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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 XXIII.

THE ARREST AND EXECUTION OF CAPTAIN J. A. SLADE, WITH A SHORT ACCOUNT OF HIS PREVIOUS CAREER.

Some write him here, some, a very brave; Curses and tears are mingled in his grave.—ANON.

J. A. Slade, or, as he was often called, Captain Slade, was raised in Clinton County, Ill., and was a member of a highly respectable family. He bore a good character for several years, in that place. The acts which have given him a celebrity to his name, were performed especially on the Overland Line, of which he was, for years, an official. Reference to these matters will be made in a subsequent part of this chapter.

Captain J. A. Slade came to Virginia City in the spring of 1883. He was a man gifted with the power of making money, and when free from the influence of alcoholic stimulants, which seemed to reverse his nature, and to change a kind hearted and intelligent gentleman into a reckless demon, no man in the Territory had a greater faculty of attracting the favorable notice of even strangers, and in spite of the wild lawlessness which characterized his frequent spells of intoxication, he had many, very many friends whom no commission of crime itself could detach from his personal companionship. Another, and less desirable, class of friends were attracted by his very recklessness. There are probably a thousand individuals, in the Territory, possessing a correct knowledge of the leading incidents of a career that terminated at the gallows, who still speak of Slade as a perfect gentleman, and who not only lament his death, but talk in the highest terms of his character, and pronounce his execution a murder. One way of accounting for this peculiarity of opinion regarding Slade is sufficiently obvious. Those who saw him in his natural state only, would pronounce him to be a kind husband, a most hospitable and a courteous gentleman. On the contrary, those who met him when maddened with liquor and surrounded by a gang of armed roughs, would pronounce him a fend incarnate.

During the summer of 1883, he went to Milk River as a freighter. For this business he was eminently qualified, and he made a great deal of money. Unfortunately his habit of profuse expenditure was uncontrollable, and at the time of his execution, he was deeply in debt almost everywhere.

After the execution of the five men, on the 14th of January, the Vigilantes considered that their work was nearly ended. They had freed the country from highwaymen and murderers, to a great extent, and they determined that, in the absence of the regular civil authority, they would establish a "People's Court," where all offenders should be tried by Judge and Jury. This was the nearest approach to social order that the circumstances permitted, and, though strict legal authority was wanting, yet the people were firmly determined to maintain its efficiency, and to enforce its decrees. It may here be mentioned that the overt act which was the last round on the fatal ladder leading to the scaffold on which Slade perished, was the tearing in pieces and stamping upon a writ of this court, followed by the arrest of the Judge, Alex. Davis, by authority of a presented Derringer, and with his own hands.

J. A. Slade was himself, we have been informed, a Vigilante; he openly boasted of it, and said he knew all that they knew. He was never accused, or even suspected, of any murder or robbery, committed in this Territory, (the latter crime was committed to his charge, in any place); but that he had killed several men in other localities, was notorious, and his bad reputation in this respect was a most powerful argument in determining his fate, when he was finally arrested for the offense mentioned. On returning from Milk River, he became more and more addicted to drinking; until, as last, it was a common feat for him and his friends to "take the town." He and a couple of his dependants might often be seen on one horse, galloping through the streets, shouting and yelling, firing revolvers, etc. On many occasions, he would ride his horse into stores; break up bars; toss the scales out of doors, and use the most insulting language to parties present. Just previous to the day of his arrest, he had given a fearful beating to one of his followers; but such was his influence over them, that the man wept bitterly at the gallows, and begged for his life with all his power. It had become quite common, when Slade was on the spree, for the shop-keepers and citizens to close the store, and put out all the lights; being afraid of some outrage at his hands. One store in Nevada he never ventured to enter, that of the Lott brothers—as they had taken care to let him know that any attempt of the kind would be followed by his sudden death, and though he often rode down there, threatening to break in and raise —, yet he never attempted to enter the store.

From time to time, Slade received warnings from his friends to desist from his course, but he would not listen to them. There was not a moment for weeks previous to his arrest, in which the public did not expect to hear of some bloody outrage. The dread of his very name, and the presence of the armed band of hangers-on, who followed him, alone prevented a resistance, which must certainly have ended in the instant murder or mutilation of the opposing party.

Slade was frequently arrested by order of the court whose organization we have described, and had treated it with respect by paying one or two fines, and promising to pay the rest when he had money; but in the transaction that occurred at this crisis, he forgot even this caution, and, goaded by passion and the hatred of restraint, he sprang into the embrace of death.

