



"STINGAREE TOPPLED OUT OF THE SADDLE IN THE PATH OF THE
CANTERING HOOFS."

(See page 7.)

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V.—THE REAL SIMON PURE.

THE disastrous episode of the sticking-up of Mulfera Station, N.S.W., is on all grounds ineligible for inclusion in these little memoirs. Of the telling of Stingaree stories, round the camp-fire or in the men's hut, there is, indeed, no end to this day; but in print, at least, a certain precedence is due to those which reflect least discredit upon Stingaree. His villainies were often brutal, seldom in expert; at Mulfera, however, they were both. And yet, even there, the trouble began in one of those grim jokes which were a continual temptation to this masterless mind. But all the back-block world knows how a bishop and a bushranger met twice on one summer's day, and how the bushranger laughed first, but the bishop last and longest. It is the conclusion of that matter of which far too little has been heard.

But at eight o'clock of the Monday morning, with a sheltered mercury already in three figures, it is known that the romantic ruffians were led away in unromantic bonds. Their arms were bound to their bodies, their feet lashed to the stirrup-irons; they sat like packs upon quiet station horses, carefully

chosen for the nonce; they were tethered to a mounted policeman apiece, each with leading-rein buckled to his left wrist and Government revolver in his right hand. Behind the quartette rode the officer in command, superbly mounted, watching over all four with a third revolver ready cocked. It seemed a small and yet an ample escort for the two bound men.

But Stingaree was by no means in that state of Napoleonic despair which his bent back and lowering countenance were intended to convey. He had not uttered a word since the arrival of the police; had let them lift him on horseback, as he now sat, without raising his morose eyes once. Howie, on the other hand, had offered a good deal of futile opposition, cursing his captors as the fit moved him, and once struggling so insanely in his bonds as to earn a tap from the wrong end of a revolver and a bruised face for his pains. Stingaree glowered in deep delight. His mate's part was as well acted as his own; but it was he who had conceived them both, and expounded them in countless camps against some such extremity as this. The result was in ideal accordance with his calculations. The man who gave

"Well, you ran against a snag that time, Mr. Sanguinary Stingaree!"

"I couldn't resist turning Howie into the bishop and making myself his mouthpiece. I daren't let him open his lips! It wasn't the offertory that was worth having; it was the fun of rounding up that congregation on the homestead veranda, and never letting them spot a thing till we showed our guns. There hadn't been a hitch, and never would have been if that old bishop hadn't run all those miles barefoot over hot sand and taken us unawares."

Made with wry humour and a philosophic candour, alike germane to his predicament, these remarks seemed natural enough to one having no previous personal knowledge of Stingaree. They seemed just the sort of things that Stingaree would say. But there were other things that his chief listener had to say, that he had been rolling on his palate all the morning, and he may have listened the less critically in consequence.

"You ran against a snag," he repeated, "and now your mate's run against another." He gave the butt of his ready pistol a significant tap. "And I'm the worst snag that ever either of you struck," he went on in his vainglory. "Make no mistake about that. Do you know who I am?"

"Not an idea," yawned our own Stingaree.

"Ever heard of Superintendent Cairns?" proceeded the other, digging him with his barrel in the corded ribs. "Ever personate *him* in your time—eh?—before you looked so high as bishops? Well, I'm the real Simon Pure!"

Stingaree was gazing squarely on his man. The hump was by no means so pronounced as he had made it on Rosanna; it looked more like a ridge of extra muscle across a pair of abnormally broad and powerful shoulders. There was the absence of neck which this deformity suggests; there was a great head lighted by flashing and indignant eyes, but mounted only on its mighty chin. Such was the bushranger's first impression of one with whom he had latterly enjoyed every hostile relation short of the personal encounter. He was conceited enough to find in the flesh a coarser and more common type than that created by himself for the honour of the road. But this did not make the real superintendent a less formidable foe.

"The most poetic justice!" murmured Stingaree, and resumed in an instant his apathetic pose.

"It serves you jolly well right, if that's what you mean," the superintendent snarled.

"You've yourself and your own mighty cheek to thank for taking me out of my shell and putting me on your tracks in earnest! But it was high time they knew the cut of my jib up here; the fools won't forget me again in a hurry. And you, you demon, you sha'n't forget me till your dying day!"

On Stingaree's off-side Sergeant Cameron was also hanging an insulted head. But the bushranger laughed softly in his chest.

