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THE

LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

JOHN A. MURRELL,

THE

GREAT WESTERN LAND PIRATE,

WITH TWENTY-ONE SPIRITED ILLUSTRATIVE ENGRAVINGS.

NEW YORK:

H. LONG & BROTHER

No. 32 ANN STREET.

1848

the rushing of mediators in between, Murrell stripped off his coat and neck-cloth for a fight. Then, tearing into the circle like a wild beast bounding into a jungle for its prey, he grasped his enemy by the throat. A desperate struggle ensued, which at length extended to the friends of both sides, and knives being drawn in the heat of the affray, the combat soon became as bloody as it was desperate. From the time it took this change, the contest lasted but a minute, when Drayton fell before the trenchant blade of the Tennessean, fatally wounded.

Fear treads upon the heels of crime, and the instant the negro-stealer saw the measure of his vengeance was complete, he turned to fly. He rushed toward the door, but already the buzz of gathering voices was heard outside, and warned him to seek some other issue. Turning back, he dashed up stairs, and bursting into a room upon a second floor the window of which looked out upon an open lot, he threw up the sash, and putting his knife between his teeth in case he should want to overcome resistance to his escape, he lowered himself outside, and dropped to the ground. No one opposed his way, and leaping a fence in the rear, he was soon lost in the gloom of an adjoining lane.

CHAPTER VIII.

The friendly receiver—The orthodox disguise—Success as a preacher—a wolf in the fold—Natchez—Descent upon the trinkets—Vicksburg—Cincinnati—Re-union—The southern tramp—Hymeneal views—Marriage—Resumption of a roving life—The Tipton boy—Danger on the steamboat—Lucky escape—Ingenuous and daring artifice—The bloody termination of the train of crime.

Diving through the most obscure avenues of the town, Murrell at length reached an unfrequented portion of the river's bank, when, considering himself beyond the danger of immediate pursuit, he cast himself, spent and breathless, on the shore. Rising, after a momentary pause, he threw his bloody weapon into the turbid stream, and stooped down and washed from his hands and face the sanguine stains of the affray.

The conflict between himself and Drayton was a most unfortunate affair, and, view it in any phase he might, was sure to result, more or less, disastrously to his interests. He did not dread an information from the hands of Drayton's friends, for, however bitterly they might resent their leader's overthrow, he was well aware that their professional souls would disdain a legal vengeance; but the fight had taken place in the presence of several abandoned women, who, in their eagerness to acquit themselves of any blame, would tell every detail, and not only give the name of its principal actor, but also put the officers upon his haunts. He, therefore,

dared not go to his hotel, even for a change of clothes; and, added to the other evils of his predicament, he found himself with but two or three dollars in his pocket. In this dilemma he resolved, after a few momentary pause, to run half a mile farther up the bank to the house of a friendly speculator, and obtain from him the necessary clothing and means to get away. The man whom he selected was just the one who was calculated, above all others, to supply his wants, for he was a receiver of stolen goods, who had obtained many a profitable "*swag*" from Murrell's hands, and his ample store of second-hand apparel was sure to furnish a ready and complete supply to the fugitive robber's wants.

Taking from this man a prim-cut coat, a broad brim hat, half a dozen white neck-cloths, a bible, a double-barrelled pistol, and a heavy knife, Murrell stood prepared to play the preacher or the devil, as the fluctuations of his fortune might require; and after storing them away in a small valise, and obtaining a sum of twenty dollars from the receiver, as a loan, he sat down and wrote a letter, directing his brother to meet him in the latter part of the following month at Natchez. He and his friend then started for the shore, and taking a boat, shot down the river with the current, and at midnight parted on the opposite bank—the receiver to return to the city, and the robber to set out toward the north, in the guise of a preacher of the Gospel, and with a forged certificate of probation in his pocket. Availing himself of the information he had obtained during his recent residence in New Orleans, of the haunts of the associates of the clans to which Phelps and Haines belonged, Murrell found in Iberville a friendly gang of counterfeiters, who, on the presentation of his credentials, readily admitted him to their confidence, and supplied him with a large amount of counterfeit money to aid him in his northern progress. In return, they only asked in payment for the boodle, his personal due bill, which they filed among the rest of their accounts, to await the chance when his affairs should be in a more flourishing condition. With three or four hundred dollars, mostly in spurious tens and twenties the desperate adventurer then set out again, so as to be in Natchez at the appointed time to keep his appointment with his brother. He still kept up his character of Methodist preacher, and, during the course of his journey, delivered several sermons, and indeed lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself with the godly of each village, by a passing exhortation to sinners to seek the blessings of redeeming grace. The result of these amiable little pauses was generally the passing off of several counterfeit notes, which, in consequence of their coming from the very

pouch of sanctity itself, were never mistrusted for a moment.

