

Avenged on Christmas Day



INDIAN GRAVE IN THE WILDERNESS

By R. D. Strong.

THE sobbing of the wind as it swept through the dismal pines and the sharp crunching of the ice on the boughs as the blast tossed them to and fro were the only sounds that broke upon the ears of the weary man as he stumbled on and on through the gloomy forest, faint with hunger, chilled to the bone by the bitter cold that had settled down upon the Northland, and bleeding from a ghastly wound in his side from which the crimson blood trickled in a steady stream, freezing even as it flowed.

Far he had wandered in the woods, in search of human habitation, and as he realized that his strength was almost gone and no help near, a moan burst from his whitened lips. Early in the afternoon, while sitting on a deer runway, in the hope of securing a juicy steak for his Christmas dinner, he had heard the report of a rifle, and at the same instant his side had been pierced by the missile fired by an unseen marksman.

Fighting for Life.

Fearfully wounded though he was, Jack Thornton was not the man to give up without a fight for his life. Raised in the north woods, and as much at home in the pines on the darkest night as he was in the daytime in the little clearing in which stood his log cabin, he had more than once battled for existence with the elements and the denizens of the forest, and now, although his very life-blood stained the snow into which he had thrown himself when struck, he refused to give up.

With an effort he arose to his feet. The exertion was fraught with pain most intense, and as he grasped a tamarack for support as he gathered his feet under him preparatory to trying to make his way out of the timber in an endeavor to find, perchance, the home of a settler, he failed to notice that his compass had slipped from his pocket and had fallen in the snow, where it sank from sight beneath the red-tinged covering of the earth.

Reels Like Drunken Man.

For a moment he staggered like a drunken man after releasing his hold upon the tree upon which he supported himself, and with a muttered curse he stooped and picked up his rifle, intending to use it as a crutch.

But as he grasped the weapon he realized that its weight was more than he could carry, and in a second the gun went crashing back to the ground to join the compass, that faithful companion which every man in the woods carries and values as he does his life.

For an hour or more Thornton staggered along, now cursing the day he was born and then uttering prayers such as only a man from whom all hope had fled can utter.

The pain in his side, through which the bullet had torn its way, leaving a great hole in its wake, was growing more intense at every step; fast ebbing the strength of the stricken man, and more than once he threw himself down in the snow, intending to lie there until death should come.

These paroxysms of despair grew more and more frequent, and at last the woodsman, crying like a baby, fell headlong to the ground, his hands tearing at the snow in his agony. How long he lay there he did not know or care—time had no meaning for him.

Suffers Fearful Torment.

All that he knew was that he was suffering the torments of the damned, that his brain was in a whirl, and that a thousand devils were tearing at his vitals as if to get at his heart, through which the blood seemed to run icy cold.

Through the pines came the sobbing of the wind, like the last wail of a soul doomed to everlasting damnation, and as the wailing fell upon the ears of Thornton he cringed and seemed to shrink in size.

To his fevered brain the sobbing of the wind was the wailing of a woman, and as it rose and fell with the violence of the wind a fierce rage grew upon him and his teeth gnashed at his lips until the blood came and froze upon his beard.

"Curse, you!" he shouted, trying to shake his fists at the forms he imagined he saw about him; "curse you; you have come back to mock me and to jeer at my agony, have you? Curse you, I won't die—I won't die—I won't die, I tell you. Begone!"

The Stamp of Death.

Gradually a mist came before his eyes, and his face grew white and wet. It seemed as if death had placed its stamp upon the figure lying so silent and still. The blood trickling from his side dyed red the snow and formed a crust about the body. A faint breathing alone showed that life still lingered.

Through the forest an owl came flying, almost over the man lying in the frozen particles, and as the sigat broke upon the eyes of the uncanny bird it uttered a note of alarm and swiftly turned its course, leaving Thornton alone.

like and so fierce that the man shuddered and tried to rise to his feet. A look of fear froze upon his face and his hands shook with more than faintness.

Wolves' Supper Call.

Woodsmen that he was, Thornton knew only too well the meaning of that wailing cry that had brought him back from the very gates of death—it was the cry of a pack of timber wolves of the North, which had scented fresh blood, and which would not rest nor cease running until the quarry had been overtaken and torn to pieces.

