

# 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.

## Synopsis of Story Thus Far:

Forty years ago, in a small village near the town of Little York lived the heroine of our story with her father. It is the intention of Miss Aster's father to have her marry their next door neighbor, Mr. Ham, a vulgar sort of person, in order to unite the two farms. However, a refined college bred young gentleman from the city Mr. Roland Gray, visits Miss Aster's home and accidentally meets Mr. Ham. The two become enemies from the time of the first meeting, due of course to the attentions of the other towards Miss Aster. Mr. Ham, as well as Aster's father treat Mr. Gray in a very insolent manner, and as a result he leaves the house determined to make Ham pay for his behaviour. Gray immediately seeks an old Eton school fellow, Frank Harland, and asks his aid in the matter. On the following morning Harland visits Mr. Ham at his farm at Outlands and informs him that Mr. Gray wishes to meet in a duel either by sword or pistol, and to make terms for such. To hide his cowardice Ham makes all kinds of excuses why he can't enter a combat of honor with one such as Mr. Gray but when Harland proves to him Gray's decency from an earl in the British peerage, he gives his consent for the meeting reluctantly.

Ham chooses Jabez Drummond, a friend, for his second and on the following morning all four meet at Sleepy Gulch, as mall hollow running at right angles to the Don. They find it necessary to relieve Mr. Ham of a great deal of clothing which he has donned as a means of protection, and after much forcible persuasion the two men take their ground. At the count of three the pistol shots ring out resulting in the severe wounding of Mr. Ham. While the medical man is attending to him Mr. Gray has to flee from the officers who are just approaching the scene on horseback. They fire but he keeps going until his horse is shot from underneath him. Then he disappears in a dense dark wood and when he is sure he is quite safe from his pursuers he dresses his own wound and from sheer exhaustion falls asleep. When he awakens it is not Aster's sweet voice, which he had heard in his dreams, that comes to his ears but the baying of bloodhounds. Now Read On:—

"Merciful God! what chance have I with bloodhounds in this wood?" Roland exclaimed as he arose. Then he set out as fast as he could in the same direction which he had pursued during the morning. He was well aware that the hounds had been brought into the wood at the point where he had entered it; and that they were now fast upon his track. Reflecting upon his hunting experiences he concluded that the cries which he could now hear whenever he paused, were little more than half a mile behind him.

A man fleeing through such a wood as this had little need of speed with only human pursuers upon his track. But with a pack of bloodhounds holding the trail, and that keep well in advance of their followers, it was far otherwise. It was only necessary to follow the baying pack; and pursuit could thus be maintained at a pace fully as swift as the flight.

But Roland was weak from the loss of blood, and from hunger which the scant supply of beech-nuts, and the bitter rowanberries, only in a small measure allayed; so it was very plain that his capture was only a question of time. But the labyrinth of forest aisles now began to grow dimmer, and a throb of hope came into his heart as he thought of the coming darkness. Yet in this wilderness the dogs would know their game, and there was no escape by clambering a tree! Meanwhile he redoubled his exertion, now slightly altering his course. When it was fairly dark he emerged from the wood upon the road by which he had made his flight in the morning.

"Thank God. Here, the dogs, among so many other scents, must miss mine." He perceived to his great joy that there was not a star in the heavens; nor was there to be seen any of the dusky yellow in the south-east which marks the rising of the harvest moon.

The wind was blowing from the south-west and the fugitive's eyes could see that large masses of dark cloud were rolling before the wind, and gathering to leeward like a mighty army, which halts its forces to prepare for the battle. A heavy storm was brewing, and there would be no light from the moon. Providence indeed had been kind to Roland giving in the morning the shelter of His forest's sanctuary, and now the

kindly shadow of His clouds.

He had lost the sound of his pursuers, and concluded that they must have either returned for the night, or sped the opposite way. He had not gone far, when he was startled by the sharp whinny of a horse. His first impulse was to avoid the beast; but upon consideration he resolved to reconnoitre. Approaching cautiously he found that the cause of his alarm was one horse only, tied to a tree which grew by the roadside. His sight having become accustomed to the darkness he was soon able to assure himself that no human being was nigh. Proceeding then to the animal, which he found saddled—it belonged, no doubt to one of the pursuers who had left it there while in the woods with the hounds—he tightened the girths, mounted and rode away. This was indeed a god-send! He had not proceeded far when he saw a horseman approaching. The stranger stopped and pulled rein.

"Hullo, Oswald; that you?" I thought you should never come. Judge the consternation to discover in the voice of the speaker that of Aster's father, the man who was the cause of all the woe and mischief. When his emotion passed he could have smitten the misguided man to the earth. Disguising his voice thoroughly, for he was an accomplished mimic, he replied:

"This is not Mr. Oswald. I am from York. Rode by the Yonge Street Road. I bear a special dispatch from the Government to the magistrate at Markham respecting steps to be taken for the apprehension. Good-bye, sir. I am in haste." Before the other could reply Roland was trotting away briskly. After an hours sharp riding he slackened his pace and allowed his horse to walk along the road.

The land dipped here slightly and the fugitive judged that he must be in the neighborhood of River Rouge, and not far from Markham.

The forest seemed to grow thicker, and as far as he could judge through the dark, it appeared draggled and intermixed with larch and cedar. It was a lonesome spot; and Roland marvelled to himself if this could be the swamp that concealed so many mysteries, and filled all the country-side with alarm. While he was thus musing a figure sprang out of the bush and seized his bridle; at the same moment the shining barrel of a pistol gleamed in his eyes.

"Surrender, fugitive duelist!" a powerful voice shouted.

