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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 knave; Curses and tears are mingled at his grave.—ANON.

There have been so many versions of the affair, all of them differing more or less in important particulars, that it has seemed impossible to get at the exact truth; but the following account may be relied on as substantially correct.

From Overlanders and dwellers on the road, we learn that Jules was himself a lawless and tyrannical man, taking such liberties with the coach stock and carrying matters with so high a hand that the company determined on giving the agency of the division to J. A. Slade. In a business point of view they were correct in their selection. The coach went through at all hazards. It is not to be supposed that Jules would submit to the authority of a new comer, or, indeed, of any man that he could intimidate; and very limited income was sufficient to increase the mutual dislike of the parties so far as to occasion an open rupture and bloodshed. Slade, it is said, had employed a man discharged by Jules, which irritated the latter considerably; but the overt act that brought matters to a crisis was the recovery, by Slade, of a team, which had been stolen by Jules. Some state that there had been a previous altercation between the two; but, whether this be true or not, it appears certain that on the arrival of the coach, with Slade as a passenger, Jules determined to arrest the team, and there; and that, finding Slade was equally determined on putting them through, a few epithets were exchanged, and Jules fired his gun, loaded with buck-shot, at Slade, who was unarmed at the time, wounding him severely. At his death, Slade carried several of these shot in his body. Slade went down the road, till he recovered his wounds. Jules left the place, and in his travels never failed to let everybody know that he would kill Slade, who, on his part, was not backward in reciprocating such promises. At last, Slade got well; and, shortly after, was informed that his enemy had been "corralled by the boys," whereupon he went to the place designated, tying himself, shot him to death by degrees. He also cut off his ears, and carried them in his vest pocket for a long time.

One man declares that Slade went up to the rancho where he had been shot, and "getting the drop on him," that is to say, covering him with his pistol before he was ready to defend himself, he said, "Jules, I am going to kill you;" to which the other replied, "Well, I suppose I am gone up; you've got me now;" and that Slade immediately opened fire and killed him with his revolver.

The first story is the one almost universally believed in the West, and the act is considered entirely justifiable by the wild Indian fighters of the frontier. Had Slade simply killed Jules, he would have been his enemy, however, and of no account.

While on the road, Slade ruled supreme. He would ride down to a station; get into a quarrel; turn the house out of windows, and maltreat the occupants most cruelly. The unfortunate had no means of redress, and were compelled to recuperate as best they could. On one of these occasions, it is said, he killed the father of the fine little half-breed boy, Jenny, whom he adopted, and who lived with his widow, after his execution. He was a gentle, well behaved child, remarkable for his beautiful, soft black eyes, and for his polite address.

Sometimes Slade acted as a butcher. On one occasion, some emigrants had their stock either lost or stolen, and told Slade, who happened to visit their camp. He rode, with a single companion, to a rancho, the owners of which he suspected, and opening the door, commenced firing at them, killing three and wounding the fourth.

As for minor quarrels and shootings, it is absolutely certain that a minute history of Slade's life would be one long record of such practices. He was feared a great deal more, generally, than the Almighty. From Kentucky, West, there was, it seems, something in his blood, which made him generous, and firm attachment to his friends, whose quarrels he would back, everywhere and at any time, that rendered him to the wild denizens of the prairie, and this personal attachment it is that has cast a veil over his faults, so dark that his friends could never see his real character, or believe their idol to be a blood-stained desperado.

Stories of his hanging men, and of innumerable assaults, shootings, stabblings and beatings, in which he was a principal actor, form part of the legends of the stage line; nevertheless, such is the veneration still cherished for him by many of the old stages, that any insult offered to his memory would be fearfully and quickly avenged. Whatever he did to others, he was their friend, they say; and so they will say and feel till the tomb closes over the last of his old friends and comrades of the Overland.

It should be stated that, late as at the time of his coming West, a fugitive from justice, in Illinois, where he killed a man with whom he had been quarreling. Finding his antagonist to be more than his match, he ran away from him, and, in his flight, picking up a stone, he threw it with such deadly aim and violence that it penetrated the skull of his pursuer, over the eye, and killed him. John W. Shields, who pursued him for nearly four hundred miles, was in Virginia City, not very long since, as we have been informed by persons who knew him well.

Such was Captain J. A. Slade, the idol of his followers, the terror of his enemies, and of all that were not within the charm circle of his dependents. In him, generosity and destructiveness, brutal lawlessness and courteous kindness, firm friendship and volcanic outbreaks of fury, were so mingled that he seems like one born out of date. He should have lived in feudal times, and have been the comrade of the Front de Beauf, de Lucy's, and Bois-toutiers, of days almost forgotten. In modern times, he stands nearly alone.

