

The Young Trail Hunters eBook

The Young Trail Hunters

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Contents

The Young Trail Hunters eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Page 1.....	6
Page 2.....	8
Page 3.....	10
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	14
Page 6.....	16
Page 7.....	18
Page 8.....	20
Page 9.....	22
Page 10.....	24
Page 11.....	26
Page 12.....	28
Page 13.....	30
Page 14.....	32
Page 15.....	34
Page 16.....	36
Page 17.....	38
Page 18.....	40
Page 19.....	42
Page 20.....	44
Page 21.....	46
Page 22.....	48
Page 23.....	50

Page 24.....	52
Page 25.....	54
Page 26.....	56
Page 27.....	58
Page 28.....	60
Page 29.....	62
Page 30.....	64
Page 31.....	66
Page 32.....	68
Page 33.....	70
Page 34.....	72
Page 35.....	74
Page 36.....	76
Page 37.....	77
Page 38.....	79
Page 39.....	81
Page 40.....	83
Page 41.....	85
Page 42.....	87
Page 43.....	89
Page 44.....	91
Page 45.....	93
Page 46.....	95
Page 47.....	97
Page 48.....	99
Page 49.....	101

Page 50.....	103
Page 51.....	105
Page 52.....	107
Page 53.....	109
Page 54.....	111
Page 55.....	113
Page 56.....	115
Page 57.....	117
Page 58.....	119
Page 59.....	121
Page 60.....	123
Page 61.....	125
Page 62.....	127
Page 63.....	129
Page 64.....	131
Page 65.....	133
Page 66.....	135
Page 67.....	137
Page 68.....	139
Page 69.....	141
Page 70.....	143
Page 71.....	145
Page 72.....	147
Page 73.....	149
Page 74.....	151
Page 75.....	153

Page 76.....	155
Page 77.....	157
Page 78.....	159
Page 79.....	161
Page 80.....	163
Page 81.....	165
Page 82.....	167
Page 83.....	169
Page 84.....	171
Page 85.....	173
Page 86.....	175
Page 87.....	177
Page 88.....	179
Page 89.....	181
Page 90.....	183
Page 91.....	185
Page 92.....	187
Page 93.....	189
Page 94.....	191
Page 95.....	193
Page 96.....	195
Page 97.....	197
Page 98.....	199



Page 1

CHAPTER I.

"Boys, the mustangs will be up from the range this morning. Which of you want to go down to the corral with me?"

"I do! I do!" exclaimed both in the same breath.

"I spoke first," cried Hal.

"No, you didn't; I spoke first myself," retorted Ned.

"I say you didn't," rejoined Hal.

Seeing that the dispute was likely to become a serious one, I interrupted it by saying,—

"Well, boys, I'll settle the matter at once by taking you both with me. In this way there'll be no chance for a quarrel."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" exclaimed Ned. "We can both go; ain't that nice?"

"But I spoke first, though," declared Hal. "Never mind which spoke first. If either of you want to go with me, you must come now."

We immediately started towards the corral; but, before reaching it, I saw the herd coming over the plain towards us, their heads high in air, as though sniffing the morning breeze, their necks proudly arched, and long manes and tails gracefully flowing to the wind, as they pranced and gambolled along the high swell of land that marked the gentle descent to the valley where we stood.

As soon as the boys discovered them, they went into raptures, exclaiming,—

"Oh, what a big drove of horses! Whose are they? Are they all yours? Can't I have one to ride? What are you going to do with them?" and a hundred other questions, asked more rapidly than I could possibly find opportunity to answer.

As the mustangs came nearer, and the boys began to distinguish more clearly their elegant forms and beautiful color, they became greatly excited, declaring loudly, that, if they could only have one of them to ride, they should be perfectly happy.

I found great difficulty in so far repressing them, that they would not frighten the herd which was now close to the enclosure; but finally succeeded in keeping them quiet, by promising that each should have one for his own.

When the last of the gang had passed into the corral and the gate was shut, the boys mounted the wall, eager to select their ponies. This was soon done: Hal choosing a beautiful black, and Ned deciding upon a spirited blood-bay mare.

[Illustration: In Camp.]

Calling Manuel, the Mexican herder, I gave the requisite order, and he entered the corral, lasso in hand. He stood for a moment, waiting his opportunity, and then, swinging the rope gracefully over his head, the noose dropped upon the neck of the black.

The instant she felt it touch, she lowered her head, in an endeavor to throw it off; but Manuel anticipated the movement, and gently tightened it; when, with a snort of defiance, she settled back on her haunches, as though inviting him to a trial of strength.

After many and repeated failures, by the exercise of great patience and skill, Manuel succeeded in separating her from the remainder of the herd, and leading her into another and smaller enclosure.

Page 2

And then commenced the contest with the bay. The herd had by this time become very sensitive, and it was with great difficulty that Manuel managed to cast his noose over the mare's head; and, even when this had been accomplished, she seemed disposed to make him all the trouble possible; but, after a long time, he obtained the mastery, and led her out to share the fate of her black companion.

"Now, boys, you've got the ponies, what are you going to do with them?" asked I.

"Do with 'em? Why, ride 'em, of course," answered Hal.

"I'd like to see some one ride mine, before I back her," remarked Ned.

"And so you shall," said I. "Come, Manuel, let's see you ride the bay."

First obtaining one end of the lasso, which still encircled her neck, he made a turn around a stout post, which enabled him to bring her head so perfectly under his control, that, with comparative ease, he made a loop with his lasso around her lower jaw; then, leading her into the open plain, he vaulted lightly upon her back.

The moment she felt his weight she uttered a scream of rage, and raised herself upright upon her hind legs, standing so admirably poised that Manuel was only able to retain his seat by clinging with both arms around her neck. Unable to rid herself of her burden in this manner, she planted her fore feet firmly on the earth, and elevated her hind legs high in the air with great rapidity and fury, forcing the rider to turn quickly upon her back and clasp his arms tightly around the barrel of her body, bracing his toes against the point of her fore shoulders, and thus rendering futile all her frantic efforts to unseat him.

Apparently convinced that neither of these methods would relieve her, she stood still for a moment, as if to gather strength for a last, grand, final effort for her freedom; then, bounding like a deer, she dashed furiously over the plain.

Away she sped, Manuel still upon her back, now disappearing for a moment in some ravine, to again come in sight, galloping madly over the swell of the plain, swerving neither to the right nor the left, but once more disappearing, to finally become lost in the distance.

"I'm glad I ain't on her," said Ned. "Will she ever come back? If she does, I don't want to ride her. Didn't she just fly, though? Do you believe I shall ever be able to manage her?"

"I think perhaps after Manuel gets through with her, you'll find it easier than you imagine," was my answer.

"I'd like to ride as well as Manuel," remarked Hal. "I wonder if all Mexicans ride as nicely as he does."

“Many do; and there are thousands of Americans in Texas who ride equally well, if they do not surpass him in horsemanship.”

“Then I mean to learn how to do it,” rejoined Hal; “and I won’t be satisfied until I do.”

“You may as well commence now, on your black, Hal. She’s waiting and ready for you,” remarked Ned.

Page 3

"Thank you! but I believe I'll wait and see how the bay comes out. Come, let's go and see the beauty," said Hal; and the two started for the corral, to discuss the probable relative speed of the captives.

A couple of hours later, we saw Manuel returning; the mare trotting as quietly as though she had been accustomed to the saddle for years. Riding up to where we stood, he dismounted; and, handing Ned the end of the lasso, said,—

"There, youngster, throw this over her head, and lead her to the corral. She'll fancy you're the one who first gained the mastery over her, and you won't have no trouble in riding her when you want to."

Ned led her to the corral, and then Hal's mare was obliged to submit to a similar experience; and, after that, the boys, with Manuel to instruct, mounted their ponies and took their first lesson in mustang riding.

Hal Hyde and Ned Brown were two boys who had arrived from the East the night previous to the morning on which our story opens.

They were the sons of two old friends of mine, and had been sent to Texas that they might learn something of life upon a stock-ranche.

It is not my intention, however, to relate their experience during the few months they remained on the Ranchee; for they found, after the first novelty had worn off, the life was dull and exceedingly tiresome. So monotonous did it become in fact, that it was with difficulty I persuaded them to remain, even until the fall, when I intended to make a journey overland to California.

As the time drew near for me to start, the boys became so anxious to accompany me, that I finally decided to travel with my own team, instead of taking the stage to San Diego, as I had originally intended. I purchased four stout wagons, and thirty mules with harness and outfit for the road, complete; and engaged the services of an old Texan named Jerry Vance, as wagon-master for the trip. We also bought a small but well-selected lot of goods, suitable for either the Mexican or Indian trade; laid in a large stock of stores for use on the road; and then awaited the departure of some "freighter" for the "Upper Country," that we might take advantage of the better protection afforded by a large party in travelling through a country infested by hostile bands of Indians.

The boys became very impatient to be off; for we had gone into camp near the headwaters of the San Pedro, four miles above the city of San Antonio, and their only amusement consisted in practising with their rifles or revolvers or exercising their ponies.

At last (it was the first day of September) Jerry brought word to camp, that, on the following morning, Magoffin's train, consisting of seventeen wagons, forty men, and two hundred mules, would start for Fort Fillmore, nearly a thousand miles away upon our direct route.

This was indeed agreeable news; and the boys could hardly contain themselves for joy at the thought of so soon being on the road.

Page 4

Every one about camp went to work with a will; for there were many things yet to be done before we should be ready to leave.

Mules were to be shod, harness examined, wheels greased, nuts tightened, firearms put in order and freshly loaded, wagons repacked, and, in fact, a thousand things that are always postponed until the last minute before starting on a trip like ours.

Shortly after sundown, however, old Jerry announced everything ready, and then we gathered around our camp-fire, and the boys spent the evening in asking him questions about the route, which were easily answered; for he had passed over it seven times, and met with hundreds of adventures on the road, that afforded both instruction and amusement for his listeners.

It is the story of our trip across the plains, from San Antonio, Texas, to San Diego, California, as well as some of the adventures we encountered on the road, that I have to tell you.

Long before daylight the next morning I was awakened by the noise and confusion in camp, incident to a first start. Men were shouting at the mules; mules were braying; whips cracking; wheels creaking; and, far above all, I could hear the loud voices of Hal and Ned, now giving orders and endeavoring to instruct old Jerry how to catch an unruly mule that seemed disposed to make some trouble, and again cautioning every one to make no noise, for fear of disturbing me before my breakfast should be ready.

Springing to my feet, I found that the teams were already harnessed, and only waiting the appearance of our travelling companions to start.

Breakfast was soon dispatched, the camp equipage, blankets, *etc.*, stowed in one of the wagons; and very shortly the still morning air bore to our ears the distant rumble of heavy wagons, the shouts of the teamsters, and the many sounds indicating the approach of a large train. Presently the herd of spare mules was seen, and then the covers of the wagons. We mounted our ponies, old Jerry called out in a cherry tone, "*Vamose!*" the teamsters cracked their whips, the mules pulled with a will, and we fell in behind the wagons, and were at last fairly on the road, bound for the "Golden State."

As the first rays of the rising sun flashed athwart the beautiful green prairie, the boys gave a yell of delight at the sight, which was indeed a glorious one;—the long line of wagons, each drawn by eight mules, stretching far ahead and following the tortuous windings of the road, their white covers, blue bodies, and bright red wheels presenting a contrast to the sober green of the surrounding country that was at once pleasing and unique.

[Illustration: Leading the Train.]

As we realized the truly formidable appearance of the caravan, Hal, with his usual impetuosity, declared that there weren't Indians enough in the country to whip us; for confirmation of his opinion, appealing to old Jerry, who, however, only shrugged his shoulders after the peculiar manner of frontiersmen, and said, "*Quien sabe?*" or, who knows?

Page 5

For five long days we followed the road, without meeting with any incident worthy of note. The settlements had all been passed, Fort Clark left far behind, and not an Indian been seen by any of our party.

On the evening of the eighth day, we encamped upon the banks of the Nucces. It was a beautiful night. The young moon was fast sinking behind the line of the distant mountains, leaving us to enjoy the light of our camp-fire, and admire its ruddy glow, reflected on the snow-white covers of our wagons. These were parked in a semi-circle around us, and forcibly recalled to my mind the stories I had read in my boyhood, of gipsy encampments upon some grand old English barren.

"Now I call this comfort," said Hal, as he lazily stretched himself upon a blanket before the fire. "Eight days on the road, and we haven't seen an Indian. I don't believe there are any. Now what's the use of standing guard and shivering round the camp half the night, watching for Indians that never come?"

"I come on first to-night, and shall stand my watch, at any rate," said Ned. "And before it gets any darker, we'd better drive the mules down to water."

"Do you think," asked Hal, appealing to me, "that there's any need of standing guard to-night?"

"Certainly I do," replied I. "It's always best to be on the safe side. Why not exercise the same precaution to-night that we have since we left San Antonio? It is impossible to tell how near Indians may be, or when they will attack us. Travellers on the plains should be prepared for any emergency."

"True as preachin'," interrupted old Jerry. "They ain't so very fur off, either. I've seen 'em signalin' all the afternoon, and signalin' allers means bizness with them red varmints. If we don't see 'em to-night, we shall afore a great while, and I think—"

"Never mind what you think," interrupted Hal, saucily. "You are always imagining things that never come to pass. I guess you've been pretty badly scared some time by Indians."

"Wal, young man, when you've travelled over these plains as many years as I hev, maybe you'll know more about Injuns than you do now, and maybe you won't," rejoined Jerry, in a tone of contempt, as he slowly moved away in the direction of the herd.

Asking Jerry to make sure that the animals were properly secured, I threw myself down on Hal's blanket, and gazed into the fire.

Jerry and the boys soon returned, saying that the animals were perfectly safe; but somehow I found it impossible to rid myself of the impression made by Jerry's casual

remark. Calling him to me, I asked him more particularly about the signals he had seen. His answer did not relieve my uneasiness, for he said,—

“Them varmints don’t make smoke for nothing; and, when you see ’em in so many directions, it’s a sure sign that they’re gatherin’ for mischief: at least, that’s my ’sperience.”

Page 6

As it was still early in the evening, I determined to walk over to Magoffin's camp, which was about a quarter of a mile above us, and ascertain if his men had seen anything to cause them to apprehend danger. I found that Don Ignacio, the wagon-master, fully corroborated Jerry's statements about the smoke signals, adding that he intended to have a very strict watch kept that night.

With this information I returned to camp; and, after telling the boys what I had heard and cautioning them to keep a sharp lookout during their watch, I "turned in," resolved to nap "with one eye open" myself.

I lay for a long time trying in vain to compose myself to sleep; but, finding it impossible to do so, concluded to rise and endeavor to walk my nervousness away.

Without thinking of my firearms, I sallied forth, and must have travelled nearly a mile, when I came suddenly upon a mule, standing alone, a short distance from the roadside.

Supposing it to be one of our own, which, through carelessness, had been permitted to stray from the herd, I attempted to secure it, with the intention of leading it back; but, to my surprise, it started and dashed furiously away across the prairie, in an opposite direction from camp.

I well knew that a mule, when alone on the plains, is one of the most docile creatures in the world, and will permit any one save an Indian to approach it without making an effort to escape; consequently, the more I thought of the matter the more singular it seemed. Returning to camp, I found old Jerry awake and on the alert, and briefly told him what I had seen, asking him if he did not think it a strange thing for the animal to do.

Without a moment's hesitation he replied,—

"Strange? no! That air lost critter of yours was a Comanche scout's, you bet; and, bein' a scout, he couldn't have done nothin' else, 'cause it might hev spilt their entire calculation. You'll hev a chance ter see him agin afore mornin', I reckon."

"But there was no Indian with the mule," I insisted.

[Illustration: Comanche Riding.]