He had seen too much of the "hell dogs of the North" not to know what his fate would be were the pack to overtake him, and he seemed to feel the fetid breath of the creatures in his face and their fangs at his throat as he roused himself.

On and on he plunged, his face torn by the twigs and his feet catching in the roots and fallen branches. Hatless and with bare hands, he was making a run for his very life—and he knew that death in its most awful form was close at hand.

The cry of the inhuman pack behind him grew nearer and nearer, urging the man to greater speed, until it seemed as if human flesh and bone could do no more. Agonizing sobs broke from the lips of the hunted man and he strained every nerve as he fled.

In Deadly Fear.

Like a red-hot iron piercing his vitals came the deadly pain in his side, but this was nothing compared to the pain of fear which consumed him as he plunged on in his mad flight.

He was willing to die, he said to him-

self, but he wanted to cheat the "devil's dogs" of their prey. This thought alone spurred him on, and he goaded himself with mental spurs until he ran as does a man who has trained for a race among athletes.

Now the leader of the pack was giving tongue to encourage the less fleet of his followers—he had sighted the quarry and in a few minutes there could be a royal feast for the four-footed imps, whose eyes shone red and green, and whose jaws were already flecked with white foam as they clashed their teeth

together in their lust for human blood. The panting of the hunted man was growing in intensity and his speed was perceptibly slackening, when there came into view two white and ghost-like objects on the bank of the river at his left.

Two Indian Graves.

There on the bank overlooking the Father of Waters, now sheathed with a thick coating of ice, stood two Indian graves, covered with small board houses, such as the red men of the forest erect over the resting places of their loved ones to protect the bodies lying underneath from the wild animals of the woods.

One of the graves was that of an adult, while the other was that of an infant, and as Thornton took this in at a glance he uttered a groan of mental agony.

Shrinking back, almost as if he had run against a wall of red-hot steel, he passed for a moment. Rushing through the scrub pine, less than 20 rods away, came the "imps of Satan"—he could see them plainly as he turned, faced the pack and called down upon the head of the Creator curses which made the woods ring with the blasphemous sounds.

Lying on a Grave.

Apparently he was going to defy the hungry friends, who were rushing upon him at race-horse speed. There was a moment of indecision and then the human game made a dash for the larger of the graves.

With a powerful wrench he pulled a board from the side of the house covering the place and threw himself inside and onto the birch bark-covered mound under which a still form was lying.

"Was but the work of a second to replace the board and hold it in place, and then hurl a defiance at the snarling pack without, which had reached the grave as Thornton placed the barrier against them.

"Snap, snarl and fight, you dogs of the devil!" shouted Thornton glaring at the wolves through the little hole in the upper part of the tiny house which sheltered him from the evil brutes.

"Snap and snarl, curse you; you can't get me. You will never be able to pick my bones. No, curse you now and forever, I may die, but you'll never be able to tear my body to bits and carry pieces of me far and wide."

The tremendous exertion of the man in making his run through the woods had sapped his strength, and as the reaction came he grew delirious and maniacal in demeanor. Fits of laughter shook his powerful frame, and then these would give way to soft words, such as a man might use to the women he loved.

Sings Backwoods Song.

Tenderly he passed his hands over the birch bark covering of the mound

pet, I'll always love you, and some day we will marry and live in our own home.

"Desert you? Why, sweet, because other white men have deserted the Indian woman they have sworn to love is no reason why I should desert you. Leave you after I have become tired of you and have met some white woman who is fairer than you?—why, sweetheart, I swear by the Great Spirit above that I'll never leave you.

"Curse you! Take your arms away, you red skin. You don't expect me to love an Indian girl, do you, when I can have a white woman for the asking. Ha, ha, ha! That's good. You all you have to do is to go back to the family wigwam—you will soon find some buck to make you his squaw."

"Your baby? Curse you, girl, I'll no, I won't hit you. You need not fear that. You have no baby yet, and you'll soon be married to some buck who won't care for a little thing like that!

"Yes, you've been a good little girl to me—here's some money, if that will do you any good. I'm going now, and say, if you ever come bothering around me it'll be the worse for you, d'ye hear. None of your pitiful tears, now—that game won't go with me. I won't marry you, and that's settled.