Slade had been drunk and "cutting up" all night. He and his companions had made the town a perfect hell. In the morning, J. M. Fox, the Sheriff, met him, arrested him, took him into court, and commenced reading a warrant that he had for his arrest, by way of arraignment. He became uncontrollably furious, and seizing the writ, he tore it up, threw it on the ground and stamped upon it. The clicking of the locks of his companions' restraints were instantly heard, and a crisis was expected. The Sheriff did not attempt his capture; but being at least as prudent as he was valiant, he succumbed, leaving Slade the master of the situation and the conqueror and ruler of courts, law and law-makers. This was a declaration of war, and was so accepted. The Vigilance Committee now felt that the question of social order and the preponderance of the law abiding citizens had then and there to be decided. They knew the character of Slade, and they were well aware that he would submit to his rule without murmur, or else that he must be dealt with in such fashion as would prevent his being able to wreak his vengeance on the Committee, who could never have hoped to live in the Territory secure from outrage or death, and who could never leave it without encountering his friends, whom his victory would have emboldened and stimulated to a party, that would have rendered them reckless of consequences. The day previous, he had ridden into Dorris's store, and on being requested to leave, he drew his revolver and threatened to kill the gentleman who spoke to him. Another saloon he had ridden to, and had bought a bottle of wine, he tried to make the animal drink it. This was not considered an uncommon performance, as he had often entered saloons, and commenced firing at the lamps, causing a wild stampede.

A leading member of the committee met Slade and informed him in the quiet, earnest manner of one who feels the importance of what he is saying: "Slade, get your horse at once, and go home, or there will be — to pay." Slade started and took a long look with his dark and piercing eyes, at the gentleman—"what do you mean?" said he. "You have no right to ask me what I mean," was the quiet reply, "get your horse at once, and remember what I tell you." After a short pause, he promised to do so, and actually got into the saddle; but, being still intoxicated, he began, calling aloud to one after another of his friends, and, at last, seemed to have forgotten the warning he had received, and became again uproarious, shouting the name of a well known prostitute in company with those of two men whom he considered heads of the Committee, as a sort of challenge; perhaps, however, as a simple act of bravado. It seems probable that the intimation of personal danger he had received and not been forgotten entirely; though, fatally for him, he took a foolish way of showing his remembrance of it. He sought out Alexander Davis, the Judge of the Court, and drawing a cocked Derringer, he presented it to his head, and told him that he should hold him as a hostage for his own safety. As the Judge stood perfectly quiet, and offered no resistance to his captor, no further outrage followed on this score. Previous to this, on account of the critical state of affairs, the Committee had met, and at last resolved to arrest him. His execution had not been agreed upon, and, at that time, would have been negative, most assuredly. A messenger rode down to Nevada to inform the leading men of what was about to be done, and it was desirable to show that there was a feeling of unanimity on the subject, all along the gulch.

The miners turned out almost en masse, leaving their work and forming in solid column, about six

hundred strong, armed to the teeth, they marched up to Virginia. The leader of the body well knew the temper of his men, on the subject. He spurred on ahead of them, and, loudly calling a meeting of the Executive, he told them plainly that the miners meant "business," and that, if they came up, they would not stand in the street to be shot down by him and his friends; but that they would take him and hang him. The meeting was small, as the Virginia men were loath to set at all. This momentous announcement of the feeling of the Lower Town was made to a cluster of men, who were deliberating behind a wagon, at the rear of a store on Main street, where the Olinghouse stone building now stands.

The Committee were most unwilling to proceed to extremities. All the duty they had ever performed seemed as nothing to the task before them; but they had to decide, and that quickly. It was finally agreed that if the whole body of the miners were of the opinion that he should be hanged, that the Committee left it in their hands to deal with him. Off, at hot speed, rode the leader of the Nevada men to join his command.

Slade had found out what was intended, and the despair sobbed him instantly. He went into P. S. Plout's store, where Davis was, and apologized for his conduct, saying that he would take it all back. The head of the column now wheeled to the corner of Wallace street, and marched up, at quick time. Halting in front of the store, the executive officer of the Committee stepped forward and arrested Slade, who was at once formed of his doom, and enquiry was made as to whether he had any business to settle. Several parties spoke to him on the subject; but to all enquiries he turned a deaf ear, being entirely absorbed in the terrifying reflections on his own awful position. He never ceased his entreaties for life, and to see his dear wife. The unfortunate lady referred to, between whom and Slade there existed a warm affection, was at this time living at her Rancho, on the Madison. She was possessed of considerable personal attractions; tall, well formed, of graceful carriage, pleasing manners, and was, without an accomplished horsewoman.

A messenger from Slade rode at full speed to inform her of her husband's arrest. In an instant she was in the saddle, and with all the energy that love and despair could lend to an ardent temperament and a strong physique, she rode her best charger over the twelve miles of rough and rocky ground that intervened between her and the object of her passionate devotion.

Meanwhile a party of volunteers had made the necessary preparations for the execution, in the valley traversed by the branch of the Union Pacific. Beneath the site of Plout's and Russell's stone building, there was a corral, the gate posts of which were strong and high. Across the top was laid a beam, to which the rope was fastened, and a dry-goods box served for the platform. To this place Slade was marched, surrounded by a guard, composing the best armed and most numerous force that has ever appeared in Montana Territory.

