

# The Robbers of Markham Swamp

BY EDMUND COLLINS

The following story is founded on fact and as the author aptly said "everyone in this part of the country who is not deaf has heard of the gang at Markham Swamp." The story was first published in 1886. It will run as a continued story in The Liberal.

## THE FOUR CANADIAN HIGHWAYMEN OR The Robbers of Markham Swamp. CHAPTER I

### The Pretty Aster and Mr. Ham

It was the autumn of the year, and the dress of the Canadian woods at that season, forty years ago, differed little from the gaudy garbs of now. Near a small village not far from the town of Little York, I choose as the place for the opening of this true story.

The maple, of all the trees in the forest, was the only one so far frost-smitten and sun struck. The harvests had been gathered, and the only tenants of the fields were flocks of pigeons that came to feed among the stubble; for many a ripe ear fell from the heads in the tying of the sheaves; many a shower of golden grain had fallen as the load, drawn by slow oxen, lurched and swayed along the uneven ground.

Nestling in a grove of primeval pines that sentinelled the placid, shining waters of the Don stood a low wide-eaved cottage. It was completely clad in ivy; and upon the eastern side there was a dull copper tinge through the matted masses of Virginia creeper.

Many of the earlier flowers had faded; but the pinks and the poppies were still rich in blood; and the sunflower sturdily held up its yellow face like a wizened sorcerer of old, as a fair and gifted friend of my acquaintance put it. The property and the grounds about it were the property of an English gentleman of taste and means. The nearest dwelling had an air of luxury, and round about it stretched wide areas of land from which the harvest of wheat and oats had been taken. Here and there in the distance a group of boys might be seen with their fishing rods in their hands; for at that day the Don stream was not foul by the drainage of fields and shrunken by the downpour of sun, and from the loss of its sheltering forest. Trout and often salmon trout went into its quiet retreats in the face of the spring freshets; and many a congregation of foam bubbles did it hold upon its breast to screen the greedy, vigilant speckled trout.

In a little summer house through whose latticed sides the gadding vines were so interlocked and twined, as to remind you of the legend of Salmacis and Hermes' son, sat a girl. Her wide brimmed hat rested upon the seat beside her, and round about it was a double girdle of ivy, as if twining there. Looking through the door at the dainty place you could not see the girl's face; for she had turned her head, and her chin was resting upon her slim white hands, as she read from a book that lay in her lap.

Her hair you could see, for it hung over her shoulders and down her white dress, like a gold flag over a sail. For myself I usually prefer dark hair for women; but ah! who could have gainsaid the glory of those luxurious coils that hung over that sweet neck and draping the curving shoulders! Through the open doorway the sun streamed upon it; and the soft tangles gleamed like ruddy gold. Hence you will see that the color was not that insipid 'blonde' with which shallow girls may adorn their heads for the sum of ten cents.

But although her face could not be seen, anyone looking at the balance of the head, the statuesque neck, would have surmised that it was beautiful.

A tall, lithe, well-built young man, who had a few moments before entered the cottage, walked from the back door. His eye as the casual observer would describe as 'full of mischief,' but behind the sunny brightness was a pensive cast. He walked softly towards the arbour, and stood for several seconds looking at its beautiful occupant. Then, in moving his foot, the dry branch of a rose bush snapped, and the girl turned her head.

'Ah, it is you, Roland—pardon me, Mr. Gray.'

'Yes I have come to eat your apples and your peaches; and to despoil the grove of their woodcock.'

'Papa said you were coming some time soon; but I did not know when.'

'Why I met him this morning at the Don Mills, and told him he would have me during the afternoon and evening. I sent that message distinctly to you Miss Aster.'

A faint shadow passed over her face; and it was plain that she was a little confused, as she stammered: 'Papa must have misunderstood you.'

