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Wright and His Electric Stage;, by "Noname"

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK WRIGHT ELECTRIC STAGE ***

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JACK WRIGHT AND HIS ELECTRIC STAGE; OR, Leagued Against the James Boys.

By "NONAME," Author of "Jack Wright and His Electric Battery Diver," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANDIT KING.

As the 11:30 A. M. express train from New York was speeding toward the fisher village of Wrightstown, one of the passengers went out on the rear platform of the last car and intently gazed back along the rails.

He was a compactly built man, with rather rough clothing on, and the soft felt hat on his head shaded a bearded face, which denoted a daring, reckless disposition.

A half smothered oath escaped his lips as he caught view of a locomotive chasing the train he was on, for he distinctly saw a man in the cab whom he recognized as one of his worst enemies.

"Sheriff Timberlake!" he growled between his clenched teeth, as a dark scowl mantled his brow. "Curse him! he is hot after us now, and if he overhauls this train he may give us no end of trouble."

"The skunk has followed us all the way from Missouri, and after we saw the sights of New York, and gave him the slip, he must have discovered that we started for home in this train. Now he has evidently hired that locomotive to chase and capture us. I'll go in and tell the boys. We must keep out of his reach."

His anxiety was caused by observing that the pursuing locomotive was slowly but surely gaining on the train.

Opening the door, he passed into the car.

It was occupied by four men, who were part of a gang of outlaws whom he commanded, for the bearded man was the notorious bandit king, Jesse James.

The men who were with him were known as Jim Cummins, Wood Hite, Clell Miller and Frank James--a brother of Jesse.

Sitting in a bunch, they were quietly laughing and talking over their experience in New York, when the chief hurried in with a look of supreme disgust upon his face.

The moment the rest glanced up at him and saw it, they knew something out of the ordinary had happened.

"What's the matter, Jesse?" demanded Jim Cummins.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost!" laughed Frank, jocularly.

"What sent you out on the rear platform!" asked Wood Hite.

"Timberlake is after us," said Jesse, with a steely glitter in his eyes.

"Thunder!" roared Clell Miller.

With one accord the quartet pulled revolvers from their pockets, bounded to their feet and sprang into the aisle.

A grim smile passed over the face of Jesse James for a moment, and as it faded sway, he made an impatient gesture and said:

"He is on a locomotive that is chasing us."

"Sure!" asked Cummins, with a dubious look.

"I saw him in the caboose."

"Can he overtake us?" asked Frank.

"Eventually; but we mustn't let him."

"How can we prevent it?" queried Miller.

"By jumping off at the next curve and hiding."

"Good!" exclaimed Wood Hite, "Where's the curve?"

"Just before we reach Wrightstown."

"Let's get ready for it then," suggested Frank.

"All right," assented the bandit king; "but be careful that no one detects us. To avoid being seen we must leave by the rear platform."

As he said this he thrust his head out the open window, and peering ahead, he studied the roadbed.

Satisfied with his scrutiny; he said to his companions:

"There's the curve about a mile ahead."

"Well?" demanded Cummins.

"The train is bound to slacken speed when it goes around. A mass of timber, bushes and rocks abutt into the curve. It will hide our movements from the sheriff's view. We can easily hide there."

Stationing themselves near the rear door, they waited.

In a few minutes the cars reached the curve and went around.

As the last car turned they dashed out upon the rear platform, and one after another they sprang to the ground.

Then they plunged late the bushes.

Gathering speed again, the express train ran away without them, and a few minutes afterward a locomotive came flying along in pursuit of it with an engineer, a stoker and the sheriff in the cab.

The bandits glared from their coverts at Timberlake like so many wild beasts as he sped by, ignorant of the trick they played upon him, and nearly all of them gripped their pistols with a burning desire to fire at him.

It would have been too rash to do that.

In fact Jesse observed their anxiety, and hissed in warning tones:

"Don't drop him!"

In a moment more the locomotive was gone.

The outlaws emerged from their places of concealment.

"How long before Timberlake will discover our ruse?" asked Frank.

"If the train goes on, not for an hour yet," replied Jesse, as he cast a swift glance around. "But we are in a sorry plight now."

"How do you mean?"

"You know we all lost every dollar we had, playing faro in the city. How are we going to ride back to Missouri without a cent? It's my opinion that we'll have to do some work about Wrightstown to get ahead. The last dollar I had went for the purchase of tickets to Missouri, which we gave the conductor."

The gang looked very glum.

"What sort of a place is Wrightstown?" asked Cummins, finally.

"I've heard that it's a fisher village. A young fellow named Jack Wright lives there. He's an inventor of electric machines for flying through the air, navigating under water, and running over the land. Everybody has heard of him. He has the reputation of being one of the richest boys in the country. By means of his famous inventions he has made a barrel of money."

"Then he's our game," said Frank, decisively.

"Yes," assented Jesse. "He's about the only one from whom we could expect to make a rich haul. I hope he's at home. I've got a plan in view now by means of which I can bunco him out of several thousands of dollars, if we can operate the game before the Wrightstown Bank closes."

"What are you going to do?" eagerly asked Miller.

"I'll show you when I try the trick. It's a very smooth game, and if I'm clever enough I'll succeed. Come on to the village, and see if we can operate it. We've got to have money. If we can't get it by means of the plan in view, I'm going to lay out the first man I meet, and go through him."

The rest chuckled at this remark.

Going to the village, they found it to be a thriving place at the head of a beautiful bay on the Atlantic sea coast.

There was a bank on the main street, and when it was located, Jesse said to Frank:

"In nearly all banks there is a desk or table, for the benefit of depositors, on which are pens, ink, deposit slips, and blank checks. You go into the bank, and pocket several of the checks. There's an old hostelry down there near the bay called the Sea Spider House. We will register there, and you'll find us in the bar room."

Frank James nodded, and in a moment his compact and wiry body was going rapidly down the street.

Although Frank was a desperate, fearless ruffian, he had a pleasant face, keen gray eyes, a light mustache, and a most quiet air and unassuming manner.

No one would have suspected him of being a bandit, and as he was a fairly good talker, full of grit and coolness, and best suited for the work in hand, Jesse trusted him implicitly.

The outlaws registered at the hostelry with as much sang froid as if their pockets were lined with gold.

They patronized the bar liberally, had the drinks charged to their account, and ordered a fine luncheon.

Frank soon returned.

He had the blank checks.

Handing them to Jesse he said in low tones:

"No trouble at all. The clerks paid no attention to me."

"They'll soon have reason to remember us," grimly answered Jesse.

Telling his companions to remain there until he returned, he left the hotel, asked a pedestrian the way to Jack Wright's house, and having received the desired information, made his way there.

It proved to be a magnificent mansion, standing in the midst of a handsome garden which sloped down to a creek.

There was a fine big workshop standing at the foot of the garden, upon the bank of this creek, in which the young inventor constructed the machines that made him world renowned.

Jesse James boldly ascended the piazza, rang the bell, and an old sailor with a sandy beard, a glass eye and a wooden leg, answered it.

His name was Tim Topstay, and he lived with the inventor and not only aided him to build his inventions, but always went with Jack on the adventurous journeys he made.

"Waal, messmate," said he, in bluff, hearty tones, as he took a chew of navy plug, and scanned the outlaw with his solitary eye. "Wot kin I do fer yer ter-day?"

"Is Mr. Jack Wright in?" politely asked the bandit.

"He are," replied Tim. "D'yer wanter see him?"

"Yes, sir, and on important business too."

"Then step inter ther library an I'll call him fer ye."

Ignorant of the dangerous nature of the caller Tim ushered him into a cozy library and left him there.

A fat young Dutchman was in the room, but he immediately left it, casting an inquiring look at the bandit king.

His name was Fritz Schneider, and he had yellow hair, watery blue eyes, an enormous stomach and a pugnacious temperament.

Fritz and Tim were chums and the fat fellow occupied about the same position in the house as the old marine

did.

A few moments afterward Jack Wright entered.

The outlaw keenly sized him up and observed that he was a well dressed young fellow with a sturdy figure, not particularly good looking as his features were very angular, but his dark eyes showed a very high spirit.

"You wish to see me, sir?" he asked, as he studied Jesse and felt a most repugnant sensation creep over him.

"I have called on a begging expedition," bluntly replied the bandit, inventing a plausible lie. "I live in Missouri, and wish to go home. I was unlucky enough to lose my pocket-book. I am an utter stranger here, and did not know what to do to raise ten dollars to pay my car fare. Having been told that you was a charitable man, I wish to know if you will lend me the money. I will gladly mail the amount to you when I reach home."

"Why certainly I'll let you have it," replied Jack.

"To prove to you that I want the money only for the purpose I mentioned," glibly preceded the outlaw, "you can make out a check payable to the bearer, and you will find the voucher stamped or endorsed by the railroad company in payment for my ticket."

"I would have been obliged to give you a check anyway," laughed Jack, "for I've only got three or four dollars in cash in my pocket. Just wait, and I'll give you the check."

He sat down at his desk, and Jesse saw him pick up several checks exactly like the ones purloined from the bank by Frank.

Jack filled out one of the orders for ten dollars.

He handed it to Jesse, and the bandit thanked him like a very grateful man, repeated his assurance that he would refund the money upon his arrival at home, and then departed.

Jesse James was delighted at his success thus far.

Returning to the hotel, he procured pen and ink, retired to his room and studied Jack's check intently.

The signature to it was a very peculiar one that the most expert forger in the world would have found it almost impossible to imitate.

But the rest of the writing was easy to copy.

The bandit practiced the formation of the different letters for over an hour, and made a good imitation of them.

"And now to raise Wright's cheek," he muttered in tones of exultation, when he saw how successful he was.

CHAPTER II.

SWINDLING THE INVENTOR.

The date, number, amount, and figures designating the amount of money Jack's check called for were written.

Jesse now took one of the blank checks Frank got for him, and imitating Jack's writing, he filled it in with the same number as the good check; after the words: "Pay to the order of---" he wrote, "Bearer," as Jack had done; before the word "Dollars," on the next line he wrote "Five thousand," and after the mark "\$--" he put "5,000."

He left out the date and signature.

These were unnecessary in the trick he was playing.

Having satisfied himself that his writing bore a close resemblance to that on Jack's check, he laid the check he had filled out one top of the one Jack gave him with the greatest care, so that all the lines on one were exactly opposite the lines on the other.

This he ascertained by holding them up to the light and staring through the thin paper.

When he had them matched exactly, he located a spot across the width of both where no writing was seen.

Holding the checks tightly together he tore them in two, just as if the two checks were one thickness of paper.

Consequently both were torn exactly alike.

Taking off the two top pieces he laid them side by side, joining the edges where they were torn, and then did the same with the other check.

This done he took the right hand piece of Jack's check, upon which were the date at the top and signature at the bottom.

He then took the left hand piece of the check he had made out and put it to the piece with the signature which Jack inscribed.

The check now, instead of being for ten dollars, called for \$5,000 and although a composite thing the signature was no forgery, and that was the principal writing studied by the paying tellers of banks.

It looked like a perfectly genuine check torn in two, for as both checks had been torn together, the curves of one fit the grooves of the other piece to perfection.

Jesse now burned up the remaining two pieces.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, with an evil smile. "I've done it well. The most experienced bank clerk in the country would fail to detect the deception. Now to get it cashed!"

He put on his hat, and holding the two pieces of check in his hand, he left the Sea Spider House.

Making his way to the Wrightstown bank, he coolly entered, and approaching the paying teller's little brass barred window, he thrust in the two pieces of check and said blandly:

"Please cash that for me."

"You've torn the check in two," said the paying teller.

"I had it in my breast pocket, and as I was coming in the door I put my hand in my pocket to draw it out, when the end of the check caught in some books and it ripped in two."

The paying teller matched the torn ends.

They fitted with the utmost accuracy.

He then keenly scanned the signature.

Familiar with Jack Wright's checks as he was, he saw at a glance that the signature was genuine.

Without the slightest hesitation he cashed the check, paying the bandit with one hundred dollar bills.

Jesse requested him to give him bills of smaller denomination for one of the bank notes, and when this was done, he leisurely counted the money, placed it in his pocket and strolled out into the Street.

Here he came face to face with Jack.

The young Inventor was just about to enter the bank.

The shock upon a man of weaker nerves than Jesse James had, to thus meet Jack, would have been awful.

But the bandit king had nerves of steel.

He did not start, turn pale, or twitch a muscle.

On the contrary he assumed a cheerful smile, shook hands very heartily with Jack, and said in apologetic tones:

"I deemed it best to pay for my railroad fare in cash, so I came here and got the money for your check, Mr. Wright."

"It's just as well you did," replied the Inventor. "I'm a director of this bank, and hold the position of president. The board meets to-day, and as I need some cash, I'm killing two birds with one stone."

"Very clever," said Jesse. "Good-bye. I must be off."

"Good-day, sir," said Jack, and he entered the bank.

The bandit strode swiftly to the Sea Spider House.

He found his companions dining, and joining them, he made a good meal, and at its conclusion all hands repaired to the bar again, and indulged in several more drinks.

Jesse then startled his companions by pulling out his big wad of bills, and paying the landlord for their fare.

The moment the gang got him alone, Frank whispered:

"Where did you get the roll, Jess?"

"From Jack Wright," laughed the outlaw.

"Tell us about it!"

"Certainly. It was the easiest game I ever played, and I got \$5,000 out of it, too. Ha, ha, ha!"

Looks of intense astonishment appeared on the faces of his friends.

He then explained what he had done.

A roar of delight went up from the gang when he finished.

"Bully for you, Jess!"

"Oh, Lord, what a game!"

"You've done splendidly."

"What a roasting for the bank!"

They laughed and chuckled over it for some time.

But suddenly the solemn-faced Frank exclaimed in startled tones:

"Say! Suppose Jack Wright finds out in the bank what you've done! We'll have all the police in this town looking for us. Hadn't we better get out of here?"

"Oh, don't hurry yourself," coolly replied Jesse, as he noted the blank look of dismay on the faces of the rest produced by his brother's words. "There's no danger."

The bandit king always exercised a powerful influence over his brother and his men, and they immediately became imbued with his reckless carelessness, and got over the sudden fright which had for a moment shocked them.

Jesse then questioned the hotel keeper about the departure of trains from there, and learned that they could not leave Wrightstown in less than an hour.

He told his companions the news.

Before the train came in which, they intended to depart, another one arrived from the opposite direction.

Sheriff Timberlake was aboard.

His locomotive had caught up with the express train, and he boarded her, and learned that a passenger had seen five men spring aground at the Wrightstown curve.

As Jesse James and his men were not aboard, he at once presumed it was they who had thus eluded him.

He, therefore, alighted at the next station, and boarded the first train back for Wrightstown.

By dint of inquiring, he discovered that five men who answered to the description of his prey, were at the Sea Spider Hotel, and made his way there.

When he reached the hotel, he learned that the men were there, and had retired to one of the rooms.

Timberlake was a man who never wasted words.

When he spoke or acted, it was to the point.

He therefore made no remark, but quickly made his way up-stairs, sure that he had his prey cornered.

By moving quietly, and listening at the different doors, he finally located the sound of several voices coming from the room occupied by the James Boys.

He recognized them at once as the voices of the gang whom he had tracked to New York.

"It's time to get ready, boys," he heard Jesse say.

"We've got ten minutes yet," replied Cummins.

"Just time enough to reach the depot," added Frank.

The sheriff smiled, and produced a brace of revolvers.

Flinging open the door he saw the five men in the bedroom, sitting around a table upon which stood an empty whisky bottle and a deck of cards with which they had been amusing themselves.

Leveling his pistols at the outlaws he cried:

"Hands up!"

"Timberlake!" roared Jesse.

"Quick, obey or I'll fire!"

"Caught!" muttered Frank.

"I've got the drop on you!"

They saw that resistance was simply madness, so up went their hands and the keen glance of the sheriff swept over the party and he counted four men.

Miller was missing.

For a moment there was deep silence.

The bandits had time to recover from their panic.

"Let up, Timberlake, and I'll give you \$5,000," said Jesse.

"Not for ten times that amount," replied the sheriff.

"You can't take all of us."

"Two will do--you and Frank."

"Will nothing bribe you?"

"Absolutely nothing." Jesse uttered a sharp signal whistle.

It echoed piercingly through the hotel, and the sheriff started and demanded with a frown:

"What did you do that for?"

"To summon assistance," coolly replied Jesse.

"You won't get any here."

"Oh, yes, we will. You'll see."

"I am going---"

He never finished that sentence.

Miller had heard the danger signal, came up in the hall, saw how the situation stood, and stealing up quietly behind Timberlake, he dealt the plucky officer a stunning blow with the butt of his pistol.

It knocked the sheriff down.

He was hardly prostrate before the whole gang was upon him, and while one took the pistols away from him, the rest bound and gagged him.

He thus was rendered perfectly helpless.

When he recovered from the effect of the blow, he found himself at the mercy of the gang, unable to move or speak, and tied up to the old-fashioned bed post.

"Fool," said Jesse, standing before him, and bending a burning glance upon him of mingled hate and rage.

"Are you soft enough to imagine you can get away with all of us single handed?"

Timberlake did not reply of course.

But the look of intense fury he bestowed upon Jesse, amply evinced all that was passing in his mind.

"We are going to leave you here," preceded the king of the bandits, "and we are going back to Clay County. I'd like to blow your head off before we go, but that would run my bead in the hangman's noose. If you are unlucky enough to stumble across my path again, though, I shall be less merciful. I'd wipe you out as I would a viper."

Gagged as he was, Timberlake remained silent.

"Come, boys, let us begone," said Jesse turning to his companions. "We barely have time to catch the train."

They filed out of the room, and Jesse locked the door, carried the key away, and they left the hotel.

Making speed, they quickly reached the railroad depot.

A train was just leaving.

They quickly boarded it.

Away they were whirled to Missouri.

And that was the last Wrightstown ever saw of them.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTRIC STAGE.

Toward evening a chambermaid in the Sea Spider House went up to the room which had been occupied by the James Boys and discovered Sheriff Timberlake bound and gagged.

She was very much frightened at first, and ran screaming from the room, for she thought the apartment was vacant and had gone up to put it in order.

The landlord heard her shrieks, learned what frightened her, and hastening up to the room liberated the sheriff.

"Another victim of these villains!" he exclaimed.

"Have they got the best of some one else?" asked Timberlake.

"Yes; the evening paper contains an account of a clever check swindle they played on the Wrightstown Bank, by duping Jack Wright, the most respected young citizen in this town."

"How long have they been gone?"

"They departed a few minutes after you went up here at noon."

"Do you know which way they went?"

"The paper says they boarded a westbound train."

"In that case they've given me the slip again."

"Why did they treat you this way?"

"I am the sheriff of Clay County, Missouri, and they were Jesse and Frank James, the notorious bandits, and three of their gang."

