thousand dollars in gold is a heavy pack. It's a deadweight, and no man could pack it, or a mule either, over this trail."

"But the man made four trips with it, and he had a mule, too."

"That sounds better, but I don't believe the story; all the same," persisted Ralph.

"You've got the story as I got it," replied Curtis sullenly.

"And if you don't want to join in the search you needn't; only don't try to balk me," and his hand sought the stock of his ever-ready pistol.

"Well," said Ralph, "I'll help you dig a shaft, but bear in mind that I will not keep my half unless the government says I may."

A pick and shovel that had been abandoned by a discouraged prospector were found in a cabin, and Curtis and Ralph began to sink a shaft at the spot indicated on the plan. The boulders and gravel gave the appearance of having been recently disturbed, and before midnight the men were down several feet. During the night the banks caved in and the work of the day before had to be gone over again. At the end of three days they were down about ten feet, when another cavein was threatened, and it was decided that Ralph should return to Victoria and bring out some provisions and tools to cut timber, and Curtis was to remain on the spot and see that the shaft was not interfered with. Ralph was absent six days. When he returned to the river again he found the hut deserted. The pick and shovel lay at the side of the shaft, in the bottom of which the bedrock was visible. To a tree hard by was pinned a piece of paper, on which there was writing, that ran thus:

"Mr. Ralph—I have bottomed the shaft in your absence and found nothing. The dying man lied. There is no buried gold here, and I'm going back home. Sorry I can't wait till you are back, but I don't mind telling you that your dividend will be so small that you can put it in the eye of a needle. Thank you for your hospitality and goodness. Good-bye. May God bless you and give you prosperity if you should decide to continue the work."

"GEORGE CURTIS."

In spite of this bitter disappointment, Ralph did strong in the faith that somewhere on the bank of Leech river the bandits' loot is buried, and that some day it would be found and enrich its finders. There are others who believe that Curtis, after bottoming the shaft, found the stolen gold, and with the co-operation of several confederates carried it away, thus cheating Ralph out of his share. If that theory be adopted, how they could carry so large an amount of deadweight over that rough trail to Victoria and ship it away without attracting attention, must ever remain an unsolved problem.

AUSTRALIA'S NEW GOVERNOR

The appointment of Lord Dudley to succeed Lord Northcote as governor-general of the Australian Commonwealth is an excellent one, says the London Daily Chronicle. It is not quite on the usual party lines; but if Lord Dudley is not, or was not until recently, a Liberal, he has not for some time been a Unionist in the full sense of that term. He it was who proclaimed during his viceroyalty of Ireland that the government of Ireland should be conducted in sympathy with Irish ideas, and who dissociated himself only the other day in the House of Lords from the Unionist advocacy of coercion. His personal qualities, and those of Lady Dudley, will, we do not doubt, make the appointment as popular in Australia as was his tenure of office in Ireland. He is possessed of good sense and judgment. Also he is a sportsman; and he has that faculty of sympathy without which even the greatest abilities cannot command success in such a post as that which he is to fill in the Australian Commonwealth.

Study of Heredity



NEW BOOK has just been issued by a London publishing house on "Heredity," from the pen of J. Arthur Thompson, M.A., Regius Professor of Natural History in the University of Aberdeen. It is thus reviewed by the London Times:

It is almost a truism among physicians that the intractability of a disease may be measured by the number of "infallible" remedies for it which from time to time have been recommended; and it is perhaps equally true that the insolubility of the problems dealt with by any branch of science bears a definite relation to the number and variety of the solutions which have been proposed. If this be so, it will hardly be encouraging to students of heredity to find that the latest work on the question contains no fewer than 48 pages of bibliography, as an appendix and 338 of text, especially when we are informed that this bibliography is "simply representative and not in any way exhaustive." The work itself is entitled to the credit of presenting a luminous summary of many opposed or divergent views, and of being, at least, an attempt to indicate the roads by which careful observation of the influence of ancestry may hereafter be rendered conducive to the improvement of the human race.