"Someone has got to do your dirty work," said he. "I did it that time, and the bishop has done it now; but you shouldn't blame me for helping your fellows to bring a murderer to justice."

"You guyed me," cried Cairns through his teeth. "I heard! I heard! You guyed me, blight your soul!"

Stingaree felt that he was missing a strong face finely convulsed with passion—as indeed he was. But he had already committed the indiscretion of a repartee, which was scarcely consistent with an attitude of extreme despair. A downcast silence seemed the safest policy.

"It used to be forty miles to the Corner," he murmured, after a time. "We can't have come more than ten."

"Not so much," snapped the superintendent.

"Going to stop for a feed at Mazeppa Station?"

"That's my business."

"It's a long day for three of you, in this heat, with two of us."

"The time won't hang heavy on *our* hands."

"Not heavy enough, I should have thought. I wonder you didn't bring some of the boys from Mulfera along with you. They were keen enough to come."

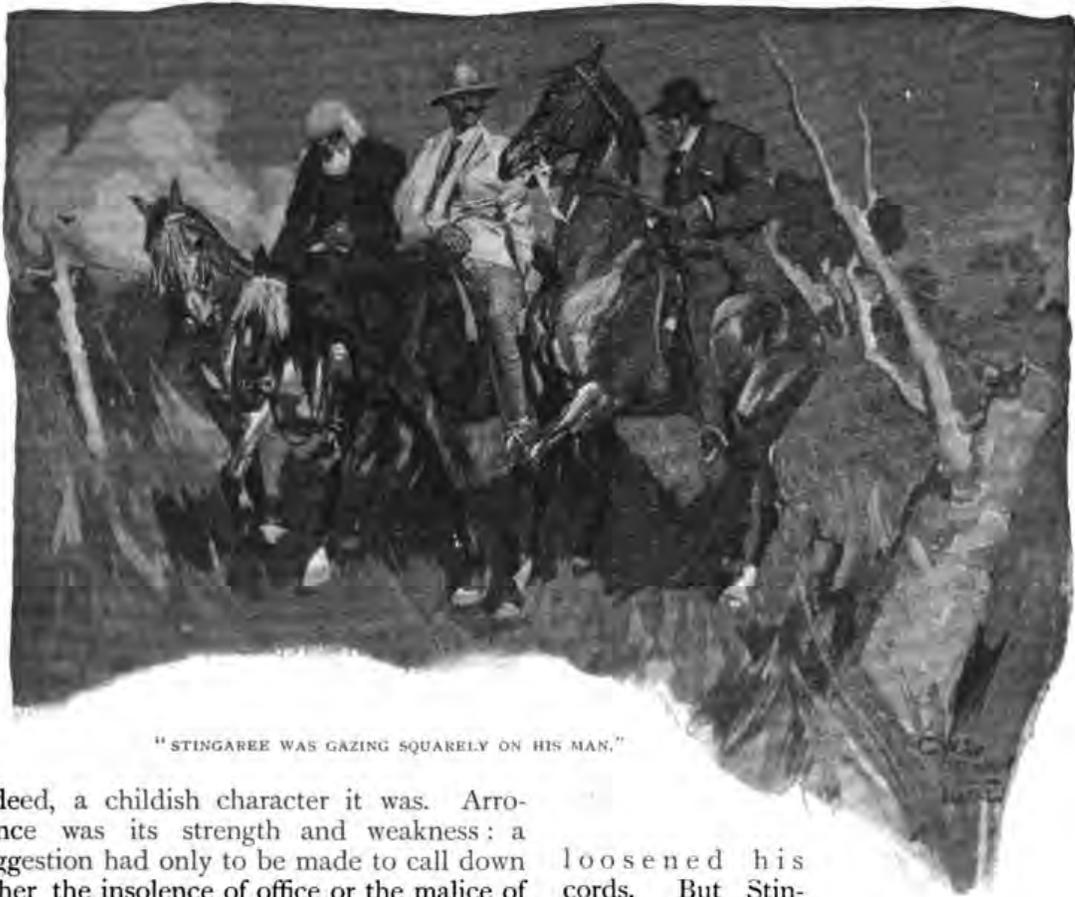
Superintendent Cairns brayed his high, harsh laugh.

"Yes, you wonder, and so did they," said he. "But I know a bit too much. There'll always be sympathy among scum like them for thicker scum like you!"

"You're too suspicious," said Stingaree, mildly. "But I was thinking of the bishop and the boss."