"Good heavens! and I harbored them here!"

"Of course you did not know who they were."

"Certainly not, if I had I would have handed them over to the police."

"Let me read the newspaper account."

The landlord handed him the paper.

He read the article, which gave an account of how Jack Wright had been cheated, and added, in conclusion, that after the inventor entered the bank he discovered the swindle.

The police were notified.

They traced the James Boys to the hotel.

But when they got there the birds had flown.

Hastening to the railroad depot, they discovered that the bandits had made their escape on the cars.

They telegraphed to the authorities ahead of the train at its first stopping place to arrest the bandits.

But the reply finally came back that the cars did not stop there, as the bandits had taken possession of the engine, and were seen forcing the engineer to keep the train going by menacing him with their pistols.

Timberlake was not surprised at this.

He knew that there were no more desperate men than the James Boys, and was aware that they would resort to any means to escape.

"I can't do anything farther," he sighed. "At least, not until I get back to Missouri. I think I'll call on Jack Wright, and get all the facts from him of the bank swindle."

He thereupon left the hotel.

Going to Jack's house, he found the inventor in.

Introducing himself, and showing his credentials, the sheriff had a long talk about the matter with the inventor.

In conclusion, he said:

"For a long time I have tried every means to capture those bandits. But they slip away from me with the most remarkable ease every time I feel surest I've got them. There's a reward of \$5,000 offered by the governor of the State for their capture, and I and a Pinkerton detective named Carl Greene have been making the most desperate efforts to capture the James Boys, and break up their gang. We have thus far failed to do so."

"Why has it been such a difficult task?" asked Jack.

"In the first place, Jesse James owns a horse named Siroc which is unequalled in speed and intelligence by any horse in the world that I know of, and he can easily outfoot the fleetest animal that ever chased him."

"Well," asked Jack, "suppose an electric overland engine were to chase that remarkable quadruped, don't you think he might be overtaken? The engine I refer to can run at the rate of fifty miles an hour over rough ground."

"Any engine could last longer than a horse, and such a machine as you mention could outspeed that horse. But, of course, such an engine is an utter impossibility."

"You are mistaken," said Jack, quietly.

"How so?" asked Timberlake, with a puzzled look.

"Because I have got such an engine."

"You have?"

"Just finished building it."

"And it runs by electricity?"

"Entirely so."

"Without tracks?"

"On the ground."

"And at fifty miles an hour?"

"Yes. I have tested her to that speed."

"This, if true, is most extraordinary."

"No, it isn't. I have constructed such machines before."

"I've been told you are an inventor of electrical contrivances."

"Do you doubt the probability of such an engine?"

"Candidly, I do."

"Do you want me to prove it?"

"By all means."

"Then come with me. I'll show it to you."

"I am burning with curiosity to see the wonderful affair."

Jack smiled and led his caller out into the yard.

Proceeding to the door of the workshop he opened it with a latch key and they entered a very large room.

It was cast in gloom.

Jack turned a switch on the wall.

Instantly scores of brilliant incandescent electric lamps were put in circuit and blazed out, illuminating the room as if by day.

A strange-looking vehicle in the form of a stage was disclosed standing in the middle of the apartment.

Jack pointed at it and said:

"There's the machine that will do all I claimed for it."

"By thunder, that's an odd looking affair!"

"She certainly is a peculiar carriage."

"Yet she is very handsome, light, and durable."

"Lift one end of her. You will be amazed at her weight."

"How can one man lift such a heavy thing as that?"

"Try, and you'll see."

The sheriff complied.

He was astonished to find he could raise her,

Jack burst out laughing at his amazed expression.

"I can't imagine what material she can be made of!" said the officer.

"It's aluminum," replied Jack, "Have you a revolver?"

"Yes--a 32 calibre weapon."

"If you will put a bullet through her I'll give you \$10,000."

Timberlake's surprise increased, and he drew his weapon.

Aiming it at the vehicle in various places he blazed away.

Six shots were thus fired.

He then closely examined the Terror, as the stage was named, and although he saw where each of the heavy caliber bullets had struck the machine, he failed to find a perforation.

In fact he picked up the bullets from the ground fused and battered out of shape.

Jack watched him with an amused smile.

"What do you think of that for bullet-proof armor?" he asked.

"It is simply wonderful--extraordinary!"

Timberlake scanned the engine with newly awakened interest.

It was about thirty feet long, by ten in breadth, rode on four broad cogged wheels, and was set on strong, flexible springs.

Under the middle of the car was a powerful motor for revolving the wheels, in front of the dashboard was a projecting ram over which stood a search-light of 90,000 candle power, above the forward wheels were air brakes, the driver's seat was in front, and before it stood a steering wheel and several levers.

All the actions of the Terror were controlled by these levers.

Each side of the car was indented with four windows and four bull's-eyes, there was a door front and back, and a rear platform from which hung a ladder to get on and off.

The lower section of the walls consisted of metal plates, while the upper part was made of aluminum wire netting, there was a small smokestack on top of the roof, and on each side a railed platform.

Her interior was divided by partitions into three rooms, the forward one being a general living room containing bunks for sleeping, the middle one was a combined dining room and kitchen, the cooking being done on an electric stove, and the rear room was for storage.

In it water and provisions, arms and ammunition, tools and many other useful articles were to be stowed.

There were two compartments--one under the sleeping room floor in which stood the mechanism for running the Terror, and the other beneath the store room floor, in which stood a small powerful dynamo which operated automatically by a spring clockwork.

All the room lamps and the search-light derived their current from the dynamo, while it worked the motor, and that in turn operated the driving wheel machinery.

"It don't require a skilled electrician to see how the Terror operates." said Jack, as he showed the sheriff the interior, "for I have based her construction upon the simplest known principles."

"Oh, I can readily see how she ought to work."

"I'll give you an example," said Jack, seating himself behind the steering wheel and pulling a lever.

That set the clockwork in motion, it spun the dynamo armature, a current was generated, flashed into the motor, the shaft operated the machinery, and the Terror rolled ahead.

When she reached the end of the room he reversed the lever and she backed to the other wall.

He then ran her around the room in a circle, steering by the wheel, and attained a tremendous velocity; he put on the brakes and she stopped within a few feet, and he turned a switch that caused the search-light and lamps in her to glow.

By the time he finished the sheriff was wild with admiration of the extraordinary vehicle.

"For what purpose did you build her? he asked Jack, when they finished maneuvering her, and alighted.

"Just for fun, I have plenty of money and leisure, and a strong liking for building these electrical inventions."

"But why did you say she could catch Jesse James' horse Siroc?"

"Simply because I have made up my mind to do so?"

"What! Go to Missouri in pursuit of the James Boys?" asked Timberlake, as he took up Jack's remark.

"Yes, sir. I or the bank have lost five thousand dollars by a mean trick the bandit king played on me, and I mean to recover it."

"League yourself with the State Government against the outlaws, and you may not only recover the stolen money, but you stand a mighty good chance of winning the standing reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the James Boys."

"The money is no temptation to me whatever," asserted Jack. "I don't need it. But you must consider that I was greatly chagrined and mortified when I discovered what a clever game had been played upon me, and I am very anxious to even matters up with those villains. Besides, I rather like the wild, exciting adventures in view if I run after those outlaws."

"You must not forget that it may cost your life."

"Oh, I am aware of that! And say---"

"Well?"

"How would you like to accompany us?"

"First-rate. I would be of great help to you, too, as I am familiar with all parts of the State."

"That settles the matter then. You go with us."

"When will you depart?"

"I'm going to write to the Governor of Missouri, and I'll go just as soon as I get a reply from him."

"I'll write him at the same time then, and I feel confident that we won't be there long before we break up that gang of outlaws, and have the James Boys behind the bars."

CHAPTER IV.

OFF FOR MISSOURI.

The sheriff resolved to remain in Wrightstown, and start from there on the Terror, with Jack and his two friends.

While awaiting a reply from the Governor of Missouri he put up at the Sea Spider house, and went daily to the young inventor's workshop to help get the engine ready.

Jack had to purchase many necessary articles to equip the electric engine, and while they were stocking her, he said one day to Timberlake:

"As you are the sheriff of Clay County, Missouri, I cannot understand what, right you had to desert your post of duty there, and go off on a chase after the James Boys all the way to New York."

"That mystery can easily be explained," replied Timberlake with a smile. "I was taking a vacation, to which I am entitled, when I learned of their proposed trip to the metropolis to see the sights. Instead of taking a rest, I became excited into a longing to capture them, and started in pursuit as a detective would have done."

"Oh, that accounts for it!"

"You see I always carry with me a warrant for the arrest of the James Boys and their gang, and therefore was prepared to take them had luck favored me."

Just then Tim stumped up to them, and proffering a plug of tobacco to the sheriff he asked:

"Have a chew?"

"No, I never use plug."

"Yer werry welcome, said Tim, and he took a bite.

"Don't mention it," laughed the sheriff.

"I've been havin' a awful hard time o' it, Timberlake."

"You don't say, Tim! What has happened?"

"Oh, 'twuzn't nuthin' wot occurred lately."

"To what do you refer then?" asked the perplexed sheriff.

"A leetle incident wot happened ter me when I wuz aboard o' the ole frigate Wabash in ther navy."

"Indeed! Was you in the navy?"

"A good many years, sir. Whar else did I git this leg blowed off?"

"You was just going to mention something that happened."

"Ay, ay. So I wuz. Yer see, it happened this way. We wuz a coastin' through ther Red Sea one brilln' arfternoon, watchin' ther monkeys an' crocodiles on ther Arabian shore when all at onct I noticed a queer yaller-redness in ther sky on ther Afriky shore. It wuz caused by a simoom. Great clouds o' sand, driv' by the wind, wuz a-rushin' acrost ther desert toward ther ship, an' as it came out toward us, we seed we wuz doomed."

"You were in a mighty tight box," observed the sheriff, interestedly.

"Keel haul me if we wuzn't," agreed Tim, with a nod. "Waal, sir, we knowed that ther minute them ere clouds o' red-hot sand came down on ther ship, it would bury us an' bake us ter death. All my messmates wuz skeered ter death, an' droppin' down upon thar marrer bones about ther deck, they begun ter pray like sons of guns. Did I give away ter ther general panic? Not much.

"Cause why? I'll tell yer. A way ter save ther ship an' crew ocured ter me. Wot wuz it? Yer'll see. Yer know as crocodiles is reckoned ther fastest swimmers in ther water. Waal, sir, as soon as I seed that ere storm abarin' down on us I knowed as our only chance to save ourselves laid in runnin' away from it. Now thar wuzn't wind enough for ther sails ter do it, so wot does I do but gits a rope; then I jumped overboard right in ther midst o' them crocodiles. Afore yer could count ten I made a slipnoose fast about ther necks o' forty o' them animiles, got back aboard the frigate an' tied ther other and o' ther line ter the capstan. Then I took a spear an' cllmbin' out on ther bowsprit I began ter jab 'em an' away they went, pullin' ther frigate along like greased lightning---

"Say, Tim---

"I ain't done yet---

"But I tell you---

"Awarst thar! As I wuz asayin' along we went like fury, ther simoom chasing arter us. It wuz a terrible race an' I yelled and poked at them ere crocodiles like mad.

"In a few moments we wuz makin' eighty knots an hour, an' I noticed as we wuz pullin' away from that ere storm werry stiddy, ontill at last we lef it astarn, an' ther ship wuz saved. You'd oughter seed how glad my poor messmates wuz when I finally cut ther crocodiles loose an' we sailed in clear water---

"It must have been great," dryly said Timberlake.

"Ay now," proudly replied Tim. "That it wuz, sir."

"Say, Tim, that would be a splendid yarn only for one thing."

"An' wot might that be, Mr. Timberlake?"

"Crocodiles can't live in salt water, and as the Red Sea is exceedingly briny, I don't understand how the ones you captured could have been there and submitted to being harnessed as you did it, without offering to make a meal of you."

A rather startled look crossed Tim's face.

He thoughtfully rubbed his big red nose and gasped:

"Gee whiz!"

The fact was Tim was an awful liar.

He seldom spun a yarn without being tripped up.

That is the trouble with most liars; they generally make an error in their stories which won't stand analysis.

"Will you be kind enough to explain how those saurians happened to be in that sea in such a docile frame of mind, Tim?" asked Timberlake, with a provoking smile of derision.

"No, sir," flatly answered the old sailor, who was utterly at a loss how to clear himself. "The fact are, sir, as I never gives explanations e' my yarns, an'---"

But here he was interrupted.

By the wild shriek of an accordeon.

In the hands of Fritz.

The Dutchmen hated Tim's yarns.

And Tim hated Fritz's music with equal fervor.

Consequently, while the yarn caused the fat fellow to strike up his frantic melody, the music grated on Tim's ears so that a wild desire entered his soul to pulverize the Dutchman.

"Hey!" he howled, shaking his fist at Fritz. "Belay thar!"

"Shiminey Christmas, vos yer tink I vould listen ter some more ohf dem lies mitoud dot I trownd it oud alretty?" fiercely bellowed Fritz, working away at the wheezy box.

"Ye kin dash my toplights if I don't wipe up ther floor wi' yer then!" yelled Tim, and he made a rush for Fritz.

"Shtood beck!" roared the Dutchman. "Stob a leedle, or py yiminey I soak yer in der chaw mit dot moosic!"

He brandished his accordeon in the air by the strap as he spoke, and as it opened out and his fingers were pressing on several of the keys, it let out a shrieking groan horrible to hear.

Tim did not pause.

His spunk was up.

As soon as he reached Fritz he gave a whoop and jumped on him.

The next moment they were tangled up in a heap on the floor, and a terrific struggle began between them, the sailor trying to put his wooden leg through the accordeon, and the Dutchmen industriously striving to gouge Tim's glass eye out.

In the midst of the scuffle, a monkey and parrot came flying in from the next room, howling like fiends.

The parrot was named Bismarck.

Whiskers was the name of the monkey.

Fritz owned the bird, and Tim claimed the animal.

They had once been captured in Africa by their masters.

Since then the sailor and Dutchman invariably took their pets off on the expeditions they made in Jack's inventions.

Between Bismarck and Whiskers there existed a deep rooted enmity, which always culminated in pitched battles.

The monkey had been chasing the parrot when Tim and Fritz got fighting, and as these two creatures possessed more than ordinary intelligence, they at once determined to take sides with their respective owners.

"Whee!" bowled Whiskers, and he hopped on top of Fritz's head, grabbed him by the hair, and tried to pull it out by the roots.

"Mild up, Boilvar!" yelled the slangy bird, as he fastened his beak in Tim's ear. "Waow! Whoop her up, boys! Cracker! Crack---"

Biff! went Tim's hand against Bismarck's head, interrupting him.

Bang! went Fritz fist against the monkey's neck sending him spinning.

"Wow!" screamed Whiskers.

"Root, you sucker, root!" yelled Bismarck.

Then he made a dive at the monkey, and as Whiskers scampered away, the parrot flew after him, plunged his beak in Whiskers' tail, and away they flew into the next room.

Just then Jack interrupted the fracas.

"Stop, boys, and attend to business!" he sung out.

Tim and Fritz were accustomed to obeying him, and ceasing hostilities at once, they rose, and the old sailor asked solemnly:

"Goin' ter stop playin' if I stops yarnin'?"

"For sure, Mikes," replied Fritz. "Put it dere."

They shook hands and that settled the matter.

Work on the electric stage was resumed, and by noon they had her in perfect condition for her long journey.

When they entered the house they met Jack's beautiful wife and bright little son.

Answers had arrived from Missouri.

The governor wrote Jack the following lines:

"Mr. Jack Wright,--In reply to your letter I beg to assure you of my heartfelt gratitude for your kind offer to

try to apprehend the James Boys and break up their villainous gang. These outlaws have too long been a terror to the community, and there is not a decent man, woman or child in the state who would not be glad to hear of the extermination of the gang. The list of crimes for which the James Boys are amenable is too long and too horrible to enumerate here in detail. Let it suffice that there are charges of every description in the category against them, including many atrocious murders.

"So bitter is the feeling against them that a reward of five thousand dollars has been offered for the James Boys, dead or alive. I enclose warrants and all necessary authority for you to act in league with the officers of this State in the capture or killing of the bandits in question, and sincerely trust that you will meet with entire success. By this mail have also written to Sheriff Timberlake whom I am delighted to hear intends to go with you on your perilous expedition. He is a brave and true man, in whom I have the most implicit confidence. Yours truly, John Doe."

The papers in Jack's envelope were entirely satisfactory.

Timberlake's letter was of a personal nature, and when he finished reading it, and heard what was communicated to Jack, he said:

"Well, now that all details are settled, when do you intend to go in pursuit of the outlaws?"

"To-night," replied Jack. "We have everything ready but the stowage of our clothing aboard."

"Good! The sooner the better."

"I tink so neider," agreed Fritz.

"That settles it, then," Tim added.

It did not take them long to put their clothing and the parrot and monkey aboard the Terror.

When night fell, Jack took leave of his wife and child.

They all then boarded the electric stage. Jack taking his seat at the wheel, and she started.

Many people in the village streets saw them as they went flying by, and heartily cheered them on their way, as the news of Jack's intention had got abroad.

The Terror soon left Wrightstown behind.

Following the hard country road he sped along swiftly, and soon was lost to the view of the villagers.

CHAPTER V.

THE JAMES BOYS' MOTHER.

The trip to Missouri was made without adventure by the Terror, but her peculiar appearance aroused the wonder of everybody who saw her during her journey through several States.

Late in the afternoon of a pleasant day she passed Kearney, in Clay County, and followed an old country road.

A few miles from the town she arrived near a neat old log house standing back in a wooded pasture near the road.

This house contained three rooms; in the front yard were several lilac bushes, and all the way from its fences to the town many farm houses lined the road.

Sheriff Timberlake sat on the steerer's seat of the electric stage beside Jack, and the moment the old fashioned Western home referred to came in view he pointed at it and said:

"There is the home of the James Boys."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, eying the house intently.

"Yes; it is the residence of Dr. Reuben Samuels, their step-father, and the mother of the two villains. She's a Tartar about her boys--a regular she-fiend in temper, although a woman of fifty-five. Ah--see! There she is now!"

He pointed at the house.

The woman, in a gingham dress, stood at the door.

She was shading her eyes with her hand.

A look of surprise crossed Jack's face as he glanced at her.

"Why," said he, "she has only got one arm."

"Yes; the other was blown off by the explosion of a hand grenade which a Pinkerton detective threw into the house some years ago in an attack upon her sons. There was a younger son of hers killed by the same bomb."

Mrs. Samuels was suspiciously and curiously eying the Terror as it rolled toward her.

Then she suddenly disappeared in the house.

Her action struck Jack as being very significant.

"Did you see that!" he asked the sheriff.

"Yes. She's a queer, violent tempered woman,"

"Perhaps she has gone in to warn her sons of our coming."