"Hit me with a knife, would you—take that and that and that!" and the delicious man struck again and again at the empty air, and then sank back exhausted, his energy gone and his mind a blank.

Shadow Form Is Seen.

Perhaps 'twas nothing but a slender thread of breath ascending as Thornton drew into his lungs the frost-laden air and expelled it as steam, but this thread took shape in the gloom of the tomb and grew and grew until it resembled the shrouded form of an Indian girl, with a baby on her back.

How white and still the little face looked, and what a look of unutterable agony there was upon the face of the girl as she gazed down at the form of a man stretched out upon the grave!

No one knows what was passing in the brain of the woodsman, who lay like a log upon his back, his eyes half open and his hand pressed to his side, but there came to him a little thrill of life, and his breast heaved in a convulsive way.

Then, with a long-drawn sigh and a stifled cry of pain he rose to a sitting posture and gazed wildly about him. What he seemed expecting to see had vanished like the shadow of a dream, and he fell back with a muttered curse, his voice faltering as he spoke it.

Single Ray of Light.

As Thornton lay back in the tomb a single ray of light entered the place through the hole that the persons who had erected the grave-coverings had cut out so that the spirit of the human lying below might have free exit and ingress.

Like the eyes of The Father above this single ray of light fell squarely upon the face of the wounded man, and it revealed features torn not only by

he had escaped the fangs of the wolves, and then strange fancies began to fill his brain.

Picture Will Not Fade.

Try as he would, he could not rid himself of the picture that intruded itself upon him. Curses and groans aided him not in shutting out from his mind things he did not wish to dwell upon, and as picture after picture ran through his brain he began to compare himself to the four-footed wolves outside.

They had sought his life, but had he not taken from an Indian girl what was more precious to her than life itself; and had he not sent her back to her father's tepee a thing unclean, a woman to be spat upon, and whose name would be a byword in the lodge of the tribe to which she belonged?

Dying, he supposed, Thornton at last faced the mental charge that forced itself upon him, and he shrank under the accusing finger pointed at him by a shadowy Indian girl, whose face was strangely like the face of the apparition that had hovered over him as he lay unconscious soon after seeking the shelter of the tomb. His past life came floating by him like a fleecy cloud, and this is the picture that he saw:

Happy Indian Maiden.

Around a tepee made of birch bark an Indian girl was playing, happy in her ignorance of the sin and the pleasures of the world which lay the other side of the reservation. Pretty as a flower, and admired by the braves of the tribe, little Pta was the belle of the village, and her hand was sought in marriage by more than one of the dusky fellows, each one ready to make her his lawful wife, according to the custom of the Indian, and give her a home in his wigwam.

Then a tall, stalwart white man appeared upon the scene, and soon was a welcome visitor at the tepee of old Ge-wan-go-bah, the father of Pta. Fond was Ge-wan-go-bah of the freewater of the white man, and as the stranger was always ready to furnish this the old warrior had a warm spot in his heart for the young woodsman, and in angry tones he bid the dusky suitors of his daughter's hand begone.

Wife's Confession of Love.

By flattery and honeyed words the white man appealed to the Indian maiden, and by fair promises and tender caresses he won from her a confession of her love for him.

Long walks they took together in the silent forest, and often in the dusk they drifted idly with the stream in the canoe of the white man, who was an expert in the use of the paddle and the rifle, which things had won for him a name among the red men of the reservation as a man to be feared.

Closer and closer grew their intimacy, much to the anger of Shang-neo-she, one of the rejected suitors of Pta, and more than once he made threats against the life of the man from outside, who, he said, desired not to make Pta his wife, but to make her a despised woman in the eyes of the tribe as soon as he found it convenient to leave her for a white woman.

Little Pta only laughed at these warnings and made merry with her white lover, who, she said, was going to marry her soon.

Several months had come and gone before the love of the white man grew cold, and then he met her with bitter words and the offer of money. With downcast eyes the little Indian maiden whispered a secret to her recreant lover, but he laughed her to scorn and told her to go and marry one of the bucks of her tribe, who "would not mind a little thing like that."

Then the Indian girl, heretofore loving and yielding to his every wish, had suddenly drawn a knife and made a lunge at the man who had betrayed her, and he, the brute that he was, had struck her down with cruel blows.