"Ten to one there was, though," replied Jerry. "You ain't so well 'quainted with them Comanches as I be. They're cunnin' fellers! They never show themselves when they're on a horse, or in a fight. They just stick closer'n a tick to their hoss's side, and do a heap of mighty good shootin' from under his neck, I can tell you. Why, I've seen forty of 'em comin' full tilt right towards me, and narry Injun in sight."

"If you think they are going to attack us, Jerry, hadn't we better rouse the camp at once, and notify Magoffin's people?"

“We’d better just tend to ourselves, and let other folks do the same; and as to rousin’ the camp, why them boys is a heap better off asleep than they would be round here. That’s a nice sort of a guard, ain’t it?” said Jerry, pointing to Hal, who was slumbering soundly near the fire. “That’s just what he was doin’ when I got up; and on his watch too. We can git along without any such help as thet. Air your shootin’-irons reddy?”

Page 7

Before I had time to reply to his question, the sharp, shrill war-whoop of the Comanches fell upon our ears, ringing out on the still night air with a yell fiendish enough to paralyze the stoutest heart. For a single instant it lasted, and then the most unearthly din that can possibly be imagined filled the air; while the neighing of horses, the braying of mules, beating of drums, and discordant jangle of bells, accompanied by an occasional discharge of firearms, rendered the scene as near pandemonium as it is possible to conceive.

We saw a dozen or more dusky forms coming towards us, and Jerry and myself raised our rifles and fired.

Hal, Ned, and the teamsters were by this time awake; the latter being obliged to give their whole attention to the animals, which were making frantic exertions to escape.

The boys rushed in the most frightened manner from one place to another, —not knowing what to do or where to go,—only adding to the terrible confusion; until, by Jerry's direction, they ensconced themselves under one of the wagons, with orders not to leave it without express permission.

CHAPTER II.

As the Indians swept by us, like a whirlwind, Jerry exclaimed, "Them ain't nothin' but a pack of thieves, tryin' to stampede our stock. If ther boys tied them mules squar, they hain't made nothin' out 'er us, that's sartain. You youngsters 'd better show yourselves, for there ain't no more danger to-night."

At the sound of Jerry's voice, the boys came out from under the wagon, both looking exceedingly foolish.

"I'll never get under a wagon again, if you do order me to," said Hal, turning towards Jerry. "It was a shame to send me under there when I wasn't scart a particle."

"Oh! you wasn't, hey? Wal, I'm glad to hear you say that, for mebbe you won't object to go down and count ther stock; for I've an idee that we shall find just about ez many mules gone ez you tied up, young man."

"I was scart, and I don't deny it," said Ned; "but I'll go down and see about the mules, Jerry."

"Bless you! don't yer trouble yerself one mite, I'm going myself, now," said Jerry.

An examination of our stock showed that, notwithstanding the care taken in securing them, seven mules were missing; and that, as Jerry surmised, they were the ones that had been tied by the boys.

"I wonder how many Magoffin's folks hev lost," said Jerry.

"I believe I'll walk over to the camp and ascertain."

"I wish you would," said Jerry; "and, judge, ef they've lost any, and will let me hev twenty men, I'll fetch every one o' the critters back afore ter-morrow night at this time, or you may call old Jerry a liar, and that's what no man ever done yet, that's sartin."

"Do you really think it can be done, Jerry?"

"I'm sartin of it," was the confident reply.

Page 8

“Well, I’ll go over and talk with Magoffin; and, if he’s lost any stock and will lend us the men, I’ve no objection to your making the attempt.”

“You bet, judge, he’ll see for himself, that them cussed varmints won’t hev more’n four hours the start; an’, ef he’ll let us hev the men, we kin ketch ’em, sartin.”

I visited Magoffin’s camp, and found it, like our own, in some confusion. I ascertained, however, that Magoffin himself was not with the train, which was in charge of his *major-domo*, or head man, Don Ignacio. Him I sought and learned that between twenty and thirty of their mules were missing. I then briefly stated Jerry’s proposition, to which Don Ignacio immediately assented, offering to accompany the expedition himself.

Word was sent to Jerry; and, half an hour afterwards, when I reached camp, I found him ready for a start.

Hal and Ned were both extremely anxious to go; but Jerry would not hear to it for a moment, declaring they must remain and take charge of camp during our absence.

The sun was just peeping above the eastern horizon when the party from Magoffin’s appeared. They were all Mexicans, each man provided with three days’ rations, which consisted of about a quart of *atole* [Wheat and brown sugar ground together and dried. A small quantity mixed with cold water makes a very pleasant and nutritious meal.] and a piece of jerked beef, securely fastened behind their saddles with their blankets. Every man was armed with a rifle and two revolvers, and carried, besides, forty rounds of ammunition in his belt.

A delay of a few moments only, and we were off.

We soon struck the Comanches’ trail and followed it in a north-easterly direction for three or four hours, when Jerry turned to me and said,—

“I was afraid of this, judge. Them varmints hev struck a ‘bee-line’ for the Pecos; and if we don’t ketch ’em afore they cross it and git into the Llano, [The Llano Estacado, or staked plain; a favorite resort of the Comanches. It is about four thousand feet above the level of the ocean, and entirely destitute of wood and water.] that’s the end on ’em, as fur as we’re concerned, so I reckon we’d best hurry on.”

[Illustration: Trailing.]

Uttering the single word, ‘*Adelante!*’ or ‘Forward!’ we started in a brisk canter. It was a beautiful morning and the trail was easily followed.

Our animals were fresh, and everything appeared favorable for the success of our expedition, especially as we realized that the progress of the Indians must necessarily be somewhat impeded by the large number of animals they were driving before them.

The trail followed the course of the river for several miles in the direction of the Concho Springs; but, at last, turned abruptly to the left, and commenced the ascent of the great "divide" which separates the waters of the Pecos from the headwaters of the San Pedro, leading us directly towards the former stream.

Page 9

For many hours we rode, hoping each moment to obtain a sight of the Indians. No stops were made, except to permit our animals to drink a few swallows from the streams we crossed, or when we removed the saddle and bridle and gave them an opportunity to enjoy a roll in the tall grass through which we passed; and as twilight settled around us, both men and animals began to show unmistakable signs of fatigue, and it became evident that we must halt for rest and supper. While discussing the subject with Jerry, he suddenly grasped my bridle-rein, and pointed out a bright speck on the distant horizon.

"St! there they be!" he exclaimed. "That's them. The fools didn't 'spect ter be follered, and they've lighted some rosin weeds ter cook their supper with. We've got 'em, sartin."

A halt was ordered; and, in an incredibly short time, our animals were picketed, Jerry and Don Ignacio had started out for a *reconnaissance* of the Comanche camp, and the men were enjoying a hearty supper.

I was greatly amused to see the facility with which they accommodated themselves to the situation. No sooner were their suppers eaten and cigarettes smoked, than, wrapping their blankets around their shoulders, with their saddles for pillows, they one after another dropped off to sleep; and, in a short time, I was the only one of the party awake.

While I listened for the sound of Jerry's return; ascending a slight eminence, I watched the glow of the Comanche camp-fire in the distance, and almost persuaded myself that it was a light in the window of some settler's dwelling, rather than an Indian encampment.

At length the low, delighted neigh of his pony, which, with my own, had been picketed near the spot where I was reclining, warned me that his master was not far away. I soon heard his voice as he spoke to the animal in passing; and, a moment later, the men stood beside me.

Jerry reported that they ventured near enough to the camp to look into it. He had counted eleven Indians. Five of them were guarding the animals. Near the camp was the carcass of a mule, which the savages had undoubtedly killed for food. The remainder of the party were evidently gorged with mule meat, and sleeping soundly.

Both were satisfied that, by the exercise of proper caution, we should have no difficulty in surprising the Indians. It was thought best for our animals to remain where they were, with a few men to guard them, and for the rest of the party to go on foot to the camp, which was about two miles distant.

The men were awakened, arms carefully examined, and five were detailed to remain with the animals. The remainder of the party was then divided into two companies. One was placed under charge of Jerry, the other under Don Ignacio.

Our orders were to move forward as quietly and expeditiously as possible until we came within half a mile of the Indian camp; then to separate. Jerry's party was to attempt the recapture of the stock. The other was to pay its respects to the camp itself.

Page 10

Nothing was to be done, however, until ample time had passed to enable each man to reach the position assigned him. Then, upon a signal from Jerry, which was to be the bark of a *coyote*, or prairie wolf, three times repeated, the attack was to be made. After the signal, every man was expected to take care of himself.

The preliminaries arranged, the men one after another disappeared in the darkness as they moved forward to the attack, until finally Don Ignacio and myself were left alone. Motioning me to follow him, he led the way to the top of a slight elevation, where we dropped upon our faces and peered over into the enemy's camp.

With the aid of my glasses, by the uncertain, flickering light of their fire, I could see every object in the camp distinctly.

One Indian was bending over the coals, as though in the act of warming himself; while, about the fire, lay five others, wrapped in their blankets, and evidently fast asleep.

A little distance below them, I could just discern the dark outline of the herd, quietly feeding. It was evident that they neither knew nor dreamed of pursuit.

It was a splendid night: not a cloud was to be seen; and, although there was no moon, the heavens were thickly studded with stars. No sound disturbed the profound silence that reigned about us, as we waited and listened for the signal that was to decide our fate. How many voices, before another hour, might be hushed in death? I asked myself the question, but there came no answer.

Suddenly, the stillness was disturbed by the quick, snarling yelp of a *coyote*, so natural, that, for an instant, I persuaded myself it was the creature itself and not old Jerry. Again I heard it, seemingly more distinct and nearer than before. Would it be repeated?

My heart almost ceased to beat as I asked the question, and I held my breath in my anxiety to hear. Will it ever come?

Ah, yes! there it is: quick, sharp, and unmistakable, followed by the report of a single rifle.

The next instant, the sound of a dozen shots burst upon the air, mingled with the terrible, unearthly yell of the Comanche war-whoop, and we all rushed forward pell-mell for the camp, through the whizzing of arrows, the ping of bullets, the shouts of Mexicans, and the yells of Indians.

It was such a scene of excitement that I hardly knew what I was doing, although I fully realized we were in the Indian camp: before I had time to do more than this, I saw Jerry coming towards me. As he came up, he said, in tones that carried cheer with them,—

“Well, Judge, we’re in luck; fifty mules and two varmints is a pretty good night’s work. How many hev you got up here?”

An examination revealed three dead bodies in camp, making in all, five Indians killed. The remainder had managed to escape in the darkness. We quickly despoiled the camp; giving the plunder to the men, and leaving the dead bodies behind us.

Page 11

But two of our party were injured—and they slightly—by arrows. Upon reaching camp their wounds were carefully dressed; after which we partook of a slight lunch, and were ready to start for our camp on the banks of the Nucces, when Don Ignacio came to me, saying, that, as his presence was really very necessary in camp, with my permission, he would take his men—leaving enough behind to assist in driving the stock—and hurry on.

This would not inconvenience us, and enable him to arrive in camp several hours earlier than ourselves.

Jerry at once acquiesced in the arrangement, saying that three men, besides ourselves, would be all we should require.

Don Ignacio detailed that number to remain with us; and, with the balance of the party, left us.

We made very fair progress during the night; and, when morning dawned, were a long distance on our road.

An hour or two after daylight, old Jerry's keen eye detected, upon an elevation in the distance, a party of three Comanches. We were in hope that they would not discover us at first; but it soon became evident that they had seen us, for one of their number turned and rode towards us, waving a blanket in the air. This, Jerry said, was indicative of a desire for a parley.

After a short conference together, Jerry decided it was better for us to ride out and meet the party, rather than permit them to join us.

We accordingly prepared for the expedition, giving the Mexicans instructions to proceed quietly with the stock.

As we approached the Indians, their leader, an old man apparantly about sixty years of age, with a singularly cunning and wicked looking countenance, came towards us and extended his hand for a shake; while, with much solemnity, he announced himself as *Cuchillo*, a Comanche chief, and a great friend of the whites.

While Jerry was conversing with the old fellow in Spanish, I made myself familiar with the general appearance of the party. They were dressed each with a buffalo rug thrown over his left shoulder in such a manner as to allow it to sweep the ground behind him. They wore moccasins on their feet, made of buckskin, with a heavy fringe or tassels pendant from the seam behind, long enough to permit it to drag upon the ground. These, with leggins made from a piece of blanket, which was wrapped about the leg below the knee and fastened with a thong of buckskin, heavily fringed, and the breechcloth, completed the dress.

Each was painted in a most hideous manner, in ochre and vermilion mixed with a whitish clay.

Cuchillo shortly produced a well-worn greasy paper from a small bag he wore around his neck, which he handed me, making a sign that I was to read it.

It was as follows:—

“The Bearer, Cuchillo, is a Comanche Chief, who says he is a friend of the White’s. My advice is not to Trust him, or any other sneakin’ varmint like him. *Bill Pope.*”

Page 12

I handed the paper to Jerry; who, after reading it, gave it back to its owner with the remark, it was *muncho bueno*, or very good.

The chief received it with a smile; and, as he returned it to the little bag, remarked,—

“Very good, *me bueno amigo*” (good friend).

“P’raps yer be,” remarked Jerry, in English, “but yer ain’t ther sort I hanker arter. I reckon we may as well shake hands, old feller, ’cause we must be a-goin’, an’ you an’ me hain’t got no use for one another, no how.”

But our Comanche friends were not to be shaken off, so easily; for, even after bidding them good by, Cuchillo insisted upon accompanying us; and, rather than betray any fear, or show that we distrusted him, Jerry was obliged to make a virtue of necessity, and assent to the proposition with as good a grace as possible.

It was evident that curiosity at least was one of the motives that actuated the Indians; for, upon overtaking our herd, they looked about them, evidently expecting to see a larger party with us, and expressing surprise at the quantity of stock we were driving.

Jerry informed them that we had a large company a few hours’ ride to the north; and had been out purchasing some stock from another party, who were encamped to the south of us a few miles.

This information seemed to cause them some surprise; for they asked many questions concerning the strength of this last party, its destination, *etc.*, all of which Jerry answered in a straightforward manner, to their evident satisfaction.

Cuchillo was very curious in regard to our revolvers,—of which each man in our party had two, in addition to his rifle,—and at last we determined to show them that we were well armed, and ready for any emergency. I set up a small mark at the distance of sixty or seventy feet; and Jerry immediately emptied, in rapid succession, the contents of both revolvers, without stopping to reload. This caused the greatest astonishment; and, in a short time, they began to manifest a disposition to leave. With many professions of friendship, Jerry endeavored to persuade them to accompany us to our camp; but they declined, promising to visit us on the morrow; and, after a most affectionate farewell, Cuchillo and his braves left us, riding towards the south-west.

“There,” exclaimed Jerry, as soon as they were fairly off, “ef there don’t go as sneakin’ a varmint as there is in the whole Comanche nation, I’ll lose my guess. They’ll go for that air camp to the southward, expectin’ to find some greenhorns; and I only hope they may find ’em. The thing for us to do is to git our cattle into camp ez soon as possible. We kin hurry ’em some, and I reckon we’d better do it.”

We made good progress for a couple of hours; and, on reaching the top of a “divide,” saw a large emigrant wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen, slowly making its way through the tall bottom grass of the valley beneath us, surrounded by quite a number of men on horseback.

Page 13

"Hurrah!" cried Jerry, "there's friends. This is the fust party we've seen out on the plains since we left San Antonio. We mustn't let 'em go by without overhaulin' 'em."

We soon came up with them; and they proved to be Capt. Blodget and four companions from Missouri, on the way to Fort Davis, accompanied by an Arapahoe Indian as guide.

We were, of course, delighted to meet with Americans, and eagerly questioned them as to their adventures on the road; but they had seen no Indians; having, by the advice of their guide, kept a few miles away from the main travelled route, on account of there being less liability of meeting the prowling bands, who generally followed the course of the road, in expectation of more successfully conducting their thieving operations.