"By thunder, you may be right."

"We'd better search that house, Timberlake."

"I intend to do so."

"The woman is acquainted with you, ain't she?"

"Well, I should say so," laughed the officer. "I've been here often enough to be pretty well known. My posse has shot bullets into nearly every square inch of that house and the fence, in our past efforts to get at the two bandits."

"The woman can't have much affection for you."

"She would gladly kill me, I believe, if she had the chance."

By this time the Terror reached the house.

Jack cut out the current and alighted with his companion.

They knocked at the door, and a moment later it was opened by Mrs. Samuels, who glared at her callers and demanded:

"Well--what do you want, Timberlake?"

"Your sons, madam," blandly replied the officer.

"They ain't here."

"I am not sure of that."

"Search the house if you like."

"Thank you. I shall."

He swiftly passed inside and went through the rooms, but saw nothing of the James Boys.

Jack remained at the door with the woman.

He saw by her nervous manner that she was smothering a feeling of intense agitation.

Whether it came from her aversion of the officer, or because her sons were around, Jack could not judge.

"That's a mighty queer wagon you've got there," she remarked presently, as she pointed at the Terror.

"Yes," replied Jack. "It is designed to run down your sons."

She started, and a tigerish look flashed from her eyes.

"So you are leagued against them, too, eh!" she hissed.

"Yes. I am here to capture them if I can."

"But you will never succeed."

"That remains to be seen."

At this moment Timberlake rushed out.

He was terribly excited.

A smothered cry of alarm escaped Mrs. Samuels.

"I've seen them!" gasped the officer.

"Where?" demanded Jack, quickly.

"Both were here. She warned them. They got down in the cellar. I found a tunnel there, leading over to that timber. They had gone through. Jesse's horse, Siroc, and Frank's horse, Jim Malone, must have been tethered there, for they mounted and dashed away."

"Get aboard, and we'll chase them."

"You shall not go!" hissed the woman.

She slammed the door shut, and put her back against it, a look of fierce determination upon her face.

It was clear that she designed to delay them so as to give her fugitive sons as long a lead as possible.

Jack saw through her scheme.

"Get away from there! he cried, sternly.

"You can't leave this house!" she shrieked.

"I see through your plan."

"Stand back, or I'll brain you with this!"

She had been holding her hand behind her back.

As she now brought it into view, they saw that she held a hatchet with a keen, glittering edge.

"This way, Mr. Wright!" cried Timberlake.

And he dove headfirst through a window.

Jack started to follow him, when the woman rushed after him with the hatchet upraised.

There was no such emotion as fear in the mother of the Missouri bandits, and she had bred her ferocity and evil will into her two detestable children.

Jack's life was in danger, for she could have dealt him a death blow with the weapon before he could get out the window after the sheriff.

He therefore turned upon her.

The young inventor was noted for his enormous strength.

Avoiding an ugly blow she aimed at his head by nimbly leaping aside, he seized the hatchet before she could raise it again and made an effort to take it away from her.

She was wonderfully strong in her single arm.

In fact, the strength she lost with the arm which had been blown off seemed to have concentrated in this remaining arm.

Jack found it no easy matter to get the weapon, for she held on to it with great persistence, and exerted every device to delay him as long as possible.

"You shall not have it!" she raved as she struggled.

"Let up!" cried Jack, losing patience. "I don't want to use you roughly on account of your sex and crippled condition. But I'll have to do it."

He thereupon tore the hatchet from her hand.

Flinging it into the next room, he saw her spring toward him, and make an effort to grapple him.

Struggling with women was very distasteful to Jack.

He therefore avoided her and rushed out the door.

She ran after him screaming and threatening, but he kept out of her reach and got upon the stage.

The sheriff was already aboard.

Jack sent the Terror flying along the road.

In a few moments she was out of reach of the woman.

There was a door in the forward part of the vehicle beside Jack, and Tim and Fritz now opened it.

"Gee whiz," chuckled the old sailor. "She wuz ther most piratical craft in petticoats wot I ever seen!"

"I don't blame her for trying to protect her sons."

"Yah; but she vos delay us!" growled Fritz.

"Only a few moments."

"There they go now!" cried Timberlake.

He pointed up the road at two flying horsemen.

They were so far away that their figures could hardly be distinguished, and their steeds were going like the wind.

"What a magnificent black horse," commented Jack.

"That's Siroc," informed the sheriff, "Jesse's horse."

"We'll overhaul them though."

"Let her fly if you wish to succeed."

"Are you sure they were the James Boys?"

"Certain. I did not get very near them, but noticed that one wore a heavy beard and the other a mustache. They had on riding boots, with the legs of their pants tucked in the tops, flannel shirts and soft felt hats, while around their waists were buckled cartridge belts into which were thrust a knife and brace of revolvers a piece."

"Does that description tally with the general appearance of the James Boys?" asked Jack.

"Yes. I am sure it was them."

The young inventor put on full voltage.

It caused the motor to fairly buzz, and the Terror shot ahead along the road with the velocity of an express train.

She rapidly bore down upon the fugitives.

It was a long and exciting chase, though, for Siroc and Jim Malone were wonderfully fleet horses.

Several miles were thus covered.

Finally, though, the machine drew close to the two riders.

"Halt!" shouted Jack.

Casting a quick glance back the riders obeyed.

So suddenly did they pull up their steeds, that they rose on their haunches and pawed the air.

The four inmates of the Terror had them covered with their rifles, and when the horses came down and wheeled around, a shout of chagrin escaped Timberlake.

"Duped!"

"What do you mean?" asked Jack, in surprise.

"They ain't the James Boys."

"Sure enough. But the horses belong to the bandits."

"Yes; that's how I was deceived. Now I see through it. I've been tricked. I really chased Jesse and Frank from the tunnel. They put these men on their horses and hid, while their two men rode off to decoy us from the spot so they could escape."

Such was really the way it happened.

Jack had stopped the Terror, and now shouted to the two men, who were part of the James Boys' gang.

"Throw your hands up!"

Both men obeyed.

"Don't fire!" pleaded one of them.

"That depends on how you answer me."

"What do you want to know, sir?"

"You just heard our version of how the James Boys eluded us?"

"We did, sir."

"Is it correct?"

"Yes."

"Are you members of their gang?"

"We are."

"Where have they gone!"

"I refuse to tell you!"

"Your life depends upon it."

"I don't care. I won't betray them."

"Fool! I will count three. If you don't answer, we'll fire!"

"Go ahead!" was the defiant reply.

"One!" exclaimed Jack.

The two bandits did not flinch.

"Two!" sternly cried the inventor.

Still the men stubbornly refused to speak.

"Three!"

A deathly silence ensued for a moment.

Then the weapons in the hands of our friends were discharged.

CHAPTER VI.

SHADOWING A LONE HORSEMAN.

Although there was a tacit understanding among the crew of the Terror to fire over the heads of the two bandits to frighten them they imagined that they were to be shot down in cold blood.

It electrified them.

An instant before Jack gave the order to fire they plunged their spurs into the flanks of the horses.

One animal sprang to the right and the other to the left.

It was done like lightning.

Both steeds were well trained.

Siroc cleared a hedge and wheeling to the right went flying back in the direction he came from, while Jim Malone went thundering in among some rocks and vanished.

Both bandits imagined they had a narrow escape from death, although the fact was they had been in no danger at all of being shot from their horses.

Our friends burst out laughing.

"Badly scared," said Jack.

"Oh, Lord, wot cowards!" Tim chuckled.

"Ain't they likely to return to the James Boys?" asked the sheriff.

"Dot vas more as likely," agreed Fritz. "If dem vas der Chames Poys' horses vunct, dey vill back by deir owners go, don't it?"

Jack peered around.

At some distance off to the south was a forest.

He caught view of both horses plunging into it.

"That settles our pursuit of them!" he exclaimed, in disgust. "We can't follow them among those trees, and as they seem to realize it, they've taken advantage of the timberland."

"We might keep a watch upon the woods anyway," suggested Timberlake. "They are bound to come out somewhere sooner or later. If we can get upon their track we may yet force them to lead us to the bandits' rendezvous."

"It won't hurt to follow the plan," assented Jack; "for we haven't the remotest idea where to look for the villains."

He thereupon steered the Terror toward the trees, and as Fritz was a good cook and had charge of the culinary arrangements, he set about getting their supper ready.

It was a waste of time to guard the forest.

Several days passed by and nothing was seen of the two men.

They had gone straight through the timberland at a gallop, and emerging on the other side, rode rapidly away.

Jack and his friends had therefore been watching and hunting for a mere phantom, as it were.

The young inventor quickly arrived at this conclusion, and on the evening of the third day he said to Tim:

"It's my opinion that there isn't anyone at all in the woods, and I'm going to give up the watch and move on."

"Ay, ay, that's ther bes' plan. I quite agree wi' yer, lad."

"Those fellows would not be foolish enough to remain in that forest all this time for nothing."

"If they wuz thar, I'm mighty sure as we'd a sighted somethin' o' them long afore this, my hearty. I recollect when I wuz in ther navy how I wuz once fooled this way. Yer see we'd been chasin' one o' ther enemy's ships, an' drove her into a lagoon. Thar we pounded her with our guns, an' ther crew deserted her, an' went ashore. We sunk ther ship, an' mannin' ther boats, we pulled ashore arter ther crew. We found ther shore lined with cliffs a thousand feet high. Thar wuz no coast, that water beatin' up again ther base o' ther cliffs on all but ther seaward side o' ther lagoon. There wuz one indentation in the cliffs, covered wi' trees an' bushes, inter which ther hull crew went an' hid. Waal, sir, we landed thar, an' beat about lookin' fer 'em. Thar wuzn't no possible way fer 'em ter git away unseen, with ther water in front, them high cliffs surroundin' 'em on three sides, an' only a small plot o' ground filled wi' trees an' bushes fer 'em to hide in. So yer see we wuz sure o' catchin' 'em. Yet, when we'd sarched ther hull place not a sign o' them wuz ter be found! They'd wanished as complete as if ther arth had swallered 'em up. Now wuzn't that a worry mysterious perceedin'?"

As Tim asked this, he refreshed himself with a chew of tobacco.

Jack did not reply.

He had his glance fixed upon the woods.

Taking it for granted that he had aroused the curiosity of the young inventor to fever heat, Tim continued:

"Waal, sir, everybody wuz puzzled cept me. Wot had become o' them lubbers wasn't werry plain. Howsome ever, when they gave up huntin' I made up my mind as I'd locate ther fugitives. Goin' over ter ther cliff I examined ther face of it, an' found a trap door. Openin' it, I entered a cave. Thar they was, armed wi' rifles, pistols, cutlasses and knives, an' ten o' them sprung ter thar door astarn o' me ter cut off my retreat while ther rest aimed thar weapings at me. Did I run? No, sir. Wot did I do? Stood. Wot happened then? Pointin' my finger at 'em I ses, surrender yer swabs, or I'll blow yer brains out! All o' them wuz so skeerd o' my threat they begged fer mercy. An' ther joke of it wuz, I didn't hev no pistol neither. It wuz so dark in ther cave yer couldn't see ther smellin' tackle on yer figger head, an in that gloom they mistook my finger fer a gun. Waal, sir, in less'n two minutes I made prisoners o' ther fifty men, an' marched them out ter my messmates in triumph. Now how wuz that fer a bloodless victory?"

And with a triumphant grin Tim turned to Jack.

The young inventor made no answer.

"He must be struck dumb with astonishment!" thought Tim.

Then he seized Jack by the arm and shook him.

"Say, my lad, how wuz that fer a victory?" he asked.

"What victory?" asked Jack, rousing from a deep reverie.

"That one I jist told yer about, o' course."

"Did you tell us about something?"

"Of course I did. Didn't yer like ther yarn?"

"I didn't hear a word of it. I've been thinking."

Tim groaned.

Jack's answer crushed him.

"Oh, gee!" he gasped. "I've been a-talkin' ter myself!"

Jack burst out laughing at him, when he realized into what a ridiculous position Tim had placed himself.

Unable to bear it, the old sailor retreated into the stage.

Jack then turned the Terror away from the forest, and sent her flying across the rolling country.

He had come to the conclusion to make inquiries at the nearest town for information about where the James Boys had last been seen terrorizing the community.

It was his hope to thus get on their trail.

The gloom of night fell.

Heavy, dark banks of clouds covered the sky.

The electric stage finally reached an alluvial bottom, through which wound a broad deep creek.

Here she went among a dense growth of bushes, and Fritz served an excellent supper.

While the rest were partaking of the meal Jack remained on duty, and suddenly caught view of a lone horseman moving slowly along the bank of the creek like a shadow.

As quick as a flash Jack turned a switch, putting out the lights.

He could barely discern the horseman, and did not remove his glance from him for an instant.

Jack was suspicious of the man.

It did not seem likely to him that any honest wayfarer could be wandering along that unfrequented section of the country at night, acting in such a stealthy manner.

At all events he made up his mind to keep the man in view without being seen himself.

He therefore graded the speed of the terror to accord with that of the walking horse, and kept along the clearest ground he could distinguish in the gloom.

The sudden extinguishing of the lights alarmed Jack's friends, and brought them to the front room with a rush.

"Vot's der droubles?"

"Anything happened?"

"Is ther lamps injured, my lad?"

These three questions were discharged at him together.

Jack gave a warning hiss, pointed ahead, and said:

"I've just spotted a horseman ahead, boys."

"Who he vos?" eagerly asked Fritz, peering out.

"I haven't got the least idea."

"Be yer follerin' him?"

"Yes, Tim. Ha! there he goes!"

The rider had turned abruptly to the left, out across the course of the Terror, and headed for a mass of trees, rocks and bushes, that formed a hollow near the creek side.

Jack stopped the machine.

He had caught view of a gleaming light ahead.

It came from a camp-fire down in the hollow, and flung a lurid glow upon the scene around.

Timberlake gave a slight start and now said:

"Do you know that the James Boys generally prefer to make their camp in just such hollows as this is?"

"Is that so?" asked Jack. "Then you have an idea that by following the lone horseman we have accidentally run into the outlaw's encampment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'm going ahead to see."

"I'll go with you, if you like."

"Very well; arm yourself."

They procured a pair of deadly pneumatic rifles and revolvers of Jack's invention that hurled explosive bullets.

Then they left the stage in Tim's care.

Alighting, they crept toward the hollow.

In a few minutes they reached it.

The lone horseman had disappeared.

Jack and the sheriff proceeded with the caution of two cats, and slowly worked their way down into the hollow.

They presently neared the fire, when a startling scene met their view.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHERIFF'S MISFORTUNE.

Jack and Timberlake had reached the bottom of the verdure clad hollow, and were lurking behind a clump of bushes.

It was darker down there, if possible, than it had been above, but the ruddy glow of the camp-fire lit up a patch in the scene.

Around the fire were grouped a dozen ruffians, among whom Jack recognized the two James Boys.

Among the others were Jim Cummins, Wood Hite, Clell Miller, Cole Younger and his three brothers, John, Jim and Bob, Dick Little, Jack Keene, Ed McMillan, Bill Chadwell, Hobbs Kerry, Charley and Bob Ford and Oll and George Shepard.

The horses belonging to the gang, most of which had been stolen, were tethered to the nearby tree.

An exciting dialogue was going on among the bandits, and Jack and the sheriff heard Jesse say:

"Yes, Timberlake has got the Governor at Liberty to league Jack Wright against us. It's been hard enough to fight the sheriff's posse and the military reserve but it's going to be a blamed sight harder to get the best of that inventor. Wright owes me a grudge. He has soured on me for doing him out of that \$5,000 in Wrightstown."

"That machine of his'n must be a wonder," said one of the men.

"You have no idea what a dangerous article it is," promptly replied Jesse, with a fierce expletive. "Ripley and Barker had a taste of it, though, when the machine chased them on Siroc and Jim Malone. It was awful the way the electric engine overhauled them, I can tell you. Our only salvation now lies in leading them to places where the Terror can't run."

"If Barker hadn't put on false whiskers to look like you and if I hadn't fixed myself up to resemble Frank," spoke up one of the men, "we wouldn't have no Wright after us. But seeing us on your horses increased the deception so that we had no trouble about the matter. You should have seen how disgusted they were when they discovered how we fooled them."

"No doubt," said Frank, with a grim smile.

"What are you going to do about the hold-up to-night, Jesse?" asked Jim Cummins impatiently. "We've arranged to meet here and settle the whole matter and not gab about things of no interest to the case."

"There's plenty time," quietly replied the bandit king.

Jack squeezed Timberlake's arm.

"They're going to lay a plot!" he whispered.

"We'll hear the whole thing," replied the sheriff.

"Perhaps we can baffle them."

"Yes, if they give themselves away."

"Then we can't attack them now."

"Not if they have got work in view. If we should tackle them now we might not frustrate any game they might play when they get away. We can't expect to scoop the whole gang you know. Some would be bound to escape."

"Well, we'll hear what they have to say anyhow."

"Of course. We can grade ourselves according to circumstances afterward," whispered Timberlake cautiously.

The gang had been drawing closer around Jesse.

When they were close enough, the bandit rose, and said:

"Boys, we've got a big haul in view for to-night."

"What is it, anyway?" demanded Miller.

"An express package on the M. & M. road, which will go through on the midnight express, it's worth \$10,000."

Whistles and exclamations of surprise and delight escaped the gang.

This was something unusually rich.

Besides they were all pretty hard up.

"Let's hear about it," said Cole Younger.

"Well, I was in Kansas City and there learned that the Fourth National Bank sends a keg of \$10,000 in gold coin on the tenth of each month, to the banking firm of Bradford & Co., in Springfield, Illinois. That train will reach a point between Polo and Cowgill, according to the timetable, shortly after midnight. As it is the only train which carries an express car bound for Springfield, it must be the one we are after."

"That's fair to presume," said Frank.

"We had better stop it and see!" Jesse exclaimed. "We can hold it up at the curve, and as there's a dense mass of bushes on each side of the track, you all can conceal yourselves there until I get the cars stopped. Then an attack can be made upon the passengers, while I and several others get into the express car after the keg of money."

A plan of operations was then agreed upon.

When they finished, Jack whispered to the sheriff:

"There are three things we can now do. One is to attack the bandits here; the next is to notify the railroad people to look out for them; and the last is to let them attempt to carry out their plan and raid them in the act. Now, what shall we do?"

Timberlake pondered.

He wanted to avoid making any mistake.

Finally he muttered:

"If we were to run away to the railroad to apprise the company, something might happen that would delay us. Then the villains could carry out their purpose anyway. We can't do that. Now if we tackle them here, some of them are apt to give us the slip, an' do the job in spite of us. I think it will be safer to let them go to the rendezvous, and try to stop the cars. Then we can sail into them, and frustrate their plans."

"I quite agree with you," said Jack.

"Then let us return to the Terror."

