

# 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

The story opens about forty years ago in a small village near the town of Little York. Mr. Roland Gray is fleeing for his life as the result of having shot Mr. Ham in a duel which arises from hard feelings and insolence caused by the affection each has for a beautiful young lady, called Astor, who lives with her father on a farm. The officers of the law have bloodhounds on Roland's trail.

Roland now thinks that his capture is a surety but the elements seem to be in his favor, with the darkness of the night and the changing of the wind he feels more at ease. Finally he comes upon the road and mounting a horse which one of his pursuers has left tied on the side of the road he hurriedly sped away.

He meets Astor's father but successfully disguises himself and passes on to be met by the captain of the men who have possession of Markham Swamp. He has no choice but to be led to the heart of the swamp where he learns a number of horrible and sickening truths. Behind a huge rock he finds the gang assembled. One, a hideous looking ruffian, Joe Murrey; another villainous looking person, with greenish skin and flaxen hair, Jud Sykes, plays the part of a minister; the last of the male members of the gang being known as, The Lifter. Two ladies, one very young and at one time beautiful, Nancy, and Silent Poll who seems quite content with her lot, look after the domestic needs. Supper is prepared during which the ruffian Joe begins to harbor a hatred for Roland on account of the attention Nancy gives him. Later on Roland discovers that they are surrounded by a dense forest which hold the dreadful secrets he is about to learn.

## Now Read On

"But there is a very interesting history belonged to the Rev. Mr. Jonas. That is, as how he became the Rev. Mr. Jonas. Well, it was like this. He was caught when very young at Piccadilly picked a gentleman's pocket. He learnt the trade under one Fagan, a Jew, the cheese toaster that you read about in that new book, Oliver Twist. He was sentenced to three years; but when he got out he joined the pickpockets again; but was again caught and transported to Australia. From that far away place he beat his passage to Halifax; and worked his way from that town, too, till he got to York. He was prime always at worken anything. Well he got tired of idleness in York, and one night climbed into the residence of Sir Edmond Bond Head, the gov'nor, and stole his watch. The gov'nor fired, but harmed nothen but the glass. The next day he sold the watch to a Jew; but the detectives were on his track and nabbed him. He was sent down for six years.

"When two years were served he began to long for a more active life; and slipeen one night through the bars he came away. They put up the hue-and-cry next mornen, and had half the country at his heels. The capteen met him; said he was just the young man he wanted; and took him to the heart of the establishment. 'And now comes the interesten part of the story. Mr. Sykes was not an idle man; he would scorn to eat a crumb of bread that he did not work for; so he was every day abroad, and if he could not bring in something better he was sure to return a little after dark with a half a dozen chickeens or a couple of quarters of lamb or veal around his neck. One day he came in with something that wasn't lamb nor veal nor fowl. Now what do you think it was? Blow my eyes if it wasn't a Methodist parson!

"The parson was a meek looken man, with a white bow under his throat; and his name was Mr. Jonas. 'What in thunder did you bring that sky pilot here for?' the capteen asked in his most angry tones; while old missus ran a screechen to the cavern.

"I have good reason, I assure you, capteen, for the capture," was the reply. "Give the man of God something to eat. He must pray for us this evenen. It'll be as good as a circus to listen to him. It's been so

long since we had divine service in here."

"Ah, young man it was great fun to hear that parson pray and preach that night. The very; 'Aisles of the dim-wood rang to the anthem,' that he raised; and I am sure he thought that he had carried our hearts by storm. He prayed God to soften our obdurate hearts; and especially asked heaven to cause these misguided men to relent in their intensheens, and permit him to go and carry the efreshen rain of the Gospel to thirsy ground. After the prayer was ended I showed him to his couch, the same whereon you slept last night, and before I said good night I asked him to pray for me. He squeezed my hand and said:

"Is your heart softened? May I depend on you?"

"I answered, 'Fear not. I have been a burnen brand and you have snatched me from the fire.' He turned his eyes toward the clayey roof and gave thanks. When I returned to the upper air Mr. Sykes had gathered Mr. Jonas' late congregasheen about him and thus addressed the meeteen:

"Brethern and sisters, I intend to amend my life. I have been a wicked man; but the good parson below has carried the grace of God to my heart. Henceforth my mission shall be to preach the word. So zealous am I in this respect that I intend to preach instead of Mr. Jonas!"