An instance of the ingenious manner in which he accomplished these profitable deceptions may not be amiss, as an illustration of his tact. A travelling Methodist, by the name of Marvin, who had chanced to be present at one of his discourses, was so charmed with his eloquence and striking energy of manner, that he waited till he had descended from the pulpit, and, after complimenting him upon his sermon, insisted that he should accompany him to his town, and preach there on the following Sunday. Murrell readily accepted the invitation, and for the next three days the pious brethren travelled amicably together, the robber stopping now and then to make a discourse and keep up what he called the Lord's work, but really to spiritedly maintain the outlines of his assumed character. The travellers arrived on a Saturday afternoon in Marvin's town, and that worthy man, proud beyond measure of his travelling companion, started out, immediately on their arrival, among the pious notabilities of the village, and made arrangements for a prayer meeting at his house that very night. The exercises passed off with the spirit and fervor usual to such gatherings, and the preacher guest, in addition to the congratulations which were heaped upon him for his admirable conjurations, received from the stationary preacher of the place, the offer of the use of his pulpit on the following day.

The offer was accepted, and it is hardly necessary to say that the clerical marauder fully maintained, with the mass of the congregation, the impressions which he had excited among the leaders of the flock on the previous evening. After the sermon was over, the congregation flocked around the youthful wonder, with an admiration little short of idolatry, and invitations to sojourn for a few days with this one and wish that were showered upon him on all sides. He excused himself, however, by representing his engagements as imperative; that he was obliged to leave on the following (Monday) morning, and was pledged to remain with brother Marvin during his stay.

When about to start, on the following day, he pulled out his pocket-book, and, assuming an embarrassment which was natural to the situation of one who wished to be thought neither mean nor ostentatious, hinted his desire to make some pecuniary compensation for the trouble the household had been put to in his accommodation, but perceiving that Marvin seemed to be hurt at the idea, he drew forth a spurious twenty dollar note, and holding it out, with a frank and apologetic smile, remarked:

"Well, brother Marvin, I'll tell you what you can do for me. I am out of change. en-

tirely, and you can, perhaps, oblige me by breaking me a twenty dollar bill. I dislike to offer a note of that size for a night's lodging, where I am not known, for fear it may be ascribed to a desire to avoid payment altogether. The world, alas! judges all our acts invidiously, and I, therefore, always scrupulously avoid doing any thing that may, even by the remotest implication, be tortured into a questionable motive. The honor of the Lord's name is in our hands, Brother Marvin, and the spotless purity of the ministry is but second in importance to the redemption of souls."

Impressed more profoundly than ever with the refined piety of his guest, Brother Marvin was but too happy to oblige him, and running to his wife, got his keys, and commenced counting out the change. Unfortunately he could not muster but seventeen dollars and a half; but after digging his fingers in his head, for a few moments, as if he sought the balance there, he suddenly jumped up, and running out, soon obtained the remaining portion of a neighbor. Though everything was now ready for his departure, Murrell still had some further designs upon his worthy host, which required a little more delay. He did not intend, after all the trouble he had had in turning from his road, and sweating through so many exhortations, to let him off at so cheap a rate as twenty dollars; so, turning on his heel, as he got on the front stoop, he cast his eyes upon a splendid mottled colt in the yard; and admiring his points, inquired of Marvin if he had raised him.

"Yes; he was foaled mine," answered the Methodist. "He is thorough bred."

"Do you wish to dispose of him, Brother Marvin?"

"Well, I raised him for that purpose; but I don't know as I can get the worth of him in this part of the country. I have never been offered more than a hundred and fifty for him; but he is worth full a hundred dollars more."

"Indeed, I think he is; and if I had the money with me, you should have no further trouble to get rid of him."

"Well, brother, that need be no hindrance to a bargain between us," said Marvin, with a jocular expression at the idea of any stronger guarantee being required. "You can take him at 'two fifty,' and when we meet at our camp meeting next month, you can hand me the amount."

Upon this, Murrell took the animal, and having warmly embraced his hospitable host, and imprinted a respectful kiss upon the cheek of sister Marvin, sprang upon the back of his blooded purchase, and frisked up the road, more like a young brigadier upon parade, than like one of the elect.

In a few days after this transaction, Mur-