

DETECTIVE'S SEARCH FOR PIRATES AND THE RESULT

(Grant Allen in New York Evening Post.)

When news first reached me that a distinguished M. P. had been set upon and robbed by a well-dressed highwayman on the main stream of the Thames, just below Cliveden Woods, I confess I was more than half inclined, on the first blush of it, to treat the whole affair as a cock-and-bull story. I had been High Constable of the county for fifteen years, and as my own place at Bray slopes down with its lawn to the river's edge, I know perfectly well how crowded this part of the Thames is with punts and rowing boats during the whole summer season. Moreover, the particular spot chosen for the extraordinary attempt seemed so very unlikely. Cliveden reach is the most frequented stretch of water on the whole river; hundreds of holiday-makers pour down from London every day to Taplow or Maidenhead; so that the channel is alive with scullers and steam launches for some five miles up stream till a late hour in the evening. A pool-poohed the policeman who first told me the tale. "Nonsense," I said; "the gentleman must have been dining at some riverside hotel, perhaps with casual or undesirable acquaintances, and having had his pocket picked by them, or been diddled out of his money, he has invented this extremely improbable story to allay his wife's well-grounded suspicions." For, I am sorry to say, one cannot be High Constable of a riverside county for fifteen years and yet retain a childlike trust in the perfect goodness of human nature.

But when the Right Honorable Edward Symington himself, the respected member for the Plympton Borough, appeared before me and told his tale, I confess I was staggered. Mr. Symington was not the sort of man, I took it, to be the victim of a delusion; nor did he look particularly glibly. Tall, thickset, stoutly built, a typical, hard-headed English squire, a good rider to hounds, a conservative country member, he had the solidity and credibility which we always attribute to the honest, straightforward, unimaginative John Bull.

He told his story with perfect frankness. He had been out on the river with a party of friends—intimate friends, and had dined—he did not attempt to deny the fact of dining—at that well-known conducted house, the Ferry Inn, at Cookham. After dinner, about nine at night, on a fine summer evening, he started in a Canadian canoe for Maidenhead. He was accustomed to manage a boat, and was a good sculler and paddler. Where the stream divides he took the inner channel, under the Cliveden Woods; and there, just behind the island, he was surprised, as he passed, to see another canoe glide rapidly out in the gloom, and a man accost him threateningly. "Fork out whatever you have in your purse! Quick! hand it over, this minute, or I shoot you!" "What sort of man?" I asked, eyeing my informant hard. Symington answered like a truthful person: "I could hardly make out, as it was growing dusk; but he seemed to me tall, with much black hair about his face—beard, moustache and whiskers. "Armed?" "Certainly; armed with a revolver. He pointed it full at me and cried, 'No hesitation, or I fire!' He was bland, but peremptory." "He dared not have fired," I said. "He would have aroused the neighborhood." "I am not so sure of that; it is lonely behind the islands, and the hour was late. I passed only one other boat all the way from Cookham. The river is crowded, I admit, Colonel, till eight or half-past; but as soon as it grows dark not a soul is left on it." "And you gave him your purse?" "Well, it was cowardly of me, I own; but what would you have? He was covering me with his revolver; I was quite unarmed. And remember, too, in a Canadian canoe, which is not the sort of place one would choose for a tussle—the least thing upsets one. Besides, I don't swim, it's the sole main accomplishment I never acquired, having been brought up inland, far away from any river. When I got to Oxford I was either too old or too ashamed to learn, and I have never learned; so the rogue had me at his mercy." "How much money did your purse contain?" "Oh, nothing to speak of—about seven pounds. But that's not what I mind. It's the principle of the thing—that a pirate should be permitted to go about unhecked on the upper Thames with 'Your money or your life' in this nineteenth century."

I paused and reflected. "Things of the sort will crop up," I said, "in spite of all the pains one may take to prevent them. But nothing like this shall crop up again. I promise you, I will have the river properly patrolled and guarded." "You must," he said warmly. "Such an outrage is a disgrace to our boasted civilization. You must catch the rogue. Till he is imprisoned, Col. Venables-Hughes, you have not fulfilled your duty to the community." As soon as he had gone I asked my chief detective, who had been present during our interview, what he thought of Mr. Symington's story. He stroked his smooth chin warily—a chief detective's chin is always smooth, as he has to get himself up in so many disguises—and answered with great deliberation: "His account has a ring of truth in it, sir. I should say, myself, he was probably robbed. Of course, a gentleman may give away money, and then desire to account for it; but Mr. Symington is not a very foolish one; and it's the young ones and the foolish ones that trump up stories of such adventures. My impression is, we might watch the reach carefully from the bank for a week or two."

"Atkins," I said, "we shall watch it, but not from the bank. You're the man to do it. You know the river well, and you manage a boat. We must fight the fellow with his own weapons—if there is any fellow, which is far from certain. He uses a Canadian canoe. He's right, of course; no boat is so noiseless; with none other can you see so well ahead exactly where you are going, and guide yourself so perfectly. You must have a Canadian canoe; perforce Cliveden reach, and see whether any such outrage is attempted again."

