

The Great K. & A. Train Robbery

BY PAUL LEICESTER FORD
AUTHOR OF.....
"The Hon. Peter Stirling," &c.
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(Continued.)

CHAPTER XI. THE LETTERS CHANGE HANDS AGAIN.

What seemed at the moment an incomprehensible puzzle had, as we afterwards learned, a very simple explanation. One of the G. S. directors, Mr. Baldwin, who had come in on Mr. Camp's car, was the owner of a great cattle ranch near Rock Butte. When the train had been held at that station for a few minutes, Camp went to the conductor, and was shown my telegram. Seeing through the device, the party had at once gone to this ranch, where the owner, Baldwin, mounted them, and it was their dust cloud we had seen as they rode up to Ash Forks. To make matters more serious, Baldwin had rounded up his cowboys, and brought them along with him in order to make any resistance impossible.

I made no objection to the sheriff serving the paper, though it nearly broke my heart to see Madge's face. To cheer her I said, suggestively:—"They've got me, but they haven't got the letters, Miss Cullen. And remember, it's always darkest before the dawn, and the stars in their courses are against Caesar."

With the sheriff and Mr. Camp I then walked over to the saloon, where Judge Wilson was waiting to dispose of my case. Mr. Cullen and Albert tried to come, too, but all outsiders were excluded by order of the "court." I was told to show cause why I should not forthwith produce the letters, and answered that I asked an adjournment of the case so that I might be heard by counsel. It was denied, as was to have been expected. Indeed, why they took the trouble to go through the forms was beyond me. I told Wilson I should not produce the letters, and he asked if I knew what that meant. I couldn't help laughing and retorting:—

"It very appropriately means 'contempt of the court, your honour.' 'I'll give you a stiff term, young man,' he said.

"It will take just one day to have habeas corpus proceedings in a United States court, and one more to get the papers here," I rejoined, pleasantly.

Seeing that I understood the moves too well to be bluffed, the judge, Mr. Camp and the lawyer held a whispered consultation. My surprise can be imagined when, at its conclusion, Mr. Camp said:—

"Your honour, I charge Richard Gordon with being concerned in the holding up of the Missouri Western overland, No. 3, on the night of Oct. 14, and ask that he be taken into custody on that charge."

I couldn't make out this new move and puzzled over it, while Judge Wilson ordered my commitment. But the next step revealed the object, for the lawyer then asked for a search-warrant to look for stolen property. The judge was equally obliging and began to fill one out on the instant.

This made me feel pretty serious, for the letters were in my breast pocket, and I swore at my own stupidity in not having put them in the station safe when I had first arrived at Ash Forks. There weren't many moments in which to think while the judge scribbled away at the warrant, but in what time there was I did a lot of head work, without, however, finding more than one way out of this snarl, and when I saw the judge finish off his signature with a flourish I played a pretty desperate card.

"You're just too late, gentlemen," I said, pointing out the side window of the saloon. "There comes the cavalry."

The three conspirators jumped to their feet and bolted for the window. Even the sheriff turned to look. As he did so I gave him a shove toward the three, which sent them all sprawling on the floor in a pretty badly mixed up condition. I made a dash for the door, and as I went through it I grabbed the key and locked them in.

As I turned to go so I saw the lot struggling up from the floor, and knowing that it wouldn't take them many seconds to find their way out through the window, I didn't waste much time in watching them.

Camp, Baldwin, and the judge had left their horses just outside the saloon, and there they were still patiently standing, with their bridles thrown over their heads, as only Western horses will stand. It didn't take me long to have those bridles back in place, and as I tossed each over the peak of the Mexican saddle I gave two of the ponies slaps which started them off at a lope across the railroad tracks. I swung myself into the saddle of the third and flicked him with the loose ends of the bridle in a way which made him understand that I meant business.

Baldwin's cowboys had most of them scattered to the various saloons of the place, but two of them were standing in the doorway of a store. I acted so quickly, however, that they didn't seem to take in what I was about till I was well mounted. Then I heard a yell, and, fearing that they might shoot—for the cowboy does love to use his gun—I turned sharp at the saloon corner and rode up the side street, just in time to see Camp climbing through the window, with Baldwin's head in view behind him.

Before I had ridden 100 feet I realized that I had a done-up horse under me, and, considering that he had covered over 40 miles that afternoon in pretty quick time, it was not surprising that there wasn't very much go left in him. I knew that Baldwin's cowboys could get new mounts in plenty without wasting many minutes and that then they would overhaul me in very short order. Clearly there was no use in my attempting to escape by running. And, as I wasn't armed, my only hope was to beat them by some finesse.

While they were engaged in this I was trying to think out some way of letting Mr. Cullen and Albert know where the letters were. The problem was to suggest the saddle to them without letting the cowboys understand them, and by good luck I thought I had the means. Albert had complained to me the day we had ridden out to the Indian dwellings at Flagstaff that his saddle fretted some galled spots which he had chafed on his trip to Moran's Point. Hoping he would "catch on," I shouted to him:—

"How are your sore spots, Albert?"

He looked at me in a puzzled way, and called, "Aw—I don't understand you!"

"Those sore spots you complained about to me the day before yesterday," I explained.