Creeping silently away, they were getting safely out of the hollow, when suddenly a sentry came along, and almost stumbled over them.

"Hello!" he roared. "Who goes there?"

"Caught!" gasped the sheriff bounding to his feet.

"Timberlake!" groaned the man, recognizing him. "Hey! Help! Help!"

He yelled furiously.

The sheriff sprang at him like a tiger.

"Shut up!" he hissed, grappling the bandit.

"A spy! A spy!" howled the guard, wildly.

He clung to the sheriff with all his might, and they fell struggling to the ground, locked in a tight embrace.

Jack was startled.

He heard the gang rushing toward them.

"Can you manage him?" he panted.

"Yes--run!" replied the sheriff.

Thinking he might have to call his friends to help, Jack slipped away unseen, and Timberlake might have gained the mastery of his opponent, had not the gang at that moment dashed up to them.

Surrounding him, they attacked the sheriff upon all sides, and in a twinkling made a prisoner of him.

He was knocked senseless, bound and gagged.

As soon as Jack found that the sheriff was not following him, he paused.

"I wonder if he's in trouble?" he muttered. "I can't go on this way. No! I'll return and see."

With this resolution he retraced his steps.

Reaching the spot where he had left Timberlake, he found that the sheriff had vanished.

Looking across the hollow, Jack saw the bandits mounting their horses.

He could just see them by the light of the camp-fire.

A moment afterward they went galloping out of the hollow, and he saw Timberlake a prisoner among them.

"They've captured him!" he muttered.

Jack's dismay increased.

He could not do anything single handed to save his friend, so he hurried back to the electric stage.

"Hello!" called Tim, seeing him alone. "Whar's ther sheriff?"

"Caught by the James Boys," replied Jack.

"Ach du lieber Gott!" gasped Fritz.

Jack hastily got aboard.

"We must chase them!" he exclaimed.

"Wuz them lubbers down in that 'ere holler?" asked Tim.

"Yes--the whole gang," replied Jack.

"Den dot feller by horses back vos van ohf dem?"

"He was, Fritz, and a nice plot they have formed."

"Wot is it?" asked Tim.

The inventor briefly explained.

When he finished he sent the stage ahead.

Tim and Fritz armed themselves, to be prepared for trouble, and they sped along the course of the creek.

Nothing was seen of the bandits for some time.

They had gone several miles in this manner from the place where Timberlake was captured, when the moon suddenly burst from behind a cloud bank.

Just then Jack uttered a stifled cry.

"There they are!" he exclaimed.

"Whar?" eagerly asked Tim, peering out.

"Across the creek! See there!"

He pointed to the eastward and stopped the Terror.

A league away rode a large body of horsemen, and as Jack leveled a glass at them, he saw that there was no mistake about the matter--they were the James Boys' gang.

"How ve get across dot streams ter shase dem?" asked Fritz.

"That's what worried me," replied Jack. "I can't see a means anywhere. It's bound to delay us. Before we can do anything for Timberlake, they may kill him."

"Ay, ay, an' wot's more," added Tim, "they may reach ther railroad an' stop them cars afore we kin stop them."

"What a pity that I did not have a pair of air cylinders under this stage!" regretfully said Jack. "We could then have floated her across the stream."

He noted the direction the bandits were pursuing, and sent the Terror running along again.

Tim and Fritz maintained an anxious lookout in the meantime for an opportunity of getting over the creek.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLDING UP A TRAIN.

"Midnight!"

"Dere vos der roat."

"Ay, but whar's the bandits?"

The Inventor had been obliged to run the Terror to the headwaters of the creek ere they were able to pass the stream.

Considerable time had thus been lost.

Indeed, it was twelve o'clock before they reached the railroad track at a point between Polo and Cowgill.

"The question is, has the train passed?" said Jack.

"Ve ditn'd seen nodding ohf her yet," replied Fritz.

"Ay, but that ain't no sign as it didn't pass," growled Tim, as he took a chew of tobacco. "I recollect when I wuz in the navy how we started fer ther rendezvous o' a enemy's ship---"

"I won't listen!" exclaimed Jack, with a frown.

"Waal, I'll tell Fritz," said Tim, in nowise abashed. "Yer see it wuz sich a dark night we missed ther spot, which was a lagoon, on the coast o' Georgie---"

"Try ub!" roared Fritz.

"I'll be blowed if I will!"

"I don'd vant ter hear dot yarn."

"I don't keer if yer don't. Ter continer: But although we missed ther lagoon in ther gloom, an runned inter a leetle bay, our enemy did ther same. Thar we had him. Gee whiz, how we socked it ter him! He sailed aroun' and aroun' ther bay, an' we arter him. I manned ther long Tom, an' pickin' 'em out one by one, I gave it ter each o' ther crew---"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" cried Jack.

"Wot fer?"

"How could you see in the dark?"

"Why, every time I fired ther moon popped out, an' as soon as I stopped it hid itself agin," explained Tim, "Waal, sir, arter ther crew o' that ship surrendered, wot d'yer s'pose?"

"Ve don't vos tink noddings!" roared Fritz.

"But I wants yer ter, I'll tell yer. We diskivered as ther ship wot we wuz firin' at wazn't no enemies wessel at all. It wuz our own consort, an'---"

"Oh, you old liar! You positively asserted it was your enemy---"

"But I wuz mistooked. I---"

Bang!

A startling report rang out.

It came from beneath the stage.

The Terror stopped.

"By jingo, she's broken!" gasped Jack.

"How?" asked Tim, forgetting his yarn.

"It must be in the truck."

"Himmel! How ve go aheth now ter safe dot drain?"

Jack alighted.

He quickly examined the gear.

"It's one of the driving rods snapped in two!" he cried, finally.

"Kin ye fix it, my lad?"

"I don't know till I take it off. We are crippled."

He got a wrench and unfastened the bolts, took off the two pieces, and then saw that the rim of one of the wheels had picked up a long stone which flew around with it.

It jammed between the body of the stage and one of the spokes, and the sudden shock had caused the rod to snap.

Just as Jack examined it, he heard the distant tooting of a locomotive whistle, momentarily drawing nearer.

"Here comes the express now!" he exclaimed.

"Kin yer git her ready in time?"

"No. It will take an hour to fix this."

"*Donner und blitzen!* Dey holt her ub!"

"No doubt of it."

"We must do somethin', my lad."

"Arm yourselves, if you're anxious. Don your metal suits. We'll follow the train. She must be nearing the curve to whistle like that. Hurry up, and we'll leave the Terror here."

They all put on suits of aluminum mail and armed themselves.

Then they ran at full speed along the track in the direction from whence the whistle sounded.

The moon was then flooding the scene.

Far ahead the polished rails described a curve in a wide, deep cut, filled with trees and shrubbery.

In the middle of the north-bound track stood Jesse James waving a red lantern to an oncoming train, the headlight of which was blazing upon the bandit king with a silvery glow.

Jesse had a black mask on, and clutched a revolver in his hand.

None of the men were visible.

The train had slackened speed to round the curve, and as soon as the engineer saw the danger signal he stopped the cars.

"Hello!" he cried, "What's the matter?"

"Rail broken!" replied Jesse, approaching the cab.

"Here comes the conductor."

"I'll speak to him about it. Come down."

"Can't. It's against the rules for me to leave the caboose."

The conductor and several brakemen had alighted and now came running toward the outlaw to learn the news.

As they drew near Jesse dropped his lantern.

That was the signal for his men to emerge, and to the alarm and astonishment of the train crew, the gang of masked men rushed from the shrubbery toward them.

Jim Cummins and Wood Hite clambered into the cab.

There the plucky engineer and fireman had armed themselves with a monkey wrench and a crowbar.

They attacked the two bandits as they climbed into the cab, dealing them such terrible blows that they were knocked down.

Just as the engineer seized the throttle valve to start the cars, Dick Little and Hobbs Kerry rushed up, and aiming their revolvers at the driver and stoker, the former yelled:

"Throw up your hands!"

"All right!" gasped the engineer.

He knew he had to do it or get shot.

The fireman wanted to resist.

A word from the engineer sufficed to change his mind.

While Dick held them up Hobbs climbed into the cab and pitched the two men out, so they could not run away with the train.

A swarm of the thieves had approached the passenger coaches under the leadership of Frank, and dividing into several detachments, each party took a car.

The train only consisted of the locomotive, the express car, two day coaches and two sleepers.

As the bandits crowded into the doorways they began to fire into the cars to intimidate the passengers.

A tremendous clamor arose.

Women shrieked and fainted, men yelled for mercy, and a wild panic ensued that beggars description.

The bandits rushed in in the midst of the confusion, and flourishing their knives and pistols in the faces of the terrified passengers, they demanded their valuables.

Out came pocketbooks, watches, rings, studs, bracelets, lace pins, and scores of other things.

While this was going on, Jesse and several of the men had gone to the door of the express car.

It was guarded by an express messenger, and a trainman.

"Open that door!" yelled Jesse.

"Never!" came the determined reply from within. "Never for you!"

"If you don't we'll blow it open!"

"You can't do it!"

"We can't, hey?"

And crack--bang! went Jesse's revolver.

The ball tore a hole through the car.

It was echoed by a fusillade from within.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

One of the bullets hit Jack Keene, and made him yell with pain.

It infuriated the bandits to have the two men resist them in that summary fashion, and they let drive a volley.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! went the shots.

"There's but a slim show to hit them," said McMillan.

"I'll teach them a lesson!" said Jesse, savagely.

He got several sticks of dynamite, tied them in a bunch, and fastened them along the door sill.

Standing back, he aimed his revolver at it and fired.

Boom! thundered the explosive.

There was a lurid gleam, and the stout planks of the door were torn and shattered, and a yell of delight pealed from the bandits, for an opening had been made into the car.

The force of the explosion had almost hurled the express car from the tracks.

Jesse made a rush for the opening.

He looked like a demon now, for his temper was up.

"Charge!" he yelled.

After him rushed several of the men.

Before they could get into the car, three strange-looking apparitions came dashing down the track.

They were Jack, Tim and Fritz, in their metal suits.

Losing not an instant, they opened fire upon the bandits, their bullets flying noiselessly from the pistols, and bursting with terrific force when they struck.

A roar went up from the bandits.

"Jesse!" yelled one of the men.

The bandit king gazed at the three daring fellows in surprise.

Raising his pistol, he aimed and fired at Jack, there sounded a metallic click as the ball struck the aluminum suit, and then the inventor uttered a mocking laugh.

"Here's your bullet back, Jesse James!" he cried.

Then he fired a shot at the bandit.

CHAPTER IX.

A CLEVER RUSE.

The bullet from Jack's pneumatic pistol struck Jesse James, and a hoarse yell of pain escaped the bandit king.

He reeled back and would have fallen, had not Oll Shepard caught him in his arms.

"I'm wounded!" he gasped.

"Who are they?" hissed Shepard.

"Jack Wright. I recognize his voice."

"There's only three of them."

"But they are firing bomb-shells."

"We'll bring them down!"

He yelled to the gang, and over a score of rifles and pistols were aimed at Jack, the Dutchman, and the sailor.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! rattled the shots.

A hail of leaden pellets struck the trio.

But their suits shed the bullets as if they were rain drops, and they continued to pour a deadly fire into the outlaws.

Every time a bullet burst it either scattered and injured many or else it lodged in a solitary man and blew a big piece out of him.

It was impossible to withstand such fire.

The worst of it was their bullets failed to injure the three.

As man after man was getting wounded Jesse gasped:

"By heavens, we'll have to retreat!"

"This is awful, and only three of them too!" groaned Bill Chadwell.

"To horse!" roared Jesse.

He had recovered from the shock of the shot he got and the whole gang made a rush for the bushes firing back at Jack and his friends as they went.

By this time the train crew recovered from their panic, and those of the passengers who had weapons drew them and began firing out the windows.

The bandits broke into a run.

"That settles them!" cried Jack. "They see that they can't hurt us, while we stand an excellent chance of killing them."

"Chase 'em! They've got Timberlake yet," said Tim.

The outlaws' horses were concealed among the shrubbery, and they mounted and sped away through the railroad cut.

Jack and his friends ran after them.

The inventor now saw the sheriff.

One of the outlaws held him on a horse.

Jack aimed at the animal and fired a shot.

True to its mark sped the bullet, a wild neigh of agony escaped the animal, and it bounded high in the air and fell dead, the two riders being thrown to the ground.

The bandit was stunned.

But the sheriff, although pounded and bruised, escaped fatal injury and retained his senses.

"I've saved him!" said Jack.

"Bully fer you, my lad!"

"I vill catch dot outlaw!"

While Jack was cutting Timberlake's bonds and ungagging him, Tim and Fritz secured the bandit.

"Well," said the sheriff, when he was free, "this is luck."

"I see they got away from you at the hollow."

"Yes; I was too confident of beating them."

"What were they doing with you?"

"They already had my death sentence passed, and were going to put me out of the way as soon as they finished that train job. But you have baffled them nicely."

"Not only with you, but we stopped them getting into the express car. We arrived just in time."

"Where's the Terror?"

"Up the road, crippled."

"That's a pity!"

"Come back to the train till I see the amount of damage they've done," said Jack. "Are you hurt any?"

"Scratched and bruised a trifle."

Tim and Fritz went ahead of them, carrying their prisoner, and when they reached the cars they found two more of the bandits badly wounded in the train crew's hands.

All had recovered from the panic by this time.

The conductor now rushed up to Jack, followed by the train crew and passengers.

He gave the young inventor a hearty handshake, and cried:

"Let me thank you on behalf of all the people and myself for your gallant conduct, sir. If you had not come to our rescue, God only knows what would have become of us at the hands of the James Boys' gang."

"You exaggerate the case," quietly replied Jack.

"No, no, no! Gentlemen, three cheers for these noble fellows!"

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" shouted the passengers.

Some of them had been robbed.

But the majority escaped, owing to the timely arrival of Jack's party upon the scene.

Moreover, the contents of the express car had been kept out of the clutches of the bandits.

True, the explosion had slightly injured the two men who had been in the car, but their condition might have been worse had Jack not interfered.

All the bandits had vanished except the three who had been captured, and they were bound hand and foot, and put aboard the car.

The conductor took charge of them.

He intended to put them in the hands of the law.

As soon as the passengers were back in the coaches, and the engineer and stoker in the cab, every one gave Jack and his friends a parting cheer.

The train then moved ahead.

"We didn't do so blamed bad arter all," chuckled Tim.

"Did yer see me drop forty o' them pirates vi' one shot?"

"Forty?" grinned Fritz.

"Ay--that's wot I see," Tim answered, haughtily.

"Nein! Yer vos misdooken."

"How so?" growled the old sailor.

"It vos eight hundert. But dere only vos dirty in ther gang."

"Come!" interposed Jack. "Quit your fooling, and let us get back to the stage. She's so disabled that we can't chase the bandits with her now. The sooner she's repaired the quicker we'll be able to get upon their trail and hunt them down."

They strode back to where they left the Terror.

Both the parrot and monkey were yelling furiously inside, and did not cease their clamor until their owners went in and pacified them.

It required several hours to repair the driving rod, and when it was finished, although not as strong as it was before, it was very firm.

They could not do anything further that night, so they divided the watch and turned in.

After breakfast on the following morning, Jack mounted the steersman's seat, and sent the Terror rolling to the place where the bandits were last seen.

There he saw a large plain trail they had left.

"I'll follow their tracks," said he to Tim, who had taken a seat beside him. "It's an easy trail to follow, and if we have say sort of a chance, we are bound to run them down in a short time."

"I ain't so sure about that my lad."

"Why not?"

"Jesse James are mighty cunnin'."

"That's a fact. He may fool us yet,"

"Still thar ain't no harm in tryin'."

Jack sent the Terror flying off in pursuit of the bandits, and they ran out on the open plain.

It was a rolling, grassy country.

The trail led them on for a distance of about five miles when an old blasted oak tree was met.

Here the cunning of the James Boys was shown.

Evidently fearing pursuit, they had ordered the gang to scatter in every direction, each one going to a different point of the compass.

It was then utterly impossible to follow any particular one of the gang, and know which one it was.

Jack was rendered angry.

"See there how they've baffled us!" he cried with a frown, as he pointed down at the scattered trails.

"Gee whiz!" groaned Tim, "they've throwed us off ther course entirely now, Wot one'll we foller?"

"If you mean so that we can corral the James Boys, I cannot say--one trail is the same as another."

"Blast thar lubberly hides!"

"I've got a plan though."

"An wot's that?"

"To pursue any one at random."

"But mebbe it won't be ther one we wants."

"Any one will do. Whoever the man is, we can perhaps catch him and force him to confess where the rest are to meet. By that means we can find them again."

"Jist ther plan, by thunder!" cried Tim, pounding his good leg with his fist. "Keel haul me if you ain't got as long a figgerhead as Jesse James, cute though he be."

Jack told Fritz and the sheriff what occurred, and what he now intended to do.

They agreed with his plan.

In fact it was the only feasible thing to do.

Accordingly Jack selected the most likely trail.

He then sent the Terror flying off after it, and she sped along until the afternoon set in before they finally sighted the man they were after.

Then they saw that he was Frank James.

CHAPTER X.

FRANK JAMES' ESCAPE.

Frank James was mounted upon his horse Jim Malone, and had paused on the crest of a hill from whence he gazed back at the bottom traversed by the Terror.

He saw the stage, and realized at once that it had followed his particular trail to the exclusion of the rest of the band.

It was clear enough to him that he could not outstrip the Terror in a running race, and would therefore be obliged to retain his liberty by resorting to strategy.

What course he could follow would depend entirely upon circumstances, but he turned over fifty plans in his mind.

Jack was a league from the man when he recognized him, but he had a powerful field glass, which plainly showed him every feature of Frank James' face.

"The rascal sees us," he commented.

"Wot's he standin' thar for like a statoo?" asked Tim.

"Probably sizing up our intentions."

"Dot retskal vos a gone goose," said Fritz, decisively.

"Better wait till you get your paws on him before you feel so certain about it," dryly remarked the sheriff. "If you knew the James Boys as well as I do, you would realize that no slipperier men exist on the face of the earth. Just when you are surest you have them is the time you haven't got the scoundrels. Ha! There he goes!"

Frank had galloped away.

He went down the other side of the hill.

In a few moments he disappeared from view.

Jack increased the speed of the stage.

She ran ahead like a locomotive.

In less than ten minutes she reached the crest of the elevation where they had seen the bandit.

From this point a view was commanded of the country for many miles in various directions.

Jack soon saw the outlaw.

He had gone down the valley, and was furiously galloping toward the rocky, well wooded foothills on the other side of the depression, and Jack exclaimed:

"He is well aware of our weakest point."

"Vot veak point?" growled Fritz unwilling to admit such a thing.

"Our inability to run among rocks and close setting trees and bushes.

"It looks mighty like as if he wuz atyirin' ter git inter sich a spot."

