

The Robbers of Markham Swamp

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.

CHAPTER II.

A Gathering Storm

"Oh! We had better go to dinner, then, had we not? I presume it is about ready."

"Stay, will you not wear this at dinner? stooping for a pansy which flourished among the late autumn blossoms. Keep it for remembrance when I am away."

"Oh, but flowers fade; and I could not remember you for a couple of days."

"Why not press it between the leaves of a book?"

"Oh, I will do that; and I will remember your lecture every time I open the volume."

"Thank you; but if you can't think a little bit about myself, I don't want you to bother about my lecture. You can feast yourself in contemplation of your loud and gorgeous friend, Mr. Ham."

They had entered the house; and and at the same moment Aster's father and Mr. Ham came in. It was plain that these two men were confidential friends; for as they entered the room the host had his arm within that of his guest, and both were so engrossed in their subject—talking in a low tone—that they seemed for a time unconscious of the presence of Aster and Roland. When the host did raise his head he simply gave a cold bow to Roland; and then bestowed a sharp glance upon his daughter. Nor was the rudeness of the host to end here. Turning his back upon Roland he said:

"Mr. Ham and I have been discussing the Marsh, and reclaiming it he thinks that I had better go on with the drainage."

"It will bring in two years all the money expended in reclaiming it," put in Mr. Ham. "Don't you think so Aster?"

"I don't know Mr. Ham; I really know very little about such matters." At this juncture Rolands temper was asserting itself under the slight by the rude parent; so he stepped in among the trio, and looking the girl in the face said:

"You are quite right, Aster, do not bother your head about bogs and swamps. Let the men attend to all that." The father was simply amazed; and drawing himself up to his full height he frowned upon the young man. He said nothing, however, and to break the embarrassing silence Aster chimed in:

"I suppose that the city girls of your acquaintance never meddle in such matters; but the truth is, papa always consults me about these things."

"In the city," retorted her father, stiffly, "young women have other concerns; but a girl who is to become a farmer's wife should make the management of stock and the tillage of the soil serious subjects of study."

"Most certainly," replied Roland; "if a girl is to become the wife of a husbandman the farm should be her great concern. But I was not aware that Aster had seriously contemplated taking such a step."

"I presume, sir," replied the father, his voice quivering with displeasure, "that there are many of my daughter's affairs which she does not feel bound to disclose to strangers."

"I had thought that I might congratulate myself as one upon the list of your daughter's friends. Was I not right, Aster?"

"I always felt great pleasure, Mr. Gray, in regarding you as my friend, as one of my most sincere friends." Her color had risen as she ended this sentence; and there was a slight tone of defiance in her voice.

"A fact of which I was not aware," her father replied, with still rising cholera.

"But you should not be too hard upon Aster," put in Mr. Ham. "Girls thoughtlessly form friendships. You'll forgive her, I know, for this indiscretion." Aster turned upon him with a look of infinite scorn.

"There is one indiscretion at least, Mr. Ham for which my father will never have to pardon me."

"And pray what is that, Aster?"

"For counting you upon my list of friends, sir."

"Leave the room instantly, Aster," her father almost shouted, while his face was purple with rage.

When the girl withdrew Roland turned, and bowing to the host, said: "Your conduct and your tone, sir, towards myself are so extraordinary, so inexplicable, and so unmerited, that there is nothing for me but to withdraw. As for this person Mr. Ham, whom you admit to terms of such intimacy, nothing, I assure you, but the sacred shield of your household has saved him from punishment which his insolence deserves. However, he will not always be able

to shelter himself by these walls, and by the presence of the inmates. I bid you good morning." So saying he walked out of the room and into the garden where sat Aster, flushed, nervous and miserable.

"I came to say good-bye, Aster; after all that has happened it is impossible for me to remain."

"I am sure," the girl said, "that Mr. Ham must have prejudiced my father against you or he never would have adopted such language and such a manner towards his guest. I feel quite certain that it was not the swamp they were discussing while alone together this afternoon but your character. From what I surmise of Mr. Ham I believe him capable of traducing you; of actually inventing charges against your reputation."

"Could he be so infamous? This is surely not possible."