Thornton groaned aloud as this part of the picture passed before him, and he saw painted in its true colors the crime of which he had been guilty. Then came a merciful blank in the mind of the injured man, and when the picture appeared before him again the scene had changed.

The white man was the husband of a white woman, and never gave a thought to poor little Pta, who had become a mother, as he was told, of a fine baby boy, whose features bore a marked resemblance to the man who had been her lover.

Finally she and her baby had faded from his mind, and he was free to shower his love and his caresses upon the woman he called his wife and the children she had borne to him.

Time and again the series of pictures unrolled themselves before the wounded man, and as some of them were flashed upon the mental canvas he writhed in agony.

Beads of perspiration stood out upon his brow, where they froze into crystals as pure as was the mind of poor dead Pta before he had come into her life.

Hoping Against Hope.

Arose the moon in all its glory, and Thornton felt for his compass, in order that he might get the time and make a note of the directions, hoping against hope that when the morning dawned, if he had not frozen to death or died of his wound before, he might be able to leave his narrow refuge and prison in one and seek aid somewhere.

His anguish when he found his compass gone was pitiful, for he knew that without it he could never find his way from the forest, except by following the river, and this he was too weak to do.

He had wandered into a territory with which he was unfamiliar, in his chase after deer, and was now he knew not where, except that the Mississippi river lay at his feet.

Camps of the lumbermen he knew he would not find, even if he succeeded in starting in the morning, for as yet the giant pines of the reservation had not felt the blighting touch of the ax, and the cabins of the squatters or lone Indians were few and far between.

Utters Bitter Curses.

As the night wore on, Thornton cursed himself, Pta and everything else time and again. The snarling and snarling of the wolves rose and fell as the pack was increased or diminished; now and then he thought he heard his name called at a distance—a woman's voice—and he tried to answer, but his words were weak and faint, and could scarcely be heard a yard away.

At every sound the "hell dogs of the north" tore so furiously at the frail shelter of the hunter that at last he ceased to call out, and finally sank into a sleep that was half the sleep of death. His life was hanging by a slender

thread, but he realized it not, for Providence was preserving him for a dozen deaths rolled into one. Had Thornton known the fate in store for him he would have willingly gone to his death by his own hand, for that would have been a merciful ending compared to the one he met.

The gray was beginning to tinge the east, and the air was filled with icy needles that stung like electric shocks when Thornton awakened from the stupor which had fallen upon him. Outside all was as silent as the tomb within which he lay, until suddenly there broke upon his ear the crunching of the snow as a human being approached the grave.

Ge-wan-go-bah Appears.

"Help! Help!" called the wounded man, as the sound grew nearer and nearer. Then a board was twisted from the tomb, and confronting Thornton stood old Ge-wan-go-bah, the father of poor Pta.

As he reached down to lift to his feet the man lying half dead within the wooden prison, he failed to see that it was Thornton he held in his arms.

Dim was his eyesight, and it was small wonder that he failed to recognize in the torn, blood-stained man before him the wrecker of his daughter's happiness.

"'Twas not until he had carried Thornton several feet from the grave that the knowledge that he was succoring a man against whom he cherished a deadly hate broke upon him.

With a curse he dropped his burden into the snow and with drawn knife sprang upon him.

For a moment the life of Thornton hung in the balance; then a grim, devilish smile lighted up the seamed face of the old Indian, and he stayed his hand.

Tied to a Tree.

Binding the hands and feet of the captive, he dragged him to a tree and there tied him. The red fire of hate was in the old man's eyes, which blazed as they had not for years, and as he contemplated his work after he had securely fastened Thornton, he nodded his head approvingly.

Hour after hour the old Indian sat in the snow and gazed at the dying white man, from whom the power of speech had fled. As the darkness of the late afternoon came on the Indian put his hand to his mouth and skillfully imitated the long-drawn howl of the leader of a wolf pack.

Away off in the forest came an answering cry; again the old man put his hands to his mouth and again the terrifying sound rang out. This time the answer came from a point much nearer than the first.

Nodding his head with satisfaction, the Indian once more gazed into the face of the white man and then swiftly moved away, leaving Thornton alone, with the wolf pack close at hand.

As the brutes appeared Thornton opened his eyes for a moment. As he saw the wolves, a quiver shook his powerful frame and his lips moved as if he were praying.