The execution of Slade had a most wonderful effect upon society. Henceforth, all knew that no one man could dominate or rule over the community. Reason and civilization then drove brute force from Montana.

One of his principal friends wisely absconded, and so escaped sharing his fate, which would have been a thing almost certain, had he remained.

It has often been asked why Slade's friends were permitted to go scot free, seeing that they accompanied him in all his "raids," and both shared and defended his wild and lawless exploits. The answer is very simple. The Vigilantes deplored the sad, but imperative, necessity for the making of one example. That, they knew, would be sufficient. They were right in their judgment, and immovable in their purpose. Could he, but be made known, how many lives were at their mercy, society would wince at the moderation that ruled in their councils. Necessity was the arbiter of these men's fate. When the stern Goddess spoke not, the doom was unpronounced, and the criminal remained at large. They acted for the public good, and when examples were made, it was because the safety of the community demanded a warning to the lawless and the desperate, that might neither be despised nor soon forgotten.

The execution of the rascals of Plummer's gang was the result of the popular verdict and judgment against robbers and murderers. The death of Slade was the protest of society on behalf of social order and the rights of man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EXECUTION OF JAS. BRADY, FOR SHOOTING MURPHY AT NEVADA.

"Murder most foul and most unnatural!"—SHAKESPEARE.

Earlier in the summer of 1864, the Committee were called upon to visit the stern retribution due to those who wantonly and maliciously attempt to assassinate a fellow creature, upon James Brady, a resident of the Lower-Low, more generally known as Nevada City. The case was clear, so far as the moral guilt of the accused was concerned, as will fully appear from the subjoined account of the transaction; but there are not a few who measure the extent of guilt by its consequences, and refuse to examine the act itself, on its own merits. Now we have always held that a man who fires at another, deliberately and with malicious prepense, inflicting him a wound of any kind, is as much a murderer as if the shot had proved instantly fatal. The other judgment of the case depends upon the relative goodness or badness of ammunition, the efficiency of the weapon, and the expertise of the mark-man. Hence, to hit the mark is murder; but to aim at it, if a ball glanced on a man's ribs, it is manslaughter; if it goes between them, it is murder. This line of argument may satisfy some people; and that it does so, we know; at the same time, it is not a doctrine that we can endorse, being fully convinced of its utter want of foundation, in right, reason, or common sense.

Murphy, the victim of Brady's shot, was believed to be dying; the physicians declared he could not live many hours, and for this crime Brady was executed. Some kind-hearted, but weak-headed, individuals think that the murderer ought to have been spared,

because Murphy had a strong constitution, and, contrary to expectations, recovered; but what the state of a man's health, has to do with the crime of the villain who shoots him, will, to us, forever remain an enigma as difficult as the unraveling of the Gordian knot. The proper course, in such cases, seems to be, not the untying of the knot, as before, but the casting on of another, in the shape of a road agent's necktie.

At about 11 p. m., the stillness of the summer's night that had closed in upon the citizens of Nevada, was broken by two pistol shots, fired in rapid succession. The executive officer of the Committee heard the reports, as he was retiring to bed; but the sounds were too familiar to a mountaineer to attract any special attention, and he laid down, at once, to sleep. In a few moments, however, he was startled from his quick coming slumber by the sudden entrance of a friend, who told him to get up, for there was a man shot. Hastily dressing himself, he found that an individual named Jim Kelly was a prisoner, on the charge of being an accomplice in the deed. Who had fired the shots was not known, the man having run off with all speed, before he could be arrested. A guard of two Vigilantes was left in charge of Kelly, and the officer went quickly to Brady's saloon, where he first heard, from the reports, that they thought Brady himself was the criminal, but that he had escaped. The wounded man confirmed this statement, and an examination of the premises showed a shot-hole in the window through which the assassin had fired. The second shot had been fired from the door-step.

A detail of twelve men were ordered to search the town, for Brady, while the captain and three others searched the Virginia City, with the intention of capturing him if he could be found there, or on the road thither. On arriving at Central City, they ascended from a citizen whom they met on the street, that a man dressed in black clothes, and otherwise answering the description of the fugitive, had passed through, but that he was apparently intoxicated. They went on to Virginia, and, on arriving there, just about midnight, they found that the only house in which a light appeared was the Boardman saloon, at the corner of Idaho and Jackson streets, (now John How & Co.'s store). Brady was taken down to Nevada by his captors, and confronted with his victim, who was lying in his own house. "Murphy," said the captain, "is this the man shot you?" The wounded man fixed his gaze on the prisoner, and replied faintly, "It is." The guard then took Brady and marched him down town, to the house where Kelly was confined. The two men were given into the custody of a strong and well armed party, for the night. The death of Murphy was hourly expected by the attendant surgeons, and all around him.

(To be Continued.)

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