'Perhaps Miss Aster; but—well I hope he did.' At this moment another person entered the garden. He

did not come with the graceful motion and easy tread of Roland Gray; but moved with pompous stride, swinging his arms almost at right angles to his body. His air you could only describe by the word 'howling'; and he was just the man to immediately catch the attention of a vulgar girl. His hair was as dark as a crow's; and it was as coarse as the bristles of a hog. He was short and rather stout of build; was somewhat 'horsey' in make-up; and had a face rather handsome. But he was low-bred, there could not be the shadow of a doubt.

'I thought you had eluded me, Aster,' he said in the most familiar way, 'thought you had stolen away up the river with that book.'

'Oh, indeed. I have been reading here during the greater part of the afternoon. Mr. Gray let me introduce to you Mr. Ham; Mr. Ham, Mr. Gray.' Roland bowed with much politeness; but Ham's stiff pompous bend was an assertion of superiority.

'I have broken in upon your tete-a-tete with the young man, Aster; so I'll take a turn out and have a jaw with your gov'nor.' In a moment he was gone.

'This is your next door neighbor, I presume, Miss Aster?'

'Yes he and papa are great friends. He consults papa on nearly everything that he does upon his farm; and papa in turn consults him concerning our affairs.'

'I suspected as much. I presume that he and you are intimate friends. I observe that he calls you "Aster."'

'I did not ask him to do so; and since he chooses to adopt this familiar fashion I cannot well rebuke him papa and he are such great friends.'

'Then do you permit me to call you Aster?'

'O indeed, I wish that you would do it; and all the time.' As she said this her eyes brightened.

'Thanks Aster. I now feel that I am on an equal footing with the rest. You are sure that you will not mind me Astering you before him? Doing it frequently?'

'Not a bit. I shall be pleased; I shall be very much pleased, because he seemed to take a pleasure in being familiar before you. And we are not such great friends after all.'

'You must not talk nonsense Aster. It would never do to let yonder well-tilled acres, that sumptuous dwelling, all those flocks of sheep, and herds of sleek cattle to pass into the hands of any other girl. Imagine pulling down the boundary line and joining the two farms into one! Imagine how your "gov'nor"—as this well-bred Mr. Ham styles him—would open his eyes if any other person should have the temerity to ask for Miss Aster.'

'Then would you be really glad to see these two farms joined in one? To see me marry Mr. Ham?' Her tremulous eyes questioned his face eagerly. When she began her queries there was in them a flash of mocking mirth; but that had disappeared, and there was now only to be observed a grave questioning expression there.

My reader is probably desirous of hearing something about Aster's face, notwithstanding the assumption that it was beautiful. As a rule we expect to find chestnut eyes with ruddy golden hair; but this was not the fact in Aster's case. Her eyes were the color which men like Theophile Gauthier attribute Venus: they were not blue, neither were they brown; but they presented in the most fascinating ensemble a grey which at night was a fathomless dusk and by day that green which you perceive where the sea is a hundred fathoms deep. With the light upon her eye there was a glint of emerald, that witching glare that made Becky Sharps irresistible. Now imagine an eyebrow, dark as the raven's quill, overarching such an eye, and contrasting itself with the burning gold of the hair, and skin of Parisian white and purity. Then contemplate a softness beside which the velvet upon the petal of a pansy would seem rigid and this eye large and timorous, and fringed with long, dark lashes!

I do not like the work of cataloguing divine wares, especially when my most elaborate estimate must present a picture crude and mathematical compared with the ideal.

This girl's nose was Roman type; and was precisely like that which the engraver gives to Annette Marton. The nostrils were finely chiselled, betokening sensitiveness; and I may add that I have never known anybody with a thick nostril to be sensitive.

For a moment Roland's eyes were fixed wistfully upon the girl's, and he did not answer her question. But es-

sape from the enquiring, unflinching stare was out of the question; so he said mystering all the courage that he could:

'Well, to tell you the truth, Aster, I think you are twenty times too good for this fellow Ham; and therefore I should not like to see you marry him; to see the two farms become one.'

