

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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A gun spat fire from the higher ground, and Willetts dropped where he stood, but was up again in a second, with a red line across his forehead where the ball had grazed his temple. The mob spread out like a fan, the men climbing the fence and beginning the advance through the fields, thus closing on the ambuscade from both sides. Mr. Watts, wading through the high grass in the field north of the road, perceived the barrel of a gun shining from the fence some distance in front of him and the same second, although no weapon was seen in his hand, discharged a revolver at the clump of grass and weeds behind the gun. Instantly ten or twelve men leaped from their hiding places along the fences of both fields and, firing hurriedly and harmlessly into the scattered ranks of the oncoming mob, broke for the shelter of the houses, where their fellows were posted. Taken on the flanks and from the rear, there was but one thing for them to do to keep from being hemmed in and shot or captured. (They excessively preferred being shot.) With a wild, high, joyous yell, sounding like the bay of young hounds breaking into view of their quarry, the Plattville men followed.

The most eastward of the debilitated edifices of Six Crossroads was the saloon. It bore the painted legends, on the west wall, "Last Chance," on the east wall, "First Chance." Next to this and separated by two or three acres of weedy vacancy from the corners, where the population centered thickest, stood—if one may so predicate of a building which leaned in seven directions—the house of Mr. Robert Skillet, the proprietor of the saloon. Both buildings were shut up as tight as their state of repair permitted. As they were farthest to the east, they formed the nearest shelter, and to them the Crossroads bent their flight, though they stopped not here, but disappeared behind Skillet's shanty, putting it between them and their pursuers, whose guns were beginning to speak. The fugitives had a good start, and being the picked runners of the Crossroads, they crossed the open, weedy acres in safety and made for their homes. Every house had become a fort, and the defenders would have to be fought and torn out one by one. As the guns sounded, a woman in a shanty near the forge began to scream and kept on screaming.

On came the farmers and the men of Plattville. They took the saloon at a run, shattered down the crazy doors with a fence rail and swarmed inside like busy insects, making the place hum like a hive, but with the hotter industries of destruction. It was empty of life as a tomb, but they beat and tore and battered and broke and hammered and shattered like madmen; they reduced the tawdry interior to a mere chaos and came pouring forth laden with trophies of ruin, and then there was a chary smell in the air, and a slender feather of smoke floated up from a second story window.

At the same time Watts led an assault on the adjoining house, an assault which came to a sudden pause, for from cracks in the front wall a squirrel rifle and a shotgun snapped and banged, and the crowd fell back in disorder. Homer Tibbs had a hat blown away, full of buckshot holes, while Mr. Watts solitiously examined a small



They were coming.

aperture in the skirts of his brown coat. The house commanded the road, and the rush of the mob into the village was checked, but only for the instant.

A rickety woodshed which formed a portion of the Skillet mansion closely joined the "Last Chance" side of the family place of business. Scarcely had the guns of the defenders sounded when, with a loud shout, Lige Willetts leaped from an upper window on that side of the burning saloon and landed on the woodshed and, immediately climbing the roof of the mansion itself, applied a brand to the dry, tawny clapboards. Ross Schofield dropped on the woodshed close behind him, his arm lovingly infolding a gallon jug of whisky, which he emptied (not without evident regret) upon the clapboards as Lige fired them. Flames burst forth

almost instantly, and the smoke, uniting with that now rolling out of every window of the saloon, went up to heaven in a cumulous, gray column.

As the flames began to spread there was a rapid fusillade from the rear of the house, and a hundred men and more, who had kept on through the fields to the north, assailed it from behind. Their shots passed clear through the flimsy partitions, and there was a screaming like beasts' howls from within. The front door was thrown open, and a lean, fierce-eyed girl, with a case knife in her hand, ran out in the face of the mob. At sound of the shots in the rear they had begun to advance on the house a second time, and Hartley Bowlder was the nearest man to the girl. With awful words and shrieking inconceivably she made straight at Hartley and attacked him with the knife. She struck at him again and again, and in her anguish of hate and fear she was so extraordinary a spectacle that she gained for her companions the seconds they needed to escape from the house. As she hurled herself alone at the oncoming torrent they sped from the door unnoticed, sprang over the fence and reached the open lots to the west before they were seen by Willetts from the roof.

"Don't let 'em fool you!" he shouted. "Look to your left! There they go! Don't let 'em get away!"

The Crossroads were running across the field. They were Bob Skillet and his younger brother, and Mr. Skillet was badly damaged. He seemed to be holding his jaw on his face with both hands. The girl turned and sped after them. She was over the fence almost as soon as they were, and the three ran in single file, the girl last. She was either magnificently sacrificial and fearless or she cunningly calculated that the regulators would take no chances of killing a woman-child, for she kept between their guns and her two companions, trying to cover and shield the latter with her frail body.