"They've done their part," growled Cairns. "They aren't goin' to interfere no more—not with me."

That had been his attitude on the station. Stingaree had heard it through his weather-board prison walls; but the man had neither the sense nor the self-control to attempt concealment of the fact. He revealed his character as freely as an angry child, and,



"STINGAREE WAS GAZING SQUARELY ON HIS MAN."

indeed, a childish character it was. Arrogance was its strength and weakness: a suggestion had only to be made to call down either the insolence of office or the malice of denial for denial's sake.

"I wish you'd stop a bit at Mazeppa," whined Stingaree, drooping like a candle in the heat.

The station roofs gleamed through the trees far off the track.

"Why?"

"Because I'm feeling sick."

"Gammon! You've got some friends there; on you push!"

"But you will camp somewhere in the heat of the day?"

"I'll do as I think fit. I sha'n't consult you, my fine friend."

Stingaree drooped and nodded, lower and lower; then recovered himself with a jerk, like one battling against sleep. The party pushed on for another hour. The heat was terrible; the bound men endured torments in their bonds. But the nature of the superintendent, deformed like his body, declared itself duly at every turn, and the more one prisoner groaned and the other blasphemed, the greater the zest and obduracy of the driving force behind them.

Noon passed; the scanty shadows lengthened; and Howie gave more trouble of an insensate sort. They reined up, and lashed him tighter; he had actually

loosened his cords. But Stingaree was past remonstrance with friend or foe, and his bound body swayed from side to side as the little cavalcade went on at a canter to make up for lost time.

He was leading now with the kindly sergeant, and his mind had never been more alert. Behind them thundered the recalcitrant Howie with constable and superintendent on either side. They were midway between Mazeppa and Clear Corner, or some fifteen miles from either haunt of men. Stingaree pulled himself upright in the saddle as by a superhuman effort, and shook off the helping hand that held him by one elbow.

He was about to do a thing at which even his courage quailed, and he longed for the use of his right arm. It was not absolutely bound; the hand and wrist had been badly mauled underfoot in the Sunday's fray—so badly that it had been easy to sham a fracture, and have hand and wrist in splints before the arrival of the police. They still hung before him in a sling, his good right hand and arm, stiff and sore enough, yet strong and ready at a moment's notice, when the moment came. It had not come, and was not coming for a long time, when

Stingaree set his teeth, lurched either way,—and toppled out of the saddle in the path of the cantering hoofs. His lashed feet held him in the stirrups; the off stirrup-leather had come over with his weight; and there at his horse's hoofs, kicked and trampled and smothered with blood and dust, he dragged like an anchor, without sign of life.

And it was worse even than it looked, for the life never left him for an instant, nor ever for an instant did he fail to behave as though it had. Minutes later, when they had stopped his horse, and cut him down from the stirrups, and carried him into the shade of a hop-bush off the track, and when Stingaree dared to open his eyes, he was nearer closing them perforce, and the scene swam before him with superfluous realism.

Cairns and Cameron, dismounted (while the trooper sat aloof with Howie in the saddle), were at high words about their prostrate prisoner. Not a syllable was lost on Stingaree.

"You may put him across the horse yourself," said the sergeant. "I won't have a hand in it. But make sure you haven't killed him as it is—travelling a sick man like that."

"Killed him? He's got his eyes open!" cried Cairns, in savage triumph. Stingaree lay blinking at the sky. "Do you still refuse to do your duty?"

"Cruelty to animals is no duty of mine," declared the sergeant: "let alone my fellow-men, bushrangers or no bushrangers."

"And you?" thundered Cairns at the mounted constable.

"I'm with the sergeant," said he. "He's had enough."

"Right!" cried the superintendent, producing a note-book and scribbling venomously. "You both refuse! You will hear more of this; meanwhile, sergeant, I should like to know what your superior wisdom may be pleased to suggest."

"Send a cart back for him," said Cameron. "It's the only way he's fit to travel."

Stingaree sought to prop himself upon the elbow of the splintered wrist and hand.

"There are no more bones broken that I know of," said he, faintly. "But I felt bad before and now I feel worse."

"He looks it, too," observed the sergeant, as Stingaree, ghastly enough beneath his blood and dust, rolled over on his back once more, and lay effectively with closed eyes. Even the superintendent was impressed.

"Then what's to be done with him?" he exclaimed, with an oath. "What's to be done?"