We soon parted with our new friends, and set out once more on our way to the Nueces.

[Illustration: The Missourians.]

CHAPTER III

Our arrival in camp, during the afternoon, was the signal for a general rejoicing among the men, who loudly applauded the determination and pluck shown by Jerry in pursuing and overtaking the thieves.

My first inquiry was for Hal and Ned, and was told that they had gone out after a flock of wild turkeys that had been heard clucking in the pecan trees, not far from camp. They had taken their guns with them, and expected to be back by noon.

Thinking they would soon return, I went over to consult with Don Ignacio about resuming our journey; but, as the water and grass were much better where we then were than at the next stopping-place, the California Springs, it was decided to remain encamped until morning.

Accepting an invitation to dine with Don Ignacio. I did not return to my own camp until about five o'clock, when I learned, to my surprise, that the boys had not put in an appearance.

Calling Jerry, I asked if he supposed any accident could have befallen them.

His reply was, "No: they had their rifles and revolvers with 'em, and they ain't likely to meet with nothin' bigger 'n an antelope. They ought to be able to take keer of themselves, specially as the biggest one ain't afraid of Injuns, no how."

“That may be true,” replied I; “but they are boys, Jerry, and I think we ought to start at once in search of them. I feel confident, if nothing had happened, they would have returned before this.”

“Boys ain’t nothin’ but a nuisance, no how, and hain’t no business travlin’ on the plains. Howsoever, I’ll hev a couple of critters ketched up and saddled, and we’ll see if we kin strike their trail,” said Jerry.

The mules were immediately brought up, and Jerry and myself mounted, and set out in pursuit of the wanderers. In a short time we struck their trail, which led through the underbrush and bottom grass, along the banks of the river for a mile or more, and then turned in the direction of a large post-oak opening, three or four miles away.

Page 14

The trail led us directly into the grove, where we were obliged to dismount, as the low, scraggy branches would not permit our riding beneath them. Securing our animals, we followed the trail on foot for some distance, when Jerry called my attention to a number of fresh tracks in the earth.

"Antelope tracks," said I.

"No they ain't neither; you must guess again. Them's *havilina* tracks."

"What are they?" inquired I.

"Them's hogs," replied Jerry; "wild Mexican hogs, and the darndest, ugliest critters on the plains, ef you git 'em riled. I'd rather meet a dozen Comanches, as far as comfort's concerned, any time, than a drove of them critters. Yer see this's their feedin' ground, and I 'spect I know where ter find them boys."

"Where?" inquired I.

"Up a tree," replied Jerry. I reckon they're treed this time, sartin; an' good enough for 'em. Boys hain't got no bizness on the plains, no how."

"Well, Jerry, I brought the boys with me, and I calculate to take care of them, if possible," was my reply.

"All right, judge; you'll hev your hands full, I reckon. I'll help you so fur's I'm able; but don't depend too much on me, fur boys hain't got no bizness on the plains, no how."

We continued our search for some time, when Jerry's acute ear detected a sound in the distance which he declared was made by the "squealin' critters;" and we hastened in the direction of the noise, which each moment grew more distinct. At length we came in sight of a large drove of the animals, gathered beneath the branches of a small, scraggy oak.

As soon as Jerry saw them, he burst into a loud laugh, exclaiming, "Jest as I 'spected, they're treed, for sartin."

"How do you know?" inquired I.

"Know! don't yer see 'em squattin' in that tree, thar?" said he, pointing to a dark object in the branches of the oak; "that's them, for sartin."

As we approached I halloed loudly, in the hope of diverting the attention of the hogs, if I did not succeed in letting the boys know' we were near them; for the animals kept up such a squealing, that it was almost impossible to hear the sound of our own voices.



My efforts certainly were successful, so far as attracting the attention of the hogs; for a number started towards us, at a speed that was quite as wonderful as it was alarming; for I had no idea before, that hogs could be as active or as ferocious as these appeared to be.

As they came towards us, Jerry exclaimed,—

“Take keer! take keer! we’d better look out;” and, without further explanation, he began to climb a tree.

I followed suit, and we were soon safely perched among the thick branches of a post-oak.

We had hardly reached a secure position when they were upon us. I must say that I never was more thankful for a place of refuge than when I saw the ferocious aspect of the gaunt, savage creatures. They crowded beneath the trees, with erect bristles, small, bloodshot eyes, gleaming white tusks, and frothing mouths, filling the air with their shrill cries, and striking the trunks such sturdy blows with their long, sharp tusks, that the trees fairly shook at each fresh assault.

Page 15

They seemed as agile as cats, and occasionally one more ferocious than the others would bound up, until I began to think I should be obliged to leave the limb on which I was sitting.

As soon as we were fairly fixed on our perches, and had time to take a survey of the situation, we opened fire upon them to such good purpose that we killed nine with our revolvers. This wholesale slaughter seemed only to excite the fury of the others, for they commenced gnawing the trees so fiercely that Jerry became alarmed, and urged me to use all possible dispatch in reloading my pistol.

Fortunately there were only ten of the animals left, and these we finally managed to silence. After descending from the tree, I found Jerry in anything but an amiable mood, at "the idee of an old hunter like he was, bein' treed by a lot of hogs;" and, as usual, he declared that "them cussid boys" was to blame, "for boys hadn't no bizness on the plains, no how."

By the exercise of considerable caution in approaching the herd, we managed to get quite near without attracting their attention; and I asked Jerry if it wasn't strange that the boys gave no sign of being aware of our presence.

"Sign!" said Jerry; "how could they give any sign when I couldn't hear my own shots? Why, the only way I knowed if thet pistol went off or not was by watchin' fur the smoke: the critters kep' up such a squealin' that I couldn't hear you speak a word. I'll bet my hoss agin a chaw of terbacker that them boys hain't heerd a shot we've fired, an' dunno we're within five miles on 'em."

Taking advantage of our former experience, we approached as near and as quietly as possible, obtaining position beneath a tree,—in the branches of which we could place ourselves if necessary,—and then opened fire upon them with our revolvers, with such good effect, that the remainder of the herd took to their long legs and were soon out of sight.

[Illustration: Wild Hogs.]

When the last of them disappeared, the boys dropped to the ground; but so cramped were their limbs from their long confinement, that it was some time before they could stand. While they were getting "the kinks out of their legs," as Jerry termed it, we counted our game and found twenty-two of the creatures dead, and the ground strewn with portions of flesh, bristles and bones, all bearing evidence of a fearful fray.

As the boys claimed to have killed but one of the creatures, we called upon them for an explanation; and, from their story, it appeared, that, shortly after leaving camp, Ned, who was in advance, had come upon a large flock of turkeys, and discharged one of the barrels of his gun at them without effect.



Soon afterwards they discovered the tracks of the *havilinas*. Supposing they were either antelope or deer tracks, they followed them into the grove, where they discovered the herd of hogs, quietly feeding upon the mast with which the ground was thickly strewn.

Page 16

Without a moment's hesitation Ned discharged the contents of his other barrel at the animals, thinking they were hogs that had escaped from some herd that had been driven across the country.

The shot did not penetrate their thick hides far enough to do anything but irritate and madden them, and the whole herd rushed towards the boys, who, frightened at their formidable appearance, jumped into the nearest tree, where they had been obliged to remain until released by us.

Once fairly out of reach of the infuriated creatures, they rather enjoyed the situation for a time; Hal feeling confident that he could, at any moment, frighten them away by the discharge of his rifle.

Finally, becoming tired of the fun, he discharged his rifle and killed his hog; but this only seemed to make the creatures more ferocious, and then, for the first time, the boys became really alarmed.

As hour after hour passed, and the hogs showed no disposition to depart, Hal began to despond, declaring that no help would reach them before they should starve. Ned, however, kept up heart, until the infuriated creatures began to devour the dead body of their comrade.

The smell of the blood and taste of the flesh maddened them to such a degree that they began a warfare among themselves, furiously striking at and cutting one another with their long, sharp tusks, killing and trampling under their feet the weaker, and then greedily devouring the dead; all the while filling the air with their sharp, shrill cries.

The boys, who had, up to this time, been hoping that assistance would come from some source, were about giving up in despair, when they witnessed the slaughter made by our revolvers and knew that succor had at last arrived.

As soon as they were able to walk, we guided them to the spot where we had left our mules, and placed them in the saddles, directing them to camp; Jerry and myself resolving to walk.

Shouldering our rifles, we started towards the bank of the river, believing it to be a shorter route than the way we had come. Although it was fast growing dark, we had no fear but that by this route we should reach camp quite as soon as the boys.

While passing through a grove of pecan trees, about a couple of miles from camp, my attention was suddenly arrested by the cry of some person, apparently in distress.

"Hark, Jerry," said I; "did you hear that? Some one's in trouble—wait a minute."

“Thunder! judge, hain’t you been in Texas long enough to know a painter’s yell when you hear it? That was a reg’lar out-and-out painter you heard. I’ve—”

Just at this moment, a prolonged, heart-rending wail trembled upon the stillness of the evening air: so piercing, yet so plaintive, was it, that it sent a shudder through my frame I have not forgotton to this day.

“That critter ain’t very far off,” exclaimed Jerry. “Mebbe we’ll git a shot at him; though they’re nasty things to hunt at night, fer yer can’t see ’em, they lay so clus onto the limbs.”

Page 17

"Did you ever kill one?" asked I.

"Yes, four on 'em; the last one was down on the Sabinal, just about a year this time. I was—"

At this point, he was again interrupted by the animal's cry; this time so near, that we both stopped short and cocked our rifles, for it seemed as though he could be but a few feet from us.

"I tell you one thing, Jerry, I don't much like walking through this grove, with one of those creatures so near; I'd rather take to the open prairie. Besides, it's getting so dark I can't see anything."

"Pshaw! yer ain't afraid o' one of them critters, be yer? You jest foller me; they never trouble any one unless they're hungry."

"But this one may be hungry," suggested I.

"Well, never you fear, you jest foller me," said Jerry, starting on.

I followed as quickly as possible; but had hardly taken a dozen steps, ere I heard a quick exclamation, as of pain or surprise from Jerry's lips, accompanied by a low, snarling growl, followed by a sound like that produced by two persons rolling on the ground together. There was violent breathing, angry ejaculations, the crashing of underbrush, and, before I had time to think what it meant, I caught sight of a dark mass, evidently rolling over and over upon the ground, a few feet in advance of me. I could not distinguish what it was in the darkness, but suddenly caught sight of two balls of living fire.

Bringing my rifle to my shoulder, and scarcely pausing to take aim or to reflect upon the consequences of the shot, I fired.

The next moment Jerry sprang to his feet with a—

"Thunder! that was a tight squeak, and no mistake. Ef you hadn't fired when you did, it'd been all up with me afore this time. The critter didn't give me no fair show; he lit right onter my shoulder here, and's tared it some I reckon, by the feel; howsoever, we kin git at it easy anyway, but if it hadn't a bin for them boys—well, boys haint got no bizness on the plains, no how."

I made an examination of the wounded shoulder, as well as I could in the darkness, and found that the creature's claws had entirely stripped it of clothing, besides badly lacerating the flesh.



Jerry declared, 'twasn't much, no how; and he could walk to camp as well as not. As soon as we arrived there, I made a more thorough examination, dressed the arm carefully, and was soon utterly oblivious of the fatigues of the previous forty-eight hours.

CHAPTER IV.

The sound of Jerry's voice, as he related the story of his adventures the night previous, awoke me in the early morning.

I, dreamingly, heard him say,—

"I didn't see the critter when he jumped; not till he lit right onto my shoulder, and the heft of him hed knocked me down and he was atop o' me. Yer see that gin him a heap the start.

Page 18

"I seed his big mouth right clus to my face, an' his jaws wide open; so I rammed my left arm right in a 'tween 'em, so that he couldn't git no purchase onto me to chew, and he hadn't really hed no chance ter bite, when the judge fired. He didn't do it a mite too soon, though, you bet. Ef it hadn't a bin for you boys—well, boys hain't got no bizness on the plains, no how. I'm all right now, and good for a dozen painters yet; but this is the biggest one I ever seed. Thunder! but I must hev thet skin; ain't it putty?"

I laid and listened for a short time to the exclamations of wonder and admiration uttered by the boys while examining the carcass, with no little amusement.

"I tell you, I should like to have been there," said Hal. "I could have shot him with my rifle as easily as any one."

"Yes, but you wouldn't have dared to," replied Ned.

"Wouldn't I?" rejoined Hal. "You just wait and see. I wasn't frightened a bit the night the Indians got into camp; and if it hadn't been for old Jerry, I'd a shown 'em—"

"Pshaw! Why didn't you show me, instead of crying, when we were up that tree, yesterday? You wasn't very brave then," said Ned.

"Umph! I didn't know anything about hogs," explained Hal.

"And I reckon you don't know much 'bout painters, either, youngster. Brag's a good dog, but Holdfast's a better one," broke in old Jerry.

"Isn't it time for a start, Jerry?" called I; "and how's your shoulder this morning?"

"It's past time fur a start, and nigh upon noon. My shoulder's putty sore, but I kin git along all right with it."

I sprang to my seat, and found it nearly noon; indeed, so late that Jerry advised remaining encamped until the following morning, although Magoffin's train had been gone some hours.

After dinner, Hal, Ned, and myself saddled up for a ride over the plain in search of antelope, and had gone some three or four miles from camp, when Ned called my attention to a horseman in the distance, leisurely riding along, almost diagonally to our own course.

We hastened forward so as to intercept him; but, seeing us approach, he turned and rode towards us.

He was a Mexican, tall and gaunt, mounted upon a superb black mustang stallion. His dress consisted of a short spencer jacket of dark blue cloth, with loose sleeves; gaudily

embroidered and laced along the seams; pants, confined by a scarlet silk sash at the waist, and open at the sides, through which the wide Mexican drawers were plainly visible; a broad, brimmed, low-crowned hat, of Spanish manufacture, with a band of silver bullion, covered his head, and boots of alligator hide, heavily spurred, were upon his feet.

He rode a deep-treed Mexican saddle, with housings of leather, grotesquely stamped: upon the pommel hung, neatly coiled, a lasso of beautifully braided rawhide.

He also carried a long rifle. His powder-horn and bullet-pouch, being suspended from his left shoulder.

Page 19

As he approached he bid us a courteous good-day in English, and inquired if we had chanced to see a “gang” of wild mustangs during the day; saying that he was known as Antonio, the “mustanger” of the Leona, and that his occupation was catching and taming wild mustangs.

We assured him we had seen nothing of the herd, which he appeared to think must be in our immediate vicinity, from the character of the tracks he had been following.

The boys were eager to learn the *modus operandi* of catching wild mustangs; and at once began to ask so many questions, that Antonio was obliged to tell them he could not explain very well; but, if they would ride with him for a couple of hours, he thought he could show them how it was done.

Of course they became eager to accompany him; and, nothing loth myself to see the sport, I assented to their request; and, joining the “mustanger,” rode towards the south-west, and in less than an hour he pointed out a small “gang” quietly feeding some three or four miles away.

As we drew near, Antonio declared that he knew the “gang,” which was too wild to approach with the lasso, but he might possibly get one by “creasing.”

“How do you do that?” inquired Ned.

“With my rifle,” answered Antonio.

“What! shoot one of those horses?” exclaimed Hal.

“If you’ll wait awhile, youngster, mebbe you’ll better understand it,” said Antonio. “Now you watch me; and, when you meet a ‘gang’ of mustangs again, you’ll know just what to do.”

It became evident that the herd was aware of our approach, for they started; and, in an incredibly short time, had approached so near, that we could plainly see their elegant forms and color, as they proudly curvetted and gamboled over the plain fully five hundred yards away. Suddenly Antonio halted and raised his rifle to his shoulder.

“Oh! don’t shoot, please,” cried Hal.