He didn't seem any the less befogged as he replied, "I had forgotten all about them."

"I've got a touch of the same trouble," I went on, "and if I were you I'd look into the cause of a warrant and protest against the illegality of his arrest, varied at moments by threats to appeal to the British Consul, minister plenipo, her Majesty's Foreign Office, etc., all of which had about as much influence on the sheriff and his cowboy assistants as a Moqui Indian snake dance would have in stopping a runaway engine. I confess to feeling a certain grim satisfaction in the fact that if I was to be shut off from seeing Madge, the Britisher was in the same box with me."

Ash Forks, though only six years old, had advanced far enough toward civilization to have a small gaol, and into that we were shoved. Night was come by the time we were lodged there, and, being in pretty good appetite, I struck the sheriff for some grub.

"I'll git you somethin'," he said, good-naturedly, "but next time you shove people, Mr. Gordon, just quit shovin' your friends. My shoulder feels like"—Perhaps it's just as well not to say what his shoulder felt like. The Western vocabulary is expressive, but at times not quite fit for publication.

The moment the sheriff was gone Fred wanted the mystery of the letters explained, and I told him all there was to tell, including as good a description of the pony as I could give him. We tried to hit on some plan to get word to those outside, but it wasn't to be done. At least it was a point galped that some one of our party besides myself knew where the letters were.

The sheriff returned presently with a loaf of canned bread and a tin of beans. If I had been alone, I should have kicked at the food and got permission for my boys to send me up something from 97, but as I thought I'd see how Lord Raltes would like genuine Western fare, so I said nothing. That, I have to state, is more, or rather less, than the Britisher did after he had sampled the stuff, and really I don't blame him, much as I enjoyed his rage and disgust.

It didn't take long to finish our supper, and then Fred, who hadn't slept much the night before, stretched out on the floor and went to sleep. Lord Raltes and I sat on boxes—the only furniture the room contained—about as far apart as we could get, he in the sulks, and I whistling, cheerfully. I should have liked to be with Madge, but he wasn't, so there was some compensation, and I knew that time was playing the cards in our favour. So long as they hadn't found the letters we had only to sit still to win.

About an hour after supper the sheriff came back and told me Camp and Baldwin wanted to see me. I saw no reason to object, so in they came, accompanied by the judge. Baldwin opened the ball, by saying:—

"Well, Mr. Gordon, you've played a pretty cute gamble, and I suppose you think you stand to win the pot."

"I'm not complaining," I said.

"Still," said Camp, angrily, as if my contented manner fretted him, "our time will come presently, and we can make it pretty uncomfortable for you. Illegal proceedings put a man in gaol in the long run."

"I hope you take your lesson to heart," I remarked, cheerfully, which made Camp scowl worse than ever.

"Now," said Baldwin, who kept cool, "we know you are not risking loss of position, and the State's prison for nothing, and we want to know what there is in it for you."

"I wouldn't bet my chance of State's prison against yours, gentlemen. And while I may lose my position I'll be a long way from starvation."

"That doesn't tell us what Cullen gives you to take the risk."

"Mr. Cullen hasn't given or even hinted that he'll give anything."

"And Mr. Gordon hasn't asked, and, if I know him, wouldn't take a cent for what he has done," said Fred, rising from the floor.

"You mean to say you are doing it for nothing?" exclaimed Camp, incredulously.

"That's about the truth of it," I said, though I thought of Madge as I said it and felt guilty in suggesting that she was nothing.

"Then what is your motive?" cried Baldwin.

(To be Continued)

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Too Much.

"In five minutes," announced the leader of the mob, "you will be hung." The victim shuddered. "No, no!" he cried. "Let me!"—

His voice rose to a shriek. —"be hanged, but not—not hung!" He buried his face in his hands. Hardened criminal though he was, he had been born in Boston.—New York Press.

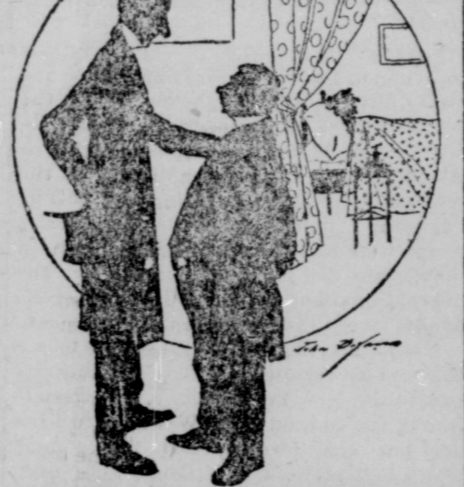
At the Seaside.

Landlady (to shivering lodger)—No, sir, I don't object to your dining at a restaurant, nor to taking an 'apenny paper, but I must resent your constant 'abit of locking up your whisky, thereby implying that me, a clergyman's daughter, is prone to larceny.—Punch.

On a Yacht.

Captain—We've just weighed anchor. Tottie—How much does it weigh?—Pick Me Up.

He Had It.



Doctor—Mr. Enpeck, I fear your wife's mind is gone.
Mr. Enpeck—That doesn't surprise me. She has been giving me a piece of it every day for ten years.—Up to Date.

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