"For several minutes I could not gather what he meant; but it became quite clear when he added:

"This congregasheen is large and wealthy enough to retain a preacher unto itself. Capteen with your permission we will keep Mr. Jonas!" The Capteen who long before had caught Mr. Sykes' intention, nodded a hearty approval.

"That evenen Mr. Sykes took possession of Mr. Jonas' private letters, recommendations, etc.; and likewise bore away to his own digeens a bible, several prayer books, and three or four hymn books belonging to the preacher.

"Brethren and sisters," he said, "I am no longer the wicked Ned Sykes, but the good and Reverend Mr. Jonas. That day, clad in the clergyman's very robes, with a white tie under his chin, and three holy books under his arm he set forth. He visited every Wesleyan family in the neighborhood; presented his credentials at each house, and received from one and all a cordial and Christian welcome. Since that time he has preached regularly every Sunday; he has the "run" of every Christian house in the denomination through the county of York. More than this, he is noted for his piety and eloquence, and people who will not trust the banks, deliver their wealth into his hands for safe keepen. About twice in the year he preaches a charity sermon, for the help of the widow, the orphan, and the distressed, generally; and requests that the amounts be forwarded to him for disposal.

"During his ministerial misheen he has collected about thirty watches; close upon a basketful of silver spoons; while he has led a nightly attack upon ten houses belonging to his parishioners. He has killed, with his own hands, in his own bed, the class-leader in the Wesleyan Sunday School, and wounded one of the church trustees. But he attended afterwards with much concern and read words of consolation to the wounded man."

"My God! Roland interrupted, 'this is shocking. Does he still continue at this work of infamous hypocrisy?'

"Bless your heart, yes."

"Eternal heaven, he is the eloquent minister who preaches every other Sunday at the Don?"

"The very same."

"Why I have gone there myself and heard him, attracted by his great repute. Yes, now that I come to reflect this miscreant who went out this morning and the preacher to whom I listened with such rapt attention are one and the same man."

"I hope that you were made better by his discourse," The Lifter said.

"And pray," our hero inquired, "what became of the poor minister, the real Mr. Jonas?"

"Oh they kept him confined for several months, and he wasted away beyond believing. Nobody here took to him like. At last the new Mr. Jonas said to him one morning:

"Mr. Jonas that was, pray come down with me to the side of the lake that we may converse. I like best to contemplate the might of God through the agitasheen of the waters; and behold how the storm blows!"

"The poor wasted Wesleyan went with him; but he never came back. An hour later the new Mr. Jonas returned; but he made no allusion to the real minister. We afterwards learnt that he had drowned him in the pond."

"Great God, how horrible!"

"There now, you must not say anything against the habits and custims of the place. I will bid you good mornen." Taking his rod and line the sleek desperado made his way up the stream; and our hero was left to horrible recollection. There was a noise among the parched leaves, and a moving of boughs. Then Nancy stood before him. She did not expect to find him here at the first turn, and she blushed deeply.

"I thought that The Lifter was with you still. But I am glad he has left you. We shall fish and talk here. Has The Lifter told you anything about the history of the highwaymen?"

"Yes I have heard enough to make me sick at heart."

"Did he tell you about the captain?"

"No."

"Well the Captain is his own father and the old woman is his grandmother. The robber chief's father was known as "Nick the Highwayman," a terrible person whose name made everybody's heart beat fast fifty years ago."

"But how came you here, Nancy? You look different from the people about you; your language is elegant and you appear as if you had been born well."

"Such words from him embarrassed the girl. But when the blood began to return to her cheeks, she heaved a sigh so piteous and profound as to move every spring of pity in our hero's heart."

"Ah, yes; I knew purer and more happy days," she replied; "but to commence my story is like opening again wounds that once have tortured. My father came to this country when I was an infant under the nurse's care, my mother having died a few hours after I was born. My father had served for many years as an officer

in the army; and he fought under Lord Wellington, as captain at Waterloo. He had several connections in this province, and shortly after his arrival here, through the influence of the governor, obtained the position of sheriff for York and the allied counties. He built a house in the heart of the wilderness, and cleared a farm, stocking it with horses, cows, oxen and sheep.

"I found it very lonely during the years of my early girinood; and I used to go, despite my father's wishes, much away from home, spending a day with one friend and a week with another. Nor was I choice at all in the selection of my acquaintances. My father used to frequently point out that I was a lady by blood, I should seek the companionship of ladies only. But his remonstrances never exceeded words; and when I disobeyed his orders he only sighed and wished that my mother had been spared to watch my welfare."

(To Be Continued)

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