The doomed man had so exhausted himself by tears, prayers and lamentations, that he had scarcely strength left to stand under the fatal beam. He repeatedly exclaimed, "my God! my God! must I die? Oh, my dear wife!"

On the return of the fatigue party, they encountered some friends of Slade, staunch and reliable citizens and members of the Committee, but who were personally attached to the condemned. On hearing of his sentence, one of them, a stout-hearted man, pulled out his handkerchief and walked away, weeping like a child. Slade still begged to see his wife, most piteously, and it seemed hard to deny his request; but the bloody consequences that were sure to follow the inevitable attempt at a rescue, that her presence and entreaties would have certainly incited, forbade the granting of his request. Several gentlemen were sent for, to see him, in his last moments, one of whom (Judge Davis) made a short speech to the people; but in such low tones as to be inaudible, save to a few in his immediate vicinity. One of his friends, after exchanging his powers of entreaty, threw off his coat and declared that the prisoner could not be hanged until he himself was killed. A hundred guns were instantly leveled at him; whereupon he turned and fled; but, being brought back, he was compelled to resume his coat, and to give a promise of future peaceable demeanor.

Securely a leading man in Virginia could be found, though numbers of the citizens joined the ranks of the guard, when the arrest was made. All lamented the stern necessity which dictated the execution.

"Men, do your duty," the command was given, "Men, do your duty," and the box being instantly slipped from beneath his feet, he died almost instantaneously.

The body was cut down and carried to the Virginia Hotel, where, in a darkened room, it was scarcely laid out, when the command of hastening his burial of the deceased arrived, at heading speed, to find that all was over, and that she was a widow. Her grief and heart-piercing cries were terrible evidences of the depth of her attachment for her lost husband, and a considerable period elapsed before she could regain the command of her excited feelings.

J. A. Slade was, during his connection with the Overland Stage Company, frequently involved in quarrels which terminated fatally for his antagonists. The first and most memorable of these was his encounter with Jules, a station-keeper at Julesburg, on the Platte river. Between the inhabitants, the emigrants and the Stage people, there was a constant feud, arising from quarrels about missing stock, alleged to have been stolen by the settlers, which constantly resulted in personal difficulties such as beating, shooting, stabbing, etc., and it was from this cause that Slade became involved in a transaction which has become inseparably associated with his name, and which has given a coloring and tone to all descriptions of him, from the date of the occurrence to the present day.

(To be Continued.)

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In all ordinary transactions, and at eighty-five cents for all contracts made for Bankable gold dust.
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Taken Up.
CAME into my enclosure, two stray steers, about four years old. The owner is requested to prove property, pay charges, and take them away.
A. M. PARSONS,
Toll-Gate, Bunkingwater,
Virginia City, December 16th, 1883. 71-4

E. Olinghouse. W. B. Ridenour.

E. OLINGHOUSE & CO.,
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They Keep constantly on hand and for sale

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A Choice assortment of
RYE WHISKEY, GIN, SCOTCH WHISKEY, CHERRY BRANDY, COGNAC BRANDY, CHERRY WINE, CHERRY JUICE.

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We solicit consignments of all kinds of
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In quantities to suit buyers.
Also a few cases of the purest
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Choice
WINE and
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CONFECTIONERY TO ORDER.
A commodious Saloon for the accommodation of guests and good music provided for their entertainment. 48-50*

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WOULD call the attention of Merchants and the Public generally to the fact that they are in receipt of a General assortment of Merchandise, consisting in part of

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A Large Assortment of
LIQUORS AND CIGARS
Of all Descriptions.

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Have on hand and for sale a complete assortment of
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SUGAR, COFFEE, TEAS,
DRIED FRUITS OF ALL KINDS
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Ropes, Nails and Sledges, of every size.
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Call and Examine our Stock. 22*

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Beef, Mutton, Veal, Game, Fish, Sausages and Fowls
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Estray Notice.
CAME to my Rancho, at Toll Gate, on Stinkingwater, about the 15th of December, two Steers, one four and the other eight years old. The owner will come for them, pay charges, prove property, and take them away.
N. W. PARSONS,
Virginia City, December 20th, 1883. 70-4*

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And call and see us.
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HIGH AND LOW PRESSURE
STEAM ENGINES & BOILERS
IRON AND COMPOSITION CASTINGS,
OF ALL SIZES.
Builders of the Pumping Engines
In the cities of Brooklyn, N. Y., and Hartford, Conn., and also, Builders of the Engines in the U. S. Steam Ship War Machine and Coal; the U. S. Gunboats Cayuga, Pequot, and Nipic; the Government Transport Dispatch and Geo. C. Collins, and Steamship America. 67*

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