Before the words were well out of his mouth, the man fired, and one of the herd dropped to the ground. The next instant he was by the mustang’s side, securing him with ropes.

In a little while the animal so far recovered from the effect of the shot, as to make the most violent attempts to get upon his feet; but the Mexican had so effectually secured him, he soon ceased his efforts, and lay perfectly still. Antonio then cautiously loosed

the rope in such a manner that he finally struggled to his feet, all the time, making the most determined efforts, to escape.

They were of no avail, however; and, when the mustang fully realized this, he stood perfectly still, permitting Antonio to approach and gently caress him. He was a noble old fellow,—a snow-white stallion with brown mane and tail, and trim, clean limbs that gave promise of great speed.

As no wound was visible upon the animal, I became quite as anxious to ascertain the philosophy of “creasing” as the boys themselves; nor was it until Antonio explained the point aimed at, that I understood it.

Page 20

The ball had passed close to the upper crease of the neck, just above the cervical vertebrae; and, for the moment, completely paralyzed the large nerve of the spine, causing the creature to drop as quickly as though shot through the brain.

We stopped some time to admire the splendid fellow, who had Apparently entirely recovered from the effect of the shot. We all congratulated Antonio upon his skill as a marksman, and then turned in the direction of camp without starting any game, however, until we reached the river bottom, when Hal was fortunate enough to secure a wild-turkey; and, with this trophy of his skill, we were obliged to be content.

The following morning found us on the road right early. Our route lay over a high, arid plain covered, as far as the eye could see, with a prairie-dog town, and for hours my ears were greeted with—

“Did you see that one?”—“Ain’t they funny little things? so cunning!”— “How can we catch one?”—“Just look at that owl!” and a hundred similar exclamations.

The boys were vastly amused by the curious antics of these little fellows, who, although not human, possess many of the most distinguishing characteristics of humanity, in their actions. They have often been classed with the marmot by prairie Travellers; but, to my own mind, partake more of the nature of the squirrel or rabbit. In frisking, flirting, sitting erect, or barking, they resemble the former; while, in feeding and burrowing, they may be classed with the latter.

They are exclusively herbivorous, and live upon the fine, short grass that is generally found growing in abundance in the vicinity of their towns, which are always located upon arid, elevated plains, at a great distance from water.

[Illustration: Prairie-Dogs.]

During the two days that our route lay through this town, we made many attempts to capture one of the little fellows; but they cleverly evaded all the snares set for them, invariably dodged at the flash of our pistols, chattering away as lively as ever, while the little brown owls and rattlesnakes that shared their houses with them fell frequent victims to the boys’ rifles.

After leaving their town, Hal declared, that, if he and Ned could remain behind the train for a few hours, he knew they could capture one; becoming so urgent in his appeal, that I finally yielded a reluctant consent to the project, cautioning them under no circumstances, to remain away from the train more than two or three hours. This they faithfully promised not to do, and departed; notwithstanding Jerry pronounced it as downright foolish a proceedin’ as he ever seed.

Four or five hours later, when we reached our camping ground for the night, neither of them had overtaken us, and I began to feel alarmed at their prolonged absence. My apprehensions were somewhat relieved for the moment by one of the men, who informed me he had seen their animals coming over the “divide” some three or four miles in our rear.

Page 21

A few minutes later, however, when the riderless animals came galloping furiously in, with their long lassos dragging in the dust behind them, the camp became a scene of confusion indescribable.

Labor of all kinds was suspended, and everyone anxious to hear what everyone else thought.

Jerry gave it as his opinion, that the animals had escaped from the place where Hal and Ned had left them; still, he reckoned some one ought to go back and search for them, "Cause the plains warn't no place for boys, no how."

Saddling our horses and taking three of the men with us, Jerry and myself rode back towards the dog-town, discharging our pistols and making all the noise possible, in order to attract the attention of the youngsters in the darkness. Occasionally we listened for a reply; but not a sound could we hear, save the snarling yelp of some prairie-dog, disturbed by the unusual noises, or the sharp, shrill cry of the night-hawk, that rapidly swooped over our heads.

In a state of great anxiety, we passed a wretched night; and, at daylight, commenced a thorough search for traces of the missing boys. Finally Jerry discovered their tracks in the road leading towards camp; and it seemed possible that we might have missed them in the darkness, and, if we at once returned, should find them with the train.

We had proceeded scarcely more than a mile on the way back to camp, when I noticed that Jerry, who was a short distance in advance, suddenly stopped, as though waiting for me to overtake him. As I rode up, he pointed to a fresh Indian trail, crossing our road almost at right angles, and said in a low tone,—

"Ez sartin ez you're livin', the Comanches hev got 'em! That trail ain't twelve hours old, and there's a dozen of the varmints ef there's one."

"Then let us instantly follow and retake them," was my reply.

"That's a heap easier said than done," replied the old man. "We won't stan' much show, chasin' a dozen or twenty Comanches, and they ez likely ez not, forty miles ahead of us. Still, we've got ter git them boys somehow; and the fust thing towards it is ter go ter camp and git some grub, 'cause a man can't fite wuth a cent on a empty stomach."

There was truth in Jerry's observation. We therefore urged our animals into a brisk canter; but, when within about two miles of our camp, his keen eyes detected, upon a rise of the ground some distance to our right, a solitary figure, motionless upon a horse.

At the sight we halted; for the figure commenced waving a large blanket in the air, then urged his animal forward, and came toward us at full run.

[Illustration: Lone Indian.]

“He shook that air blanket ter let us know that he’s friendly and wants ter speak to us; but I reckon I’d better find out who he is, afore he comes any nearer” said Jerry, as he spurred his horse forward to meet him.

Upon reaching a small knoll a few hundred yards in advance of us, Jerry suddenly stopped and held up his right hand, with the palm outward. Then he slowly moved it backward and forward a few times; when, to my great surprise, the Indian checked his horse, and sat as though awaiting further orders. Again Jerry raised his hand; this time moving it before and across his face three or four times.

Page 22

The Indian, who appeared to comprehend these signs perfectly, answered by making a graceful, undulating motion with his right hand, not unlike the wriggling movement made by a snake in crawling. Then he elevated both hands high above his head, clasped closely together; then, apparently satisfied with this pantomime, he started at a rapid pace toward us. Jerry turned; and, seeing my looks of astonishment, hurriedly said,—

“That ere’s the lingo of the plains. Every Injun understands that. I told the feller to stop and explain who he was. He answered that he was a Comanche, and friendly. Mebbe we can git some news of the boys from him, though we shan’t ef he ain’t a mind to tell, for Injuns is mighty clus-mouthed critters.”

At this moment the Comanche rode up. Bringing his horse abruptly to a stand-still, he extended a very dirty hand, ornamented with finger-nails that closely resembled the talons of an eagle.

“Me Senaco, good Injun,” he exclaimed, in pretty fair Spanish.

“Of course you be,” replied Jerry, in English. “Whoever seed a bad Injun, ef you let him tell his story?

“We’ve got to pretend to believe the lyin’ varmint or we shan’t find out nothin’ from him, that’s sartin.”

As this was the first opportunity I ever had of examining a live Comanche, I regarded this specimen with some curiosity; for a friendly Comanche in those days was indeed an anomaly.

The Indian’s body was entirely naked, with the exception of a breech-cloth and pair of leggins. The leggins extended from the knee, down; and, with his moccasins, were made of buckskin, heavily fringed and ornamented.

A large red blanket covered his left shoulder, fastened beneath his right arm in such a manner as to leave the arm free and unobstructed, and then hung loosely behind him, almost touching the ground as he sat upon his horse. The animal was a rough looking little pony, that bore evidence of being both tough and fleet.

The fellow’s face was deeply marked by the small-pox, and hideously painted with vermilion and ochre; while, from his ears, were suspended, heavy rings of brass wire. These, with the paint, gave him a most diabolical expression, that was in no manner relieved by the shaggy locks of unkempt black hair that hung around his head.

His only weapon was a long, murderous-looking, iron-headed spear, which, with his lariat, he held in his right hand.



We made several efforts to find out what the fellow's object in hailing us was, before he condescended to give it. Then he said that he had that mornin met with a party of Comanches, who had with them two prisoners,— mere boys. He was angry that braves should capture such children, for only squaws, not warriors, made prisoners of boys.

After much talk, he had made the Indians ashamed of the act, and they were willing to release the captives for a small ransom. He was a friend, and begged us to remember, was acting as an ambassador, in search of the party to which the children belonged.



Page 23

"The cussed, lyin' old heathen," exclaimed Jerry. "I wonder does he 'spose I'm green enuff to swaller that story o' his'n. It's true enuff though, that they've got the youngsters, and it's likely we kin git 'em agin, though I've always telled you, boys hain't no bizness on the plains, no how."

After long haggling and bargaining between Jerry and the Indian, the amount of ransom was agreed upon, and the brave rode off to bring the boys, while Jerry and I started for the train to procure the blankets, powder, brass wire, beads and tobacco, we were to give in exchange for them.

An hour or two later, two Indians appeared upon the summit of the high ground with the boys; then Jerry and I, with the goods, rode forward to make the exchange. This was soon effected, and they left us with profuse expressions of regard; although, from the haste displayed in removing their ill-gotten wealth, it was evident that they placed as little confidence in our honesty, as we did in theirs.

We were overjoyed to get the boys back safe and sound; and, though Jerry was disposed to grumble at the idea of having them along, in a trip across the plains, he was glad to listen to Ned's explanation of the manner of their capture.

While they were watching the dogs, their ponies got frightened and ran away; when they discovered this, they also started for camp.

After it grew dark, they saw at a long distance from the road the light of a camp-fire. Thinking it ours, they started for it, and walked directly into the midst of a party of fifteen Comanches, who were as much surprised at seeing two youngsters armed with rifles coming into their midst, as they were frightened at finding themselves surrounded by naked, painted savages.

The Comanches immediately took possession of their fire-arms, and stripped them of nearly all their clothing. Then they tried to ascertain where they came from, and how they had become separated from their party.

The boys told them, as well as they were able by signs, that they were lost, and that their friends would give a great many goods if they would show them the way back to our camp.

This seemed to please the Indians, who soon after, took a large kettle from off the fire and set it before them, motioning them to eat. The kettle held a stew of what they thought was antelope meat, so they ate heartily of it, for they were very hungry. When they had nearly satisfied their appetites, Hal fished up from the depths of the mess the fore-leg and foot of a dog. This was decidedly an unpleasant revelation, and both became very sick and vomited freely, to the great amusement of the Indians.

They were then placed under guard, and soon after fell asleep. In the morning they were rudely awakened and told to mount a pony, to which they were securely tied, so as to prevent any attempt to escape.

Many miles were travelled in this manner. The boys became anxious, and were endeavoring to prepare themselves for the worst, when, from the top of a high bluff, they saw us awaiting their arrival.

Page 24

The sudden transition from despondency to joy, quite overpowered them; and, for the first time, they gave way to their feelings.

“Both of us tried as hard as we could,” said Ned, “to make ’em think we didn’t care a snap about it. But we did, though, I can tell you. We were mighty glad when we saw you, wasn’t we, Hal?”

This question was too much for Hal. The boys looked into each others faces for a moment, then burst into tears.

Everybody about camp was delighted with their safe return, and they were obliged many times to repeat their story, not forgetting a description of their supper on dog meat, in the Comanches’ camp.

CHAPTER V.

On the following morning the camp was astir and we were under way at a very early hour,—long before sunrise, in fact,—but we had hardly proceeded a mile from our halting-place, before one of the Mexicans, who was riding ahead of the wagons, came rushing back with the information that there was a large body of Indians a short distance in advance of us.

“It’s the balance of them cusses that had the boys, as true as preachin,” exclaimed Jerry. “The sneaks! I s’pose they found out all they wanted to from ’em, and then let ’em go. Ther best thing we kin do is ter camp right here whar we’ve got water and grass, and git ready for a brush; ’cause they’ll fight us, if ther’s any show for ’em, you bet.”

“We’ll jist camp right on this knoll, and then we shall have a fair chance all round; get your animals corralled with the wagons, and then we’ll ride out and meet ’em, that is, we must keep ’em as far away from the wagons as possible.”

Everything was soon arranged; but, to our surprise, the Indians made no attack.

[Illustration: The Comanche’s Attack.]

Jerry, myself and Hal rode out towards the spot where we had seen them, and a very few moments served to convince us that they meant business; for they were scattered, with the evident intention of surrounding us.

“That won’t work,” said Jerry. “We’ll just go back to the wagons and stay there and fight it out on our own dung-hill. There ain’t more’n a dozen of ’em, and, ef we can’t lick that number of thievin’ Comanches, we don’t deserve to git to California, no how.”

We had hardly returned to the wagons before the Indians began to show their tactics by riding around us in a circle, each time coming nearer and nearer, until finally, when within easy range, they threw themselves over upon the sides of their horses and let fly a shower of arrows, that fell among us without doing any harm, other than frightening the stock.

“Don’t a man of yer fire till I giv the order, and when they come abreast of us agin give it to ’em with your rifles; but don’t one of yer waste a shot.”

Once more we saw them coming—saw them preparing to throw themselves over to shoot from under their horses’ necks, and—

Page 25

"Now for it," cried Jerry, "give it to 'em!" and we forthwith gave them a volley that caused two of their number to fall headlong to the ground. This brought the party to a halt, and they retreated out of the range of our rifles, for the purpose of holding a consultation.

While they were thus engaged, one of the Mexicans called Jerry's attention to a solitary Indian who was approaching our wagons from the rear. Jerry immediately pronounced him to be the Arapahoe, whom we had seen with the party of Missourians.

He soon came up with us, and brought the intelligence that his party was only a short distance behind and would soon be in to help us.

This was indeed good news; but, before they could possibly reach us, the Comanches, who had evidently made up their minds to once more attack, began their old plan of riding around us in a circle, discharging their arrows with such good effect that one of the Mexicans was shot in the thigh.

Jerry, and the Indian guide, both advised us to reserve our fire until the enemy should come within range of our revolvers; but their arrows came so thick and fast we decided to give them one more volley from our rifles; this we did, having the good fortune to see two more of the party suddenly tumble from their horses' backs. This put an end for the time being to their attack, for they soon disappeared over the bluff.

"We was too much for 'em that time, old pard," said Jerry, familiarly slapping the Arapahoe upon his naked shoulder. Then, turning to me,—

"I was s'prised, though' to see how them youngsters stood up ter the rack. Boys as a gineral thing hain't got no bizness on the plains, no how; but these are a-goin' to larn Injin fightin', sartin."

"Umph! putty muche boy no good," responded the Arapahoe, in deep guttural tones.

"Where's your folks, old pard?" inquired Jerry. "Better be hurryin' up; we've got ter be a-goin', as soon as I put this chaw er terbacy on that Mexican feller's leg; nothin' like it to take the sore out, you know."

The mules were now harnessed to the wagons, and everything ready for a start, when the Missourians put in an appearance. We received them right gladly, and joyfully welcomed them to our party. We started in company; but soon ascertained it would be impossible for them to keep up with us on the road, their oxen travelled so much slower than our own teams. We parted from them with reluctance; for all the indications thus far seemed to convince old Jerry that the Indians would without doubt prove very troublesome on the trip, and the larger the party the more safety, always.

We saw no further signs of their presence until quite late in the afternoon, when Jerry called my attention to a small, oblong pile of stones, that stood in a conspicuous place a short distance from the trail we were following.

“That’s a Comanche sign,” said Jerry.

“Pooh! it’s nothing but a pile of stones,” said Hal.

Page 26

"That's true enuff," said Jerry; "but who put 'em there? Somebody did, for sartin."

"Probably some Traveller like ourselves," replied Hal.

"Likely ez not!" grinned Jerry. "Travellers don't ginerally have nothin' ter do but pick up stones and pile 'em up in thet shape, do they? No, sir! them Comanches know what thet means better'n you nor me; and, ten ter one, that's bin put there within twenty-four hours, too."