'Oh, I did not think that you considered me in any sense a superior girl; and I must feel highly flattered that you put a higher price upon that superiority than upon the splendid property adjoining my father's.' There was now the merest hint of mischief in her glance; and she was evidently desirous that Mr. Gray should be more explicit in his objection to the match. 'Does Mr. Gray realize what a great compliment he has paid me, a poor rustic, an untutored country girl, with a little knowledge about bees and clover, and some cunning as to the tricks of breachy cattle? Do I know more about the English authors, or the French ones than he does? Am I more gifted in mathematical insight; or do I know more about the history of kings and ancient wars? I can paint the merest bit; and my music is attuned for little else than the heavy heels of rustic swains and clumsy lasses. Now, Mr. Ham is more skilled in painting than I, and more learned in all things acquired from books: pray where, then, is the force of your objection to this joining of hands and farms upon intellectual grounds? I think you are twenty times too good Aster. You cannot sum up the superiority of character by counting the

items as you "take stock" in a tradesman's store. The highest and most captivating points in human character, especially in a woman's, often have such an evasive subtlety of outline that you can no more define them than you could the message which some blossom, blooming in a wild, far place, has for the human heart as you stoop over it to drink its perfume and gloat upon its beauty. But you ask me to be definite: will you take offence, if, upon some points which present themselves to me, I become quite definite?'

'Not by any means Mr. Gray. I am very anxious to hear everything that you may have to say.'

'Well, Aster, I do not admire your friend Mr. Ham. I think he is a coarse snob; and under an exterior of brusque frankness I believe he is deceitful and—cowardly. I should consider your union with such a person a monstrous sacrifice.'

'Would you have me wait until some man who reaches your ideal came and asked father for my hand? Or would you have me advertise in William Lyon Mackenzie's newspaper. Or, still another and final alternative, would you have me bloom in this sweet place all my days in celibacy?'

'I simply would not have you marry that person, Ham.'

'No other definite wish with respect to me?' Her head was bowed now, and her mischievous, upward glance was very fascinating.

'I have; but I would prefer for the present to keep it to myself.'

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

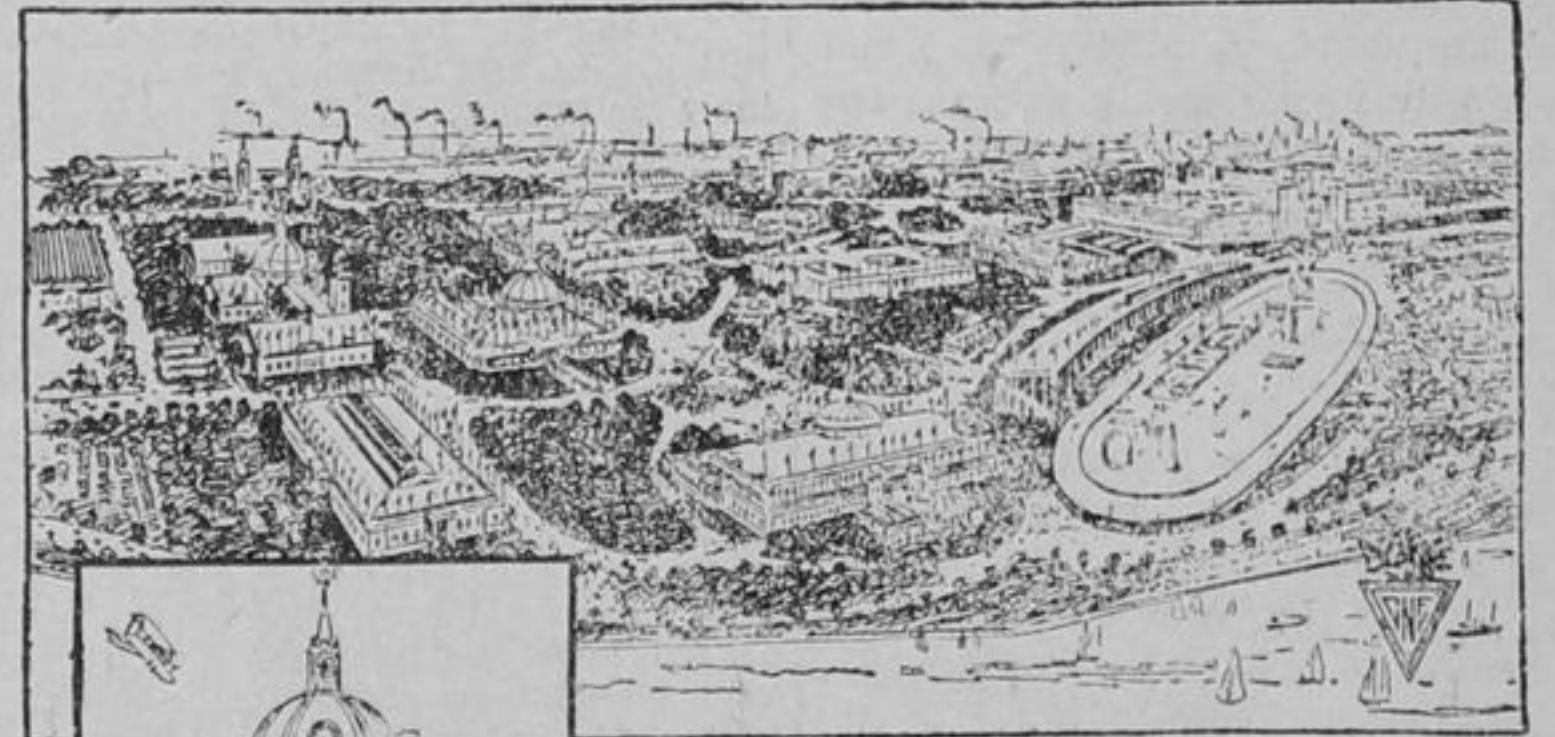
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# The Liberal YORK COUNTY PHOTOGRAPH CONTEST