The absolute material continuity of offspring with parents and, through parents, with more remote ancestors seems to have been placed, by modern microscopical and biological research, beyond the reach of question. Every individual, except among the very lowest organisms, originates in a cell which is formed by the fusion of two other cells, one contributed by each parent; and it is shown by a very remarkable piece of evidence that the contribution of each parent is of an analogous kind. Every living cell contains a nucleus; and in this nucleus the microscope discovers minute linear particles or bodies which are rendered visible by the facility with which they take color from different staining agents, and which have hence been called stainable bodies or "chromosomes." The number of stainable bodies in each body-cell is constant in the same species; and, with a few exceptions in the case of female insects, it is always an even number in all the forms of life, whether animal or vegetable, which arises from sexual reproduction. Moreover, the number in a body-cell—that is, in a cell forming part of the general bodily structure—is always precisely double the number of a germ-cell—that is, in a cell the fusion of which with another germ-cell gives rise to a new individual; so that this new individual derives its proper number of stainable bodies from the equal contributions of each parent. Each parent, again, has in like manner originally derived his or her stainable bodies in equal proportions from two ancestors; and the general evidence is to the effect that in the course of growth and development the germinal material of the individual, composed of or containing cells with only half of the number of stainable bodies proper to the cells composing the general bodily structure of the species, is always entirely kept apart from the body material which develops into that structure, and which is composed of or contains cells with twice as many stainable bodies as those which unite to form offspring. On this view of the case, not only is the germinal material separate and continuous through successive generations, but the contribution of each preceding generation is uniform and definite, so that "an inheritance is multiple, and the average contributions made by grandparents, great-grandparents, etc., are definite, and diminish in a precise ratio according to the remoteness of the ancestors."

The exceptional results of this complexity of descent, as displayed by the occasional cropping out of remote ancestral peculiarities, have not as yet been brought under the operation of any definite law. But it seems to be clear that only natural or spontaneous variations, as opposed to post-natal modifications, are heritable, and that the general law, as stated by Galton, is clearly that of a tendency to return to an average, both in manifest physical structure and in intellectual endowment. It is true, for example, that 100 fathers who are above the average will have more sons who are also above the average than 100 fathers who are themselves below it; but the sons of the first 100 would not all be above, nor would the sons of the second 100 be all below. In both cases there would be a tendency on the part of descendants to return to the normal, either by deterioration or by improvement; and it follows that, in the interests of the community, nothing by which nurture can assist race in the maintenance of a high average should be left undone. It fortunately happens that a very large proportion of the adverse conditions which affect human beings unfavorably produce only modifications, which are not heritable, and not variations, which are; so that, for example, there is no physical barrier against the ascent to, or even above, the average of the descendants of classes who are now appreciably below it, but whose condition is due not so much to inheritance as to the continued operation of injurious external agencies through successive generations. When these agencies are removed their effects will cease to appear in the descendants of those who have been subjected to them. Indeed, if this were not so, the ascent from savagery to civilization, which is written on the pages of history, could never have been accomplished. The question now pressing upon biologists is to ascertain whether, in the case of any given nation, this ascent of the average is still proceeding, or whether it is being swamped, as regards

the nation at large, by the combined effects of bad inheritance and of bad surroundings upon the numerical majority. Professor Thomson declares that it would be sound economy for the British people to devote a million pounds a year to the investigation of this and of kindred subjects; and he quotes Mr. Galton as to the national gain which would ensue if we could import ten legions of boys of sound physique and scouting intelligence, not crammed with intellectual fat like Strasburg geese with intellectual analogue, but alert in understanding of methods and with unchecked inquisitiveness.

"It would be a good investment, and it is within reach every year, since far more than ten legions of this type of boy are being born annually in our midst. That they do not effect all they might do is partly because of mis-education, but also because there is a simultaneous appearance of an enormously greater number of boys who are emphatically not of this type."