"If you ask me," returned Cameron, "I should make him comfortable where he is; after all, he's a human being, and done no murder, that we should run the risk of murdering him. Leave him to me while you two push on with his mate; then one of you can get back with the spring-cart before sundown; but trust me to look after him till you do."

Stingaree held his breath where he lay. His excitement was not to be betrayed by the opening of an eye. And yet he knew that the superintendent was looking the sergeant up and down, and he guessed what was passing through that suspicious mind.

"Trust you!" rasped the dictatorial voice at last. "That's the very thing I'm not inclined to do, Sergeant Cameron."

"Sir!"

"Keep your temper, sergeant. I don't say you'd let him go. But I've got to remember that this man slipped through your fingers once before, led you by the hand like a blessed old child, and passed himself off for me! Look at the fellow; look at me; and ask yourself candidly if you're the man for the job. But don't ask me, unless you want my opinion of you a bit plainer still. No; you go on with the others. The two of you can manage Howie; if you can't, you put a bullet through him! This is my man; and I'm his, by the hokey, as he'll know if he tries any of his tricks while you're gone!"

Stingaree did not move a muscle. He might have been dead; and in his disappointment it was the easier to lie as though he were. Really bruised, really battered, really faint and stiff and sore, to say nothing of his bonds, he felt himself physically no match for so young a man—with the extra breadth of shoulder and the extra length of arm which were part and parcel of his deformity. With the elderly sergeant he might have stood a chance, man to man, one arm to two; but with Superintendent Cairns his only weapons were his wits. They had stood him in some stead so far; he lay and reviewed the situation, as it was, and as it had been. In the very moment of his downfall, by instinctive presence of mind, he had preserved the use of his right hand, and that was a still unsuspected asset of incalculable worth. It had been the nucleus of all his plans; without a hand he must have resigned himself to the inevitable from the first. Then he had split up the party. He heard the sergeant and the constable ride off with Howie, exactly as he had intended two of the three captors to do. His fall alone introduced

the element of luck. It might have killed or maimed him ; but the risk had been run with open eyes. Being alive and whole, he had reduced the odds from three against two to man and man ; and the difference was enormous, even though one of the men held all the cards. Against Howie the odds were heavier than ever, but Howie was eliminated from present calculations. And as Stingaree made them with the upturned face of seeming insensibility, he heard a nonchalant step come and go, but knew an eye was on him all the time, and never opened his own till the striking of a match was followed by the smell of bush tobacco.

The shadow of the hop-bush was spreading like spilt ink ; and as he first looked from where he lay, Stingaree had it to himself. A wreath of blue smoke

"Very well ! Don't give me one !" exclaimed Stingaree, and dealt the moist bag a kick that sent a jet of cold water spurting over his foot. He expected to be kicked himself for that ; he was only cursed, the bag snatched out of his reach, and deeply drained before his eyes.

"I was going to give you some," said Cairns, smacking his lips. "Now your tongue may hang out before I do."

Stingaree left the last word with the foe ; that also was part of his preconceived policy. He still regretted his solitary retort, but not for a moment the more petulant act which he had just committed. His boots had been removed after his fall ; one of his socks was now wet through, and he spent the next few minutes in taking it off with the other foot. The lengthy process seemed to afford his



"GIVE ME A DRINK," HE CRIED.

hovered overhead ; he got to his elbow and glanced behind ; and there sat Cairns in his shirt-sleeves, filling the niche his body made in the actual green bush, a swollen wet water-bag at his feet, his revolver across his knees. There was an ominous click even as Stingaree screwed round where he lay.

"Give me a drink !" he cried, at sight of the humid canvas bag.

"Why should I ?" asked the inspector, smoking on.

"Because I haven't had one since we started—because I'm parched with thirst."

"Parch away !" cried the creature of suspicion. "You can't help yourself, and I can't help you with this baby to nurse !"

And he fondled the cocked revolver in his hands.

mind a certain pensive entertainment. It was a shapely and delicate white foot that lay stripped at last—a foot that its owner, with nothing better to do, could contemplate with legitimate satisfaction. But Superintendent Cairns, noting his prisoner's every look, and putting his own confident interpretation on them all, cursed him afresh for a conceited pig, and filled another pipe, with the revolver for an instant by his side.

Stingaree took no interest in his proceedings ; the revolver he especially ignored, and lay stretched before his captor, one sock off and one sock on, one arm in splints and sling and the other bound to his ribs, a model prisoner whose last thought was of escape. His legs, indeed, were free ; but a man who could not sit on a horse was not

the man to run away. And then there was the relentless superintendent sitting over him, pipe in mouth, but revolver again in hand, and a crooked finger very near the trigger.

