

The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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They were coming.

She stepped quickly out of the tangle and darted up the road. She ran with the speed of a fleet little terrier, not opening her lips, not calling out, but holding her two thin hands high above her head; that was all. But Burton Wood was come to Dunsmuir at last, and the messenger sped. Out of the weeds in the corner of the snake fence, in the upper part of the rise, silently lifted the heads of men whose silhouettes became a sickish white as the child flew by.

The mob was carefully organized. They had taken their time and had prepared everything deliberately, knowing that nothing could stop them. No one had any thought of concealment; it was all as open as the light of day, all done in the broad sunshine. Nothing had been determined as to what was to be done at the Crossroads more definite than that the place was to be wiped out. That was comprehensive enough; the details were quite certain to occur. They were all on foot, marching in fairly regular ranks. In front walked Mr. Watts, the man Harkless had abhorred in a public spirit and befriended in private. Today he was a hero and a leader, marching to avenge his professional oppressor and personal brother. Cool, unruffled and to outward vision unarmed, marching the miles in his brown frock coat and generous linen, he led the way. On one side of him were the two Bowlders, on the other was Lige Willetts, Mr. Watts preserving peace between the young men with perfect tact and sang froid.

They kept good order and a stillness of quiet for so many except far to the rear, where old Wilkerson was bringing up the tail of the procession, dragging a wretched yellow dog by a rope fastened around the poor cur's protesting neck, the knot carefully arranged under his right ear. In spite of every command and protest Wilkerson had marched the whole way uproariously singing "John Brown's Body."

The sun was in the west when they came in sight of the Crossroads, and the cabins on the low slope stood out angularly against the radiance beyond. As they beheld the hated settlement the heretofore orderly ranks showed a disposition to depart from the steady advance and rush the shanties. Willetts, the Bowlders, Parker, Ross Schofeld and a dozen others did, in fact, break away and set a sharp pace up the slope.

Watts tried to call them back. "What's the use your gettin' killed?" he shouted.

"Why not?" answered Lige, and, like the others, was increasing his speed when old "Wimby" rose up suddenly from the roadside ahead of them and motioned them frantically to go back. "They're laid out along the fence waitin' fer ya," he warned them. "Git out the road. Come by the fields. For the Lord's sake, spread!" Then as suddenly as he had appeared he dropped down into the weeds again. Lige and those with him paused, and the whole body came to a halt while the leaders consulted. There was a sound of metallic clicking and a thin rattle of steel. From far to the rear came the voice of old Wilkerson:

"John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground.
John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground."

A few near him as they stood waiting began to take up the burden of the song, singing it in slow time like a dirge. Then those farther away took it up. It spread, reached the leaders. They, too, began to sing, taking off their hats as they joined in, and soon the whole concourse, solemn, earnest, uncovered, was singing a thunderous requiem for John Harkless.

The sun was swinging lower, and the edges of the world were embroidered with gold, while that deep volume of sound shook the air, the song of a stern, savage, just cause—sung perhaps as some of the ancestors of these men sang with Hampden before the bristling walls of a hostile city. It had iron and steel in it. The men lying on their guns in the ambuscade along the fence heard the dirge rise and grow to its mighty fullness, and they shivered. One of them, posted nearest the advance, had his rifle carefully leveled at Lige Willetts, a fair target in the road. When he heard the singing he turned to the man next behind him and laughed harshly, "I reckon we'll see a big jamboree other side Jordan tonight, huh?"

The huge murmur of the chorus expanded and gathered in rhythmic strength and swelled to power and rolled and thundered across the plain.

"John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the ground,
His soul goes marching on!
Glory, glory, halleluia!
Glory, glory, halleluia!
Glory, glory, halleluia!
His soul goes marching on!"

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, 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 area 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, battered down the crazy doors with a fence rail and swarmed inside like busy insects, making the place hum like a hive, but with the better 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 solicitously 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, time worn clapboards. Ross Schofeld dropped on the woodshed close behind him, his arm lovingly infolding a gallon jug of whiskey, 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 cumbrous, 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 hurried 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 Schofeld 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 Schofeld 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

on 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 ride 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, divining that the diversion was in their favor, secured themselves in their decrepit 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, and, rising 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 secondhand 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 movement Crossroads. This clears Skillet, etc. Come over on 2:15 accommodation.

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

"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 any one would have been confused 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 Rouen accommodation."

A slightly cracked voice, yet a huskily 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—these natives and refugees, conscious of atrocity, dumfounded by a miracle, thinking the world gone mad, hovered together in a dark, ragged 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 a-mold-

*** we go march *** on."

At the city hospital in Rouen 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 before 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 stow-

ed 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 delirious, 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 thug 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 traitorous 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, Gay," 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 now how Henry felt over the great Guisard. How tall he looks! That doesn't seem to me like a thug's hand."

The surgeon nodded. "Of course if there'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 they had been good once, especially the linen."

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."

The incoherent muttering continued. "See here, Jerry!" repeated Barrett more 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 slightly.

The Teller uttered a short, gasping cry.

"Let me," said Gay and swiftly interposed. Bending over the cot, he said in a pleasant voice: "It's all right, old man; it's all right. Slattery wants to know what you did with that man down at Plattville when you got through with him. He can't remember, and he thinks there was money left on him. Slattery's head was hurt. He can't remember. He'll go shares with you when he gets it. Slattery's going to stand by you if he can get the money."

The Teller only tried to move his free hand to the shoulder Barrett had shaken.

"Slattery wants to know," repeated the young surgeon, gently moving the hand back upon the sheet. "He'll divvy up when he gets it. He'll stand by you, old man."

"Would you please not mind," whispered the Teller faintly—"would you please not mind if you took care not to brush against my shoulder again?"

The surgeon drew back, with an exclamation, but the Teller's whisper gathered strength, and they heard him murmuring oddly to himself. Meredith moved forward, with a startled gesture. "What's that?" he said.

"Seems to be trying to sting, or something," said Barrett, bending over to listen.

The Teller swung his arm heavily over the side of the cot, the fingers never ceasing their painful twitching. The surgeon leaned down and gently moved the cloths so that the white, scarred lips were free. They moved steadily. They seemed to be framing the semblance of an old ballad that Meredith knew. The whisper grew more distinct. It became a rich but broken voice, and they heard it singing like the sound of some far, halting minstrelsy:

"Wave willows—murmur waters—golden sunbeams smile,
Earthly music—cannot waken—lovely—Annie Lisle."

Meredith gave an exclamation. The bandaged hand waved faintly over the Teller's head. "Ah, men," he said, almost clearly, and tried to lift himself on his arm. "I tell you it's a grand eleven we have this year! There will be little left of anything that stands against them. It's our championship. Did you see Jim Romley ride over his man this afternoon?"

(Continued Next Sunday.)

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