"But you will not marry that man, man with whom my poor father, who really has my interests at heart, would have me link my life. For the past four years his wishes in this respect have been horribly plain to me. Oh, it is very dreadful, Mr. Gray; and it will be still worse for me now that you, my friend, must henceforth be estranged from our house."

"But you will not marry that man, Aster, dear?" He was looking wistfully into her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, no; I shall never do it of my own free will."

"Farewell, Aster. Though estranged from your father and your house, fate may some time be kind enough to let me see you. Farewell." And taking her hand into his he raised it reverently, tenderly, to his lips. Then he arose, bowed and went away. For many a bitter day afterward he remembered the mute misery in her look as he left the garden.

That evening Roland sought out an old Eton schoolfellow, whom he found smoking on the lawn of his uncle's house.

"Why, you seem rather excited, old fellow; what is wrong? I thought that the fair Aster had a monopoly of your company for this evening."

"Yes; it had been so arranged. But I found that cad, Ham, there, and he saw fit to insult me. You can now guess, I suppose, the nature of my mission."

"Hem; things are really serious then. Do you want me to help you through with the affair?"

"If you will, old fellow. My wish is that you wait upon this person in the morning, that he may name a friend with whom you can arrange the meeting. Let it not be later than the following morning. He has, of course, his choice of sword or pistol."

"I doubt if the man will fight."

"Then nothing will remain for me but the loathsome job of giving him a horsewhipping. And I presume that you will not be silent as to his cowardice."

Early on the following morning Frank Harland, for such was the name of Roland's friend, road away towards Oatland's, the residence of the coarse-haired Mr. Ham. He alighted at the gate, and throwing his bridle rein over a post entered the grounds. Mr. Ham was at the moment crossing the field towards his residence; but when he perceived the early visitor changed his course and proceeded to meet the comer.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Harland? Did not know it was you. It is a long time since we have seen each other. Was over looking at some of my fellows who are clearing the bush of a piece of interval. Rascals will not work if one's eye is not constantly upon them."

In a similar strain did he chatter on; but his ease of manner Harland could see was only counterfeited. The early visit and the grave face of the visitor had alarmed him; but he had not the courage to put any of the questions that had turned his face into a note of interrogation. At last they were at the door of the dwelling; and Harland paused upon the steps.

"I come to you this morning, Mr. Ham, upon an important and delicate mission; and should be glad if you would accompany me to your office or library."

A flush of scarlet came into Ham's face, and it was vivid through the roots of his coarse black beard.

"Certainly, I shall attend you with pleasure. I hope, at least, that the matter is capable of an amicable and satisfactory settlement. I have always sought to do what is right, and—"

"I have no doubt Mr. Ham, that it can be arranged with entire satisfaction." With these words the visitor seated himself in the chair to which Mr. Ham, with a trembling hand,

pointed.

"I am, sir, the bearer of a message from my old school friend, Roland Gray. What the purport of such a message is you will no doubt very readily guess, when you come to remember the language you recently employed respecting him, and the threat which your words evoked. I am therefore ready to arrange terms for a meeting with any friend you may be good enough to designate."

"I really fail to comprehend what you mean, Mr. Harland."

"Oh that is impossible, Mr. Ham. There is a code of honor among gentlemen under such circumstances, of which you must certainly be aware."

The fellow's courage had quite failed him, if the pallor in his swarthy cheek did not utter a huge lie.

"You surely do not mean that you come to propose a duel?"

"I have come just for that purpose; and shall immediately wait upon any friend you will name to me."

"But there must really be some mistake. I am not aware of using any language that could evoke the resentment of your friend." Harland simply shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not here to discuss that point." And he rose with scorn on his face. "I take the word of my friend upon the matter; and he is a gentleman and a man of honor." At this reply Mr. Ham adopted a new line of policy, and with it a completely altered manner and tone.

"Well, Mr. Harland, suppose that it be as you say with respect to the provocation; there is another feature of the matter which I bring for-

ward with reluctance, considering your relations of friendship with Mr. Gray." Here he paused.

"Pray proceed sir."

"I may say, Mr. Harland, that the repute of Mr. Gray is not the highest; and considering my own character and standing I do not see how it is possible for me to engage in a combat of honor with him. My position as I have said is unquestioned; but I know nothing of your friend save that report speaks of him as an adventurer without character. He has had a good education, and all that, and associates with people of my own standing; but these facts count for little."