"You an right, Tim. But he has lost a mile though."

Down the declivity shot the stage, and she swiftly reduced the distance that separated her from the fugitive.

As the flying horseman went up the hill on the other side of the valley, he glanced back over his shoulder and saw that the Terror had arrived within a mile.

Fast as Jim Malone was on a level stretch, he could not race up the steep grade of a hill with anything like the speed at which the Terror went.

In consequence, long before the bandit reached the plateau he was heading for, the engine was close behind him.

Jack sat outside steering.

He did not have on his armor.

Frank suddenly paused.

Wheeling his horse around he raised his rifle.

Crack--bang!

It was a good shot.

The bullet struck the stage within an inch of Jack's head.

Frank dared not remain to attempt it again as every second was precious now.

He therefore dashed away again.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! came three shots.

Tim, Fritz and the sheriff had fired.

Exploding around Frank the awful bullets tore up the ground, chipped the rocks, trees and bushes and stung the horse, but failed to injure the rider.

The bandit reached the shelter of the rocks and trees on the plateau before any of the bullets hit him.

He then disappeared.

Along thundered the electric stage.

She had a hard climb, but her dynamo and motor were very powerful, and carried her up to the level ground.

There she got on Frank's trail again.

The plateau was a picturesque place, as it was covered with flowers, tumbled rocks, vine-clad trees, and dense shrubbery.

A plain track through it was seen.

"We'll reach him in a few moments!" muttered Jack.

He cast his glance ahead, and as the ground gently sloped down from there, he saw the outlaw.

And he also saw a wide chasm.

It stretched straight across the horse's path.

Frank James was caught in a sort of natural trap, for he had gone plunging in between two steep rocky walls.

He could not turn to the left or right, and ahead of his sweating horse there yawned the wide deep chasm.

If he wished to escape he would have to clear the gulf, and as it was fully twenty-five feet wide, such a feat seemed to be entirely out of the question.

He glanced back again.

The Terror was swiftly coming along after him.

It rendered the fugitive desperate.

He headed his gallant steed straight for the chasm and plunged toward it a furious pace.

"By heavens, he is going to attempt to leap that split!" cried Jack, observing what the outlaw intended doing.

"He can't clear it, said Tim.

"Vell, he vos got der nerve ter dry!" Fritz exclaimed.

"He's bound to go down!" cried Timberlake, excitedly.

"If he does, he may perish!" said the inventor. "The man must be fearfully desperate to attempt the jump."

"Gief him a hall vunct."

"Hey, Frank James!" called Jack.

The man looked back, but did not answer.

He did not look in the least unnerved by the terrible ordeal.

Jack could not help admiring his courage.

He hailed him again from sheer pity.

"Halt there, you madman, you are committing suicide.

"You'll not nab me!" came back the defiant reply.

"Pause--quick! We'll spare you."

"Never! Good-bye! Now, Jim, up, boy, up!"

The gallant horse seemed to gather every muscle to a high tension when he reached the verge of the chasm.

He bounded high in the air.

For an instant the horse and rider were poised there.

It was a brave effort.

But it failed.

Three-fourths of the distance was covered.

Then down the animal plunged into the abyss.

As they sunk out of sight Jack whirled the wheel around and applied the air brake.

The Terror barely had time to swing around to avoid the edge of the chasm, and a cloud of dirt and dust flew up from beneath her wheels.

She quickly paused.

Jack alighted.

Going to the edge of the abyss he peered down.

It was not more than twenty feet deep.

Along the bottom flowed a wide, deep mountain stream.

Frank James and his horse had alighted in it without the slightest injury, and Jack saw the beast swim ashore and wade out.

They had been swept some distance down the stream by the fierce current, and had got out near a wide opening in the rocks on the side opposite Jack.

"Stop where you are!" shouted Jack.

The drenched fugitive looked at him and laughed ironically.

Then he dashed ahead, for Jack had drawn a pistol, and was aiming it at him.

Just as the horse leaped into the opening in the rocks, the young inventor fired at the bandit.

The ball cut the spot Frank had just evacuated, and striking against the rocks, exploded there.

Up jumped the young inventor, and he ran along until he arrived opposite the split rocks.

But he failed to see the fugitive as Frank had gone around a bend in the opening, and was then hidden from view.

As he could not do anything there, he hastened back to the Terror, sprang aboard, and started her back the way she came from, at the same time telling his friends what happened.

Jack made a wide detour, and passed the end of the gorge.

The stream there broadened and became so shallow that he easily drove the stage through it.

Reaching the other side, he began a search for Frank, but it finally proved to be in vain.

The shadows of twilight fell when he finally gave up the hunt and headed for a tiny hamlet near where he was.

It was a place which had built up about a general store, at which the stage coach, paused which carried passengers from the northern railroads who wished to make connections with the smaller branch lines dissecting that portion of the state.

At this place--called Jones' Corners--there was a big surprise in store for our friends.

It came about when Jack drove the Terror up to the store and quietly made inquiries of the owner as to whether he had seen a man answering to Frank James' description about that vicinity that day.

The man told him he had seen such an individual.

CHAPTER XI.

A SUSPECTED PLOT.

The store at which the electric stage paused was a small, dingy place, used as a grocery, a post-office, a saloon, and, in fact, half a dozen different kinds of business.

Its owner was a typical Missourian, in raw hide boots, his pants tucked in the legs, a flannel shirt upon his ample body, a felt hat on his long hair, and one of his bewhiskered cheeks distended with a huge quid of tobacco.

When he had eyed the electric machine, and commented upon it at some length, he finally said:

"Yas, neighbor, I reckon thar wuz sich erchap hyar ez you wuz quizzin me erbout. It's ergoin' on two hour ergo as he stuck his nose into this ere place, an' ast me all erbout ther runnin' er that stage-coach from hyer ter Independence."

"Asked you about the stage-coach, eh!" said Jack, his attention particularly attracted by this remark. "What did you tell the gentleman about it?"

"Why, I jist guv him ther time table all erlong its route, an', ses I, thar's ter be one erlong ter-night erbout ten er-clock from ther south'ard, which'll stop hyar ter water ther nags. It ginerally kerries from five ter ten people, yer see, an' I allers hev ter laugh when I hears how skeered they gits while er-crossin' ther ledge down yander on thet ere spur er ther hills."

"Dangerous place?"

"Wall, I reckon it be. Hev a chaw er terbacker?"

"No, I thank you. What time does the stage leave the next town?"

"Nine o'clock--it's jist one hour difference."

"Did the gentleman inquire particularly about this stage?"

"Certain. It's ther only one wot's due fer two days."

"Did he say anything about the ledge?"

"Sure he did, an' axed me werry pertickler all about it. I was erwondsrin' wot he was erquizzin' me about so much, but reckon it wuz only his pesky curiosity."

"Very likely," said Jack, in grim tones. "Then he rode off?"

"Yes, an' or mighty likely nag it wuz, too, which he called Jim."

"That's Jim Malone," thought Jack.

The information he received plainly showed him that Frank James intended to rob the people of the Independence stage at the mountain ledge.

In order to do this he would very likely summon some of the gang and be at the pass at nine o'clock that night.

The storekeeper had no idea of this.

Indeed, as he did not know who Frank James was, not a suspicion of the truth of the matter was likely to enter his mind, for the bandit led him to suppose he was anxious to travel to the northern main line on that vehicle.

"In which direction did that man go?" asked Jack, in conclusion.

"Ter ther west'ard. But why d'yer want all or this infermation?"

"Simply became he is one of the James Boys."

"Holy--jumpin'--jingo!" gasped the man.

"He intends to rob that stage!"

"Oh, thunder! wot er big fool I wuz ter post him!"

"We will block his game. You keep mum."

"Yes kin jist bet I will!"

Jack returned aboard the Terror, and told his friends all he had learned, and a consultation was held.

It was then seven o'clock.

They had but little time to waste,

"Our plan to save the people in that stage coach from robbery is a very simple one," said Jack. "We must run ahead and intercept them."

"Supposin' them 'ere lundsharks is on ther road now? They will sight us again along ther trail," said Tim.

"We can make a detour," replied Jack. "The only place they are apt to use to waylay the coach will be along the ledge mentioned by the storekeeper."

"Fer sure." assented Fritz, "Ach, I vish me dot ve vos fighdin' dem now! Let her gone, Shack!"

The inventor started the Terror off.

It had begun to rain.

There was every indication of a wet night.

Jack had informed himself about the roads.

Both he and Tim put on their rubber clothing and occupied the front seat, where they managed the wheel.

A detour was made, and several miles further along they struck into the high road again.

"If the stage-coach in any manner resembles the Terror," said the young inventor, as they ran along, "I think I know of a way in which we can substitute this vehicle for it and fool the bandits, should they waylay her."

"Decoy 'em, eh?"

"Yes. We can easily disguise this coach."

"By hitchin' ther stage horses onter it, yer kin do it."

"I'll make the venture anyway, if I can meet the stage."

"When I wuz aboard o' ther frigate Wabash, we once played that ere trick on a pirate," said Tim. "Yer see, it happened---"

But Fritz heard him.

And produced his accordeon.

Its horrible tones rang out.

Tim stopped and was just going to expostulate, when Jack put an end to the playing by saying:

"Stop that, Fritz!"

"But dot yarn---"

"The road agents may hear it."

That settled it; the music ceased.

It made Tim chuckle, and he said:

"Gosh blame yer fat mug, I'll spin ther yarn anyway now! As I wuz a-tellin' yer, we wuz arter a pirate, an' as a passin' ship captain told us he seen ther lubber a-hidin' in a bay, we made up our minds ter disguise ther frigate so's ter haul up inter gun range o' ther lubber. So we sot ter work, an' paintin' her white, we altered her rig, an' bore down on ther bay. In we went, but ther pirate had gone. Whar? Nobody knowed. We was disappointed. Whar wuz we ter look next? No one knowed. So we sailed away. Night fell. We hadn't gone far afore we sighted her ten leagues away ter ther---"

"Say! You can't see thirty miles at night."

"I meant to say three leagues---"

"Nor three leagues---"

"One league then, gosh blame it!"

"That's better."

"Waal, we sighted her b'arin' down on us."

"And then?" asked Jack, smilingly.

Why, we let her git right up ter us, thinkin' she had a easy wictim. Then we turned on her to fire, an' blow her ter pieces. Wot wuz our horror ter find as our powder got so wet we couldn't use it. Bein' as ther guns wuz

useless, wot did we do? Perpared ter board ther lubber. Up ter her we dashed. Over flew ther grapplin' irons.

"On her deck swarmed her crew. Down in her hold they chased ther pirates. But that wuz only a ruse on thar part. As soon's our crew went below, up came ther lubbers through ther hatch, an' fastened our marines down in ther hold. They wuz prisoners. I alone wuz lef aboard ther Wabash. Seein' 'em makin' a rush fer our deck I grabbed a ax an' cut ther grapplin's. We drifted apart afore they could board ther frigate. Seein' as all wuz lost onless I licked ther swabs, I manned ther guns an' gave 'em broadside ar ter broadside. I smashed thar ship ter pieces. She went down never ter rise again. Most o' her crew wuz killed. Them wot wuzn't swum on ther sea. Then I amused myself firin' shots at thar heads. I took 'em off as clean as a whistle every time I let 'em have it. In jest four minutes by ther clock they was all gone. Turnin' ter my messmates---"

"Confined in the pirate's hold, they all went to the bottom with the ship," said Jack, quietly.

"I--oh--ouch!"

"The powder was so wet you couldn't use it. But in spite of this you did some remarkably good shooting, didn't you, Tim?"

"Wha'--wha--what d'yer mean?" feebly stammered the old sailor.

"Just what you said," laughed Jack.

"I must a fergot about sayin' that."

"Very likely. Will you acknowledge now that I've got you?"

"Ay, ay. There's no help for it."

"In a big lie?"

"But, my lad---"

"Tell the truth once in your life!"

"Waal, I owns up," groaned Tim.

It was a severe hardship to do it.

But there was no help for him, he realized.

Jack burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

The sheriff and the Dutchman, inside the stage, had heard all that passed, and they fairly yelled over Tim's discomfiture.

"Nipped that time, Tim," laughed Timberlake.

"Shiminey Christmas, ditn'd he got it by der neck!" grinned Fritz.

"Tell as the rest of the yarn, Tim."

"Yah. Ve vos litsten," added Fritz.

"Awast yer lubbers!" growled the old fellow, sourly.

They might have chaffed him considerably more, but just then Jack interrupted them with the startled exclamation:

"Hark, boys!"

"Vos iss?" eagerly asked Fritz.

"Horses' hoofs coming!"

"Ay, ay, I hears 'em!" said Tim.

"There's a wagon, too," the sheriff added.

The sound was rapidly approaching along the road.

All listened intently, and soon distinguished the steady pounding of hoofs and the rumble of wheels.

A few moments later they caught view of two bright lamps on the vehicle, shining ahead, with a steady glow, through the falling rain drops.

"That looks like a stage," muttered Jack, "but we will know positively in a moment more."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CANYON.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Oh, Lor'! what's this?"

"Is that the Independence stage?"

"Yes. Don't shoot! I cave!"

"Ah! do not alarm yourselves; we are friends."

Jack turned on the search-light as he spoke and beheld four horses pulling an old fashioned yellow stage coach, on each side of which burned two lamps.

Upon the box sat an old jehu, Sandy Ellis by name, who had driven that vehicle for quarter of a century over that route.

He was a gray-whiskered old fellow, with a bony face and a long red nose, and his stage contained half a dozen people, who were excitedly discussing the stoppage and the meaning of that brilliant electric light.

"For the Lord's sake, boy, what's that you've got there--the sun?"

"Only an electric search-light," laughed Jack.

"But where's your team?"

"Don't need any for this electric stage."

"What's that--a sort of a trolley car?"

"Yes, without the overhead pole and wire."

"Thunderation! this beats everything! What do you want?"

"I wish to protect you from the James Boys."

"Say, now, is them varmints around?"

"Laying for this stage,"

"Wow!" gasped Sandy. "That's terrible, so it is!"

Jack gave all hands an account of what happened, and when he finished the stage passengers were in a cold sweat.

They wanted to turn right back.

But Jack wouldn't allow this.

"I ain't sure whether they're ahead or behind us," said he. "At any rate you can't turn back now."

"But they may kill us!" said a fat man in the stage.

"They're bound to rob as anyway," asserted a man with a valise filed with genuine diamond jewelry samples.

"That depends entirely upon all hands present," said Jack. "Are all of you armed?"

Every one but a woman in the stage assented, and Sandy pulled out a big navy revolver from his boot leg, and remarked:

"You can just gamble on it I am."

"Any of you afraid to fight, if it became necessary?"

"I'd rather not if I could avoid It," replied a thin fellow, with a hacking cough. "Fighting isn't my fort."

"Waal, I guess you'll pull a trigger if you saw a gang of masked bandits trying to bore a hole in your head."

"I fancy I would."

"That's settled then. Now you see my stage?"

"Yes, and a queer one she is!" commented Sandy.

"She is bullet proof. I propose that as she is safer than your ramshackle old wooden affair, all hands get inside of her, and let me carry you through."

"But what about my horses?" asked Sandy.

"Hitch them on to this vehicle. Throw those rubbers over my stage to hide her outline. You can also put your lamps on here and drive for us. That will draw the bandits from cover. My friends are all armed and ready to fire the moment they show their noses."

Every one but the lady liked the plan.

She, of course, was averse to fighting of any kind.

As there was no way out of their dilemma, and Jack's offer gave promise of protecting them from robbery and, perhaps, death, every-one got into the Terror.

The lamps and horses were transferred.

"You can leave the stage here," said Jack to Sandy.

"No one will molest it until you return for it to-morrow."

"Are you pretty sure about them there James Boys?"

"Decidedly, or I wouldn't have troubled myself to do this for you," replied Jack.

"Well, it would do no harm, even if we are disappointed about meeting them," said the old driver.

They had been obliged to tie the traces to the Terror, but there was no pull on them as Sandy had only to keep his horses trotting while Jack made the machine run itself.

Owing to the gloom of the night, the rubbers on the body of the Terror, the horses, lamps and driver any one would have imagined it was the regular old stage coach.

The people inside talked in low tones and every man aboard held his weapon ready for use.

Down pattered the rain drops with a monotonous sound, and the hoofs of the four horses splashed up the muddy water from the puddles in the road and beat on the hard ground with the regularity of clockwork.

They rattled along in this manner for quarter of an hour and ran from the regular road into a dark canyon.

Here the walls towered up hundreds of feet.

It was a very gloomy place.

"We must be pretty near the ledge road now, ain't we?" Jack asked.

"Yes; in five minutes this 'ere canyon will swing us out on it," replied Sandy. "That's where we're to look for them, ain't it?"

"Yes--if not sooner---"

"Hark! D'you hear that?"

Jack listened intently.

The wind was howling over the crags.

All the trees and bushes were loudly rustling.

But it was not this that attracted the driver's attention.

Jack quickly caught the sound of pattering hoofs coming toward the vehicle from both sides.

Then a stentorian voice roared out:

"Halt!"

"What--me!" shouted Sandy.

"Yes--you!" came the reply.

And at the same moment Jesse James, mounted on his wonderful coal black steed, Siroc, dashed up beside the stage.

He was followed by his entire band.

Although he and the rest were masked, Jack knew his voice at once, and shrank back to conceal his features in the collar of his rubber coat, which was turned up around his neck.

In a moment the whole gang was about the Terror.

Sandy reined in his horses.

Then he growled:

"What do you want?"

"Throw up your hands!"

"No, I won't! You're thieves!"

"Obey, or I'll blow your head off."

This order was accompanied by the click of a pistol, and it was poked over toward the old driver's face.

Sandy dropped the reins, and Jack stopped the Terror.

This was no sooner done when two of the bandits cut the traces, and delivering the horses a blow, sent them galloping away.

"Oh, Lor'! There goes my nags!" roared Sandy.

"Shut up, and hand over your valuables."

"Ain't got none!" roared the old driver.

"Give me some light, boys, and we'll go through the passengers."

The next moment a dozen dark lanterns in the hands of the horsemen flashed out upon the Terror.

They recognized her instantly.

"Duped!" yelled Jesse. "It's the electric stage!"

"Fire, boys!" shouted Jack.

A deadly volley was poured from within the Terror, and many a yell of pain from the outlaws plainly told how effective some of them had been.

They dashed their lanterns to the ground and galloped off.

But that did no good.

Jack turned on the search-light.

Its broad glare brightly lit up the canyon, and they saw the bandits galloping ahead of them.

"Give it to them again!" cried Jack.

The inmates of the Terror let drive a second volley.

Crack, bang!

Crack, bang!

Crack, bang!

Shot after shot pealed out.

Jesse James never was more furious.

He yelled at his men, and then screamed:

"Fire back! Obey, or I'll fire at you yourselves!"