With a bound the wolves were upon him.

When old Ge-wan-go-bah visited the spot the following morning there was a bone or two lying in the snow, which was discolored and trampled, and here and there a fragment of cloth—that was all. The "dogs of the devil" had done their work thoroughly, and Pta, the Indian girl, was avenged.

Increase in State Funds.

The report of State Treasurer A. H. Barret, filed with the governor recently, shows that from all sources he received during the fiscal year ending Saturday, November 30, \$1,343,338.75; that he disbursed on various accounts \$1,303,779.04; that there is in the hands of the state treasurer \$544,686.87.

Three reports were recently completed and filed with the governor, the annual, the quarterly and that for the month of November.

The quarterly report shows that during the three months ending December 1 the state treasurer received \$249,408.33 and disbursed \$172,468.64.

The largest amount from any one source was received from the state land department, in the amount of \$129,710.73. The counties paid in taxes to the amount of \$98,291.31. Silver Bow county led with \$15,221.48. Lewis and Clarke county was second with \$11,272.55.

Collections for Quarter.

The state treasurer's report for the month of November shows that \$158,020.47 was received, while \$61,203.56 was paid out.

The report for the month further shows that the permanent school fund contains \$413,022.19 in bonds, warrants and cash. During the quarter the general fund received \$41,750.99 from licenses, \$32,400.13 from taxes and \$15,881.71 from other sources. For the quarter \$9,492.30 was paid out on account of warrants.

The report for last year showed that at the end of the fiscal year 1900 there was \$514,771.16 in cash in the different funds. This fiscal year commences with \$544,686.87 in cash in the various funds.

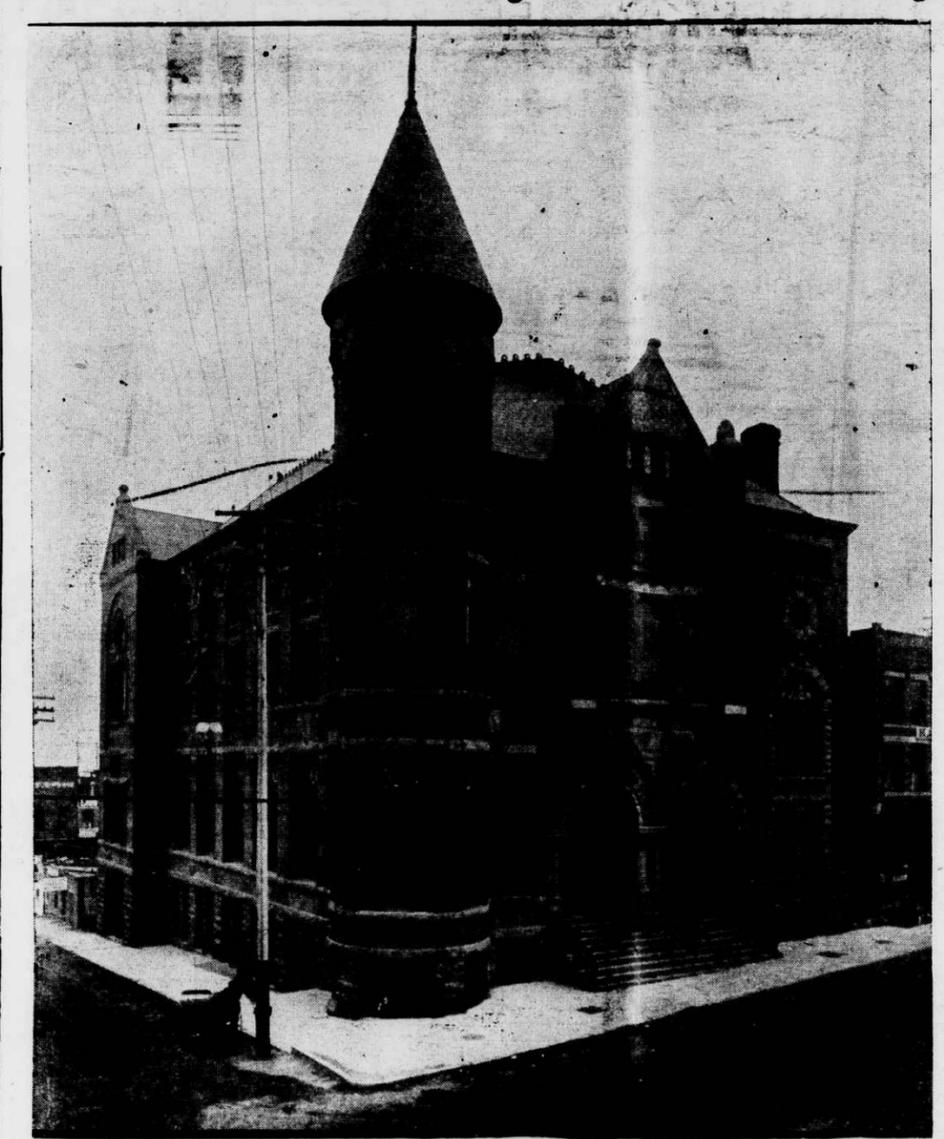
Balances in Various Funds.