"Let us preserve while we may, in photographs, the growth, development and history of the County."

FIRST PRIZE---FIVE DOLLARS IN CASH  
SECOND PRIZE---THREE DOLLARS IN CASH  
THIRD PRIZE---TWO DOLLARS IN CASH  
Also three additional prizes of ONE DOLLAR EACH.

## PURPOSE OF CONTEST

The help of our readers is sought by the Liberal in conjunction with Mr. E. A. James in assembling a collection of photographs of points of historic interest in the county of York.

### WHAT WE WANT

What we want are good pictures of historic sites in the County of York Sites such as Col. Moodie's grave, the Eckhardts homestead and Sharon's Temple, St. John's Church, Heise Hill Cemetery, etc.

In every community there are houses, schools, churches, mills, halls and scenes that recall the history of York.

If you have a good distinct photo, or a collection of such photos, preferably 4 inches by 5 inches or larger, either snapshots or time exposures, in black-and-white, ferrotype or gloss finish, mounted or unmounted—send them in. Mark clearly on the back of each photo submitted your name and address and description of the place pictured. Pictures not bearing this information will be disqualified

### CONDITIONS

- 1—Photos any size may be entered, but the best size is 4 inches by 5 inches, or larger. Smaller pictures are difficult to reproduce in print.
- 2—Name and address of contestant and exact description of the scene illustrated must be clearly written on the back of each photo submitted.
- 3—All entries should be carefully wrapped to avoid damage in the mails.
- 4—It is not necessary to mount photos. Any finishes may be submitted, although black and white, ferrotype or gloss finishes are best for reproduction purposes.
- 5—Photographs of photographs are just as acceptable as original photographs.
- 6—All photographs submitted become the property of The Liberal Printing Company, Limited, whether awarded prizes or not, and may be used by them in any way desired without further recompense.

Remember that if it has an historic interest a photograph of a photograph will qualify just as readily as an original photograph provided it applies to the County of York.

### JUDGES

The judges in the photograph contest will be;—Mr. A.J. Galbraith Photographer, Newtonbrook Father Kelly, Richmond Hill Mr. L. L. Nichols, Principal Public School Victoria Square.

The Judges decision will be final.