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THE VIGILANTES OF MONTANA.

A FULL AND COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE CHASE, CAPTURE, TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF ALL THE OUTLAWS WHO FIGURED IN THE BLOODY DRAMA.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUNNY SIDE OF MOUNTAIN LIFE.

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."—SHAKES.

In the preceding chapter, it was necessary to show to the reader the dark side of the cloud; but it has a golden lining, and though many a cursory observer, or disappointed speculator, may deny this fact, yet thousands have seen it, and know to their hearts' content that it is there. Yes! Life in the mountains has many charms. The one great blessing is perfect freedom. Untrammelled by the artificial restraints of more highly organized society, character develops itself so fully and so truly, that a man who has a friend, knows it, and there is a warmth and depth in the attachment, which unites the dwellers in the wilderness, that is worth years of the insipid and uncertain regard of, so-called, polite circles, which, too often, passes by the name of friendship, and, sometimes, insolently apes the attributes, and dishonors the name of love itself. Those who have slept at the same watch-fire, and traversed together many a weary league, sharing hardship and privation, are drawn together by ties which civilization wots not of. Wounded or sick, far from home, and depending for life itself, upon the ministrations and tender care of some fellow traveller, the memory of these deeds of mercy and kindly fellowship, often mutually rendered, is as an oasis in the desert, or as a crystal stream to the fainting pilgrim.

As soon as towns are built, society commences to organize, and there is something truly cheering in the ready hospitality, the unfeigned welcome, and the friendly toleration of personal peculiarities, which mark the intercourse of the dwellers in the land of gold. Every one does what pleases him best. Forms and ceremonies are at a discount, and generosity has its home in the pure air of the Rocky Mountains. This virtue, indeed, is as inseparable from mountaineers of all classes as the pick and shovel from the prospector. When a case of real destitution is made public, if any well known citizen will but take a paper in his hand and go round with it, the amount collected would astonish a dweller in Eastern cities, and it is a fact that gamblers and saloon keepers are the very men who subscribe the most liberally. Mountaineers think little of a few hundreds of dollars, when the feelings are engaged, and the number of instances in which men have been helped to fortunes and presented with valuable property by their friends, is truly astonishing.

The Mountains also may be said to circumscribe and bound the paradise of amiable and energetic women. For their labor they are paid magnificently, and they are treated with a deference and liberality unknown in other climes. There seems to be a law, unwritten, but scarcely ever transgressed, which assigns to a virtuous and amiable woman, a power for good which she can never hope to attain elsewhere. In his wildest excitement, a mountaineer respects a woman, and anything like an insult offered to a lady, would be instantly resented, probably with fatal effect, by any bystander. Dancing is the great amusement with persons of both sexes, and we might say, of all ages. The comparative disproportion between the male and female elements of society, ensures the possessor of personal charms of the most ordinary kind, if she be good natured, the greatest attention, and the most liberal provision for her wants, whether real or fancied.

If two men are friends, an insult to one is resented by both, an alliance offensive and defensive being a necessary condition of friendship in the mountains. A popular citizen is safe everywhere, and any man may be popular that has anything useful or genial about him.

"Putting on style," or the assumption of aristocratic airs, is the detestation of everybody. No one but a person lacking sense attempts it. It is neither forgotten nor forgiven, and kills a man like a bullet. It should also be remembered that no people more admire and respect upright moral conduct, than do the sojourners in mining camps, while at the same time none more thoroughly despise hypocrisy in any shape. In fact, good men and good women may be as moral and as religious as they choose to be, in the mining countries, and as happy as human beings can be. Much they will miss that they have been used to, and much they will receive that none offered them before.

Money is commonly plentiful; if prices are high, remuneration for work is liberal, and, in the end, care and industry will achieve success and procure competence. We have travelled far and seen much of the world, and the result of our experience is a love for our mountain home, that time and change of scene can never efface.

CHAPTER III.

SETTLEMENT OF MONTANA.

"I hear the tread of pioneers, Of nations yet to be; The first low wash of waves, where soon Shall roll a human sea."—WHITTIER.