An examination revealed the fact that the pile had indeed been recently collected and put together with great care, evidently for the purpose of giving information to some party who were expected over the route within a short time. I have since found, that, in the absence of stones, these Indians frequently set the bleached head of a buffalo or deer in some conspicuous place, with so much significance that the whole tribe understand its meaning perfectly.

Just before dark, we found good water and grass about fifty yards away from the road in a little ravine, and here I determined to encamp for the night, notwithstanding Jerry advised our moving to the top of a knoll, half a mile away.

Our wagons were drawn up between the camp and the ravine, so as to serve as a protection to our animals as well as ourselves in case of an attack. We also adopted the further precaution of securely fastening our mules to the wagon wheels and putting out an extra guard, that was to be relieved every two hours during the night, which proved to be cloudy and dark.

We all retired early, neither of us really apprehending any trouble; but, about two hours before daybreak, we were awaked by the guard, who reported that he heard noises in and about the ravine.

"If that's the case, we may ez well git up and be ready for 'em," said Jerry, "Rout 'em all out; it's most daylight, anyway;" but, before the guard had time to obey this order, the war-whoop burst upon our ears, accompanied by a flight of arrows that went whizzing far over our heads into the darkness beyond.

In an instant every man was on his feet, rifle in hand. It soon became evident that the Comanches had taken possession of the ravine, its banks serving as a breastwork, behind which they were effectually sheltered in the darkness, from our bullets.

"Wal, there's one good thing," remarked old Jerry; "ez long ez they shoot from behind them banks there ain't no danger of their hitting us; for they'll allus aim too high."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied I, as an arrow struck me in the thigh.

“Nor I, either,” exclaimed Ned, as one of the mules dropped to the ground, with the shaft of an arrow sticking in his side.

“We can’t stan’ this a great while, no how; we must drive ’em out,” said Jerry. “Who’ll go with me round to the mouth of that cussed ravine? We must git inter their rear, somehow.”

“But we don’t know their exact position, nor how many there are of them,” replied I; “and it seems to me that the best thing we can do, is to remain where we are.”

Page 27

"And be shot like dogs?" queried Jerry. "No, sir; it won't do ter fire from this pint, 'cause ther flash from our guns will give 'em light enuff ter find out our position; but we kin git round in behind 'em, and a few shots will settle the matter. It's mighty lucky for us, that they hain't got nothin' but arrers; for if they hed firearms, 'twould hurt."

Jerry and one of the Mexicans started for the purpose of getting in the rear of the enemy, if possible, while I remained in charge of the camp. Suddenly, Ned, whose eyes were keen, declared that he saw something crawling in the tall grass behind the wagons. He was so positive of this, that after vainly endeavoring to get sight at the object myself, I told him to take good aim and fire. This he did, bringing out a lusty yell from his mark, and a fresh shower of arrows from our assailants.

In a short time we heard the sound of Jerry's revolvers from some distance down the ravine, and then all was quiet. It was fast becoming light; but we did not dare to move from our position until assured beyond doubt that the Indians had left. We soon heard old Jerry's cheery voice announcing that everything was right; and then we ventured out upon an exploring tour.

The first thing we discovered was a dead Indian, within thirty feet of the wagons. Ned's first Indian! The boy looked frightened as he realized the fact that he had really killed a Comanche; and, for some time thereafter, hardly appeared like himself; but the congratulations he received upon all sides, soon served to reassure him again, and in a little while he felt as proud of his exploit as old Jerry did for him.

We lost one mule, and I was slightly wounded by an arrow, during the fight; while the enemy lost one killed, and, we had good reason to believe, had several wounded.

The wagons bore the marks of many arrows; and, had it not been for the protection afforded by them, our entire party would have been massacred without doubt.

Old Jerry attributed the failure of the attack in a great measure, to the fact that they were deprived of the use of their horses; for they rarely go into a fight, except when on horseback. We were glad enough to see daylight, as well as rejoiced to be able to once more resume our trip.

CHAPTER VI.

We had been on the road several hours, when Hal came riding up, very much excited, declaring that he had found a bear's track.

Jerry, Ned, and myself at once went to the spot, and saw what I immediately admitted to be the clear, well-defined track of a grizzly in the sand.

Turning to Jerry, I said, "Why, Jerry! I didn't know that grizzlies were found on these plains."

"No more they ain't," was the reply.

"But how could that track be there, if there was no bear to make it?" inquired Ned.

"But it ain't a bear's track," said Jerry, attentively regarding it without dismounting from his horse.

Page 28

"But it certainly is some creature's track," said I. "You'll admit that, won't you?"

"Admit it? No; sartin not: that ain't no critter's track," declared Jerry.

"It's a bear's track," rejoined I. "You certainly are mistaken, Jerry. Look! here is the imprint of the heel, and there the toes, as plain as the nose on your face, and as clear as though made not an hour ago."

"Well, it may look like a bar's track, but 'tain't one. What you call the heel and toes, is made by them spires of grass which the wind bends, makin' 'em scoop out the sand, as you see thar. You ought to hev seen that yourself; but you see you 'States' men never stop to think. If a hundred was ter travel over them plains once a year for fifty years, not more than one out er the hull lot would make a respectable woodsman."

"Why not?" interrupted both Hal and Ned, in a breath.

"Why not, youngsters? I'll tell you why: 'cause 'Mericans allus travel with their mouths open and their eyes shet tight. A Mexican or Injun will go all day without speakin', onless he's spoke to; but he'll see everything there is ter be seen on the route: a 'Merican'll talk continually, and see nothin' but a blasted dried-up country, that ain't fit for nothin'."

"I wish I knew something about trailing," remarked Ned. "Can't you give us a few general rules, Jerry?"

"Rules!" repeated Jerry, contemptuously, "what good d'yer s'pose rules 'ed do you? Yer wouldn't foller 'em. P'r'aps ter-night, after we git inter camp, if these cussed varmints'll let us alone long enuff, I'll give yer a lectur' on trailin', ter pay fer yer killin' that Comanche last night;— there they be agin, surer'n shootin'," exclaimed he, suddenly pausing, and pointing to a dark spot far away on the prairie.

We had just reached the top of a long ridge that gave us an extensive view of the country around; and far, very far in the distance, Jerry's keen eyes had detected this moving object.

I brought my glasses to bear upon it, and could distinctly see a party of three or four Indians, and some one who was dressed in skirts, like a woman.

I remarked that I believed there was a woman with them, and Jerry, who had been looking long and earnestly at the party, said,—

"Yes, there's six on 'em, and one hez got on a white woman's dress, ez near ez I kin make out. We've hed 'bout 'nuff Comanche fightin', so far ez I'm consarned; but ef them devils hev got a woman pris'ner, why we'd be less than men not ter go arter her

whatever happened. We kin head 'em off easy enuff by riding along on this side the ridge; but we must stop the wagons down in the holler there, so they won't see 'em."

After some little hesitation, caused by a reluctance to leave the wagons in the unprotected situation that we should if we attempted to overtake the Indians, we finally decided that common humanity required we should rescue the woman, if it could be done; and, procuring a good supply of ammunition, Jerry, myself, Hal, and one of the Mexicans started, leaving Ned in charge of the wagons, with directions relative to camping for the night in case we did not return before dark.

Page 29

It was an oppressively warm day, and we had a ride of many miles before us, ere we could hope to reach the point where we expected to intercept the savages. We rode swiftly along over the beautiful green rolling prairie, pausing for nothing, until Jerry proposed a halt for a few moments, while he made a *reconnaissance*.

Approaching the top of a slight eminence, he dismounted, and carefully picketing his horse, dropped upon his hands and knees, and stealthily crept to the top. A single glance sufficed to show him the situation; and he returned to us, vainly endeavoring to repress the excitement that was plainly visible in every movement, as he said, in a low voice,—

“We kin ketch ’em, boys, sartin. It’s a woman, for sure, riding on a pony, with one of the varmints on each side of her; but we’ve got to hurry some.”

Then striking his spurs deep into his horse’s flanks, he was soon far in advance of us. An hour’s ride, and we came to a halt; our horses reeking with sweat, and panting like frightened deer.

Once more Jerry crept cautiously to the top of the bluff. Again we saw his head appear for an moment above the level of the waving grass that grew on the summit; then he carefully arose upon his feet, and, standing erect, gazed about him for an instant, to again drop to the earth, and quickly make his way towards us.

I had watched his movements with a nervous curiosity that I could not repress; and now, as he came towards us, saw that the time for action had come. Hurriedly he told us that the party were not a mile away; but he had failed to discover the two braves with the prisoner, who were evidently lingering behind for some purpose. His idea was to dash in between the separated party, and thus prevent them from uniting and rendering each other assistance.

Jerry took the lead; whispering to Hal to be sure and keep by my side, whatever might happen; we spurred our horses up the steep acclivity; our rifles cocked, and ready at the word to pour a volley into the savages.

We were discovered before we reached the top; for, with a yell, the three Indians who were in advance, turned their horses and galloped furiously back in the direction of the remainder of their party, who were not yet in sight.

It was a run for life. Our horses fairly flew over the prairie, as we rapidly approached each other, almost at right angles. I saw Jerry bring his rifle to his shoulder. I noticed the long, bright barrel glisten in the sunlight, and then the little puff of white smoke curl gracefully up from the end, and knew that the foremost Indian had fallen, without looking towards him.



His two companions, with a yell of rage, hastily threw themselves over upon the sides of their horses as though to protect them from our expected volley. But not a shot was fired. We could neither of us shoot a rifle with accuracy while our horses were in motion. What should we do?

Page 30

Jerry made no sign. We must either halt or use our revolvers. We still followed Jerry, whose horse was travelling at a marvelous pace. Hal kept close to my side, as we swiftly sped over the beautiful green turf. I watched every movement of the savages. Were they gaining on us? No: we seem to have headed them off. Yes: now they turn. They are going to escape us, surely.

Jerry says, "Now's your time, boys! give 'em one!"

And "give 'em one" we did.

One reels in his saddle, but clutches his horse's mane and saves himself; then, a moment after, falls, and his horse dashes off over the plain, while his comrade turns and rides madly away.

"Now, boys, easy. We've got 'em," says Jerry. "Let's give our horses a chance to breathe. That ain't no hurry, now; we'll have the varmints in a few minutes. Here's their trail, now."

Slowly we follow it, away from the flying fugitive towards the prisoner and her captors;—carefully we examine every foot of ground. Old Jerry says, "We must be near to 'em; but where are they? We must soon meet them;"—but meet them we never did.

In a little swale, a short distance from the trail, where the grass was fresh and green, we came upon the body of a Mexican woman—dead.

She had been scalped; and a single spear thrust, through her body, told us all that could be told of her sad story.

She had Apparently been very feeble, and unable to keep up with the savages; for her worn and bloody feet bore evidence that she had walked many weary miles, while about her waist was a portion of the lariat that had been used in leading her.

Finding that she could no longer walk, her captors placed her on the horse; but this had greatly delayed them, and they had disposed of her in the manner above narrated. The bloody deed accomplished, the murderers were hurrying on to join their comrades, when the sound of Jerry's rifle warned them of danger; and they had made a long *detour* from the trail, and thus escaped us.

It was growing too late to think of pursuing them farther; and we reluctantly turned our horses' heads towards camp, which we reached just after nightfall, very weary from our long afternoon's ride and quite ready for bed; nor was our sleep any the less sweet for the attempt to perform a kind action.

Ned made an effort to have Jerry deliver his lecture upon the art of trailing, but the old man appeared to think it would receive more attention another time; and so it was

postponed till the following evening, when, true to his promise, he entertained us for a long hour; giving us much useful information upon the subject, which I will endeavor to repeat for the benefit of my young readers, some of whom may one day be placed like Hal and Ned in a position where they will find it, not merely a matter of entertainment, but exceedingly useful; for trailing is as much an art as is painting or sculpture, and requires the most constant practice to become a proficient in it.

Page 31

Having filled and lighted his pipe, old Jerry began as follows:—

“There ain’t no rules, boys, that anybody kin give yer. You must have a sharp eye, a fine ear, and a still tongue;—these make your principal stock in trade.”

But I do not propose to follow old Jerry *verbatim* in his long talk with the boys, but shall give you merely the substance of his remarks; and here let me add, that, in addition to the above requirements, a successful trailer should possess quick perception, fertile resources, and great presence of mind.

Almost any scout knows, that, in order to overtake a party of Indians who have stampeded his stock the night previous, he should travel slowly at the first, and follow persistently at a moderate pace, giving his animals the night to rest in, and starting at daybreak in the morning. By following this course he is pretty certain of overtaking the party on the third day, especially if they do not suspect pursuit. Then comes the time when the services of an experienced trailer are requisite to tell you the number and condition of the enemy, and how many hours have elapsed since they passed a given point; for it is necessary to remain concealed after you ascertain these facts, until you decide upon the manner of attack; for, if Indians suspect pursuit, they always scatter, and it is impossible to overtake them.

One can easily tell from the appearance of a trail, if it be made by a war-party or not, because there are no Indians who take their families along when starting on the war-path; consequently, they never carry their lodge-poles with them, which are always fastened to the sides of the animals, and the ends permitted to drag on the ground behind. If there should be no trace of these, it is safe to regard it as a war-party.

It is always easy to distinguish the track of an Indian pony from that made by a white man’s horse; for the former will be much smaller, and bear no impression of a shoe.

One of the most difficult things to accomplish in trailing is to learn to correctly ascertain the age of a trail.

If a track is very fresh, it will show moisture when the earth is turned up, which in a few hours becomes dry. If in the sand, little particles will be found running into the impression left in the ground. Should rain have fallen since the track was made, the sharp edges will have been washed away. The condition of the ordure also furnishes an indication.

I once employed as scout, a Mexican, who could tell by a single glance at a trail, by what tribe it had been made, their number, its age, and in fact every particular concerning the party, as truthfully as though he had seen them.

We were one time following an Apache trail, when we came to a ledge of bare rock. I examined it carefully, and could detect no mark of any kind; but the Mexican led us across as easily as though it had been a beaten path, without even once hesitating a moment, during the two miles over which it extended.

Page 32

When I asked him what he saw that indicated the course of the trail, he showed me that the surface of the rock was covered with a very fine, dry moss, that, with the closest scrutiny, bore evidence of having been pressed by the foot: so slight was the impression made, it would have escaped the notice of ninety-nine out of every hundred persons; yet his keen eyes detected every footprint as plainly as though it had been made in the grass.

If a trail is for any reason lost, an expert will easily recover it by following for a time its general direction and watching the formation of the land; for all trails are made over the highest portions, thereby affording a view of the entire country through which they pass.

In the grass, a trail can be seen for a long time: the blades will be trodden down and bent in the direction followed by the party; and, even after it has recovered its natural position, a good trailer will have no difficulty in following it; for his keen eye will detect a slight difference in the color of the grass that has been stepped on from that growing around it.

So, also, the appearance of the tracks will at once show him the gait at which the party were travelling, and he thus knows how to regulate his pace so as to overtake them.

It is exceedingly rare to find a white person that can retrace his steps for any distance in an open country; while an Indian is always able to do it. No matter how circuitous may be the route by which you may have reached a certain locality, an Indian will find his way back to the place of starting by the most direct route, though it be in the darkest night; and, if you ask him how he does it, if he replies to your question at all, he will simply shrug his shoulders and say, "*Quien sabe?*" or who knows.

No matter how agreeable he may be about camp; on the road he never speaks, except it should be necessary to give some direction or order.

Thus it will be seen, that he who would become a skilful trailer, must of necessity be an observer, as well as thinker; and remember, boys, that he who talks most, generally thinks the least.

CHAPTER VII.

On the evening of the second day after the incidents narrated in the previous chapter, we encamped on the banks of the San Pedro, with wood, water, and grass in abundance; in fact, using the words of Hal: "Everything to make us comfortable, but fresh meat; and meat we must have. Let's go out and get some. We shall be sure to find a deer or antelope in this beautiful bottom."