"Shoot, Lige," called Watts. "If we fire from here we'll hit the girl. Shoot!" Willetts and Ross Schofield were still standing on the roof at the edge out of the smoke, and both fired at the same time. The fugitives did not turn. They kept on running, and they had nearly reached the other side of the field when suddenly, without any preliminary gesture, the elder Skillet dropped flat on his face. The Crossroads stood by each other that day, for four or five men ran out of the nearest shanty into the open, lifted the prostrate figure from the ground and began to carry it back with them. But Skillet was alive. His curses were heard above all other sounds. Lige and Schofield fired again, and one of the rescuers staggered. Nevertheless as the two men slid down from the roof the burdened Crossroads were seen to break into a run, and at that, with another yell, fiercer, wilder, more joyous than the first, the Plattville men followed.

The yell rang loudly in the ears of old Wilkerson, who had remained back in the road, and at the same instant he heard another shout behind him. He had not shared in the attack; but, greatly preoccupied with his own histrionic affairs, was proceeding alone up the pike, except for the unhappy yellow mongrel still dragged along by the rope, and alternating, as was his natural wont, from one fence to the other, crouching behind every bush to fire an imaginary rifle at the dog and then springing out with triumphant howlings to fall prone upon the terrified animal. It was after one of these victories that a shout of warning was raised behind him, and Mr. Wilkerson, by grace of the god Bacchus, rolling out of the way in time to save his life, saw a horse dash by him, a big, black horse whose polished flanks were dripping with lather. Warren Smith was the rider. He was waving a slip of yellow paper high in the air.

He rode up the slope and drew rein beyond the burning buildings just ahead of those foremost in the pursuit. He threw his horse across the road to oppose their progress, rose in his stirrups and waved the paper over his head. "Stop!" he roared. "Give me one minute! Stop!" He had a grand voice, and he was known in many parts of the state for the great bass roar with which he startled his juries. To be heard at a distance most men lift the pitch of their voice. Smith lowered his an octave or two, and the result was like an earthquake playing an organ in a catacomb.

"Stop!" he thundered. "Stop!" In answer one of the flying Crossroads turned and sent a bullet whistling close to him. The lawyer paused long enough to bow deeply in satirical response; then, flourishing the paper, he roared again: "Stop! A mistake! I have news! Stop, I say! Horner has got them!"

To make himself heard over that tempestuous advance was a feat; for him, moreover, whose counsels had so lately been derided, to interest the pursuers at such a moment enough to make them listen—to find the word was a greater, and by the word and by gestures at once vehemently imperious and imploring to stop them was a still greater. But he did it. He had come at just the moment before

the moment that would have been too late. They all heard him. They all knew, too, that he was not trying to save the Crossroads as a matter of duty, because he had given that up before the mob left Plattville. Indeed, it was a question if at the last he had not tacitly approved, and no one feared indictments for the day's work. It would do no harm to listen to what he had to say. The work could wait. It would "keep" for five minutes. They began to gather around him, excited, flushed, perspiring and smelling of smoke. Hartley Bowlder, won by Lige's desperation and intrepidity, was helping the latter tie up his head. No one else was hurt.

"What is it?" they clamored impatiently. "Speak quick!" There was another harmless shot from a fugitive, and then the Crossroads, declining that the diversion was in their favor, secured themselves in their dearest fastnesses and held their fire. Meanwhile the flames crackled cheerfully in Plattville ears. No matter what the prosecutor had to say, at least the Skillet saloon and homestead were gone, and Bob Skillet and one other would be sick enough to be good for awhile.

"Listen!" cried Warren Smith, arising in his stirrups again, read the



She made straight at Hartley.

missive in his hand, a Western Union telegraph form. "Warren Smith, Plattville. Was the direction."

Found both shell men. Police familiar with both, and both wanted here. One arrested at noon in second-hand clothes store wearing Harkless' hat; also trying to dispose torn full dress coat known to have been worn by Harkless last night. Stains on lining believed blood. Second man found later at freight yards in empty lumber car left Plattville 1 p. m. badly hurt, shot and bruised. Supposed Harkless made hard fight. Hurt man taken to hospital unconscious. Will die. Other man refuses to talk so far. Check any letter, etc. Come over on 2:15 accommodation.

The telegram was signed by Horner, the sheriff, and by Barrett, the superintendent of police at Ronen.

"It's all a mistake, boys," the lawyer said as he handed the paper to Watts and Parker for inspection. "The ladies at the judge's were mistaken, that's all, and this proves it. It's easy enough to understand. They were frightened by the storm, and watching a fence a quarter of a mile away by flashes of lightning and imagined all the horrors on earth. I don't deny but what I believed it for awhile, and I don't deny but the Crossroads is pretty tough, but you've done a good deal here already today, and we've saved in time from a mistake that would have turned out mighty bad. This settles it. Horner got a wire to go soon as they got track of the first man. That was when we saw him on the Ronen accommodation."