"By thunder, this was a surprise!" groaned Frank.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! went the shots fired by the gang.

A storm of bullets flew back at the stage.

Poor old Sandy Ellis suffered death for his temerity.

A bullet struck him in the breast, and he uttered a groan and fell to the ground, never to rise again.

"They've killed Sandy!" cried Jack.

His words aroused the rage of the inmates of the Terror.

"B'ar down on ther pirates!" gasped Tim.

Jack sent the machine racing after the bandits.

There was one of the masked riders directly in front of the Terror, and the villain turned in his saddle, aimed a revolver point-blank at Jack, and was just upon the point of firing when the ram struck his horse.

It toppled the bandit from the animal's back, his pistol was discharged, the ball flew up in the air, and the horse was impaled and killed.

As the Terror pushed ahead, the two front wheels ran over the bandit's neck, almost putting an end to him.

Back recoiled the stage, the ram was withdrawn from the horse, and then she dashed ahead again in hot pursuit of the gang who all rode like fury now, to escape.

As they plunged ahead, the inmates of the stage kept up a pitiless fusillade of shots against the flying outlaws.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANDED COUNTRYMAN.

"We can't run any further!"

"Gee whiz, lad, then ther bandits'll escape!"

"I can't help that, Tim; there's something the matter."

The Terror had scarcely emerged from the canyon, when the lights suddenly went out, the machinery ceased to work, and the electric stage came to an abrupt pause.

All the bandits had been seen bunched far ahead, going down the slope at a breakneck pace.

When the light went out they vanished.

That was the last our friends saw of them that night, and every one began to bombard Jack with questions.

"What's the matter?"

"Can't you go ahead?"

"Do you want them to escape?"

"What are you stopping for?"

These and similar questions assailed the inventor.

He almost lost patience with them, as he cried:

The machinery for some reason has broken down.

"Vat vos pusted--dot triffin' rod!" asked Fritz.

"I don't know yet, but I'll find out."

"Here," said Timberlake, "take one of the stage coach lanterns."

Jack alighted with Fritz, and they made a critical examination of the machinery situated on the outside of the Terror.

But they failed to find the cause of the mishap there.

Then they went inside to look.

Nor was anything broken here.

Jack was intensely puzzled.

"What does this mean anyway?" he muttered. "I can't find a solitary thing the matter with her."

"Dot peat me!" replied Fritz, scratching his head.

"With electrical machinery, which is one of the simplest things in the world, one ought to see at a glance any derangement," said Jack, "But I can't understand where the trouble is now."

"Let's look ofer it agin," suggested the Dutchman.

It was done.

The second examination was as fruitless as the first, and they were left as much in the dark as they had been before. Half an hour was thus lost.

Some of the stage passengers in the meantime went back into the canyon with a spade and the other lamp.

They found Sandy Ellis' body.

He was dead.

They buried him.

When they returned Jack said:

"I wonder if the dynamo spring can be broken?"

"See," suggested Fritz.

Jack opened the box.

One glance was enough.

"Well, if we haven't been fools!" he exclaimed.

"Vos iss now?" asked the Dutchman.

"The spring has only run down and needs winding."

Every one burst out laughing now that the threatened gravity of the situation resolved itself into a comedy of error.

Jack wound up the spring.

Everyone got aboard and the lights blazed up under Jack's management, the machinery began to work, and the Terror ran ahead again without any trouble.

The delay had given the bandits a chance to escape.

Upon reaching the nearest settlement Jack left the people there whom he had rescued, and the Terror continued on her way.

On the following morning the rain ceased.

Breakfast was partaken of and then Jack said:

"Although we have created some mischief in the James Boys ranks, we have not yet done anything to bring the two ringleaders to justice. Nor have I gained a cent of the money stolen from the Wrightstown Bank."

"I have warned you what a slippery cuss Jesse is," said Timberlake, "Now you have seen some samples of it."

"He certainly is a pretty shrewd fellow."

"But whar is we ter look fer him!" asked Tim.

"He has no regular haunt," replied the sheriff.

"Den ve only by plind luck must go?"

"I'm afraid so, Fritz," assented Timberlake. "However, since he has started upon his raids again, he won't stop now until he makes a big haul. Then he is liable to divide with the gang, disband for a while, and seek safety in flight to some other section of the country until his funds are exhausted."

"Like most criminals, though," said Jack, "I see that he has the same hankering after the place where most of his villainy is practiced."

"All outlaws have a series of habits exactly like, as far as my experience has taught me," said the sheriff.

"When I wuz in ther navy," began Tim, "I once---"

Biff! came Fritz's fingers down on the back of his neck.

What he was going to say was choked off.

Then Fritz rushed him into the next room.

There he jammed the sailor and banged the door shut.

"Dot saddles him!" he chuckled.

As the door was locked they were spared the affliction of hearing another of Tim's awful yarns for the time being.

The Terror scoured the surrounding country for a week after that, but nothing was seen of the bandits.

It was then decided to run to Independence and try to get some information from the authorities there by means of which they could locate the gang.

According to this programme, the sheriff gave Tim the direction, and the old sailor steered the stage on her way.

It was then very late in the afternoon.

They followed a country road, and passing several wayfarers, the appearance of the Terror caused them the most intense astonishment.

A few miles along the road they caught sight of an old fellow in a wagon loaded with grain.

He looked like a farmer.

There was no horse hitched to the vehicle.

But the shafts were broken and to the stumps there yet clung the remains of a broken harness.

The old fellow was the picture of despair.

He sat on top of his load, a whip in his hand and a big, red bandana handkerchief in the other with which he was vigorously mopping his forehead.

Fritz was steering the Terror.

Observing the forlorn countryman he burst out laughing.

"Shiminey Christmas!" said he, "dot fellow vas look like as if he vas got left behind mit his horse!"

"What are you talking about?" Jack asked from inside.

"Dot wagon in der roat."

"Where?"

"Ahet."

Jack emerged.

He saw the wagon.

And he also noticed an old log house.

He stood embowered among some trees, rocks, and bushes some distance ahead on the left hand side of the road.

In a moment more the Terror reached the wagon, and halting beside it, the countryman glaring at it with a look of the most intense astonishment upon his face.

"For the lands sakes alive!" he gasped, "what's that thing?"

"A stage that runs by electric power," Jack replied.

"And what's the trouble with you, sir?"

"I've been having an awful time with Eliza."

"Eliza? Who is she?"

"My mule."

"Oh! It looks as if she had been cutting up tricks."

"You'd ought to have seen her; consarn her old hide--and you'd have pitied me. She's the blamedest stubborn

critter I ever seen. Once she gets her back up and quits, there's no use trying to go no farther. Look at the way she left me."

"Pretty sad sight."

"I should say so. She took a sudden notion to stop right here, I coaxed and cajoled her, but she wouldn't budge. Then my dander riz, I spit on my hands and hit her a whang on the tail, and she raised up her heels and kicked out like a battering ram."

"How unfortunate for you."

"It made my blood bile. I then thumped blazes out of her. The more I soaked her the wuss she kicked, until finally she kicked herself out of the harness and ran sway."

"And left you here with your load?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got far to go?"

"Only to yonder old log hut."

"That isn't far."

"No, not when you say it quick."

"I'll tow you over there with this machine."

"Will you? Oh, thank you! I was just going to ask you to do it!"

"Is that all?"

"Can you help me roll the wagon inside to protect the grain in case it rains before I can find Eliza again?"

"Certainly we will," laughed Jack.

They hitched a rope to the wagon, and the Terror hauled it over to the door of the old building.

As the Terror could not get the wagon through the door, Jack and his companions alighted; each one manned a wheel, and the farmer seized the shafts.

Ahead they rolled it toward the open door.

But scarcely had they got it started when a dozen men, with masks on their faces and pistols in their hands, rushed out of the building and surrounded the four friends.

"The James Boys!" gasped Jack, in startled tones.

CHAPTER XIV.

INTO THE QUICKSAND.

It was evident to Jack that he and his friends had been the victims of a very shrewd game.

The fact was, that the James Boys had a rendezvous in the log cabin, and having held up the farmer who owned the wagon, they had stolen his money, his mule, and his clothing.

Seeing the Terror coming, Jesse concocted the scheme to trap our friends, rigged one of the gang in the farmer's clothes, and the game was played according to the bandit king's orders.

It looked as if it was going to be a success, too.

None of the Terror's crew were armed.

And the outlaws had them covered with their weapons.

"Yield!" roared Jesse.

"We're tricked!" gasped Jack.

"Hands up, or die!"

"Don't fire! We submit!"

There was no alternative.

So the four raised their hands.

"Bind them!" ordered the outlaw chief.

His men carried out this order with alacrity.

In a few moments more all were rendered helpless.

A grim look of intense satisfaction swept over the dark bearded face of Jesse James as his four enemies lay upon the ground at his feet.

He intently regarded them a moment and then hissed:

"At last I've got you, Jack Wright!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" coolly asked the inventor.

"Put you out of my way as quick as possible."

"Very well; proceed. You have an excellent chance now."

"I've got your fate settled. And yours, too, Timberlake."

"If our positions were reversed," bitterly said the sheriff, "I would not lose a moment about blowing your brains out!"

"I have no doubt of that," Jesse answered, with a dark scowl. "And I'll follow your good advice. Prepare to die."

He drew his pistol from his belt and aimed it at Timberlake.

A tremor passed over the plucky fellow and he turned pale, for he knew he was face to face with death; but his courage did not forsake him and he quietly remarked:

"I'm ready to go. Fire!"

Before Jesse could do so. Frank sprang between him and his victim.

"Fool!" he hissed, warningly. "Do you want to throw your neck in the halter by doing this with all hands looking at you?"

"Get out of my way!" savagely replied Jesse.

Although Frank was the eldest, and was accustomed to obeying his more determined brother, he did not do so in this instance.

"If you don't stop," he exclaimed, in angry, excited tones, "I'll hit you."

A look of surprise mantled Jesse's face.

He was not accustomed to threats and disobedience from Frank.

It therefore gave him a most emphatic shock.

"Are you getting crazy?" he asked.

"No--but you must be. Think of what you are doing."

"The men have seen me bring down my man many a time."

"Very true. But that was in a fight. Did they ever see you commit a cool, deliberate murder?"

This version startled Jesse.

He returned the pistol to his belt.

"You are right, Frank," said he, reluctantly. "I'll have to swallow my rage and hang or shoot these prisoners in accordance with the law of civilized communities."

There was a bitter tinge of sarcasm in his tones as he said this, and turning abruptly to the men he said, brusquely:

"Carry them into the hut."

Timberlake felt relieved.

So did Jack and the rest.

If Frank had not interfered the sheriff would have been killed, for they saw a lurking demon in the glare of Jesse's eyes when he was menacing Timberlake.

He certainly, meant to carry out his mad intention.

The prisoners were carried into the hut.

They saw the floor littered with saddles and bridles, blankets, cooking utensils and other objects of use to the bandits.

As Jack leaned against the wall opposite the open door he saw the bandits go up to the electric stage and try to get in.

The doors were secured with spring locks.

As Jesse tried to open one he was startled to hear a gruff voice inside exclaim:

"Stand back there or I'll drop a lighted match into a powder keg!"

It was the parrot.

He had once heard that sentence uttered.

Now he used it at random, never knowing what it signified.

But it was one of the luckiest expressions he ever made, for it startled the bandits and they rushed away in alarm.

"There are more people in the stage!" exclaimed Jesse, who was deceived by Bismarck's voice, as he knew absolutely nothing about the existence of the bird.

"But you counted only four in the crew," said Jim Cummins.

"I know it. They may have picked up others though."

"That's so."

"Give them a shot."

There were five men with Jesse.

All had retreated from the stage.

They now opened fire upon it.

Bang--bang!

Crack--crack!

Bang--bang--bang!

No shots were returned.

This amazed them.

But they heard Bismarck yell:

"Go it, you chumps--go it."

"Whoever that is howling," growled Jesse, "has got a nerve! I suppose he won't do anything until we get around the stage. Then he'll try to blow us up."

"Don't go near the blamed thing then," said Wood Hite.

"There's nothing in it for us, but I'd like to blow the infernal thing to pieces, so it can't do us any more damage."

"Oh, we can do that as soon as we get more dynamite."

"That's so. The party who is inside will hang around here in hopes of rescuing their pals, and we'll get a chance later."

None of them dared go too near the stage.

Nor was it of any use to fire at the Terror.

Bullets made no impression upon it.

Jesse understood this very well.

He, therefore, retreated to the interior of the hut with his men.

Jack kept his eyes and ears wide open, and soon saw the gang follow a motion of Jesse, and group themselves in one corner of the hut, and hold a whispered, conversation.

The inventor did not hear a word they uttered.

But he saw by their actions that they were scheming some mischief against them, and the result was soon manifested.

Jesse left the crowd and approached the prisoners.

"We've settled your fate!" he announced abruptly.

"Indeed," replied Jack. "What new villainy is brewing?"

"That you will find out in a few minutes. You wounded me and I know you are authorized to hunt me down, break up the gang and put us in jail. Consequently I am going to have revenge. In quarter of an hour you will be dead and buried."

"I doubt it," quietly answered Jack. "And as for your debt of vengeance, let me recall to your mind that it was you who aroused the enmity between us. You began it by robbing or rather swindling the Wrightstown Bank out of \$5,000."

"Oh, yes," grinned the bandit, pulling a big roll of bills out of his pocket. "This is the money only a couple of hundred of it gone. That was quite a clever game."

"It did not hit me as hard as it might," said Jack. "The bank loses the money of course, but as I am the president of it, and a large stockholder, fully half the amount comes out of my pocket. I'll get that money away from you now."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"This way."

And up jumped Jack.

He had got Fritz to loosen his bonds with his teeth.

Once free from the wrist lashings, he liberated his ankles.

The bandit recoiled with a startled yell, and the rest arose.

Jack sprung forward, snatched the roll of bills from Jesse's hand, shoved it in his pocket and seized the outlaw.

The young inventor was a veritable Hercules in strength.

As the gang made a rush for him, he suddenly lifted Jesse James up in the air and hurled him at the crowd.

The bandit's body struck Bob Ford and Cole Younger, knocked them back against the crowd, and ere they all recovered from their astonishment, Jack sprang out the door and rushed to the stage.

Several pistol shots were fired after him, but as the outlaws were excited, they aimed poorly and missed their mark.

Reaching the Terror, Jack jumped aboard, and she sped away.

As soon as the outlaws recovered, and saw him escaping, Jesse yelled:

"Grab the rest, and hustle them out before they escape too!"

The gang pounced on Tim, Fritz and Timberlake.

Carrying them out of the hut by a back door, they passed through the woods until they came to a glen.

In the middle of it was a small, shallow lake, covering a bed of quicksand, and they paused upon the shore.

"Throw them in!" ordered Jesse.

His men complied.

As the prisoners were bound, they could not help themselves.

One after another they were tossed into the treacherous lake.

No sooner were their bodies upon the sand when they began to slowly sink into it.

The bandits gathered along the shore to watch their unlucky victims perish in the quicksand bed.

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUED FROM DEATH.

Having gained his freedom, Jack had raced away with the Terror in order to keep out of danger until he was prepared to defend himself.

He did not stop the stage until she was at a considerable distance from the rendezvous of the bandits.

Then he critically examined her.

She proved to be in first-class order.

Jack then went inside and put on a suit of armor.

Thrusting two pistols in his belt, he procured a small basket, and opening a box, he withdrew from it a dozen steel balls to each of which a small metal handle was attached.

These he put very carefully into the basket.

They were hand grenades.

Loaded with the same terrible explosive compound that he put in the bullets he used, they possessed ten times the power that ordinary dynamite shells have.

Armed with these awful missiles, he was ready to go back and single-handed engage in a fight with the whole gang.

Jack's courage and perseverance were of a high order.

He deposited the basket in a metal, bullet-proof box on the front platform, and seating himself, seized the wheel.

"I've got explosives enough here to blow the whole crew to fragments," he muttered. "And what is more, I'll do it too, in order to wrest my friends from their clutches!"

Back along the road rolled the Terror.

The moon now rose in the sky.

In a few minutes Jack neared the hut.

Stopping the electric stage within fifty yards of it, he picked up one of the bombs and shouted:

"Jesse James, come out here, or I'll blow that hut up!"

Receiving no reply, Jack hurled the grenade.

It struck an end of the hut.

A horrible glare of light flashed out.

It was followed by a report like thunder.

Half of the hut was blown to fragments, and the ground shook.

Jack saw at a glance that the hut was deserted.

He heard the distant voices of men among the trees, and realizing that the bandits had gone into the woods, he drove the stage along a road that wound among the trees.

In a few moments he neared the quicksand lake.

The bandits saw him coming, and aiming their rifles at the gallant young inventor they fired at him.

A storm of bullets struck Jack.

They did not pierce his armor, however.

He stooped over and picked up one of the grenades.

As soon as he arrived close enough to the outlaws, he hurled the bomb at them, and it landed in their midst.

The explosion was fearful.

Three of the villains were blown to pieces, several were knocked down, the rest were half deafened, and an uproar of hoarse yells of pain escaped those who were struck by the flying particles of metal from the exploded shell.

Seeing the Terror coming on toward them rapidly, the bandits who survived rushed away into the woods.

They were filled with horror and alarm.

Such weapons as Jack Wright wielded were beyond their powers of endurance, and they set him down for a fiend.

Once protected by the trees, they shot back at him.

Bang!

Crack!

Boom!

Whiz! came the shots.

Jack picked up another bomb, and let it fly.

It landed among the trees, and bursting there, spilt and tore them to pieces, and sent the outlaws flying again.

At this moment Jack was startled by a wild yell of:

"Help! Save me!"

He looked around to see where the sound came from, and beheld his three friends buried to their necks in the quicksand.

"Good heavens!" he gasped, as he realized what the outlaws had been doing to them.

"They've tried to murder the boys."

He saw that they were in a bed of quicksand.

Assured that he would not have any immediate trouble from the outlaws, Jack went into the stage and got a hatchet.

He then alighted.

His friends were twenty feet from the bank.

They laid pretty close together, but were out of his reach.

Rushing in among the shrubbery. Jack rapidly cut down a number of cedar trees, and swiftly carried them to the quicksand.

With these he built a rude bridge out to his friends.

Even the trees began to sink in the sand as he walked out on them, but he reached Tim, and seizing him by the arm, he exerted all his enormous strength, and succeeded in pulling him up.

Jack cut his bonds.

"Don't waste a moment," he gasped, "but go ashore and cut some more of the cedars to pile on these."

"Ay, ay," replied Tim, and he hastened away.

Timberlake was next nearest.

"Are you fastened?" Jack asked him.

"Yes; bound hand and foot."

"I'll get you up in a moment."

"Shack," groaned Fritz. "Hurry up."

His mouth was even with the water, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented himself swallowing it.