"Pardon me, sir," Harland replied with a haughty smile. "I intend that your position in this matter should be made very plain. I intend to show that one matter alone stands in the way of acceptance of this challenge."

"And what, pray, may that matter be?" The fellow was once more ashy pale, and trembled.

"Your cowardice, sir."

"What! Do you dare in my own house to use such words?"

Continued Next Week

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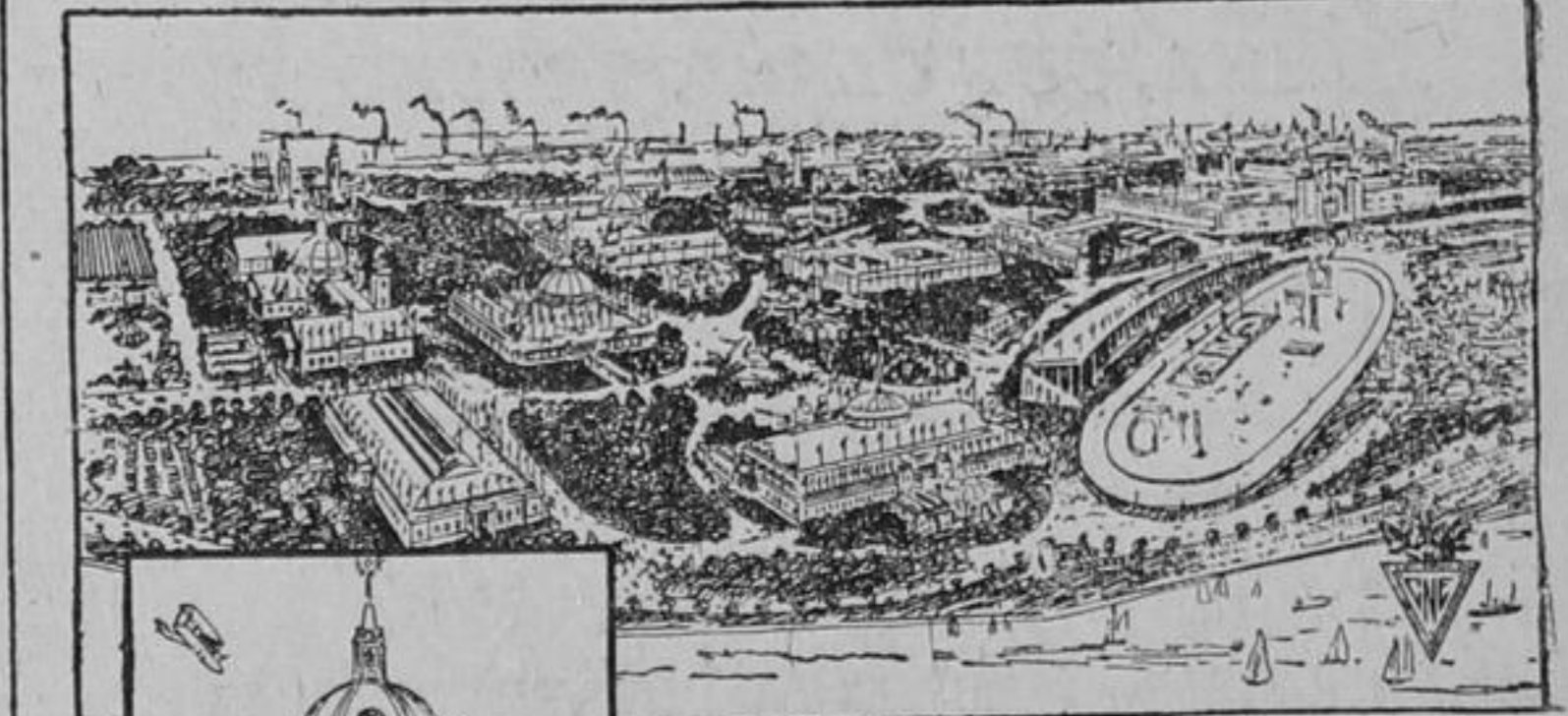
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SECOND PRIZE---THREE DOLLARS IN CASH
THIRD PRIZE---TWO DOLLARS IN CASH
Also three additional prizes of ONE DOLLAR EACH.

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 decisions will be final.