Early in the Spring of 1862, the rumor of new and rich discoveries on Salmon River, flew through Salt Lake City, Colorado, and other places in the Territories. A great stampede was the consequence. Faith and hope were in the ascendant among the motley crew that wended their toilsome way by Fort Hall and Snake River, to the new Eldorado. As the trains approached the goal of their desires, they were informed that they could not get through with wagons, and, shortly after came the discouraging tidings that the new mines were overrun by a crowd of gold-hunters from California, Oregon, and other western countries; they were also told, that finding it impossible to obtain either claims or labor, large bands of prospectors were already spreading over the adjacent territory; and finally, that some new diggings had been discovered at Deer Lodge.

The stream of emigration diverged from the halting place, where this last welcome intelligence reached them. Some, turning towards Deer Lodge, crossed the mountains, between Ft. Lemhi and Horse Prairie Creek, and, taking a cut-off to the left, endeavored to strike the old trail from Salt Lake to Bitter Root and Deer Lodge Valleys. These energetic miners crossed the Grasshopper Creek, below the Canon, and finding good prospects there, some of the party remained, with a view of practically testing their value. Others went on to Deer Lodge; but finding that the diggings were neither so rich nor so extensive as they had supposed, they returned to Grasshopper Creek—afterwards known as the Beaver Head Diggings—so named from the Beaver Head River, into which the creek empties. The river derives its appellation from a rock, which exactly resembles, in its outline, the head of a Beaver.

From this camp—the rendezvous of the emigration—started, from time to time, the bands of explorers who first discovered and worked the gulches east of the Rocky Mountains, in the world renowned country now the Territory of Montana. Other emigrants, coming by Deer Lodge, struck the Beaver-head diggings; then the first party from Minnesota arrived; after them, came a large party of the Fisk company who had travelled under Government escort, from the same State, and a considerable number drove through from Salt Lake City and Bitter Root, in the early part of the winter, which was very open.

Among the later arrivals were some desperadoes and outlaws, from the mines west of the mountains. In this gang, were Henry Plummer, afterwards the Sheriff, Charley Reeves, Moore and Skinner. These worthies had no sooner got the "lay of the country," than they commenced operations. Here it may be remarked, that if the professed servants of God would only work for their master with the same energy and persistent devotion, as the servants of the Devil do for their employer, there would be no need of a Heaven above, for the earth itself would be a Paradise.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROAD AGENTS.

"Thieves for their robbery have authority When judges steal themselves."—SHAKESPEARE.

It may easily be imagined that life in Bannack, in the early days of the settlement, was anything but pleasant. The ruffians, whose advent we have noticed, served as a nucleus, around which the disloyal, desperate, and the dishonest gathered, and quickly organizing themselves into a band, with captain, lieutenants, secretary, road agents, and outsiders, became the terror of the country. The stampede to the Alder Gulch, which occurred early in June, 1863, and the discovery of the rich placer diggings there, attracted many more of the dangerous classes, who, scenting the prey from afar, flew like vultures to the battle field.

Between Bannack and Virginia, a correspondence was constantly kept up, and the roads throughout the Territory were under the surveillance of the "outsiders" before mentioned. To such a system were these things brought, that horses, men and coaches were marked in some understood manner, to designate them as fit objects for plunder, and thus the liars in wait had an opportunity of communicating the intelligence to the members of the gang, in time to prevent the escape of the victims.

The usual arms of a road agent were a pair of revolvers, a double-barrelled shotgun, of large bore, with the barrels cut down short, and to this they invariably added a knife or dagger. Thus armed, and mounted on fleet, well trained horses, and being disguised with blankets and masks, the robbers awaited their prey in ambush. When near enough, they sprang out on a keen run, with levelled shot-guns, and usually gave the word, "Halt! Throw up your hands, you sons of b—!" If this latter command were not instantly obeyed, there was the last of the offender; but, in case he complied, as was usual, one or two sat on their horses, covering the party with their guns, while they were loaded with buck-shot, and one, dismounting, disarmed the victims, and made them throw their purses on the grass. This being done, and a search for concealed property being effected, away rode the robbers, reported the capture and divided the spoils.

