

THE RED-HAIRED ROBBER.

by J. H. SMYTHE.

I have always thought that the worst misfortune that could befall anyone was to be compelled to live all his life in one place, and for many years I have done my best to avoid that calamity, though, mind you, I do not recommend the cultivation of a wanderlust as the best means of making a living. When I was young, strong, footloose, and fancy free, money was to me just a means to indulge my bent for wandering. So it happened that I left the job I was holding down in Oregon and drifted along until I finally found myself over in Montana and not far from the international boundary-line between the United States and Canada.

I was never at any time particular where I went. I just followed any road that took my fancy, and trusted to luck that I would find a meal and a bed for myself and my pony at the end of each day - and a job when my exchequer got too low. Well, just at dusk one evening we drifted into a small place called Condor, at the foot of the Cypress Hills and well off the beaten track. Condor was the usual straggling town you find in the West, just one long street, containing the usual stores, saloons, blacksmith's shop, jail, mission hall and livery stable, plus the inevitable swarms of flies, mongrel

dogs, and clouds of dust. However, home to me was where I hung my hat up, so I hunted up the livery stable, put up my pony for the night and then went in search of supper and a bed.

I found both at Sam Goldberg's saloon, and after eating I wandered into the bar to pass an hour or so before bedtime in whatever company I happened to find there, and also to have my usual modest gamble at the roulette-table. A game was in full swing as I entered, so I strolled up to the bar to buy a few chips to join in. As I glanced casually over the rows of bottles on the shelves at the back of the bar I noticed what at first sight appeared to be a piece of dirty paper set in a beautiful gilt frame hanging above the top row. When I looked closer I found that the paper was a one-dollar bill, pasted on a sheet of cardboard which bore the inscription in letters of red ink, 'The one and only'.

As you might imagine I was very curious to know the reason for the framed bill and the strange inscription, so when old Sam had an interval in his duties I asked him what was the story of the 'one and only' dollar bill - for there was a story behind that gilt frame, I felt certain.

I wasn't mistaken either, and the tale was one which caused Sam to lapse into profanity at times as he told it. Leaving out the old saloon-keeper's picturesque comments, this was the story:

In common with other saloon-keepers in places where there was no bank, Sam always kept a large sum of money by him to cash cheques for his patrons. On one occasion he was holding 4,000 dollars in various denominations ready for the monthly payout among the neighbouring ranchers, miners and lumber men - all of whom were mostly paid by cheque.

On the night before pay-day a stranger arrived in Condor, stabled his horse and booked a room at Sam's place. He gave his name as Sid Moran - Ginger for short, on account of the colour of his hair - and said he was a cattle buyer for an Eastern firm and was on his way to some point further west in connection with his business. After spending a little time in the bar, and buying drinks for the crowd with a bill which Sam had to go to the safe to change, the stranger said he was going to bed as he was very tired and wished to have a good night's rest before making an early start next morning. Sure enough, he did leave early and not alone either, for the contents of the safe went with him, the whole 4,000 dollars except one - one dollar bill, which must have escaped his notice when he rifled the safe. That bill was the one now in the gilt frame, and all Sam had to show for the sum he once possessed.

The sheriff and his deputies trailed the robber for several days, but they finally lost track of him down in the Sarnia Flats on the Canadian side of the line, and having no

jurisdiction on that side, they gave up the chase. Though Moran's description was circulated throughout the country, he was never seen or heard of again from that day. That was the story of the dollar bill as related to me by old Sam in fluent and vigorous language.

All this had happened about ten years before I arrived in Condor and I was not reminded of the story until several more years had elapsed and I had nearly forgotten all about it.

In the autumn of 1910 I was working over in the Big Stick country in Southern Alberta, close to the Indian Reservation there. I was able to be of some small assistance to one of the tribe, and so I got on very friendly terms with them all and used to visit the native village quite a lot. One day I had the honour of being invited to the old chief's dwelling, for a friendly smoke and a look at the collection of skins on which the Indians, having no written language, have from time immemorial painted in symbolic characters the history of their people. You may be sure I accepted the invitation, as it was a wonderful opportunity of learning something of the Red Man's history at first hand, and besides it would have hurt the old fellow's feelings deeply if I had refused, and broken off a friendship which was beneficial to me in more ways than one.

Well, the paintings proved a most interesting and engrossing study and the manners, customs and pursuits of the tribes were so faithfully portrayed on the softly tanned hides that I had no difficulty - or very little - in following their history. Scenes of hunting and fishing, of peace and war and of tragedy, were in turn unrolled for my inspection, and I thought they were marvellously well executed.

The very last skin I examined was a most beautifully tanned hide; the pictured story was finely painted and evidently of much more recent date than the others. Starting at the top or neck end of the hide a tragedy in picture unfolded itself with every detail described by vivid and clear-cut illustration. I could see a white man, creeping cautiously through the bushes and long grass towards a wigwam in front of which stood an Indian maiden holding a pony by the head. She seemed to be looking away from the approaching danger. Then in succession I saw in pictures the man close behind the girl, his hand up in the act of shooting, the girl lying dead on the ground, and then the murderer galloping off on the pony.

Next an Indian warrior was illustrated trailing the white man, who could be seen on the stolen pony in the far distance. Then the Indian ran his quarry to earth, for I could see him crawling towards the man as he lay asleep by his camp fire.

Next I saw the warrior with his bow bent and an arrow about to speed from the taut string. Then the murderer and horse-thief was seen transfixed by the arrow through his throat, and the last scene showed the warrior galloping off on the return trail, mounted on the recovered pony and carrying in his hand the dripping scalp of the white man.

As I at last laid down the skin and turned to ask the old chief some question in connection with the picture, I found he was standing motionless behind me, waiting for me to turn and look at something he held in his hand. To my surprise the thing he held out to me was the dried scalp of a man, obviously a man not of Indian blood. With a sudden rush the story of Ginger Moran and Sam Goldberg's framed dollar bill came back to my memory. The hair still adhering to the scalp was red.

Then I understood, but I didn't ask if any money was found on the body; that would have been indelicate, and I am doubtful if the old fellow would have told me.