

A ROBBING GANG

EARLY DAYS OF GOLD MINING IN MONTANA.

A Sanctimonious Sheriff Who Was the Leader of a Band of Highwaymen.

A few days ago Abraham Case, of Portland, Oregon, passed through Philadelphia on a visit to his former home, in Maine. Mr. Case was one of the Argonauts, landing in California from a whale ship in '49, and his recollection of the early gold settlements are very interesting, particularly the breaking up of the Plumer gang of outlaws in 1863. Mr. Case was a member of the Vigilantes who performed this service to the community.

In 1862 Bannock City, Montana, was founded, and the gold discoveries on Salmon river at once attracted a numerous class of settlers, most of whom came from west of the mountains. Many of these were outlaws and ruffians of the worst kind. Mr. Dempsey, the first Sheriff of Beaverhead county, was not able to deal with these desperate characters, and Henry Plumer, a man of approved courage, was selected to succeed him.

The new Sheriff was a well-known resident, who had crossed the plains in the fifties. He had a very genial manner and as a church member was shining light among religious people, leading in prayer and occasionally preaching at several meetings. Some of the old timers had less confidence in his morality than the general public and there were stories afloat of his intimacy with some of the bad men that had been killed or driven out of the mines.

PLUMER'S APPARENT EARNESTNESS.

The former Sheriff had done his best to put down lawlessness, and more than once he complained that the ruffians who infested the town were aided and abetted by certain officials, but he was never able to bring these men to book. Plumer went to work with apparent earnestness to rid the town of its criminal population, but there was still a great deal of horse stealing and murdering going on. It was noticed that when a handsome reward was offered for a stolen horse the Sheriff nearly always succeeded in getting it, and while certain ruffians were vigorously hunted down and killed by the Sheriff's posse, others equally bad were let alone. As everybody was making money and driving trade but little attention was given to the rumors, and Plumer kept up his credit by occasionally raiding dance houses and the smaller gambling saloons, while the big ones were not disturbed.

In no community in the West were there more bad men at this time, and miners coming to town to sell their gold were almost certain to be waylaid by highwaymen and sometimes killed.

WAYLaid BY MASKED ROBBERS.

One instance of this kind attracted much notice. Three brothers, named Conwell, were running a mine on Horn tail creek, about twenty miles west from Bannock. They started to come in, bringing about \$3,000 worth of dust. Two miles from town five masked men halted them, and in the desperate fight that ensued two of the road agents were shot down and John Conwell killed. The survivors hurried into town and notified the Sheriff. He set out accompanied by the brothers and a boy. When they came to the place one of the robbers was dead, and the other, a notorious villain known as "Red McCoy," was just alive and no more.

Plumer sent the two brothers into the brush to get some poles to make a litter and they, taking the boy with them a short distance, sent him back to watch, as they suspected the Sheriff for certain reasons. The boy heard Plumer tell the wounded man to keep his mouth shut and all would come right; but the robber cursed the Sheriff and threatened to blow on him. The next instant Plumer's hands were on the man's throat and he said no more. When the Conwells got back the robber was dead, and the black

silk handkerchief that he wore around his neck looked as if it had been twisted.

A GOOD RIDDANCE.

Plumer, as usual, self-possessed and pleasant manner, said "it was a good riddance and would save the country expenses and the party returned to Bannock. The brothers, taking the boy with them, saw James Sutton, a leading merchant, and told their story. Sutton communicated with some friends and it was determined to watch Plumer. He had evidently strangled McCoy to prevent him talking. All parties were enjoined to keep the matter a secret and the boy was given \$20 and a promise of more if he would be silent.

About this time there came a succession of daring stage robberies that excited the public indignation. Within six weeks Butterfield's stages were attacked three times, a driver and two passengers killed and the treasure boxes taken. The stage agent, Mr. Regan, consulted the Sheriff, who made many efforts to catch the thieves, without success, and then he put men on the coaches as guards and those were not molested. But the truth was soon to come out. In August, 1864, a stage left Bannock with \$12,000 in dust in the box and two passengers. About three o'clock in the morning, at a place called Bow Hill, thirty miles from the city a volley of balls from the thicket that lined the road killed the driver and one passenger. The other, a German named Lutz, although shot through the body, managed to get out of the coach and into the brush. Here he fell into an old prospect hole and lay concealed.

RECOGNIZES PLUMER.

After a time he heard the robbers searching for him and a voice that he knew well say: "We must have the Dutchman, boys, or there'll be trouble; knife him at once if you find him." The poor fellow recognized the speaker as his neighbor, Henry Plumer. So unsuspecting was he that he was about to call for aid, but refrained. Then some one called out that there were men coming down the road, and to his great relief Lutz heard the murderers crashing through the brush. In ten minutes a party of horsemen rode up and Lutz's name was called and in a few minutes he was telling his story to a strong party of citizens who had ridden after the coach, suspecting trouble. The wounded man and the dead were placed in the coach and all started for Bannock City.

After riding about ten miles a man was seen crossing the road and recognized as a gambler and reputed horse thief named Buck. When halted he raised his gun and was at once brought down by a charge of buckshot. He was charged with being with the party that robbed the stage. After several denials he offered for a pint of whisky to tell the truth. This was given him and the story came out.

THE SHERIFF MARKED.

Plumer was the leader of the gang that had killed the driver and passengers and he had planned all the murders and robberies that had been done within the past year. After this last outrage he and his party had gained their horses and were making their way to the town. Buck's horse had fallen and broken his leg, and so he was left to get back on foot. As he was evidently dying a further supply of liquor was furnished him and the man left the road. About 8 o'clock the party, numbering twenty men, got to town and without stopping rode to Plumer's house, a neat cottage on Main street. Entering they listened for a moment at the dining-room door. The scoundrel was at the breakfast table saying grace, "asking God to bless the work of his hands. As they entered he started up with a pleasant greeting, but grew livid as Mr. Sutton seized him and said: "Plumer, it has all come out. We know you now, you villain." His pale little wife screamed out: "Oh, Henry, I knew this would be the end of it." Plumer's manner changed and he became defiant.

"You can't hang me anyhow with

out a trial. You'll give me a chance for my life?"

"You'll have just the same chance you gave Sam Parry and Mr. Lutz. We propose to hang you inside of an hour," was the answer, and then the scoundrel broke down, took all and begged for his life. But his captors were resolute men and in no mood to be merciful. In ten minutes Fink's saloon was surrounded and nine men taken. Although all desperadoes of the worse kind they made no resistance.

By ten o'clock Plumer and his associates, securely guarded and followed by almost the entire population of the town, made their way slowly up the street. The Sheriff was scarcely able to walk and mingled prayers with appeals for mercy. Ten men were strung up.

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Franklington, 12 51 9 04
Kittrell, 1 10 9 35
Henderson, 1 30 10 05
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No. 41, No. 53, Mail train, Fast Frt.
Stations, Le. Weldon, 11 35 p. m. 1 40 a. m.
Littleton, 12 18 2 54
Henderson, 1 25 5 04
Kittrell, 2 01 5 35
Franklington, 2 16 6 06
Wake, 2 38 6 48
Ar. Raleigh, 3 15 p. m. 8 00

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