"What say you, Jerry, shall we try it?" inquired I.

"I reckon so. We've got plenty of time before night, and I 'spect I may as well go and show you how ter hunt 'em; 'cause yer won't git none unless I go 'long with yer, that's sartin."

"Well, we'll see what we get if you do go along," responded Hal; "so come on."

Page 33

Mounting our horses, Jerry, Hal, Ned, and myself set out in pursuit of antelope, whose tracks could be seen in all directions about us.

We had ridden two or three miles without starting game of any kind, when Jerry, who was a short distance in advance of us, suddenly dismounted, and began studying the ground attentively.

"Hilloa!" exclaimed Ned, "Jerry's struck something."

As we rode up to him, he said,—

"Wal, boys, here's game, sartin sure."

"What is it, Jerry?" inquired Hal.

"What is it? Why, a fresh Comanche trail; and 'tain't no war party, neither, for they've got their lodges with 'em."

"How do you know that?" inquired Ned."

"How do you know you're settin' on that horse?" asked Jerry. "Why, I know one just ez well ez you know t'other. Can't you see whar the ends of the poles dragged in the dirt behind 'em. Anybody could see that, I should think."

"How old is the trail, Jerry?" inquired I.

"That trail waz made afore eight o'clock this mornin'," was the answer.

"Before eight o'clock," sneered Hal. "Why don't you say that the Comanches passed this spot at precisely seventeen minutes past six o'clock this morning? You might just as well be particular, Jerry."

"Come, Jerry, tell us how you know when the Indians passed?" said I.

"Sartin I will," he good-humoredly replied. "Yer see we hed a purty hevvy dew last night, but the sun waz up so high that the grass waz all dry at eight o'clock. Wall, now, if you'll look you'll see, that where the grass was pressed down by the horses' feet into the earth, a little of the sand stuck to it, (coz it waz damp), that has dried on since. Now if the trail bed been made after eight o'clock, when the grass was dry, why, it wouldn't stick eny more than it does now."

"A very satisfactory explanation," said I.

"Now what I propose is," continued Jerry, "thet we just foller the trail, and we'll strike something afore many hours, ez sure's my name's Jerry Vance."

"But we may get into trouble," urged I.

"Ther ain't no danger. It's a party of squaws and pappooses, I reckon, coz yer see ther ain't more'n four horses with 'em."

"I'm agreed," said I, and away we galloped over the beautiful green prairie; but, before we had gone a mile, a fine large herd of antelope appeared, quietly grazing upon a knoll at a little distance, who, when they saw us, stood for an instant curiously regarding us, and then trotted leisurely away.

"They're kinder wild, I reckon," said Jerry. "These Injuns must hev bin huntin' 'em, and we might chase 'em all day without gittin' a shot. So we'll just tie our horses in thet chaparral down there, out of sight, and then we'll call 'em up."

We dismounted, and securing our horses, followed Jerry. He removed the ramrod from his rifle, and tied to one end of it an old-fashioned, red bandana handkerchief. This done, he planted the other end firmly in the ground, leaving the flag to flutter in the breeze.

Page 34

"Now, boys, you just lie down here, in the tall grass, so the critters won't see yer, and wait awhile."

Following Jerry's instructions, we placed ourselves in the tall grass, and lying still awaited the result of the experiment.

"Yer see," continued he, talking in a low tone of voice, "antelope's the most curious critters in the world, 'ceptin' women. Jist ez soon ez they see that red flag, they'll want to know what it means, and they won't rest easy till they find out, either."

And, sure enough, in a few moments we saw the graceful creatures, one after another, turn and attentively look at the signal. Then they slowly walked towards it. Then came a pause and a nibble of grass, and again, as though they could not resist the desire to ascertain what this singular thing fluttering in the breeze was, they hesitatingly came still nearer, as though they feared some hidden danger. In this way they soon approached within easy range, and we shot five with our revolvers.

"There," said Jerry, as the remainder of the herd finally galloped away over the plain, "you boys see what curiosity does. Yer kin allers fetch 'em with a red hankercher, and gin'rally by jist layin' down on yer back, and holdin' up yer feet. They're awful curious critters, them antelopes is. I reckon we'd better quit this trail, and git them air carcasses inter camp. What d'yer say, youngsters?"

"I declare, I forgot to fire at all!" exclaimed Ned. "I never once thought of my pistol."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Jerry. "You've got the 'buck-fever' my boy. I might a knowed you wouldn't a fired; no, nor you, neither," continued he, turning towards Hal.

"But I did fire twice, though," said Hal.

"Le'me see yer pistol, youngster," said Jerry; after examining it, he again burst into a loud laugh.

"Jest as I 'spected! Every barr'l loaded. Yer see you was so 'cited that yer forgot all about firin'. You thought yer did, I s'pose; but don't be too sartin next time, 'cause the fever allers takes what little sense a feller's got, when it strikes him."

The antelope were soon dressed; but Hal's chagrin was so great at the thought of being so cleverly detected by Jerry's shrewdness, that I attempted to comfort him by promising to relate my own misfortunes upon experiencing my first attack. After supper, and while we were smoking our pipes, the boys claimed the fulfilment of my promise.

I only hope that the narrative may prove as interesting to my young readers, as it did to Hal and Ned, who heard the story with roars of laughter at my blunders.



Well, boys, I was once passing through the Sacramento range of mountains in New Mexico, in company with an old trapper and hunter, named Nat Beal.

Nat was a jovial, pleasant companion; and, in truth one of the best shots I ever saw.

While riding through one of the numerous little valleys with which that range abounds, we saw at a little distance, a magnificent specimen of a black-tailed deer.

Page 35

Now I had always wanted to kill a black-tailed deer, and this was the first time I had ever seen one, so I begged Nat to let me shoot it.

He said, with a laugh, "Shoot away!" and I took deliberate aim and fired.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared he, as the fellow bounded away unharmed, "it's as clear a case of 'buck-fever' as ever I saw."

"Not at all. I aimed too high; that was the only trouble."

"Jest so," replied Nat; "a man with the 'fever' always aims too high."

"I'll bet I won't miss the next one," said I, angry at the imputation.

"I'll bet you will, two to one on it," said Nat. "But it's too late to get another shot to-night, so we'll wait until to-morrow evening; and, in the mean time, I'll give you a few ideas 'bout deer."

"As soon as the sun had sunk to his rest the next evening, I borrowed Nat's 'call' and started out."

"What's a 'call'?" inquired Ned.

"A 'call' is a whistle, made from an eagle's bone. It is generally fancifully carved, and, when sounded, makes a noise that perfectly resembles that made by a young one in calling its mother. So perfect is the imitation of the bleating of a fawn, that, when properly sounded, you will sometimes see half a dozen does, running to see if their young are in danger."

"But don't they stay with their little ones?" asked Hal.

"No: they hide them in the tall grass at night. You see a fawn gives out no scent until after it's a month old, and can run well; but the old one does, and knowing this she goes off to sleep alone, so that the wolves and panthers won't be attracted by her scent to the fawn. This she continues doing until the fawn is able to protect itself by running. In the fall of the year, therefore, if you select a spot near the foot of a mountain where the grass is tall and free from bushes, and, between sundown and dark, conceal yourself in it and sound your call, you are very apt to get a choice between four or five good fat doe's."

Well, I was determined to get a deer; so I borrowed the 'call,' and started out. After walking a mile or two, I came to a beautiful stretch of open prairie, where the tall grass served admirably for concealment.

I lay down upon my belly, and commenced crawling towards a grove of young cedars, near the base of the mountain.

I very soon discovered that propelling myself along, Indian fashion, with my elbows, was of itself no small job, especially when obliged to carry a rifle and keep my head below the level of the grass about me.

I persevered however, and after working like a beaver for nearly an hour, began to wonder why I did not see any deer, when all at once it occurred to me, that I hadn't sounded the call; and that made me remember, that I had forgotton in which pocket I put it.

I endeavored for some time to get hold of it, but was finally obliged to roll over upon my back before I could fish it out of the depths of my pantaloons pocket. This was easy enough to do, but to resume my former position without betraying my presence—ah! that was another thing. I eventually succeeded in doing it however, and placing the whistle between my lips, put forth my hand to recover my rifle, when, to my horror and dismay, I saw, within four feet of my face, a huge rattlesnake.

Page 36

To say that I got up, don't half express it, boys. I bounded as man never bounded before, startling deer, fawn, and everything else about me, but the snake. He didn't seem to care a particle, but retained his position near the rifle, looking as angry as if he thought me to blame for jumping; and the worst of it was, there was neither stick nor stone within sight, that I could get hold of.

I said, "Shoo!" but the snake wouldn't shoo worth a cent. I stamped on the ground, and said, "Get out!" but he wouldn't move. There he was, within six inches of my rifle; his long, slender body partially coiled so that he could easily strike any object approaching; with form erect, and long forked tongue, darting in and out of his half-opened mouth, as his flat, ugly head slowly vibrated to and fro like the pendulum of a clock.

It was growing dark too, and I was a long distance from camp, and the country was full of Mescalero Apaches, and I hadn't even a stick to reach him with. What could I do?

I bethought myself of my powder-flask, and taking good aim, hurled it with all the force I could muster. It struck him fairly on the body and with a rattle of defiance, he sprang towards me, and I—well, I jumped.

I managed to get hold of my rifle, but the snake was gone: he was somewhere in the grass about me, and I didn't know where; so I concluded to stand not on the order of my going, but go at once to camp, and go I did; but, before I was a hundred yards away I remembered that I had left my powder-flask behind. Nor could I find Nat's whistle anywhere about me, or even remember what I had done with it. In the surprise occasioned by my discovery of the snake, I had dropped it.

It was too dark to think of returning to search for it that night; besides, there was a snake loose in the vicinity that I didn't care to encounter.

I knew Nat would laugh at my returning without a deer, but I made up my mind to endure that, without getting angry; for I felt confident, camp was the place for me just then.

Nat asked no questions; but after a time, I voluntarily related to him the mishaps of the afternoon. He laughed heartily, and promised to go with me in the morning and give me a practical lesson in deer-stalking.

The next day we visited the scene of my discomfiture, which Nat pronounced a splendid place for stalking, showing me where several fawns had lain the previous night. We also found the 'call,' just where I dropped it when I made my jump, which Nat pronounced, equal to any ever made by a first-class circus-man: in fact, I felt rather proud of it myself; and when Nat slyly remarked that I was better at jumping than at hunting, I made up my mind that I would have a deer that night, come what would.

Page 37

Sunset came; and telling Nat that I would not return to camp without the deer, I started for the scene of my former ill luck. I was delighted to find, that by following Nat's instructions, I was able to move over the ground much easier than the night before. Still, it was pretty hard work. But I persevered; and upon reaching the proper place, sounded my call—once, twice, thrice; and in a short time, saw a fine fat doe coming directly towards me, apparently listening for a repetition of the sound. Once more I used the 'call:' the imitation was perfect. She approached a little nearer to me, and stopped.

I dropped my head, and once again sounded the 'call,' endeavoring to give it the quick, impatient tone of the young when in danger.

The effect was perfect. I fairly laughed to myself, to see the doe bound towards me until she stood within easy rifle range, when she suddenly stopped again, as though frightened at her own temerity.

I brought my rifle to my shoulder, and was in the act of pulling the trigger, when a slight rustling in the grass at my right attracted my attention. Thinking of that snake, I turned my eyes in the direction of the sound, and saw, to my horror and amazement, not the snake, but a large panther, not twenty yards away, and creeping stealthily towards me, with glaring eyes, gleaming white teeth, and ears well laid back upon his head. For an instant I was dumbfounded; then, recollecting myself, I turned the rifle and gave him its contents.

The creature made a convulsive leap into the air, and dropped to the ground—dead; and I—well, I believe I started for camp to tell Nat.

We packed the carcass into camp and while removing the skin, Nat took occasion to congratulate me, on being able to so perfectly imitate a fawn as to lure a panther from its lair; advising me however, to give up deer-stalking until I struck a better streak of luck.

"There boys, you see what the 'buck-fever' did for me. We are all liable to take it."

"Yes; but you killed the panther," said Hal.

"True; but it was only a piece of luck that might not happen again in a dozen times, and I didn't kill the deer."

The boys agreed that my story was both amusing and interesting; and as for old Jerry, he laughed most heartily at my experience, saying that it reminded him of his first adventure with a bear.

The boys, eager for another story, urged him to relate it then, but Jerry declined; promising them however, that they should have it the next night.

Early on the following morning, we once more started on the road; and for two days, met with no incident worthy of note.

We were now approaching the section of country bordering on the Rio Pecos, one of the most barren and desolate portions on our whole route.

This stream runs for hundreds of miles through the plains, its course being marked by the growth of no living green thing: in fact, you do not know of its presence, until you stand upon its banks.

Page 38

It is narrow, deep, extremely crooked, and very rapid, while the water is both salt and bitter. The banks are very steep and there are but few places throughout its entire length where it can be crossed in safety.

But little grass grows near it, and neither man nor beast can drink the water with impunity.

Upon reaching the top of a long line of bluffs, towards which we had been travelling for the last two days, we came in sight of a large wagon-train encamped, apparently upon the open plain.

Jerry at once declared it to be Magoffin's; and the boys and myself volunteered to ride forward and ascertain the cause of their delay.

A brisk canter of a couple of hours brought us to the encampment, which sure enough, proved to be Magoffin's train, delayed by the high water in the Pecos.

Right glad were we all, to fall in with our old companions once more; for, aside from the company their presence furnished, we felt infinitely safer than when travelling alone with our small party.

As soon as Jerry arrived with the wagons, a consultation was held; and it was decided to go into camp and wait for the water to subside.

"It's high'n I ever see it afore," said Jerry, standing on the brink and gazing at the turbid, swift current, that almost filled its banks; "and the mischief is, that when she once gits up, there's no tellin' when she'll go down. We may hev to lay here two weeks, afore we kin cross."

"Two weeks!" exclaimed I, why we'd better build a boat."

"Ef we hed a lot of empty casks, we might float our wagons over and swim the mules; but we hain't got 'em, that's sartin."

"I'll tell you what we can do," said Hal; "we can build a raft."

"Yes; or better still, float the things over in one of the wagon-bodies," suggested Ned.

"Well thought of," exclaimed I: "we can at least make the attempt."

We soon had one of the wagons unloaded and on the ground; beneath which we carefully stretched a couple of the sheets. One of the men was sent across the stream with a small cord, by which he drew over a rope, to which was attached a common block, after which the wagon-body was launched, and pulled across the river in safety.

It was then returned and loaded, reaching the opposite bank without mishap, or leaking a drop.

The wagons were now taken apart; and piece by piece, carried across and put together; into them, the goods as fast as ferried over, were reloaded; and at the end of the second day we were ready to swim our mules. This was accomplished without loss; and thanks to Ned, the day following we were once more on the road.

I ventured to remind Jerry of his favorite saying regarding boys, but the old man had no reply to make, save that "Ned was a most 'stonishin' boy. He'd killed a Injin, and had a wonderful head on him, which was more'n he could say of t'other one."

In consideration of Ned's valuable services, old Jerry consented that evening, to relate for his especial benefit, the story of his first experience in bear hunting, which I shall give as nearly as possible in the old man's words:—

Page 39

"Yer see boys, I was bringed up in Tennessee; leastways, I lived thar till I was nigh onter seventeen year old, when I struck out and come to Texas.

"Father hed a farm in Tennessee, and ez I was the only boy, I had a heap of work ter do on the cussid place. I didn't like fannin' much, and used ter tease the old folks ter let me go down ter Knoxville and go into a store, or enter inter some other ekelly 'spectable bizness. But the old folks allowed that I must stay with 'em till I was twenty-one, any how.

