

THE
MOLLY MAGUIRES

AND

THE DETECTIVES.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

AN EXTRAORDINARY PROPOSITION.

EARLY in the month of October, 1873, I was in Philadelphia, and one day received a note from Mr. F. B. Gowen, President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Company and the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, saying that he desired to see me at his place of business. I immediately responded to the invitation, accompanied by Superintendent Franklin, and met the gentleman in his private apartment, in the Company's elegant building on Fourth Street.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Pinkerton," said the President of the two great Pennsylvania corporations, after we had exchanged greetings, "upon business of importance."

I made known my willingness to hear what it was.

"The coal regions are infested by a most desperate class of men, banded together for the worst purposes—called, by some, the Buckshots, by others the Mollie Maguires—and they are making sad havoc with the country. It is a secret organization, has its meetings in hidden and out-of-the-way

places, and its members, I have been convinced ever since my residence in Pottsville and my connection with the criminal courts as District Attorney in the county of Schuylkill, are guilty of a majority of all the murders and other deeds of outrage which, for many years, have been committed in the neighborhood. I wish you to investigate this mysterious order, find out its interior workings, expose its evil transactions, and see if the just laws of the State cannot again be made effective in bringing criminals to justice. At present, whenever an assassination is consummated, and, as a consequence, a trial is instituted, a convenient *alibi* steps forward and secures for the prisoner his freedom. Municipal laws are thus incapable of execution; sheriffs of counties are powerless, and the usual run of detectives are of as little value as the open, uniformed police of the different cities. All of these have been tested, and all have failed. Now, if you cannot disperse the murderous crew, or give us grounds upon which to base prosecutions, then I shall believe that it never will be effected."

I considered the proposition for a moment, turning over in my mind the magnitude of the labor to be performed.

"Let me think of it a little," I answered; "and, in the meantime, tell me more about the Mollie Maguires."

"As far as we can learn, the society is of foreign birth, a noxious weed which has been transplanted from its native soil—that of Ireland—to the United States, some time within the last twenty years. It lived and prospered in the old country considerably earlier. Its supporters there were known as Ribbonmen, the White Boys, and sometimes as Mollie Maguires, but their modes of procedure were the same as now pursued in the coal regions. Men were then, as they are at this time, killed—sometimes in broad daylight, sometimes at night, and invariably by strangers—persons at least unknown to chance spectators, or to the parties violently put out of the way. Suspected

individuals would be apprehended, but in the end nobody could be found able to identify the criminals. It was only after a protracted struggle in Ireland that the proper evidence could be elicited to convict the tools doing the bloody behests of the society. I suppose it will not be easy to do this in Pennsylvania. The same minds, the same combinations, are to be encountered here. The Mollies rule our people with a rod of iron. They do this and make no sign. The voice of the fraternity is unheard, but the work is performed. Even the political sentiments of the commonwealth are moulded by them, and in their particular field they elect or defeat whomsoever they may please. They control, in a measure, the finances of the State. Their chiefs direct affairs this way, and that way, without hinderance. Men without an iota of moral principle, they dictate the principles of otherwise honorable parties. In its ultimate results this complexion of affairs in Pennsylvania touches, to a considerable degree, the interests of the citizens of the whole country. Wherever anthracite is employed is also felt the vise-like grip of this midnight, dark-lantern, murderous-minded fraternity. Wherever in the United States iron is wrought, from Maine to Georgia, from ocean to ocean—wherever hard coal is used for fuel, there the Mollie Maguire leaves his slimy trail and wields with deadly effect his two powerful levers: secrecy—combination. Men having their capital locked up in the coal-beds are as obedient puppets in his hands. They have for some time felt that they were fast losing sway over that which by right should be their own to command. They think, with some show of reason, their money would have profited them as much had it been thrown to the fishes in the sea, or devoted to the devouring flames. Others, wishing to engage in mining operations, and who are possessed of the capital and experience necessary, are driven away. They cannot intrust their hard-earned property to a venture which will be at the beck and call of a fierce

and sanguinary rabble and its heedless and reckless directors. They wisely turn aside and seek other and less hazardous uses for their talents and their means. The entire population of this State feel the shock, and it is in due season communicated to the most distant parts in which anthracite is used and ores reduced or smelted."