"Dismount," Roland did so; but move which way he would the weapon still glittered in his face. As we have seen Roland had resolved that there would be no more spilling of blood, else his courage and dexterity might have enabled him to cope even with his daring captor. He was astonished to see but one person present, and looked around him for the others. But as his searching gaze could reveal nothing but the sturdy figure at his side, and the gloom wrapped trees at the roadside, he began to reproach himself bitterly for not having been more alert. It was bitter to think that after all the excitement, strain and strategy of the morning, it should fall to his lot to be trapped in this way in the darkness of the night.

He began to wonder that his companion gave no whistle or other call for help, but remained silently standing upon the road, one hand upon the horse's bridle, the other holding the menacing pistol. At last the captor spoke.

"Know who I am?"

"A Queen's officer."

"Ha, ha, ha!" And the man's strong cruel voice sounded far through the solitudes of the wood.

"No! I am not a Queen's officer; but I am captain of the sturdy men who have made yonder bush a terror to the Province of Upper Canada. I have heard about the duel and the fall of Ham. You have rid the world of at least one worthless cur, and this is why I have waited for your coming to offer you, for the present, the security of our dense bush and treacherous bogs."

Roland hesitated. The fellow seemed to speak the truth; therefore what had he to fear with respect to his personal safety. He had some money and a watch; this the highwayman could have had by now for the asking. Yet these men bore the reputation of atrocious criminals to whom every sort of lawlessness was familiar. However, he need not compromise himself by taking part in their enterprises. The main thing was the chief of the band had offered him an asylum; and as a last resort, if the place became intolerable he could flee from it.

"Yes; I will accept your offer."

"Good. I take your word. Walk at my side, keeping close; for the path is narrow." So saying the two moved onward, the robber leading Roland's horse.

## CHAPTER V.

**The Robbers of Markham Swamp.**  
After proceeding several paces the robber chief tied his horse to a tree, and then bidding Roland follow made his way through the dark and silent masses of the wood.

Several times our hero, despite his experiences of forest travel, was tripped up by tree shores, or a tangle of underbrush; and once his forehead struck a sturdy limb with such force that he became for several seconds stupefied. The voice of the highwayman recalled him.

"Hallo, Master Duellist, are you trying to escape me?"

"I gave my word," replied Roland, "touching that matter. But I am not experienced in such travel as this."

"No," sneered the robber, "you heroes of the city and level field are mighty as travellers upon the open road."

"Your opinion as to that gives me no concern," our hero replied. "But I have eaten nothing since yesterday gave some beech-nuts and a few rowan-berries. Beside I have lost much blood."

"Are you wounded?"

"Yes."

"Where?" Roland informed him.

"Is it bleeding still?" He likewise informed him upon that point.

"I see you are not such a calf after all," and then Roland heard him mutter something about 'an acquisition to the band.' The words made the matter clear enough now to our hero. This ruffian had not saved him because he had shot Ham, but because he wanted an addition to his force. Knowing that there was a price upon Roland's head, he believed that he would find little difficulty in bending him to his infamous ends.

"Here; let us take your hand. We shall never reach home at this rate. It was with something akin to shudder that Roland felt the touch of his guide's hand but the arrangement was successful, and the two got over the ground at a rapid pace. Every maze and tree in that dismal swamp seemed to be known to the guide; and he swerved to right and left,—sometimes so changing his course that it seemed as if he were retracing his steps,—with such astonishing swiftness as to completely bewilder our hero.

"I wonder," observed Roland, "that the law does not reach you here by the aid of bloodhounds; they filled the woods with dogs this morning for my benefit."

"They tried that twice, but it didn't turn out profitable," replied the robber.

"How did you elude them?"

"Why we simply posted ourselves at convenient points and caught the intruding idiots. Out of a pack of twelve only one got out of the swamp alive."

"Have the constabulary ever sought you here?"

"Oh, frequently. Once they were permitted to roam about through the swamp without molestation. They found nothing for all their searching but a shed built on the lake's edge, and evidently used by fishing parties. They then returned and declared that the swamp being infested was all fudge. A couple of years passed, during which many a bloated butcher and cattle dealer was relieved of his purse; and a few who were foolish enough to dispute about the coin were despoiled of more than their money. A girl also disappeared; a buxom lass with yellow hair and blue eyes, about whom half the country bumpkins had gone nearly wild."

Our hero shuddered at the recital; but the robber heeded not the emotion.

"Then came indisputable proof that only persons living in the jolly swamp could have stolen the girl, taken the money, and cracked the few

numb-skulls; so they resolved, in the words of the newspapers of Muddy York, to "clean out the odious nest."

"A force of twenty constables, with about an equal number of citizens, turned out and approached the swamp. The force here numbered ten in all. Ah! but we were a sturdy band then. Well, as I have said, they came, the intrusive damned fools, to the swamp and scattered their forces about. They found nothing; and this is the only fact they ascertained; that when they assembled at Reynold's Inn, of the force of twenty-one that entered the swamp, nine returned. They waited till the morrow for their missing comrades, but they came not. Yet not a cry was heard, though there was no wind among the leaves, and when murders are done the people say "you hear shrill screams."

Neither was a pistol shot heard, or so much as the clang of a dagger. Ah! but it was the sport to see how discreetly the thing was managed! I see young man, you would like to find out the modes. Well, history not infrequently repeats itself in this dark wood; and I have little doubt that you will have an opportunity of discovering how we accomplish our ends, and why the silence.

(To Be Continued)

# The Liberal PHOTOGRAPH CONTEST YORK COUNTY

"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

## Contest Closes September 30th

### 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.