"One day when I was about sixteen year old, the old man said ter me, 'Jerry, I've got a lot of wood cut, up on the mountain-lot, that wants piling up. Yer'd better take yer dinner and an axe along, and go up and pile it. Do it nice now, 'cause I shall be up 'bout noon, ter see how you git 'long.'

"I knowed what that meant, well enuff; it meant that, if I didn't do it right, I'd git a gaddin', 'cause the old man was famous for gaddins'.

"Arter breakfast mother put me up a good dinner of bread and meat, and I shouldered my axe and started for the wood-lot, 'bout three miles up the mountain.

"I whistled along and didn't think nothin' 'bout ther walk; 'cause, yer see, I allus liked ther woods, and enjoyed bein' thar. Arter I got to the lot, I found the wood, and went ter work to get it piled. 'Twarn't much of a job, and I got it done afore noon and then sot down on a log and waited for the old man ter come. Wal, I sot and waited, and begun ter get mighty lonesome and ter think 'bout Injins, though I knowed there warn't no Injins thar. I waited so long I got hungry, and concluded I'd take a bite of the bread and meat mother'd put up.

"I sot down on a log, and put my basket on the stump, and went ter eatin'. I never smelt anything so good as that dinner smelt, less 'twas a good venison steak on the coals, when you're putty hungry.

"Wal, I sot there, eatin' away, and, the fust thing I knowed, I kind 'er felt suthin' tetch my shoulder. I turned my head, and thar was a big black bar, with his nose within a foot of mine. I've seen bars sence that time, and big ones too, but that bar looked bigger'n a ox ter me. I didn't stop for nothin', but jist lited out, and the bar arter me. Maybe yer think you've seen runnin'; but I tell yer honestly, boys, yer never see nothin', like ther time I made gittin' away from that bar.

"I looked over my shoulder once in a while, but 'twarn't no use; thar was that bar right behind me, growin' bigger and bigger every minute, it seemed ter me. The harder I run, the wus I was off. I didn't gain a foot on ther critter. My heart riz rite inter my throte, and my bar riz up so I lost my cap,—leastways I've allus 'spected that was the reason I lost it. I didn't know what ter do. I kep' on runnin', but my wind was givin' out, and I knew I

couldn't stan' it much longer; so I made a break for a good sized white birch I see, and the way I shinned up that tree, would a bin a credit to any major-gen'ral, I tell yer.

Page 40

"When ther bar come to ther foot of ther tree he sot down on his haunches, ter kinder get breath a little, and then he begun ter climb it; and blast my picter boys, ef he couldn't giv me three pints in the game of climbin', and then beat me. It didn't seem ter me he was more'n a second, gittin' up. I kep' climbin' higher an' higher, and the bar kep' a-follerin'. By and by I got so high, that ther tree begun ter bend backwards and for'ards, but ther bar kep' comin' higher and higher.

[Illustration: Jerry and the Bear.]

"I saw 'twarn't no use, so I made up my mind ter swing ther tree over ez far ez I could, and drop and try my legs onct more. So I clim' a little higher, and when the tree begun ter bend, that bar sot thar and just laffed, if ever a bar laffed in this world. The tree kep' swayin' back'ards and for'ards jist like a cradle.

"I watched my chance, and, when ther top come putty nigh ther ground, I jist dropped, and, when I picked myself up, blast my eyes, ef thar warn't ther bar, right side er me. Wal I started agin, but hadn't run more'n fifty yards, afore I tripped and down I went. I knowed 'twas all up with me then, so I jist laid still. Why, I was so scart I couldn't hev moved ef I'd tried; but I did look up jist once, to see the bar set clus by, watchin' me, and lookin' as mad as a wet hen.

"I never was so scart afore nor since. I 'spected every minute to feel his teeth and hear my bones a-crunchin', but I didn't.

"Putty soon I heered somebody down in the woods a-callin'. I 'spected it was dad, but I didn't dare to holler or make any noise. I heered 'em callin' agin and agin; putty soon I jist looked out'er ther corner of my eye, and see the bar was gone. At first I couldn't believe it, and 'spected he was playin' 'possum—waitin' ter see ef I moved, afore he went for me. Well, I kep' putty still for a while, but not hearin' anything from the bar, I finally looked up, and see that he'd gone for good, and then I got up and started for home in just about ez big a hurry, ez any feller ever went down a mountain.

"I hadn't got more'n half a mile afore I see a feller rite ahead of me, a-leadin' that identical bar, thet bed been chasin' me all day.

"I never was so took down in my life boys, I wouldn't a bin s'prised at anything, arter thet. I mustered up spunk enuff ter speak to the feller, and he told me 'twas a tame bar, thet belonged ter him, thet hed got loose thet day, and he'd bin up a-findin' him.

"Well boys, I never felt so ashamed of myself afore nor since.

"You may bet, I never told no one 'bout it afore, and I shan't agin. That's all."

We were very much amused at Jerry's story, and the boys pronounced it decidedly the best they had yet heard, and as the hour was late, we all "turned in," in search of a good night's rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

Page 41

The following morning, we once more took the road, and for three days followed the course of the river, which carried us through the most undesirable portion of country we had yet seen; even game seemed to have forsaken it.

The route then brought us into the vicinity of the celebrated “Comanche Springs,” situated in the open prairie, at the crossing of the great Comanche war trail that leads into Mexico—a trail that may with truth, be said, to be marked with whitened bones, its entire distance.

As we were likely at any time to meet with bands of Comanches in this neighborhood, it became necessary to travel with the greatest precaution; but even this did not appear to prevent one of the “varmints,” as old Jerry called him, from boldly coming into camp the next day, without any one having seen his approach. Hal was the first who discovered him, and as the fellow was alone, begged so hard for permission for him to remain, that I yielded a reluctant assent, and permitted him to come into camp.

The fellow claimed to be very hungry, a good friend of the whites, and said he was on his way from Mexico, to his home on the Brazos, and only wanted permission to remain, long enough to rest a little and obtain something to eat.

“I don’t like the cut of any of them varmints,” said Jerry, “they’re all natral thieves, and ez likely ez not, thet cuss is a spy. We can’t tell nothin’ ’bout ’em, and ther best way is, ter steer clear on ’em, or at any rate keep ’em at good rifle range.”

Telling Hal not to lose sight of the fellow for an instant, and as soon as he had rested an hour, to start him on, I laid down under one of the wagons for the purpose of taking a *siesta*, but was awakened by hearing Hal loudly inquiring, if any body knew what had become of his pony. No one appeared to know anything about it, but I heard Jerry’s voice suggest, that probably his Comanche friend could tell where it was. This aroused me in an instant, and I crawled out from under the wagon, and, calling Hal, asked him where his horse was, when he saw him last.

He replied,—

“I saw him not half an hour ago, within twenty yards of this spot.”

“How did he get away? pull his picket-pin?” asked I.

“No,” replied Hal, “the lariat looks as though it had been cut.”

“It’s plain enuff to tell who’s got yer hoss; it’s that Comanche. Them varmints are nat’ral hoss thieves, any how.”

“Do you mean to tell me, that that Indian could steal my horse, right here, under my very eyes, and I not see him?” angrily asked Hal.



“Well, you see he has, don’t yer?” replied Jerry; “and not only you didn’t see him, but nobody else; and didn’t he come walkin’ into camp this mornin’ and not a soul know it, till he was right amongst us?”

“I don’t care if he did, he never could have carried off my pony and I not see him,” declared Hal.

“But he did though youngster, as sure’s you’re a livin boy.”

Page 42

"I'm inclined to think you're right, Jerry; the Comanche has stolen the pony without doubt," said I.

"But how could he?" demanded Hal. "I was sitting right here, close by him all the time."

"Listen Hal, I'll give you a bit of my experience with these same Comanches," said I: "About two years ago, I was sitting on the porch of my ranche, one afternoon, and a couple of Comanches came up and asked for food.

"Manuel, the herder, recognized one of them as a fellow named 'Creeping Serpent,' one of the most expert horse-thieves in his tribe. Naturally enough, I wanted to know how he got the name; and, in consideration of a bright red blanket, he consented to give an exhibition of his skill.

"The animals were all in plain sight, not a hundred yards from the ranche door. I was bound not to lose sight of them, and I didn't; but, in less than half an hour, I saw one of them bounding away over the plain, with an Indian on his back.

"I was so astounded that when the fellow brought the horse back, I made him show me just how it was done; and ever since then, I'm disposed to believe anything relative to the thieving abilities of the Comanches, without question."

"But how did he do it?" persistantly questioned Hal. "He never would have done it before my eyes."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed old Jerry. "Didn't one of the cussid varmints, just play the same trick on you?"

"But I won't admit he's got my pony," declared Hal.

"Tell us please, how he stole your horse, will you?" inquired Ned.

He laid himself flat upon the ground, and crawled through the grass towards the animal selected, using his elbows as the propelling power. This was done so slowly as not to alarm the herd in the least. Upon reaching the picket-pin, he loosed it so that it could be easily withdrawn; all the time taking good care that his head should not appear above the top of the grass.

"He then began to slowly coil the rope, each coil imperceptibly drawing the animal nearer to himself, until it finally stood beside him; then, getting it between him and the ranche, he gradually pulled himself up, and, clinging to its side, by skilful manipulation of the lariat, induced the animal to take an opposite direction from camp, until fairly out of sight or range; when, resuming his proper position on the creature, he galloped rapidly away.

“Having seen how the thing is done Hal, I incline to Jerry's belief,— that the fellow has stolen your pony.”

“I can't think that he's got it,” said Hal; “and I'd like to take Ned and a couple of the Mexicans, and go out and see if we can't find him.”

“We shall probably need everybody in camp putty soon,” said Jerry. “Yer see thet dust down thar to the southward, don't yer? Wall, that ain't no whirlwind, ef the wind duz blow; that's Injins, and they're headed right for our camp, too; so we'd better git reddy for 'em, and let the hoss go. Maybe, though, they'll bring him back to yer. I've knowed sich things done afore now,” continued he, glancing at Hal.

Page 43

The Indians were still nearly half a mile away, when Jerry, handing me the glasses through which he had been looking, said, in a low voice,—

“It’s jest as I reckoned; there’s Hal’s pony, and an Injun on him, I’ll bet two ter one it’s the same cussed varmint thet was a-sneakin’ about camp here, not an hour ago.”

There were ten Indians in the party, who, even at that distance, commenced riding around in a circle just out of range of our rifles, yelling furiously, using the most insulting gestures towards us, and daring us to come out and meet them. It was quite evident that the savages had no weapons but their bows and arrows; consequently, did not like to come within range of our rifles. Up to this time, neither of us had fired a shot, and Jerry suddenly went to one of the wagons; and, procuring an old Sharp’s carbine, loaded it; and, taking good aim, fired at a group of four or five, that were huddled together on the plain.

To our amazement and delight, we saw one of the number throw his arms up into the air and tumble headlong from his horse to the ground, while the rest instantly scattered; nor did they come together again until they were at least a mile away.

“That was a good one Jerry,” cried I. “Give ’em another.”

“’Twon’t do no good; ’twan’t nothin’ but luck. I couldn’t do it agin in shootin’ a dozen times, with this wind a-blowin’,” muttered Jerry. “That’s enuff to scare ’em to death. They hadn’t no more idee I could reach ’em than I had.”

“I wonder what they’ll do now? They must be going to try that circle dodge,” said I, seeing the party separate.

In a very few moments, before either Jerry or myself realized what they were doing, they had jumped from their horses, fired the tall, dry grass to the windward of us, and were scudding away from it as fast as their horses could carry them.

Quicker than thought, the wind caught the flames, that seemed to leap fifty feet into the air, which, in an instant, became so filled with heat and smoke, that suffocation seemed inevitable. We could scarcely see or breathe; and the wind was driving the flames directly towards us.

The wagons, animals, ourselves even, were at their mercy. What could we do to escape the horrible fate that stared us in the face?

Jerry was the first to realize our danger. Starting in the direction of the fire so fast approaching, as he yelled, at the top of his voice,—



“Git ther empty corn-sacks, blankets, anything ter keep ther fire off from ther wagons and critters. Be quicker’n lightnin’, thar!” cried he, as he hastily set another fire, not twenty yards from us.

In a second we were fighting the new fire with whatever we could lay our hands upon.

So vigorously did we work, that we succeeded in keeping the flames from our wagons and stock, which, in a few minutes, rolled by us in huge billows of fire.

Page 44

I never saw a grander sight than the vast blackened, smoking plain, beyond which the flames raged and roared like thunder, while the dense white smoke, settling low down, partially veiled the sunlight and gave a weird, strange appearance, that is indescribable, to the scene.

"The cowardly cusses!" said Jerry, as we paused to take breath from our labors. "They wanted to smoke us out, did they? Well, I reckon, by the looks round, thet maybe they'll have ter huff it putty lively themselves, ef they git away from it. I've heerd of the biters gittin' bit themselves, afore now."

Notwithstanding our misfortune, we could hardly help laughing at the sight of ourselves, as, with blacked faces, singed clothing, and blistered hands, we talked the matter over.

Of course we could do nothing but submit, and console ourselves by wishing that we had the cowardly fellows where we could punish them.

We passed a most uncomfortable night; and, as soon as daylight appeared, were on the road, reaching the "Springs" late in the evening, and the next morning taking up our line of march for Fort Davis. This fort is situated upon Lympia Creek, in Wild Rose Pass, a most lovely *canon*, through the *Sierra Diablo*. It is about two hundred feet wide, and carpeted with the richest green sward, while the sides, composed of dark, columnar, basaltic rocks, rise to the height of a thousand feet. Here, cozily nestled in this beautiful dell, surrounded by lofty mountains, we came upon the white walls of the fort.

We encamped within half a mile of the post; and, the next morning, the boys and I rode in to pay our respects to Colonel Sewell, then in command.

The youngsters were delighted with everything they saw, and the sutler's store proved a great attraction for them. They seemed determined to buy out his entire stock in trade, this being their first opportunity to spend money since we left San Antonio.

Colonel Young, the sutler, informed me that a friend from Chihuahua, Don Ramon Ortiz, a wealthy Spanish gentleman, with his daughter and five servants, had been for several days at the fort, awaiting the arrival of some train with which they might travel to El Paso. If agreeable, they would be pleased to accompany us.

I gladly gave assent, and was shortly introduced to the Don. He was a fine-looking gentleman, about sixty years of age, intelligent, and evidently a man of culture. The sickness of his daughter had caused his delay at the fort; but, having recovered, he was anxious to resume his journey.

The young lady proved to be a lovely little body, who spoke English like a native, and was about sixteen years old. Her wealth of raven hair, eyes of jet, and natural pleasant

manner made *El Senorita Juanita* as bewitching a little companion as one would meet in many a day's travel.

From the instant Hal saw her he became a devoted admirer, and, I foresaw, that so long as we travelled in company with Don Ramon, I need not again fear his absence from the train.

Page 45

One of the officers of the fort came to me, during the evening, with the request that I would permit a young lad to travel through with me to the Pacific coast, saying that he was without money or friends, and it would be a charity if I would allow him to work his passage.

I had but just returned to camp when Ned appeared, bringing with him a bright-looking Irish boy, about sixteen years of age. As he stood twirling his hat, and resting awkwardly upon one foot, I asked,—

“What do you want of me, my boy?”

“Av yez plaze, sur, I’d loike a job.”

“What kind of a job?”

[Illustration: Introducing Patsey.]

“A job ter go to Californy, shure, sur.”

“Well, what’s your name?”

“Patsey, yer honor; and a very good name it is, too. ’Twas my father’s before, me sur.”

“Where did you come from?”

“The ould counthry, ov coorse, sur.”

“Yes, but where did you come from now?”

“From the foort beyant, sur.”

“Well, Patsey, what can you do?”