The fiery wilderness still lay breathless in the great heat, but the lengthening shadow of the hop-bush was now a thing to be thankful for, and in it the broken captive fell into a fine semblance of natural slumber. Cairns watched with alternate envy and suspicion; for him there could not be a wink; but most likely the fellow was shamming all the time. No ruse, however, succeeded in exposing the sham, which the superintendent copied by breathing first heavily and then stertorously, with one eye open and on his man. Stingaree never opened one of his: there was no change in the regular breathing, in the peaceful expression of the blood-stained face: asleep the man must be. The superintendent's own experiments had gone to show him that no extremity need necessarily keep one awake in such heat. He stifled a yawn that was no part of his performance. His pipe was out; he struck a match noisily on his boot; and Stingaree just stirred, as naturally as any infant. But Stingaree's senses were incredibly acute. He smelt every whiff of the rekindled pipe, knew to ten seconds when it went out once more, and listened in an agony for another match. None was struck. Was the superintendent him-

opened the other, and there could be no more doubt. The terrible superintendent was dozing in his place; but it was the lightest sort of doze, the eyes were scarcely closed, and all but watching Stingaree, as the cocked revolver in the relaxed hand all but covered him. The prisoner felt that for the moment he was unseen, forgotten, but that the lightest movement of his body would open those terrible eyes once and for all. Be it remembered that he was lying under them lengthwise, on the bound arm, with the arm in the sling uppermost, and easily to be freed, but yet the most salient part of the recumbent figure, and that on which the hidden eyes still seemed fixed, for all their lids. To make the least movement there, to attempt the slowest withdrawal of hand and arm, was to court the last disaster of discovery in such an act. But to lie motionless to the thighs, and to execute a flank movement with the leg uppermost, was a far less perilous exploit. It was the leg with the bare foot: every detail had been foreseen. And now at last the bare foot hovered over the revolver and the hand it held, while the upper man yet lay like a log under those drowsy, dreadful eyes.

Stingaree took a last look at the barrel drooping from the slackened hand; the back of the hand lay on the ground, the muzzle of the barrel was filled with sand, and yet



"THERE WAS A HORRIBLE EXPLOSION."

self really asleep this time? He breathed as though he were; but so did Stingaree; and yet was there hope in the fact that his own greatest struggle all this time had been against the very thing he feigned.

At last he opened one eye a little; it was met by no answering furtive glance; he

the angle was such that it was by no means sure whether a bullet would bury itself in the sand or in Stingaree. He took the risk, and with his bare toe he touched the trigger sharply. There was a horrible explosion. It brought the drowsy inspector to his senses with such a jerk that it was as though the



"I WILL THANK YOU FOR THAT WATER-BAG,"
SAID STINGAREE.

smoking pistol had leapt out of his hand a thing alive, and so into the hand that flashed to meet it from the sling. And almost in the same second—while the double cloud of smoke and sand still hung between them—Stingaree sprang from the ground, an armed man once more.

"Sit where you are!" he thundered. "Up with those hands before I shoot them to shreds! Your life's in less danger than mine has been all day, but I'll wing you limb by limb if you offer to budge!"

With uplifted hands above his ears, the deformed inspector sat with head and shoulders depressed into the semblance of one sphere. Not a syllable did he utter; but his upturned eyes shot indomitable fires. Stingaree stood wriggling and fumbling at the coil which bound his left arm to his side; suddenly the revolver went off, as if by accident, but so much by design that there dangled two ends of rope, cut and burnt asunder by lead and powder. In less than a minute the bushranger was unbound, and before the minute was up he had leapt upon the inspector's thoroughbred. It had been tethered all this time to a tree, swishing tails with the station hack which Stingaree had

ridden as a captive; he now rode the thoroughbred, and led the hack, to the very feet of the humiliated Cairns.

"I will thank you for that water-bag," said Stingaree. "I am much obliged. And now I'll trouble you for that nice wideawake. You really don't need it in the shade. Thank you so much!"

He received both bag and hat on the barrel of the inspector's revolver, hooking the one to its proper saddle-strap, and clapping on the other at an angle inimitably imitative of the outwitted officer.