I had heard of many assassinations by these Mollie Maguires, and also about those performed by the Ku-Klux and similar political combinations in the Southern States. It had always seemed to me that it was a sacred duty which Pennsylvania owed to herself, to her own citizens, and to the country at large, to clear her garments of the taint resting upon them and bring to punishment the persons who, for so many years, habitually outraged decency, spilt human blood without stint, and converted the richest section of one of the most wealthy and refined of all the sisterhood of States into a very golgotha—a locality from which law-abiding men and women might soon be forced to flee, as from the threatened cities of the plain, or from a spot stricken with plague and pestilence.

"I will enter upon the business, but it will require time, sharp work, and plenty of both!"

"Yes! We duly appreciate this," responded Mr. Gowen. "What we want, and everybody wants, is to get within this apparently impenetrable ring; turn to the light the hidden side of this dark and cruel body, to probe to its core this festering sore upon the body politic, which is rapidly gnawing into the vitals and sapping the life of the community. Crime must be punishable in the mountains of Pennsylvania, as it is in the agricultural counties, and in all well-regulated countries. We want to work our mines in peace, to run our passenger and freight trains without fear of the sudden loss of life and property through the malicious acts of the Mollie Maguires; we want people to sleep unthreatened, unmolested, in their beds, undisturbed by horrid dreams of midnight

prowlers and cowardly assassins ; we want the laboring-men, of whatever creeds or nationalities, protected in their right to work to secure sustenance for their wives and little ones, unawed by outside influences. We want the miner to go forth cheerfully to the slope, or the shaft, for labor in the breast or in the gangway, wherever it may seem to him for the best, void of the fear in his heart when he parts from his wife at the cottage-gate in the morning, that it may be their last farewell on earth, and by evening his bullet-riddled corpse may be taken back to his home the only evidence that he has encountered the murderer—the agent of those who would compel him to refuse all employment unless the regulations of the order were complied with. The State cannot attain these things ; she has repeatedly tried, and tried in vain. You can do it. I have seen you tested on other occasions and in other matters, and know your ability to conduct the business ; we are willing to supply everything within our power to make your task a success.”

“I believe that it can be accomplished, but I am also aware that it is a stupendous undertaking. I accept the responsibility, however, with its accompanying consequences, which I perceive will prove no small burden to bear. I also see that I shall encounter no little difficulty in detailing from the many able and trustworthy men in my force one perfectly qualified for this very unusual charge. And an error in the outset would bring irreparable disaster before the end could be reached. It is no ordinary man that I need in this matter. He must be an Irishman, and a Catholic, as only this class of persons can find admission to the Mollie Maguires. My detective should become, to all intents and purposes, one of the order, and continue so while he remains in the case before us. He should be hardy, tough, and capable of laboring, in season and out of season, to accomplish, unknown to those about him, a single absorbing object. In the meanwhile, I shall have to exact from you a pledge

that, whoever I may dispatch upon this errand, he shall not, through you, become known to any person as a detective. This is highly necessary to be strictly attended to. If possible, you should shut your eyes to the fact that I have an employé of my Agency working in the mining country. If you can do so consistently, it might as well be given out to everybody interested that the idea of investigating the Molliés through the means of detectives, if ever thought of, has been abandoned as a hopeless job, and that the present status of affairs in the mines is totally incapable of being changed. Take the further precaution that my name, and those of my superintendents and employés, do not appear upon any of your books. Keep my reports in your own custody, away from all prying eyes. I would also ask, if my agents are engaged for one week, for one month, or for years, that these requests still be complied with; and further, whatever may be the result of the examination, no person in my employ—unless the circumstances are greatly changed and I demand it—shall ever be required to appear and give testimony upon the witness stand.”

“To all of this I give willing consent. I see how necessary it is. As I said before, we will do anything in our power, and within the bounds of reason, to aid you and protect your detectives.”

I then agreed that the operation should begin as soon as I might make the proper arrangements, and, after some further conversation, principally upon the purely financial portion of the engagement, took my leave.

Immediately after leaving Mr. Gowen's office I telegraphed for Mr. Bangs, General Superintendent. He arrived from New York early the ensuing day, and a consultation was held in my private parlor, over the business offices of the Agency, at No. 45 South Third Street, Mr. Bangs, Mr. Franklin and myself forming the parties to the council. The details of the case were discussed at length and a general plan of

operations decided upon, after which I started for my return trip westward.