The following are the cash balances in the different funds at the close of business Saturday, November 30: Permanent school, \$38,309.52; school income, \$115,613.63; university bond, \$18,752.40; permanent university, \$45,033.50; normal school bond, \$47,490.56; agricultural college bond, \$68,777.79; deaf and dumb asylum building, \$3597.43; reform school building, \$6400.82; state capitol building, \$805.64; school of mines building, \$37,158.21; general, \$122,707.65; stock inspector and detective, \$20,185.76; stock indemnity, \$1748.45; state bounty, \$17,417.10; fish and game, \$2269.59; university library, \$1877; state law library, \$682.35; medical board, \$137.05; state examiners, \$3725; escheated estates, \$789.16; soldiers' home, \$3947.65; capitol building, interest and sinking, \$6381.92; beautifying state capitol grounds, \$757.6; agricultural college income, \$22,119.48; total, \$554,686.87.

Amounts in the Banks.

Vouchers are attached to the report showing that cash balances in the banks are as follows: National Bank of Montana, Helena, \$47,865.71; American National bank, Helena, \$69,321; State Savings bank of Butte, \$127,349.04; Cascade bank, Great Falls, \$20,000; First National bank of Billings, \$50,000; Judith National bank, Lewistown, \$20,000; State National bank of Miles City, \$20,000; Yellowstone National bank of Billings, \$20,000; Stockmen's National bank of Fort Benton, \$25,000; Bank of Fergus County, Lewistown, \$50,000; Bank of Dillon, \$25,000; State Bank of Townsend, \$15,000; First National bank of Kalispell, \$25,000; Treasurers Cruise Savings bank, Helena, \$79,389.54, and \$11,546.59 in treasurer's vault.

The Public Library of Butte City



self, but he wanted to cheat the "devil's dogs" of their prey. This thought alone spurred him on, and he goaded himself with mental spurs until he ran as does a man who has trained for a race among athletes.

Now the leader of the pack was giving tongue to encourage the less fleet of his followers—he had sighted the quarry and in a few minutes there could be a royal feast for the four-footed imps, whose eyes shone red and green, and whose jaws were already flecked with white foam as they clashed their teeth

upon which he rested and hummed a few strains of a backwoods song. Strangely disjointed sentences came bubbling from his lips, and his alternate laughter and caressing mingled in weird manner with the howling and the growling of the beasts seeking his life.

"There, there, sweetheart," murmured the man, his voice sinking almost to a whisper, as he patted the mound and smiled in the darkness; "don't be afraid, darling; your Jack loves you and will love you always. What, not love you because you are an Indian girl—why,

physical pain, but also by mental agony. The wolves outside had found on the little platform at the head of the grave the offering of meat and bread which had been placed there for the spirit of the dead, and as they wrangled over these sacred bits—sacred because they were placed there by some one who had loved and cherished the occupant of the grave, in fulfillment of a religious duty as seen by the Indians—the sound filled Thornton with a nameless dread. He shuddered as he thought how narrowly

he had escaped the fangs of the wolves, and then strange fancies began to fill his brain.

Try as he would, he could not rid himself of the picture that intruded itself upon him. Curses and groans aided him not in shutting out from his mind things he did not wish to dwell upon, and as picture after picture ran through his brain he began to compare himself to the four-footed wolves outside.