In commenting upon this passage, Professor Thomson remarks that we are said to require,

"Inter alia, a military organization with alert scouting intelligence, not only among the officers, but in the rank and file. We are ceasing to breed this alert scouting intelligence in sufficient numbers; the nation is spawning incapables. We cannot relax our spine of our breeding national belligerence, for we have all our teeming millions to keep alive. But the question rises whether it is not in great part our preoccupation with 'Kriegsspiel' that is responsible for that relatively exaggerated multiplication of the repressed and non-individualized, and for that relatively exaggerated infertility of the fittest, or of what we think to be the fittest. If we indulge in an era of 'Friedensspiel,' which may even now be approaching like a long-delayed springtime, might not the sociological changes that ensued solve the problem which biologically seems so hopeless?"

We greatly doubt whether these observations do not really miss the point of the question at issue. It is obvious that, so long as "Kriegsspiel" holds its own among neighbors and possible rivals, the devotees of "Friedensspiel" would be in a condition of helplessness somewhat like that in which our British ancestors were left by the departure of the Roman legions. But the ascendancy of the future, whether in the rivalries of peace or of war, will be determined by the nations who most completely recognize the omnipotence of knowledge and the incapacity of ignorance. In this particular the pre-eminence, at the present moment, should probably be given to Japan; but the contrast between Great Britain and Germany is worth a moment's consideration. To take a single example, Germany, by submission to knowledge, has obtained complete exemption from smallpox, while Great Britain, as a result of subservience to ignorance, pays to this disease an annual tribute of thousands of pounds and of an indefinite number of lost or damaged lives. The same principle is of very wide application, because education in this country is less directed towards the impartment of knowledge or towards the recognition of its value and importance, than towards the communication of opinions which, in many cases, must be erroneous. Biology justifies the hope that the social conditions hence arising may be modifications and not variations, so that, even if maintained by external circumstances for a succession of generations, they may not lead to permanent deterioration of the race; but it affords no support to the delusion that their prevalence is compatible with sustained national greatness. The history of life is a history of movement; and nations, like individuals, must hold their places by effort or abandon them.

THE FASTEST CHANNEL STEAMER

What promises to be the fastest Channel steamer will, says Engineering, be launched on Monday next from the naval construction works at Barrow-in-Furness of the Vickers company. This vessel, to be named the Ben-my-Chree, has been designed and built by the company for the Liverpool and Isle of Man service of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, Ltd., who have been pioneers in respect of speed. It is therefore only consistent with their past history that the new vessel should be required to maintain in service a speed of 25 knots. To this end she will be fitted with very powerful machinery of the Parsons turbine type, constructed by the Vickers company, and embodying all the latest improvements in design and construction, and to ensure a high manoeuvring efficiency even in adverse weather. This will be the third turbine steamer on the Isle of Man service, the others being the Viking and the Manxman, the latter also a Vickers-built steamer. But these vessels, continues Engineering, do not exceed 22-1/2 knots in service, and at present 24 knots is a very exceptional speed in Channel service, and has only been excelled on the ocean by the Mauretania and Lusitania. Another outstanding feature in connection with the Ben-my-Chree is the extent of the passenger accommodation. She will carry 2,500 passengers, and as everything has been done to conduce to seaworthiness, steady running, and reliability, as well as comfort and speed, there is certainty that in the season this accommodation will be severely taxed. Engineering gives a complete description of the vessel and her turbine machinery; she is 375 feet long, 45-foot beam, and of 2,920 tons displacement.



to make any extended trip to the most notable of the present day. With that press has always been people of Canada. Dec. 12 last, a club of Montreux. I wonder what various emotions immigrant to C. passenger steamers. Remember the immigrant him by the state France at the. This message of light of liberty, emotions. Con immigrant to a with mind again Plains of Abrahams, and he sees me come and hope all that is dawning on the ground where more sacred space can contain. Ladies, it is until that poll other and more

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