It was the ending of a delightfully cool and pleasant Indian summer day, and as I was being rapidly whirled through the most beautiful portion of New Jersey, my face toward the open window, inhaling the invigorating atmosphere, and enjoying a view of the fast-fading, swift-passing panorama of plain and valley, village and stream, I continually dwelt upon the service in which I had recently enlisted. Forgetting the sunset, the agreeable evening, and every immediate surrounding, my mind was absorbed in contemplating the subject then nearest my heart. Mentally I brought in review the different devoted attachés of the Agency, who, through nativity and early training, were eligible to the place to be filled. All were trustworthy, as far as that went ; all were courageous, faithful and efficient in positions and under circumstances ordinarily calling for the exercise of these qualities. But the man now wanted was to meet peculiar dangers. He must be perfectly qualified in every respect, or he would not do. It was no discredit to my corps of detectives, that I quickly dismissed many of them as inadequate for the duty. It was not their fault. Had I one man who would go against his life-long habits, early impressions, education, and his inherited as well as acquired prejudices? Was there one who held sufficiently broad and deeply-grounded notions of the real duty of a true Irishman to his country and his fellow-countrymen to intrust with this great mission? I believed that I had, but which one was it in the number thus, in my mind, competing for the honor? He must be able to distinguish the real from the ideal moral obligation, and pierce the veil separating a supposed from an actual state of affairs. He must have the gift of seeing that the misguided people of the mining districts who had joined this order were unquestionably working evil, and only evil, to Ireland, Irishmen, and the church, in lieu of doing their

native land and their kindred at home and in America a service.

While Bishop Wood, of Philadelphia, had early placed his seal of condemnation upon the Mollie Maguires in the coal regions, and the clergy had followed, almost to a man, in bringing the individual members of the clan before them and their congregations, and heaped dread maledictions upon their heads, calling the persons by name in public, and even cut them from the church until such time as they should renounce their membership, still I knew many good Catholics, and honest men at heart, were remaining in the organization, and that, in some more peaceable sections of the State, the priesthood, if not tacitly countenancing the society said little against it. To their credit be it stated, however, they were unanimous in their abhorrence of the violent acts of the Mollie Maguires in Schuylkill, Carbon, Columbia, and Luzerne counties. I had to find a man who, once inside this, as I supposed, oath-bound brotherhood, would yet remain true to me; who could make almost a new man of himself, take his life in his hands, and enter upon a work which was apparently against those bound to him by close ties of nationality, if not of blood and kindred; and for months, perhaps for years, place himself in antagonism with and rebellion against the dictates of his church—the church which from his earliest breath he had been taught to revere. He would perforce obtain a reputation for evil conduct, from which it was doubtful that he could ever entirely extricate himself. Would the common run of men think such a position at all tenable? Would they consent to ostensibly degrade themselves that others might be saved? My man must become, really and truly, a Mollie of the hardest character, attend their meetings, and possibly be charged with direct participation in certain of their crimes. He must face the priest, and endure the bad opinion of his countrymen even until the end. For an indefinite period

he was to be as one dead and buried in the grave—dead to his family and friends—sinking his individuality—and be published abroad as the companion and associate of assassins, murderers, incendiaries, thieves, and gamblers. In no other way could I hope to secure admission to the inner circle of this labyrinth of iniquity. By no other plan could the clan be exposed and its volume of crime clasped forever. Another thing : The Mollie Maguires were working in opposition to the Welsh, English, and German miners. Their hatred of the English, especially, they had imbibed with their mothers' milk. I was, if possible, to destroy the Mollie Maguires. Therefore, my operatives must be the instruments of that destruction. Then how difficult for any Irishman to enter upon the warfare? If he had the ability to see far enough, however, it would be understood that the leaders of the obnoxious society were simply apostates—men disloyal to the land of their birth—engaged in an unholy effort, and one which, successful or not, reflected discredit upon all of their countrymen. Beholding and understanding this, the detective would not be working merely to right the wrongs of this man or that man, but to wipe off a dark blot which had fallen upon the escutcheon of Ireland, and which clouded the fair fame of every Irishman in America. Then he would meet the cry, in the mines and elsewhere, of "persecution for opinion's sake," and the danger of "a conflict between capital on the one side and labor on the other." Would he be shrewd enough to detect the untruthfulness of one and the insincerity of the other? Surely here was a task for me, in the very outset, the fellow of which I had not encountered since the war of the rebellion.