The confession of two of their number, one of whom, named Erastus Yager alias Red, was hung in the Stinkingwater valley, put the Committee in possession of the names of the prominent men in the gang, and eventually secured their death or voluntary banishment. The most noted of the road agents, with a few exceptions, were hanged by the Vigilance Committee, or banished. A list of the place and date of execution of the principal members of the band, is here presented. The remainder of the red calendar of crime and retribution will appear after the account of the execution of Hunter:

NAMES, PLACE AND DATE OF EXECUTION.

George Ives, Nevada City, Dec. 21st, 1863; Erastus Yager (Red) and G. W. Brown, Stinkingwater Valley, January, 4th, 1864; Henry Plummer, Ned Ray and Buck Stinson, Bannack City, January 10th, 1864; George Lane, (Clubfoot George), Frank Parish, Haze Lyons, Jack Gallagher and Boone Helm, Virginia City, January 14th, 1864; Steven Marshland, Big Hole Rancho, January 16th, 1864; William Buntun, Deer Lodge Valley, January 19th, 1864; Cyrus Skinner, Alex. Carter, and John Cooper, Hell Gate, Jan. 24th, 1864; Robert Zachary, Hell Gate, January 25th, 1864; Wm. Graves alias Whiskey Bill, Fort Owens, January 26th, 1864; William Hunter, Gallatin Valley, February 3d, 1864; John Wagoner (Dutch John) and Joe Pizantaha, Bannack City, Jan. 11th, 1864.

Judge Smith and J. Thurmond, the counsel of the road agents, were banished. Thurmond brought an action, at Salt Lake, against Mr. Fox, charging him with aiding in procuring his banishment. After some peculiar developments of justice in Utah, he judiciously withdrew all proceedings, and gave a receipt in full of all past and future claims on the Vigilance Committee, in which instance he exhibited a wise discretion—

"It's no for nothing the gied whistles."

The Bannack branch of the Vigilantes also sent out of the country, H. G. Sessions, convicted of circulating bogus dust, and one H. D. Moyer, who furnished a room, at midnight, for them to work in, together with material for their labor. A man named Kustar was also banished for recklessly shooting through the windows of the hotel opposite his place of abode.

The circumstances attending the execution of J. H. Slade, and the charges against him, will appear in full in a subsequent part of this work. This case stands on a footing distinct from all the others.

Moore and Reeves were banished, as will afterwards appear, by a miners' jury, at Bannack, in the winter of 1863, but came back in the spring. They fled the country when the Vigilantes commenced operations, and are thought to be in Mexico.

Charley Forbes was a member of the gang; but being wounded in a scuffle, or a robbery, a doctor was found and taken to where he lay. Finding that he was incurable, it is believed that Moore and Reeves shot him, to prevent his divulging what he knew of the band; but this is uncertain. Some say he was killed by Moore and Reeves, in Red Rock Canon.

Another favorite resort of the gang was Dempsey's Cottonwood Rancho. The owner knew the character of the robbers, but had no connection with them; and, in those days, a man's life would not have been worth fifteen minutes purchase, if the possessor had been foolish enough even to hint at his knowledge of their doings. Daley's, at Ramshorn Gulch, and ranches or wakips on the Madison, the Jefferson, Wisconsin Creek, and Mill Creek, were also constantly occupied by members of the band.

By discoveries of the bodies of the victims, the confessions of the murderers before execution, and reliable information sent to the Committee, it was found that one hundred and two people had been certainly killed by these miscreants in various places, and it was believed, on the best information, that scores of unfortunates had been murdered and buried, whose remains were never discovered, nor their fate definitely ascertained. All that was known, was that they started, with greater or less sums of money, for various places, and were never heard of again.

(To be Continued.)

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We can assure those that consign goods to us, that they will be sold at the highest market price.

We are also prepared to transport goods to any and all parts of the Territory with promptness and dispatch.

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Of all Descriptions.

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