A slightly cracked voice, yet a huskyly tuneful one, was lifted quaveringly on the air from the roadside, where an old man and a yellow dog sat in the dust together, the latter relieved at the last moment, his surprised head rakishly garnished with a hasty wreath of dog fennel daisies.

"John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground,
While we go marching on."

Three-quarters of an hour later the inhabitants of the Crossroads, saved, they knew not how; guilty, knowing nothing of the fantastic pendulum of opinion which, swung by the events of the day, had marked the fatal moment of guilt now on others, now on them who deserved it—the natives and refugees, conscious of atrocity, dumfounded by a miracle, thinking the world gone mad, hovered together in a dark, fagged mass at the crossing corners, while the skeleton of the rotting buggy in the slough rose behind them against the face of the west. They peered with stupefied eyes through the smoky twilight.

From afar, faintly through the gloaming, came mournfully to their ears the many voiced refrain, fainter, fainter:

"John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies—mold—
... we go march ... on."

CHAPTER X.

AT the city hospital in Ronen that night a stout young man introduced himself to Barrett, superintendent of police; Warren Smith and Horner, sheriff of Carlow. He spoke in a low voice. "My name is Meredith," he said. "Mr. Harkless was an old and—and—" He paused for a moment. The Plattville men nodded solemnly. "An old and dear friend of mine," he went on, with some difficulty, and Warren Smith took him silently by the hand.

"You can come in and see this man, the Teller, with us if you like, Mr. Meredith," said the superintendent. "Your friend made it very hot for him be-

fore the two of 'em got away with him. He's so shot and backed up his mother wouldn't know him if she wanted to. At least that's what they say out here. We haven't seen him. He's called Jerry the Teller, and one of my sergeants found him in the freight yard. Knew it was the Teller, because he was stowed away in one of the empty cars that came from Plattville last night. And Slattery—that's his running mate, the one we caught with the coat and hat—owned up that they beat their way on that freight. Looks like Slattery—let the Teller do all the fighting. He ain't scratched. We've been at Slattery pretty hard, but he won't open his head, and we hope to get something out of this one. He's delicious, but they say he'll come to before he dies. Do you want to go in with us?"

"Yes," said Meredith simply, and a young surgeon presently appeared and led them down a wide corridor and up a narrow hall, and they entered a small, quiet ward.

There was a pungent smell of chemicals in the room. The light was low, and the dimness was imbued with a thick, confused murmur, incoherent whisperings that came from a cot in the corner. It was the only cot in use in the ward, and Meredith was conscious of a terror that made him dread to look at it, to go near it. Beside it a nurse sat silent, and upon it feebly tossed the racked body of him whom Barrett had called Jerry the Teller.

The head was a shapeless bundle, so swathed it was with bandages and cloths, and what part of the face was visible was discolored and pigmented with drugs. Stretched under the white sheet the man looked immensely tall—as Horner saw with vague misgiving—and he lay in an odd, inhuman fashion, as though he had been all broken to pieces. His attempts to move were constantly soothed by the nurse, and he as constantly continued such attempts, and one hand, though torn and bandaged, was not to be restrained from a wandering, restless movement that Meredith felt to be pathetic. He had entered the room with a flare of hate for the thing whom he had come to see die and who had struck down the old friend whose nearness he had never known until it was too late. But at first sight of the broken figure he felt all animosity fall away from him. Only awe remained and a growing, censorious pity as he watched the long white fingers of the Teller pick at the coverlet. The man was muttering rapid fragments of words and syllables.

"Somehow I feel a sense of wrong," Meredith whispered to the surgeon, whom he knew. "I feel as if I had done the fellow to death myself, as if it were all out of gear. I know how Henry felt over the great misadventure. How tall he looks! It doesn't seem to me like a thug's hand."

"That's a mistake to be made you can count on Barrett and his sergeants to make it. I doubt if this is their man. When they found him, what clothes he wore were torn and stained, but he had been good once, especially then."

Barrett bent over the recumbent figure. "See here, Jerry," he said. "I want to talk to you a little. Rouse up, will you? I want to talk to you as a friend."

Incoherent muttering continued. "Be here, Jerry!" repeated Barrett sharply. "Jerry! Rouse up, will you? We don't want any fooling, understand that, Jerry!" He dropped his hand on the man's shoulder and shook him lightly.

Teller uttered a short, gasping cry. "I'm here," said Gay and swiftly intoned. Bending over the cot, he said in pleasant voice: "It's all right, old man! It's all right. Slattery wants to know what you did with that man do at Plattville when you got through with him. He can't remember, but thinks there was money left on Slattery's head was hurt. He remembers. He'll go shares with you when he gets it. Slattery's going to buy you if he can get the money."