"It will be attempted again, sir," Atkins said, decisively. "You may count upon that. If the story's true, the fellow will have learned that he can induce a strong and vigorous man, a member of Parliament, and a good sculler, to deliver up his purse by just presenting a loaded revolver at his head. The process is simplicity itself. Is it likely he won't try the same game on again, when he finds it so easy?" We debated where we should post him. My own idea was that the robber, having tried Cliveden reach once, would make his second attempt somewhere near Marlow or Bisham, just to avoid our precautions. But Atkins said no; and Atkins' experience was worth much in such matters. The only reach where the fellow could be sure of catching somebody worth robbing, he saw, was the most frequented piece of water. At Marlow or Bisham, after dark, he might wait for hours without seeing any one. But on Cliveden reach there was always a passer-by. Besides, he would need the cover of the reed-beds. I agreed that Atkins was right, and made all arrangements for the canoe, well as for a couple of policemen with a double sculling blade to be in waiting close by whenever Atkins sprang his rattle. The magistrates laughed at me. "If you really suppose, Colonel," one of them said to me, "such things can happen in England today? I call it preposterous. Old Symington had had quite as much as was good for him, that's the long and short of it; he lost his purse, and then invented this cock-and-bull story; or else, he found some agreeable person who relieved him of his cash, and he wanted to explain the little mishap away. The tale's not worth investigating."

Atlantic Coast Line AND BRANCHES. AND ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD COMPANY OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

Condensed Schedule in Effect June 1, 1899. TRAINS GOING SOUTH. No. 25 Daily—Leave Weldon 6:40 a.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 35 Daily—Leave Weldon 9:45 a.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 102 Daily, Ex. of Sunday—Leave Tarboro 6:30 a.m., arrive Weldon 7:15 a.m., leave Weldon 7:30 a.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 41 Daily—Leave Rocky Mount 6:45 a.m., arrive Weldon 7:15 a.m., leave Weldon 7:30 a.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 49 Daily—Leave Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Weldon 2:30 p.m., leave Weldon 2:45 p.m., leave Magnolia 4:15 p.m., arrive Wilmington 9:45 a.m. TRAINS GOING NORTH. No. 75 Daily—Leave Fayetteville 7:45 a.m., leave Fayetteville 12:30 p.m., leave Selma 12:55 p.m., arrive Weldon 2:30 p.m., leave Weldon 2:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 102 Daily Except Sunday—Leave Goldsboro 5:45 a.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Fayetteville 4:15 p.m., leave Fayetteville 4:30 p.m., arrive Florence 7:30 p.m., leave Florence 7:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m. No. 32 Daily—Leave Fayetteville 7:45 p.m., leave Fayetteville 9:45 a.m., leave Selma 10:55 a.m., arrive Weldon 12:30 p.m., leave Weldon 12:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., leave Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m., arrive Weldon 1:15 a.m. No. 40 Daily—Leave Wilmington 7:30 p.m., leave Magnolia 8:15 a.m., leave Goldsboro 9:45 a.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m. No. 48 Daily—Leave Wilmington 9:45 a.m., leave Magnolia 11:15 a.m., leave Goldsboro 12:30 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:45 p.m., arrive Rocky Mount 12:55 p.m. Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Atlantic and Yadkin Division. Man Line—Train leaves Wilmington 9:00 a.m., arrives Fayetteville 12:25 p.m., arrives Sanford 1:45 p.m., returning leaves Sanford 2:30 p.m., arrives Fayetteville 3:45 p.m., leaves Fayetteville 3:50 p.m., arrives Wilmington 6:58 p.m. Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. Bennettville Branch—Train leaves Bennettville 8:45 a.m., arrives Maxton 9:07 a.m., Red Springs 9:25 a.m., Hope Mills 10:20 a.m., arrives Fayetteville 10:40 a.m., returning leaves Fayetteville 4:23 p.m., Hope Mills 4:52 p.m., Red Springs 5:35 p.m., Maxton 6:15 p.m., arrives Bennettville 7:15 p.m. Connections at Fayetteville with Train No. 78 at Maxton with the Carolina General Railroad, and Homecoming Railroad, at Sanford with the Seaboard Air Line and Southern Railway at Gulf with the Durham and Charlotte Railroad. Train on the Scotland Neck Branch leaves Weldon 2:35 p.m., Halifax 4:15 p.m., arrives Scotland Neck at 6:08 p.m., Greenville 6:57 p.m., at station 7:55 p.m., returning leaves Kingston 7:50 a.m., Greenville 8:52 a.m., arriving at Weldon 11:15 a.m., Weldon 11:32 a.m., daily except Sunday. Trains on Washington Branch leave Washington 8:10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., arrive Farmville 9:10 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., arrive Goldsboro 10:10 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., arrive Farmville 9:50 a.m. and 3:50 p.m., arrive Washington 11:50 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., daily except Sunday. Train leaves Tarboro, N.C., daily except Sunday 5:30 p.m., Sunday 4:15 p.m., arrives Plymouth 7:40 p.m., 4:10 p.m., returning leaves Plymouth 8:10 a.m., 4:55 p.m., arrives Washington 11:50 a.m., 7:30 p.m., daily except Sunday. Train on Midland N.C. Branch leaves Goldsboro daily except Sunday 7:55 a.m., arriving Smithfield 8:10 a.m., returning leaves Smithfield 9:00 a.m., arrives Goldsboro 10:10 a.m., 5:00 p.m., arrives Nashville 11:22 a.m., 7:25 p.m., arrives Rocky Mount 11:45 a.m., 4:30 p.m., daily except Sunday. Train on Lynchburg Branch leaves Warrenton for Clinton daily, except Sunday 8:10 a.m. and 4:15 p.m., returning leaves Clinton at 7:00 a.m. and 10:25 a.m. Train No. 78 makes close connections at Weldon for all points North daily, all rail via Richmond. H. M. EMERSON, General Passenger Agent. J. R. KENLY, General Manager. T. M. EMERSON, Traffic Manager. Chesapeake & Ohio Railway. ELECTRIC LIGHTED! STEAM HEATED! VESTIBULED TRAINS WITH PULLMAN SLEEPING AND DINING CAR. Many hours quicker and miles shorter than other routes TO THE WEST AND NORTHWEST. You can breakfast today at Raleigh take C. and O. 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