Tim came back and flung some cedars to Jack.

With these he built his bridge out further.

Giving the sheriff a pull that raised him a foot, Jack left him and made his way to Fritz.

He reached the Dutchman just in time to save him.

It almost pulled the fat fellow's joints apart when the inventor hauled him up, but once he was free of his bonds and upon the cedars he aided Jack to pull the sheriff up and set him free.

They all got their feet stuck in the sand as they fought and struggled to reach firm land, for the trees were now sunk but they finally managed to get ashore.

Here they found Tim bombarding the woods.

All the bandits had seen what was happening, and now opened fire upon them again.

The old sailor procured two bombs.

He let thus drive in the direction the shots came from, and they ripped the woods and blew up rocks and trees, and created the most terrific devastation.

That silenced the outlaws.

None of them were killed, but many were wounded, and they now lost no time at making their escape.

Jack and his companions hastened back aboard the Terror, and sent her flying back to the road.

There they waited for the appearance of some of the gang; but they waited in vain.

All had escaped in the other direction.

When assured of this, the four adventurers went inside to change their clothing, and rest themselves.

Jack's companions told him how they happened to be found sinking in the bed of quicksand.

"They meant to kill you!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, ay, lad! But you balked 'em!" chuckled Tim.

"And I've get most of the stolen money back," laughed Jack, as he held up the wad of bank notes he took from Jesse James.

"Donner und blitzen! Vot a surprised barty dot vos fer der pandits," roared Fritz. "Inshtid of Yesse Yames hookin' money from odder beoples, it must haf peen shtrange fer him ter haf money hooked from him alretty."

"Yes--a very novel experience for the thief," said the sheriff, dryly. "I congratulate you, Mr. Wright, for doing something to that villain that nobody else ever did. It is a most remarkable thing for Jesse James to be robbed."

"I reckerlect when I wuz in ther navy," said Tim, "I once had a experience like that. We went out ter hunt fer a fillibuster's ship when wot wuz our surprise ter have ther lubber tackle us. Gee whiz! wuzn't I mad! I ups an' loads one o'ther guns ter fire at him when he slipped aroun' asturn us. As we couldn't train no gun ter b'ar on him in that ther sitiuation wot should I do but git a coil o' rope, mount ther riggin' an' lasso his capstan, It wuz a mighty good throw too. Waal, sir, we heaved an' hauled on that ere rope, dragging ther lubber over to our ship until we got him alongside---"

"And none of them attempted to cut your lasso from their capstan?" asked Jack. "They must have wanted to get captured."

"It's werry funny," said Tim, "but none o' them seemed ter think o' doin' that. Waal, sir, as soon as we hauled 'em alongside we had a broadside ready ter pour inter that craft ter blow her ter pieces, an' ther gunners wuz at ther posts ready ter fire. But afore we could carry out this plan ther willians boarded us an' captured us an' our ship."

"It can't be possible?"

"But it wuz, my lad."

"How did you escape?"

"One night I got free an' rushed into the powder magazine with a lit pipe in my mouth, an' them arter me."

"If you were a prisoner where did you got the lit pipe?"

"Oh, I had it," replied Tim. "Ter continer, seein' my enemies all rushin' arter me, I took ther pipe an' yelled fer 'em ter go back or I'd drop ther burnin' baccy inter ther powder. They refused---"

"And you dropped the light into the powder?"

"No. Ther light had gone out," grinned Tim. "It skeered 'em so though, that when they recovered they bolted out, an' fearin' ter git blowed up, they all jumped overboard an' was drowned. I released my messmates, an' we took ther ship."

"Tim, is that a lie, or a fabrication?"

"A fabrication, o' course," indignantly and innocently answered the old salt. "D'yer s'pose Tim Topstay would tell a lie?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTURE OF WOOD HITE.

On the second day after the foregoing events occurred Fritz happened to glance into the water tank of the Terror and noticed that their supply of liquid was running low.

This was very unpleasant, as they were then nowhere near any spring or stream, and he walked into the front room where Jack sat talking to Timberlake, and said:

"Dere don't vos more as enough water to last bis to-night."

"That's too bad. Can't we get a supply near here?" said Jack.

"Not that I am aware of," answered the sheriff. "But, about three miles along the road there is a farm-house, and we can get all we want from the countryman's cistern."

"Suppose we go there and try," suggested Jack.

"Vell, I dell Dim," said the Dutchman.

He then spoke to the old sailor who was steering, and Tim sent the stage in the direction indicated.

In a short time they came in view of the farm-house.

This had scarcely been done when Tim caught sight of a man with his head swathed in bandages rush out of the house to the stable from whence he soon emerged on horseback.

He gave one glance back at the stage and then, plunging spurs into his steed's flanks, he dashed away.

Off he went across the rolling country at a furious pace, his peculiar action at once arresting Tim's attention.

The old sailor only had one eye, but it was a good one, for no sooner had he seen the fugitive's face when he recognized him as that mercenary member of the James Boys' gang called Wood Hite, and noted as a desperate ruffian.

"Gee whiz!" gasped Tim.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack.

"Thar goes Wood Hite!"

"Is that so?"

"Ay, an' his head is all bandaged!"

"He must have been wounded."

"Sartin, and he wuz in thar farm-house tryin' ter git well."

"He must have seen us coming and got scared out."

"Jist my opinion, Jack."

The young inventor came out on the front platform.

He gazed long and earnestly at the flying rider and then said:

"You have made no mistake--that's Hite."

"This ere ole eye o' mine are a regler telescope."

"Chase the villain, Tim!"

"You bet I will."

And pulling the dynamo lever over as far as it would go, the old sailor spun the wheel around, turning the stage from the high road, and sent her flying after the horseman.

"If he thinks we can't run on anything but hard ground," said Jack, grimly, "he will soon learn his error."

"That ere's a mighty good nag he's a-ridin'."

"Yes--all the James Boys' gang are well mounted."

"Ain't Hite ther lubber wots allers grubbin' fer money?"

"Yes, he, the most grasping one of the gang."

"D'yer reckon as thar's any more o' his messmates in ther farm-house?"

"No, I believe not. If there had been, they would have come out with him," replied Jack, as they flew past the old house.

"S'posen we runs him down?"

"I'll make him admit where the rest of the gang is."

"Ay, now, that's a blamed good plan."

The bandit had taken refuge in the house, as he had suffered a very bad wound, but having seen from one of the upper bed rooms that the stage was coming, he took alarm and fled as has been recorded.

By so doing, he greatly amazed the good people with whom he had been stopping, as they knew nothing of his real character in consequence of a lie he told them.

The man was wild with fear.

He spurred and lashed his horse furiously.

And he kept his lead with remarkable speed.

The Terror rattled and bumped over the rougher grass, but found it pretty good going anyway, as the open country of Missouri is generally fairly level.

Tim watched the contest with interest.

He could not help admiring the bandit's good riding.

But he also saw that the stage slowly but surely began to gain.

"Fer a short dash, that was prutty good!" he remarked.

"In a long race no animal on earth could run against us though," replied Jack smiling.

"See how we're overhaulin' ther lubber!"

"In a few minutes well reach him, Tim, and---"

Bang!

The fugitive fired back.

Zing! came the bullet.

It grazed Jack's head.

One inch nearer and it would have killed him!

"Hit yer?" asked Tim, in alarm.

"No, just missed," coolly replied the inventor.

"Gee! it hummed like a bumble bee!"

"Yes, it was a dangerous shot."

"Shall I heave him one, an' drop him?"

"No! I want to take him alive."

On they continued to go until at last the Terror was very close to the bandit.

"There is nothing can save you from capture now!" Jack shouted at him. "Surrender, you dog!"

"I'm blowed if I will!" roared Wood Hite.

He made one last supreme effort to forge ahead, but finding he could not do it, he leveled his revolver at Tim.

Jack had a pistol in hand.

He aimed, and fired it at Hite's weapon.

Simultaneous with the explosion of the bullet there came a wild howl from the bandit, and his pistol flew up in the air, ruined beyond repair.

"I'm struck!" he groaned.

"Will you quit?" demanded Jack.

"Don't drop me and I will."

"All right! Dismount!"

The fugitive pulled in the panting and sweating horse, and Tim stopped the electric stage.

Down to the ground jumped the bandit, and raising his hands above his head he roared:

"Mind you now--no games, partner."

"What was you doing in that farm house?"

"Getting over the wounds you gave me."

"Where are the rest of the gang?"

"I don't know."

"Come, come! No lies!"

"I tell you I don't know."

"We'll see," said Jack, pulling out his watch and drawing a bead on the man. "It is now three minutes to four. At precisely four o'clock, unless you tell us where I can find the James Boys, I'll fire!"

"Say! don't do that!" cried the bandit, in alarm.

"That's the law."

"But I really don't---"

"One minute."

"For Heaven's sake, let up!"

"You are wasting valuable time, Wood Hite."

"If I knew I'd tell you quick enough."

"Your time on earth is growing mighty short."

"Won't anything else satisfy you?"

"No. Two minutes!"

"Good Lord A'mighty!"

"Speak--quick!"

"It's as much as my life is worth!"

"Very well. Ten seconds more!"

The outlaw was as pale as death.

The bandages around his head added to the look of unutterable woe upon his haggard face.

He trembled like an aspen, and burst into a cold, clammy perspiration, and was breathing heavily.

Jack glanced up from his watch.

"Time's up!" he exclaimed.

"Mercy!"

"Speak, or perish!"

"Yes! yes! I'll tell."

"Well?"

"To-morrow at two o'clock they'll be in Husking Valley."

"What for?"

"To raid the town."

"Any particular place?"

"Yes--the bank."

"Good! We'll be there. What's the plan?"

"Jess did not mention it."

"That will do."

"Can I go now?"

"Oh, no; we want you."

"What for?"

"To go with us. I want to see if you lied. Come here!"

Wood Hite slouched up to the stage, cast a regretful glance at his horse which was browsing the grass, and Tim tied his hands behind his back.

He was then hustled into the stage, and Jack had a short conversation with Timberlake about the place where the alleged raid was to occur.

The town was a place remote from where they then were, and the sheriff directed Tim in which direction to go.

Meeting with another farm house, they procured some water and then sped away.

That night they arrived in the vicinity of Husking Valley, and Jack entered the town to reconnoiter the ground.

CHAPTER XVII.

RAIDING THE BANK.

On the following afternoon there were a great many strangers in the town of Husking Valley, but the residents did not consider this very strange, as the County Fair was being held there.

These fairs were matters of great importance to the natives.

They always brought large crowds of strangers from the surrounding country, and created a rather lively scene.

Jack was lurking near the bank with Timberlake, and Tim and Fritz were aboard the Terror in easy hailing distance, yet completely concealed from view.

The inventor and his companion stood in a doorway close to the bank, intently watching the thronging natives.

"Here's another example of the James Boys' cunning," said Jack, finally breaking the silence.

"To what do you allude?" moodily asked the sheriff.

"Why, Jesse James timing his arrival here during the fair."

"In what way was that a sharp move?"

"To do this job he would need the gang, wouldn't he?"

"I think he would not venture it without them."

"And he must have known the fair was going on."

"Probably he did."

"Wouldn't the entrance of his gang to the town excite a great deal of comment and attention if there were no fair?"

"Naturally, as crowds in country towns are unusual."

"Well, I figure it that he knew the fair was in progress here, that he knew the crowd would cloak his entrance of his gang, and they would therefore excite no suspicion."

"That seems to be pretty likely."

"Would you know all the men if you saw them?"

"I believe so--at any rate, I would recognize the old members. He occasionally recruits new men. We have wiped out some of the newer element. I noticed that although some of the old bandits were wounded during our engagement with them, the ones who fell were mostly new men.

"That's the reason they fell perhaps. The older birds had experience enough to keep out of harm's way."

"Well, if any of them happen to go into that bank, you can rest assured that I'll recognize them."

"It's half-past two now, but they haven't materialized yet."

"Maybe Wood Hite was lying to save his life."

"No--I think not. His tones had a truthful ring."

Jack glanced across the street at the bank.

It was a small brick building, with two iron-barred windows and a door flush with the street, through which he could see the entire interior.

There were half a dozen clerks busy inside behind a long desk, before which there was a wire netting that rose almost to the ceiling.

The first window nearest the door was that of the cashier, the next was that of the paying-teller, and the next the receiving-teller, after which followed the book-keepers and discount clerk.

All were busy at their various occupations, as it had been a rush day, in consequence of the large crowd.

Jack had seen every man, woman and child, who had gone in or come out since midday, and he had scanned every one who had passed by without detecting a bandit.

Yet his patience did not give out.

"Do you suppose our prisoner knows what method Jesse James will employ in his attempted raid?" he asked.

"No. He never tells his plans to the men, as a rule, until a very short time before they are carried out. Jesse James is very cautious and suspicious. He knows that the hand of every honest man is turned against him. He is even on the alert for danger. He is quick witted, deep, dark and cunning, and he wouldn't trust his own brother out of his sight. That probably accounts for the wonderful success he has always had at carrying out his daring plans, and escaping the consequence."

"The fellow is certainly a marvel in some ways."

"He inspires his men with fear of him. I have particularly noticed this of the Ford Boys. They seem to think that every time he looks at them he suspects them of treachery, and they seem to think that every time he draws a gun he is going to kill them. Most of the rest have the same feeling about Jesse. They all fear him, yet he has a strange marked influence over them. It seems to inspire the gang with a certain trust, respect, and blind obedience to his commands."

"Hello! what's that? See there?"

"What?" asked Timberlake in startled tones.

Jack pointed down the street.

A great cloud of dust was rising there.

People were scattering right and left, and as it drew nearer, Jack distinguished a huge coal black horse bestrode by a man who rode him furiously.

"What is it, Timberlake--a madman?"

"It looks like a horse running away."

"The man rides it as if he were part of the animal."

"Heavens, what speed! See--here he comes!"

Like wildfire the rider came thundering along.

In a few moments he was in plain sight.

"Some drunken countryman on the rampage!" muttered Jack.

"That fellow will kill somebody yet."

"When he goes by let us stroll over to the bank, and quietly warn the clerks of Jesse James' plot to put them on their guard. Then they will be ready for him."

"It's too late to do that now."

"Why so?"

"Because that rider is Jesse himself!"

Jack shot a keen glance at the man, and a startled cry escaped him, for the horse was certainly the famous Siroc and the rider the king of the bandits!

"What's his purpose, Timberlake?" gasped Jack.

"Perhaps he is pursued. See--he clutches two revolvers, and the wild villain is holding the bridle rein with his teeth.

"He's heading for the bank!"

"Come on!"

They rushed from their covert.

Jesse's quick eyes detected them instantly.

Raising a whistle to his lips, he blew a shrill blast.

It was his usual signal to the gang and they understood it, and mounted upon their horses, came galloping out of the by streets and other places where they had been concealed.

The whole armed crowd headed for the bank.

They thus cut off Jack and the sheriff.

To everybody's surprise, the moment Siroc arrived opposite the door of the bank, Jesse turned him and sent him galloping right into the building.

Pausing before the paying teller's window, Jesse thrust his two pistols through, causing the man to yell and

recoil.

"Hand me every bundle of bills in that draw before you!" roared the bandit. "Quick, or I'll fire!"

"No--no--no!" gasped the startled man.

"I'll make you!"

And--bang! went his pistol.

The bullet grazed the clerk's head.

"I'm killed!" he screamed.

"No, you ain't, but you will be if you don't obey."

"For God's sake, don't fire again!"

"Will you give me that money?"

The cruel, wicked eyes were now turned upon the man in a manner that made him writhe.

He saw that his doom was sealed unless he complied without wasting any more time about it.

So out came the money.

There were stacks of it--hundreds of dollars.

The bandit kept the paying teller covered with one hand, and with the other transferred the money to his saddle bag.

"Now, go!" he shouted.

Then he began to blaze away.

All the clerks dodged under the desk to escape the flying bullets.

Having emptied one of his pistols, and intimidated them, the bandit king spoke to his steed.

Siroc turned and went thundering out to the street.

There an exciting scene was going on.

The gang, to cover Jesse's movements, had begun to fire their pistols right and left, and the people in the streets and houses and stores hastily made themselves scarce.

As soon as Jesse emerged, they closed in around him, dug spurs in their animals, and went clattering away.

Jack and Timberlake had been baffled.

They witnessed the daring robbery.

Seeing that it was impossible to get through the lines of the bandits to stop it, Jack signaled his friends.

No response came back.

Fearing trouble for the Terror they rushed away.

She was where they had left her, but Tim and Fritz had alighted, gone away and were only just then returning.

"What's up?" panted Jack.

"Wood Hite escaped! We've been chasin' him!" Tim replied.

"Too bad! But never mind---"

"Vot's all dot shootin'?"

"The James Boys--they've beaten us!"

"Whar is they?"

"Running away! Get aboard--arm yourselves!"

"Goin' arter 'em, lad?"

"Yes; don't lose a minute!"

All hands hastily got aboard the stage.

Jack mounted the seat and sent her rushing out.

As soon as she reached the street Jack sent her flying in pursuit of the fugitives.

The bandits soon saw her chasing them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DEAD MAN'S GULCH.

The sun was gleaming down brightly as the cavalcade of bandits went thundering out of Husking Valley chased by the electric stage.

A cloud of dust was kicked up by the horses' hoofs which almost obscured the riders from view.

Jack steered the machine with the greatest precision, and Fritz came through the forward door and joined him.

"How did Wood Hite get free to escape?" asked the inventor.

"Ach, he didn't get free, His hants vos died behint his beck yet," replied Fritz. "Me and Dim vos sittin' oud here, vaitin' tet hear yer sicknal. Puddy soon ve hear somepody behint dot stages, und see Vood Hite had got oud der beck door. He vas runnin' away. Ve runt afder him. But vhen ve got down der streed, ve don'd see noddin' ohf him. He ditsappeared."

"Couldn't you find him?"

"Nein. Ve ditn'd couldt seen where he vented."

"I'm sorry, for I wished to put him behind the bars!"

"Nefer mindt," said Fritz. "Ve mebbe caught more ohf dem."

"I hope so. Anyway, we are pretty close to them now."

"So dey gotted der money from der pank?"

"Jesse rode into the building on horseback and looted it single-handed."

"Dot son-ohf-a-sea-hooks vos got blenty spunks alretty!"

"Too much for the safety of the public. I'd sooner arrest him individually than his whole gang put together."

"Dot vould preak dem up!"

"That's just my impression."

In a few moments the town was left behind and the horse-men galloped out into the open country over a rocky tract.

There the horses had an advantage over the Terror, as they could pick their way over the rough ground.

A fearful jolting and rattling of the stage ensued, and Jack was forced to slacken speed.

That gave the fugitives an advantage.

They quickly gained a long lead, for Jack had to zigzag the Terror in and out among the stones.

She kept falling farther and still further behind.