Teller only tried to move his free hand to the shoulder Barrett had shaken. "I want to know," repeated thing surgeon, gently moving the back upon the sheet. "He'll divvy up he gets it. He'll stand by you, oh."

"I'd you please not mind," whispered the Teller faintly—"would you please mind if you took care not to bighten my shoulder again?"

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stepped forward, but Tom Meredith, with a loud cry of grief, threw himself on his knees beside the cot and seized the wandering fingers in his own. "John!" he cried. "John, is it you?"

The voice went on rapidly, not heeding him. "Ah, you needn't howl! Well, laugh away, you Indians! If it hadn't been for this ankle—but it seems to be my chest that's hurt—and side—not that it matters, you know. The sophomore's just as good or better. It's only my egotism. Yes, it must be the side—and chest—and head—all over, I believe. I'll try again next year—next year I'll make it a daily. Helen said, not that I should call you Helen—I mean Miss—Miss—Fisbee—no, Sherwood—but I've always thought Helen was the prettiest name in the world—you'll forgive me?—and please tell Parker there's no more copy and won't be—I wouldn't grind out another stick to save his immortal—she said—ah, I never made a good trade—no—unless—they can't come seven miles—but I'll finish you, Skillet, first; I know you! I know nearly all of you. Now let's sing 'Annie Lisle'!" He lifted his hand as if to beat the time for a chorus.

"Oh, John, John!" cried Tom Meredith, and sobbed outright. "My boy, my boy—old friend!" The cry of the classmate was like that of a mother, for it was his old idol and hero who lay helpless and broken before him.

Two pairs of carriage lamps sparkled in front of the hospital in the earliest of the small hours, these subjoined to two deep hooded phaetons, from each of which quickly descended a gentleman with a beard, an air of eminence and a small, ominous black box, and the air of eminence was justified by the haste with which Meredith had sent for them and by their wide reputation. They arrived almost simultaneously and hastily shook hands as they made their way to the ward down the long hall and up the narrow corridor. They had a short conversation with the surgeon and a word with the nurse, then turned the others out of the room by a practiced innuendo of manner. They stayed a long time in the room without opening the door.

Meredith went out on the steps and breathed the cool night air. A slender taint of drugs hung everywhere about the building, and the almost imperceptible permeation sickened him. It was deadly, he thought. To him it was imbued with a hideous portent of suffering. The lights in the little ward were turned up, and they seemed to shine from a chamber of horrors, while he waited as a brother might have waited outside the inquisition, if indeed a brother would have been allowed to wait outside the inquisition.

Alas, he had found John Harkless. He had lost track of him as men sometimes do lose track of their best loved, but it had always been a comfort to know that Harkless was somewhere, a comfort without which he could hardly have got along. Like others, he had been waiting for John to turn up—on top, of course—he had such ability, ability for anything, and people would always care for him and believe in him so that he would be shoved ahead no matter how much he hung back himself; but Meredith had not expected him to turn up in Indiana.

He remembered now hearing a man who had spent the day in Plattville on business speak of him: "They've got a young fellow down there who'll be governor in a few years. He's a sort of dictator. Runs the party all over that part of the state to suit his own sweet will just by sheer personality. And there isn't a man in the district who wouldn't cheerfully lie down in the mud to let him pass over dry. It's the Herald, the paper that downed McCarroll and smashed those imitation 'White Caps' in Carlow county." He had been struck by the coincidence of the name, but he had not dreamed that the Carlow Harkless was his friend until Helen's telegram had reached him that evening.

He shivered. His name was spoken from within, and Horner came out on the steps with the two eminent surgeons, and the latter favored him with a few words which he did not understand. He did understand, however, what Horner told him. Somehow the look of the sheriff's Sunday coat, wrinkling forlornly from his broad, bent shoulders, was both touching and solemn. He said simply: "He's conscious and not out of his head. They're gone in to get his antemortem statement." And they re-entered the ward.

[CONTINUED.]

Future improvement in the line of agriculture will lie in the improvement of methods rather than in improved facilities. About all that can be done has been done in the line of improved machinery.

The monarchial herd of Europe needs new blood. The present sires are old rakes, epileptics, some idiots, an inbred cancerous, unhealthy lot. Reverence for royalty is strong when intelligent nations will worship at such festering shrines.

Better get along with the old wife. Here is Mr. Hans Ivers suing for a divorce. Lawyers show up in court list of his property—mortgages, moneys and credits. Tax ferret gets list and finds Ivers has been tax dodging. Result, \$2,000 back taxes as well as alimony for Ivers to pay.

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