"I won't carry the rehearsal any further to your face," continued Stingaree; "but I can at least promise you a more flattering portrait than the last; and this excellent coat, which you have so considerably left strapped to your saddle, should contribute greatly to the verisimilitude. Dare I hope that you begin to appreciate some of the points of my performance so far as it has gone? The pretext on which I bared my foot for its delicate job under your very eyes, eh? Not so vain as it looked, in either sense, I fancy! Should you have said that your hand would recoil from a revolver the moment it went off? You

see, I staked my life on it, and I've won. And what about that fall? It was the lottery! I was prepared to have my head cracked like an egg, and it's still pretty sore. The broken wrist wasn't your fault; it had passed into the accepted situation before you turned up. And you would certainly have seen that I was shamming sleep if we hadn't both been so genuinely sleepy at the time. I give you my word, I very nearly threw up the whole thing for forty winks! Any other point on which you could wish enlightenment? Then let me thank you with all my heart for one of the worst days, and some of the greatest moments, in my whole career!"

But the hunched inspector answered never a word, as he sat in a ball with uplifted

"Dead!" said he, thickly. "He was worse than we thought. You fetch him while I——"

But the sergeant knew that voice too well, and his right hand had flown to the back of his belt. Stingaree's shot was only first by a fraction of a second, but it put a bullet through the brain of the horse between the shafts, so that horse and shafts came down together, and the sergeant fired into the earth as he fell across the splash-board.

Stingaree pressed soft heels into the thoroughbred's ribs and thundered on and on. Soon there was a gate to open, and when he listened at that gate all was still behind him and before; but far ahead the rolling plain was faintly luminous in the dusk, and as this deepened into night a cluster of



"HORSE AND SHAFTS CAME DOWN TOGETHER."

palms, and glaring, upturned, unconquerable eyes.

"Good-bye, Mr. Real Simon Pure," said Stingaree. "I'm afraid I've been rather cruel to you, but you were not very nice to me."

Sergeant Cameron was driving the spring-cart, towards sundown, after a variety of unforeseen delays. Of a sudden out of the pink haze came a galloping figure, slightly humped, in the inspector's coat and wide-awake, with a bare foot through one stirrup and only a sock on its fellow.

"Where's Stingaree?" screamed the sergeant, pulling up. And the galloper drew rein at the driven horse's head.

terrestrial lights sprang out with the stars. Stingaree knew the handful of gaunt, unsheltered huts the lights stood for. They were an inn, a store, and a police-barracks: Clear Corner on the map. The bushranger galloped straight up to the barracks, but skirted the knot of men in the light before the veranda, and went jingling round into the yard. The young constable in charge ran through the building and met him dismounted at the back.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"He's gone!"

"Stingaree?"

"He was worse than we thought. Your man all right?"

"No trouble whatever, sir. Only sick and sorry and saying his prayers in a way you'd never credit. Come and hear him, sir."

"I must come and see him at once. Got a fresh horse in?"

"I have so! In and saddled in the stall. I thought you might want one, sir, and ran up Barmaid, Stingaree's own mare, that was sent out here from the station when we had the news."

"That was very thoughtful of you. You'll get on, young man. Now lead the way with that lamp."

This time Stingaree had spoken in gasps, like a man who had ridden very far, and the young constable, unlike his sergeant, did not know his voice of old. Yet it struck him at the last moment as more unlike the voice of Superintendent Cairns than the hardest riding should have made it, and with the key in the door of the single cell the young fellow wheeled round and held the lamp on high. That instant he was felled to the floor, the lamp went down and out with a separate yet simultaneous crash, and Stingaree turned the key.

"Howie! Not a word—out you come!"

The burly ruffian crept forth with outstretched hands apart.

"What! Not even handcuffed?"

"No; turned over a new leaf the moment we left you, and been praying like a parson for 'em all to hear!"

"This chap can do the same when he comes to himself. Lies pretty still, doesn't he? In with him!"

The door clanged. The key was turned. Stingaree popped it in his pocket.

"The later they let him out the better. Here's the best mount you ever had. And my sweetheart's waiting for me in the stable!"

Outside, in front, before the barracks

veranda, an inquisitive little group heard first the clang of the door within, and presently the clatter of hoofs coming round from the yard. Stingaree and Howie—a white flash and a bay streak—swept past them as they stood confounded. And the dwindling pair still bobbed in sight, under a full complement of stars, when a fresh outcry from the cell, and a mighty hammering against its locked door, broke the truth to one and all.



"THAT INSTANT HE WAS FELLED TO THE FLOOR."