Some distance beyond the rocky place Jack caught view of a prairie covered with brush and long dry grass.

It renewed his hope, and he remarked confidentially:

"Once we reach that place we'll soon catch up to them."

"I don't tink so," answered Fritz, who was watching the bandits.

"Why don't you?"

"See vot dey vos doin'!"

A chill of dismay passed over the inventor, for he now saw the bandits setting fire to the long grass.

The wind was blowing toward the Terror.

That kept the fire burning in her direction, while the bandits galloped away from it, setting fire to it as they proceeded.

In a short space of time there was a roaring wall of flame and smoke opposed to the Terror.

In order to prevent Jack from coming in on a flank, the outlaws, spread out like a fan, and kept dropping lighted matches into the combustible grass.

It did not take long to thus create such a wide barrier that the Terror could not hope to get around it in time to overtake the miscreants.

Jack stopped her short.

Clouds of spark-laden smoke were being swept into their faces by the wind, and an intense heat was generated.

"Fritz, we are thwarted."

"Donner vetter! Dey cover deir redreat vell!"

"We can't remain here; those flames will roast us."

"Make a large circle vunct."

"That's the only way," said Jack, starting the Terror.

She now ran off at an angle, and the flames swept to the rocky section and burned out.

There was not enough grass there to keep tha fire going, but behind the first avalanche of flame came another.

It was, therefore, impossible to chase the bandits further.

The fire rendered the air stifling.

Timberlake and Tim were disgusted at this turn of affairs, for both had been confidant of capturing the outlaws.

"If it hadn't ben for ther escape of Wood Hite," growled the old sailor, "we'd aheerd yer signal in ther town, an' reached yer wi' ther Terror afore them lubbers got away."

"Regrets are useless now, Tim."

"O' course. But it allers makes a feller mad ter think he didn't do sich an' sich a thing at ther time he wuz doin' anything wot don't pan out jist as he'd like it ter."

"Perhaps we can head them off yet."

"If thar's a livin' show, Jack'll get it, When I wuz in ther navy we was once asallin' up ther Red Sea, when an Arabian dhow collided with us, an' busted a hole in ther side o' ther Wabash below ther water line; then ther willain coolly sailed away without ever excusin' himself.

"We could astood ther damage, but his indifference about ther injury he done ter us riled us all up. Seein' as he didn't care a blame, our skipper sent ther friggte aflyin' arter him. Waal, sir, ther cuss cracked on sail an' fled. Arter him we tacked, detarmined ter punish ther swab fer his imperdence. It wuz a long stern chase wot lasted ten hours. But we finally overhauled him---"

"Why didn't your frigate sink if she had a hole stove into her below the water liner."

Tim gave a slight start.

He had entirely overlooked this point.

Pondering a moment, he took a chew of tobacco, and replied:

"I guess ther hole wuzn't smashed all ther way through."

"Don't you know whether it was or not?"

"No; how could I go below ter look at sich a time?"

"You ought to know best."

"Waal, let it pass an' I'll go on."

"No, you won't go on."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I won't stay here and listen to you."

"Say, sheriff d'yer mean ter insinuate as I'm a liar?"

"Oh, no. I'm too frank to insinuate what I know to be a fact, I say it right out, openly and plainly," laughed Timberlake.

Tim eyed him with a mystified look.

He did not know whether to accept this reply as a direct insult or to take it as a belief in his veracity.

"Wot d'yer mean?" he asked.

"Simply this--you are the most outrageous old liar I ever came in contact with!" replied Timberlake.

"Oh!" cried Tim, in horror. "Listen ter him! You wait till I finish this ere yarn, an' see if I'm tellin' ther truth."

"I'm afraid I won't live long enough to wait until you finish that story," dryly answered the sheriff. "It would be too long a wait on my part, and---"

But Fritz interrupted him just there by shouting:

"Dere dey go--dere dey go!"

Timberlake opened the front door.

"Who--the bandits?" he asked eagerly.

"Yah."

"Where are they?"

"Dey go among dem rocks."

The stage had by this time run around the fire.

The James Boys must have curved their course toward the very direction to which the Terror was running, for Fritz had suddenly caught view of them.

They were heading for the rocks at the base of a rugged range of hills directly ahead of the electric stage.

Jack noticed a number of gorges, gulches and canyons splitting the towering hills and cliffs ahead, and observed that the bandits were heading for one of them.

He pointed this out to his companions.

"They don't see us yet!" he exclaimed, "but they will the moment they glance back this way!"

"I think I know where they are going," said Timberlake.

"Where?" asked Jack.

"Into Dead Man's Gulch."

"What would bring them there?"

"A huge cave, where the James Boys sometimes retreat."

"Can we reach it with this stage?"

"Yes. But once they get in they could hold us at bay."

"We will see about that when we run them to cover!"

In single file the bandits rode into the dark gulch, and when it had swallowed up the last one Jack pulled over the lever and sent the Terror ahead at full speed.

She made rapid headway to the gulch and soon reached it.

"Where is the cave situated?" asked Jack.

"Opposite that big boulder, on the left hand side," the sheriff replied. "You'd better put on your armor."

"I shall," Jack replied, as he stopped the Terror, "and you all had better arm yourselves, and prepare for trouble."

Their preparation, were hastily made.

As soon as everything was in readiness Jack alone went outside and assumed control of the wheel.

His friends ranged themselves at the windows.

All were well armed and ready for any danger.

In the course of a few minutes the Terror ran up to the big boulder and paused there.

Jack saw a mass of creeping vines that grew up the side of the wall, covering a dark aperture.

This was probably the cavern entrance.

He had scarcely noticed it when there sounded the sharp spiteful crack of a rifle behind the vines.

Ping! came a bullet.

It struck Jack squarely over the heart.

His breast plate flattened it and it fell harmless.

"A sentry's shot!" he muttered. "The villains know we are here now and the siege will soon begin."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BANDIT'S LAST SHOT.

"Timberlake, I think I can run the Terror into that cave."

"Look out you don't get her jammed in the entrance."

"Oh, I can clear the rocks on each side easily enough."

"Go ahead then."

Jack let the stage advance slowly.

A volley of rifle shots poured out of the cavern entrance.

The bullets did no harm, however, and the Terror continued on.

Reaching the opening she glided in, the hubs of her wheels grazing the rocks on each side, so close did she run.

Another volley met her.

It was lucky Jack had on his armor.

Had he not been so protected he might have perished.

Shot after shot struck him, and bullet after bullet hit the stage.

On she advanced unhesitatingly, though into a short gloomy passage, and then Jack turned on the search-light.

The dazzling glare gushed into an enormous cavern in which, the James Boys had ridden upon their horses.

At the sides there were ledges and galleries, above the roof was domed, and from the main cave numerous passages branched off in various directions.

Near one of these passages stood Siroc with Jesse James astride of his back, the bandit clutching a rifle.

The rest of the men were grouped behind him.

"Hulloa!" he shouted at Jack.

"Jesse James, I demand your surrender!" cried the inventor.

"Why should I?" demanded the bandit.

"Because you can't get away from here alive."

"That's all you know about it. There are plenty exits."

"Will you give in?"

"I want to compromise."

"That I'll never do!"

"I've got a great inducement---"

"You can make none to me."

"Come here, and you'll see."

A suspicion of treachery flashed over Jack's mind.

He turned to his companions, and said in low tones:

"We want him dead or alive. Fire at him!"

Before Jack's friends could obey, a grating sound was heard above the Terror, and the inventor glanced upward.

A cry of alarm escaped his lips.

Several of the bandits had gone up on the gallery above the Terror, and were pushing over a huge rock that rested there.

Just as Jack looked up it fell.

The rock must have weighed a ton.

It came down directly toward the roof of the Terror.

Jack gave the starting lever a sudden jerk, and the stage suddenly darted ahead.

She was too late to escape injury, though.

With a sickening crush the rock struck the rear end of the roof, crushing it like an egg shell, and going down on the platform, it carried it and the steps away.

A howl of joy escaped the James Boys.

They thought the terror was destroyed.

It was lucky Jack's friends were in the front room.

Although the machine was badly damaged, she was not crippled so she could not work.

The machinery had escaped injury, as Jack had caused her to run ahead just in the nick of time.

"Give it to them, boys!" panted Jack.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The three shots struck the men in the gallery.

Not one of the villains knew what hit them.

"Again!" roared Jack.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

This time the shots were directed at the riders, and that set up a wild chorus of yells and plunged away.

It was clear enough to Jack that the bandit king had schemed to lure him over closer beneath the gallery so that the men up there would be sure to land the rock on the stage.

A rattling volley came back from the bandits' rifles.

Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The firing continued without cessation for several minutes, but when the Terror made a rush for the outlaws, it ceased.

Every one of them drove their horses into the passages, and were instantly swallowed up by the gloom.

Jack cut out the current and put on the brakes.

"They're gone. That settles it. We can't follow them into those narrow passages!" he exclaimed. "Let's destroy this place and go out!"

He procured several of the hand grenades, to which binding screws were attached, planted them in niches in the walls, joined them in series by copper wires, and from the two end ones ran two lead wires to the dynamo.

Jack ran the stage out into the gulch.

There he turned a current of electricity into the wires, the bombs were burst, and the cave was blown up.

It was completely wrecked.

The roof fell in, the walls caved in, the passages were choked up with debris, and it was rendered utterly useless as a place of resort again for the outlaws.

Jack sent the stage dashing through the gulch.

It emerged into a valley through which ran a stream which wound in and out among the hills.

Instead of finding the bandits there though, Jack was chagrined to see that the passages they followed had led them up into the hills.

He saw some of the villains speeding away on their horses for the other side of the range.

It was not possible to follow them up there amid the tangled shrubbery and tumbled rocks with the stage.

"The only course to pursue," Jack commented, "is to go around the base of the hills and try to reach them that way."

"It's a mighty long course, my lad," said Tim.

"That's so; but there is no alternative."

"Where yer tink dey go now, Dimperlake?" asked Fritz.

"Out of the State, as fast as possible," the sheriff answered.

"Vhy yer tink me dot?"

"Because they've made a rich haul from the Husking Valley Bank, and we have sickened them with this section of the country. They are not used to such rough treatment."

"The James Boys won't leave Missouri until after I land them in prison," resolutely said Jack, "I've come here to do it and I won't be baffled. You know I've got the money they stole from the Wrightstown Bank. Now I'm going to get the governor's reward, or know the reason why."

"If you think you can do it, I'm with you heart and soul," replied the sheriff. "My chief ambition as to break up that gang, and get the nippers on those dare devil brothers."

"To leave the State what place would they go to first?"

"Well, as near as I can judge, the nearest railroad center to this place is Macon City."

"Direct me how to get there."

The sheriff complied.

Jack had to steer the stage around the hills.

She finally reached the table-land on the other side, and a survey was made with telescopes.

In the far distance a horseman was seen.

He looked not much bigger than a fly on the distant horizon, and Jack at once jumped at the conclusion that he might be one of the outlaw gang.

He, therefore, pursued the man.

As he drew near Macon City they were close enough to recognize him as Jesse James mounted on Siroc.

Not one of the rest of the band were in sight for the simple reason that they had scattered and gone in different

directions to reach the city singly and in pairs at intervals so as not to excite the suspicion of the inhabitants.

Jesse had seen the stage long before.

He was riding like the wind.

His fine horse seemed to realize the threatening danger and was straining every muscle to outstrip the Terror.

It was in vain.

Nearer and nearer drew the stage.

For a moment Jack was tempted to drive the ram into the gallant horse and thus end the race.

But when he saw what a magnificent beast it was and realized how nobly it was striving to bear its master out of the reach of his foes the inventor relented.

He did not have the cruelty of heart to kill it.

All he wanted was the rider.

So he shouted:

"Halt!"

"Only when I'm dead!" yelled Jesse.

"Then I'll shoot you."

"Two can play at that game!"

As the stage rolled up to the horse, Jack and the bandit were aiming their pistols at each other.

For a moment a deathly silence ensued.

Crack--bang!

The two reports sounded as one.

Jack was unhurt.

But Jesse James flung up his hands and toppled headlong to the ground, with blood gushing from a wound upon his head, and his face looking like that of a corpse.

Siroc galloped on, and the Terror paused.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

The moment the bandit king fell from the saddle, Jack sprang to the ground and rushed over to him.

Planting his foot on the breast of the fallen man and raising his pistol in the air, Jack shouted:

"Victory!"

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" cheered his friends.

In a moment they were beside the young inventor.

"Did you kill him?" asked Timberlake.

"No it's only a scalp wound," Jack answered.

"Let me handcuff him."

"Your surmise was correct about the gang heading for Macon City."

"I know what their general habits are."

The sheriff handcuffed the bandit king.

He was utterly unconscious from the shot.

Fritz and Tim were so delighted they shook hands fervently, let off several emphatic expletives and fairly danced.

"Gee whiz, he's captured at last!" roared the sailor.

"Shiminey Christmas, Dim, who oxbected dot alretty?"

"An' ther rest o' his crew must be in harbor in that town."

"Fer sure. Ve vhas bound ter foundt 'em mit der railroat depot."

"Carry the prisoner aboard the Terror, boys," said Jack.

Tim and Fritz did this.

Siroc ran on to the town and vanished.

When Jack realized this a grave look crossed his face.

"I'm sorry the horse escaped!" he exclaimed, regretfully.

"Why so?" asked Timberlake, with some show of surprise. "You could not do anything with that animal. There are very few people in the world who can ride him unless Jesse puts the man on the beast's back and let's it know he desires it."

"That ain't the point," said Jack, "I'm afraid the rest of the gang will see it run riderless into the town and know that Jesse has got into trouble. They may take warning and fly before we can get our hands upon them."

"Very true; let's hasten after it then."

They boarded the stage.

The shadows of twilight were falling.

Fritz and Tim took care of the wheel, and Jack and the sheriff went into the dining-room where Jesse laid on the floor.

He had by this time fully recovered and realized what happened, and a dark scowl mantled his brow as he gazed up at Jack.

"Come to crow over me?" he asked in surly tones.

"Yes," replied Jack. "I made up my mind when I came here that I'd get you, and I've done it."

"There isn't a jail in the State can hold me."

"Timberlake will answer for that."

"Where's Siroc?"

"Ran away."

"Good!"

"Oh, I didn't want him."

"I don't refer to that."

"What then do you mean?"

"All the money I got out of the Husking Valley Bank is in the saddle bag, and he will run straight to the gang, his empty saddle will warn them to fly, and they'll get the money."

"Confound it!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

It was a derisive, mocking laugh.

Jesse was delighted because the inventor had not gained all.

On went the stage.

She ran into the city at dusk.

Jesse was put in jail, and Jack and his friends left the stage under guard, and hurried to the railroad depot.

Fortune seemed to favor them.

The first person they saw standing on the platform waiting for the train, was Frank James.

Jack lightly stepped up behind him.

Grasping both of his arms, he exclaimed:

"Frank James, you are my prisoner!"

A startled cry burst from the outlaw's lips, and he made an effort to tear himself free and reach his pistols.

But the iron grip of the young inventor was not to be shaken off so easily, and the wiry bandit found himself as helpless as an infant in the hands of Jack.

Then he craned his neck around to see who had him.

A roar of rage escaped his lips when he satisfied his curiosity.

"Jack Wright!" he gasped.

"Yes, We've got Jesse, too."

"What! Jess caught!"

"Little over an hour ago."

"May the demon roast you!"

"Don't rave! it won't do any good."

"Oh. Lord! Here's Timberlake, too!"

"Yes. He waits to take you away."

"Let go, or I'll--"

He fiercely struggled again, but it was useless.

Timberlake smiled grimly as he disarmed the outlaw.

He carried a veritable arsenal.

A crowd gathered around.

As soon as they realized that the prisoner was one of the James Boys, the interest in him was aroused at once.

Timberlake snapped a pair of fetters on his own and Frank's wrists, and led him away to the jail.

An alarm had been sent out to the police to look for the rest of the gang.

As Siroc and the men had mysteriously vanished, it was fair to presume that they had found the horse, got the

money, took the hint, and left for parts unknown.

Anyway none of them were found.

Jack's mission was accomplished.

The governor was notified of what he had done, and the reward was sent to him at once.

Jack was well satisfied, and Timberlake more so.

If the newspapers had not at once published an account of the arrest, more of the gang might have been taken.

As it was all escaped arrest.

When the evidence of the four was taken, the young inventor had his wonderful electric stage repaired for the journey home as he had nothing further to keep him in Missouri, now that he had dispersed the James Boys gang.

They needed the rest they got after that.

Before Timberlake left them to go to Kansas City, he said:

"I am grateful for all you've done, boys, and will never forget your gallant conduct. You have accomplished what we have for a long time been striving to do."

"Oh, Lor'," said Tim, disdainfully. "That ain't nothin' ter wot I once did when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash."

"Whoop!" roared Fritz, interrupting him.

"Stow yer gab!"

"Vos a yarn comin'?"

"That's none o' yer business, As I was assayin---"

But he got no farther.

Fritz grabbed his accordeon and began to play.

Tim paused with a look of pain and horror on his face.

"Haul to, thar!" he bellowed.

"I can't. I vos vound up ter 'blay dwendy-four hours," grinned Fritz, grinding away furiously.

"Gee whiz! Yer'll set me looney."

"Noddings vould blease me besser."

"Are yer goin' ter stop?"

"Nien!"

"Then yer a dead Dutchman!"

And so saying Tim chased him into the store-room of the Terror, where the parrot and monkey were roosting, and a moment afterwards the four became tangled up in a struggle that shook the stage like an earthquake.

It did not last long.

When Tim, Fritz, Whiskers and Bismarck emerged from the room, they looked as if they had been passed through a threshing machine, but they were on terms of good fellowship.

Shortly afterwards, Sheriff Timberlake shook hand, with the three friends and departed.

Jack then made preparations to return home.

As soon as the Terror was ready, they left Macon City and started across the country at a rapid pace.

Nothing of importance occurred during the trip, and in due time they reached Wrightstown.

Here they were gladly welcomed.

The machine was then taken apart and packed away as they had no further use for it, the parrot and monkey were transferred to Jack's house and Jack refunded the money to the Wrightstown bank much to everybody's surprise.

It was not long after this that Jack received news that the James Boys had escaped from prison, reorganized the old gang and were devastating the State.

But he did not care to go after them again.

Indeed, he ultimately learned that such a course would have been useless, as Jesse James was finally shot dead by one of the Ford Boys.

Jack had a more peaceful pursuit in view at home.

During his absence he had thought of another new invention, and began to plan it out.

It was a most marvelous contrivance, and in the end he made a success of it, and, when he used it, the machine led him into the most thrilling situations.

For want of space here we have prepared a sequel to this story which will follow in this publication.

It is a most interesting account of Jack, Tim and Fritz, and as we will soon be in their company once more, let us conclude this narrative.

[THE END.]

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