“Phat can I do, is it? Faix, yer honor, it’s phat I can’t do yer’d better be axin’! There’s nothin’ in my loine that I don’t understand perfectly, sur.”

“Have you a recommendation?”

“What’s that, sur?”

“Any paper recommending you.”

“Och, it’s me character, is it, yeze afther axin’ fur? Will, thin, I’ve gut it in me pocket, shure;” and, pulling out from the waistband of his pants a well-worn piece of greasy paper, he proceeded to spit on it, “jist for good luck,” he said, and then, with a bow and a scrape, handed it to me.

The paper was from Captain Givens, of the Mounted Rifles, recommending the bearer, Patsey McQuirk, as an honest but ignorant boy.

I informed Patsey that his “character” was satisfactory, and I would take him along, bidding him put his luggage in one of the wagons.

He stood looking at me with a comically puzzled expression on his face, and, thinking that perhaps he did not understand what I said, I again told him to put his things into one of the wagons, for we should probably start early in the morning.

“What things’ll I put in the wagin, sur?”

“Your baggage,—your clothes,” said I.

“Shure, sur, ef I put my clothes in the wagin, it’s little I’d hev to wear mysilf,” answered the boy.

“Well, well, then, go with Ned; he’ll show you what to do.”

It had been our intention to start early on the following morning; but, information having been received at the fort that a large party of Comanches had been seen, only two days before, on our direct route, it was thought advisable to wait a short time, in the hope that Don Ignacio and his train might overtake us. Nor did we wait in vain; for, on the evening of the third day, he rode into camp, and announced his train a short distance behind.

This was good news for us, and we immediately commenced preparations for our departure the following day.

Page 46

Hal begged permission to carry the news to Don Ramon, and I never saw a happier boy than he, at the thought of once more being on the road.

About eight o'clock the next morning we again started, passing through the *canon*, over a fine, natural road. Two hours later saw the ambulance of Don Ramon, with its six white mules and four outriders, approaching from the direction of the fort, at a pace that promised soon to overtake us.

Hal at once took a position beside the carriage, and, during the rest of the day, hardly left it. I did not interfere until we were approaching our camping-ground, when I sent Patsey back, to say that I wished to see him.

The boy returned, saying,—

“He’s a-comin’, but he says, kape yer timper.”

“What did he say?” inquired I, in no little astonishment.

“He said, Yis, he’d come, but kape yer timper; shure, so he did.”

At this moment Hal rode up. I asked him what he meant by sending such an extraordinary message, at the same time telling Patsey to repeat it.

Hal heard it, and burst into a laugh, declaring that he told Patsey to say he would be with me “*poko tiempo*,”—in a little while—which, as Patsey did not understand Spanish, he had interpreted into “kape yer timper.”

[Illustration: Antelope, Patsey and Ned.]

The night passed quietly, and, just after sunrise we were again on the road, bound for “Dead Man’s Hole,” which was our next camping ground. We reached it quite early in the afternoon, and, shortly afterwards, Ned came to me in great glee, saying that he’d shot an antelope, and wanted Patsey to go and help him bring it in.

Away they rushed, and soon returned, fairly staggering under the weight of a fine fat antelope.

I could fully understand Ned’s feeling of pride, as the men, one after another, examined the game, and complimented him on his success; for Ned was a great favorite in the camp; but, when old Jerry graciously told him that he was more’n twice as old afore he killed an antelope, the boy’s eyes fairly danced with joy.

His greatest triumph, however, was at supper, when he helped Hal to a bountiful supply of the fat, juicy steak. It had been a matter of rivalry between the two, as to which of them would kill the first antelope; and Hal was inclined to feel a little uncomfortable at

Ned's victory, especially before Patsey slyly suggested, that, ef he hadn't kilt an antichoke, he'd got a *dear* beyant, and that was betther than a dozen artichokes.

When I made my usual round of the camp, before going to bed, Jerry was not to be found; so I concluded to sit up until his return.

Half an hour later he came in, informing me that "he'd heerd a *coyote* bark four or five times rather suspiciously nigh camp, and had been out to reconnoitre, thinkin' p'raps it was an Injun signal; but, havin' seen more or less of the critters prowlin' about, he rekoned it was all right."

Page 47

Commending him for his care and watchfulness, and, assured by his confident manner that there was no danger, I “turned in,” and soon fell asleep. How long I had slept I could not tell, but I was awakened by a sound that sent a thrill of terror to my heart, and caused the blood to curdle in my veins; for it was the terrible war-whoop ringing in my ears, so close and distinct, that it seemed to be in my very tent.

I sprang into a sitting posture, and hurriedly looked about me. I saw Hal’s and Ned’s frightened faces, then seized my rifle and rushed out. As I passed through the door of the tent, I received a blow that felled me to the earth. When I recovered my senses, I found the camp a scene of dire confusion: every one was hurrying hither and thither, giving orders, and talking in the wildest manner. I caught sight of Don Ramon, bare-headed, barefooted, and half clad, wringing his hands and calling in frenzied tones for his darling Juanita. Hal was talking loudly one minute, and, the next, crying, while Ned was vainly attempting to pacify him.

As Ned appeared to be the coolest person in sight, I asked him the cause of the commotion, and learned that the Indians had attacked Don Ramon’s camp, and carried off his daughter and her maid, prisoners.

CHAPTER IX.

As soon as I could get upon my feet, I inquired for Jerry, and was told he was looking after the mules. I immediately sent for him, and he came, accompanied by Don Ignacio, who, hearing the disturbance, had come over to ascertain what it meant. When we could secure the presence of Don Ramon, we learned from him the story of the surprise.

[Illustration: Capture of Juanita.]

Every heart was moved to pity as the old man, in broken sentences, told us that he had been awakened by hearing his beautiful, his darling, shriek. He had sprung to his feet, half asleep, and seen two Indians tearing her from her bed in the ambulance, while calling upon him for help.

One of the Indians threw her across his horse, and then jumping upon the animal himself, galloped madly off. Another seized her maid in the same way; but she, poor girl, made such a desperate resistance that the savage brutally plunged a knife into her heart, and then, with the rapidity of lightning, scalped her and flung her body to the ground.

Piteously the half-crazed father besought us to rescue his child from the terrible fate in store for her. Offering half—yes, the whole of his immense fortune to any one who would restore her once more to him.



After a hurried consultation, we decided to send a messenger back to the fort to notify the officers, and ask them to send a company of dragoons in pursuit, at once; Don Ignacio offering to dispatch his assistant, a thoroughly trustworthy man, who knew every foot of the country, with the message. While I was writing the note to Colonel Sewall, Hal came to me, and urged strongly to be allowed to accompany the messenger, saying that Don Ignacio thought I should send some one, and had offered to mount him upon one of his best horses if I would permit him to go. I hesitated a long time before consenting; but he pleaded so earnestly, I finally said yes, warning him on no account to leave the travelled road. This he promised, and the two set out.

Page 48

A short time after they left, we decided to send a party out ourselves, to follow the Indians and recapture the girl if possible, as well as recover the mules stolen. Jerry offered to lead the party in person, provided I would accompany it, and Don Ignacio could be induced to take charge of the camp during our absence. The arrangements perfected, Jerry selected a dozen of the best men; and before daylight, we were in the saddle and on the trail.

All day we rode over rocky *mesas* or through dense *chapparal*,—here fording a stream, now thundering over a barren plain, or picking our way through gloomy *canons* or up steep bluffs.

The sun set; but Jerry did not pause in the pursuit. With his eyes on the ground, and the same eager, anxious expression on his face, he rode as he had ridden all day. Every nerve was strung to its utmost tension, every sense was on the alert. Hardly had he spoken, not once hesitated as to the course, nor for a single instant lost the track we had been following.

At last we came to a little valley, shut in by dark gray rocks and tall mountains. At a signal from Jerry, we dismounted, unsaddled our animals, and partook of a hasty supper; then again took to the trail; penetrating deeper and deeper into the mountain fastnesses, over rocks and through dense underbrush, until at last the shimmer of the waters of a broad river met our gaze, and we paused upon its banks.

It was the Rio Grande; and here we decided to encamp for the night.

A few hours' rest and, just at daylight, we plunged into the water and renewed our search, following the banks for miles; but no trace of the track could we find. Just as we were giving up in despair, one of the party, who was a long distance in the lead, uttered a shout: he had again found the trail. It was evident now, that, in order to deceive any party that might follow them, they had entered the river and followed its bed through the water, nearly ten miles; hoping thereby to successfully hide their course.

We now sent one man back to the point where the trail entered the river, that he might guide the soldiers, whom we every moment expected to arrive from Fort Davis.

It was a useless precaution however, for no soldier came. If we had but known! but, alas! how could we? We waited until twilight came, and then reluctantly retraced our steps, believing it useless to attempt to follow the thieves after so long a time had been given them in which to escape with their prisoners. I was much pleased, however, to hear Jerry express the opinion, that the Comanches would gladly ransom them, and that the only obstacle in the way would be the difficulty in communicating with the band who made the capture; for it seemed probable that they belonged in that, then, almost inaccessible portion of the state, known as the "Pan-handle."

When midnight came and no tidings reached us from the fort, we reluctantly determined to start homeward.

Page 49

While pursuing our way towards camp, Jerry and myself determined to visit a spring several miles to the east of our course, and then to overtake our party at a point where the trail led over a spur of the mountains, that ran far out into the plain.

We experienced no difficulty in finding the spring; and, after a short rest, filled our canteens with the cool, sparkling water, and started to intercept our friends at the place agreed upon.

Ere we were a mile upon the road. Jerry uttered a low whistle, and said, "Look behind you, will you?"

I turned; and, to my astonishment, not more than a mile away, saw eight mounted Indians; and it was evident from the cloud of dust in which they rode, that they were coming at no very slow gait.

We were not an instant deciding that we had no wish to encounter eight mounted Comanches, well armed, upon the open plain, if it were possible to avoid them.

The ground was a dead level for miles in every direction; and, in a straight line six or seven miles away, we could see the spur of the mountains where we expected to meet our party. If we could only reach that, we were safe.

We had more than a mile the start of our pursuers; but our horses were worn with long travel, while it was evident theirs were comparatively fresh and vigorous; our escape therefore, must be a question of speed and endurance.

"Now," said Jerry, as we shook our reins and put spurs into the flanks of our horses, "set low, and bend in your saddle, take the motion of your horse, and let's git."

And "git" we did. Our animals seemed fairly to fly as we urged them forward. They appeared to understand every word spoken, and to be quite as anxious to escape capture as their riders.

Every ejaculation uttered, every caress bestowed, gave them fresh courage, urged them to greater exertions. Every nerve was braced, every muscle strained to its utmost tension, while their foam-flecked sides said, as plainly as words could say it, "We are doing our level best."

I cast a glance over my shoulder and saw that the Indians were "spread" in the pursuit, but evidently gaining on us. I looked at Jerry and then at the goal, each moment growing nearer, and still so far away that I began to doubt the ability of our horses to continue at the tremendous pace they were going until we could reach it.

Every minute seemed an age.

Jerry's face was a study, as, with compressed lips, and eyes that appeared to fairly flash fire, he bent so low in his saddle as to almost touch his horse's mane. On, on, we sped! Not a word was spoken—not a sound could be heard, save the dull, heavy thud of our horses' feet upon the soft turf beneath us.

Once I fancied I felt my horse waver, as though about to fall; but I spoke sharply to him, and he straightened out, just as a bullet whistled by our heads.

"That's a Comanche sign; you can always tell them devils," muttered Jerry, between his teeth.

Page 50

A mile farther, and we are safe. Can we make it? Why don't our men see us, and hasten to the rescue?

Another look behind. The Indians were still gaining on us, and I fancied I could hear the breath of their unshod horses, as they thundered after us; but it was only the distressed breathing of our own noble animals, warning us that their strength was almost gone.

Will our friends ever see us? Can we hold out five minutes longer? I hear Jerry mutter something between his closed teeth; and, the next moment, saw a dozen men dash out from behind the rocks.

"We are saved! we are saved!" is my cry. I have just strength enough left to pull up my weary horse, throw myself out of the saddle, and sink upon the ground, when the faithful creature, completely exhausted, reels and falls, as the men thunder past us, in pursuit of the now flying foe.

"Wall," said Jerry, as he dismounted, "thet was a touch and go, and no mistake. I've been chased many a time afore, but never come so near a go, ez this has been. Them critters of ourn are worth a fortune, and no mistake."

We had a good hour's rest, before our friends returned from the pursuit; and then, once more mounting, we set out for camp, which we reached late in the afternoon, to learn that neither of the messengers sent to the fort, had returned, nor had any tidings been received from them.

What did it mean? Could they have been captured?

Don Ramon was almost heart-broken, when he learned the result of our pursuit; and nothing that we could say, afforded him any comfort. His continual cry was, "Give me my daughter! my darling Juanita!"

I was extremely anxious about Hal; and at once dispatched Don Ignacio to the fort, to ascertain the reason of the non return of our messengers; and then, as nothing further could be done, "turned in" for a little sleep, giving Ned directions to call me immediately upon the arrival of Don Ignacio.

Just before daybreak, I was awakened by the startling intelligence, that neither Hal or the messenger had reached the fort; but Colonel Sewell had, upon Don Ignacio's request, immediately ordered a company of dragoons in pursuit of the Indians.

The only inference to be drawn from the facts was, that both Hal and the messenger had been killed or taken prisoners, by a portion of the same band that attacked our camp; and, although myself, greatly depressed by the uncertainty attending their absence, I endeavored to assure Don Ramon, that their capture was extremely

fortunate, on his daughter's account, for it would be certain to ensure her safe return to her friends.

This thought appeared to afford the old man a little comfort, and he finally decided, to continue with the train, until we should arrive at El Paso. We got under way about noon; and, with sad hearts, followed the windings of the road through the *Canon de los Camenos*, and on to the Rio Grande; thence, following the course of the river, to the old *Presidio* of San Elezario, and so on to Fort Bliss, about one mile below the town of El Paso.

Page 51

At this post we found Colonel Jim Magoffin, the owner of the train with which we had travelled from San Antonio; and, upon conferring with him, he informed me that Anastacio, who had been captured with Hal, was an old scout who had been in his employ for years. He was not only trustworthy, but thoroughly acquainted with the country, as well as the habits and customs of the Indians; and, if alive, would certainly find means to communicate with his family, who resided near the fort.

The colonel also recommended, that Don Ramon, should endeavor to enlist the Mexican authorities in the matter, in case the Indians, should by any chance have crossed the river with their captives.

We decided, therefore, to remain a few days in camp at El Paso, as this would give our animals an opportunity to recruit, and ourselves a much-needed rest.

I found by carefully watching Ned, that the terrible uncertainty regarding Hal's fate was preying upon his mind to such an extent, that I must do something to rouse him from the apathy into which he had fallen, and for this purpose proposed a visit to the celebrated Stephenson silver mine, in the Organos Mountains, only a few miles distant from the post.

The proposed plan pleased the boy so much, that, accompanied by Jerry, we set out upon our trip.

The first day after reaching the mountains, a severe storm came upon us, so suddenly, that we were forced to take shelter beneath a grove of cedar; and, while waiting for the storm to pass over, Jerry's keen eye discovered, some distance above us, an opening in the rocks, that he surmised might be a cave.

With this idea, we started to explore it. Upon reaching the mouth of the opening, Jerry entered it, and in a few moments reappeared, beckoning for Ned and myself to join him.

Upon reaching him, he said,—“It's a cave, but there's some kind of a critter got possession of it. I reckon it's a bar.”

We hastened to secure our animals, and then cautiously entered what appeared to be a large crack between the rocks; but, upon nearing the end of it, we distinctly heard a deep, angry growl.

It was so dark within, that, upon this protest of-its occupant, we deemed it prudent to retreat.

“We've got to git the critter out, someway,” said Jerry, “and the sooner we go about it, the better for us.”

“Suppose we try smoking him out,” said Ned.

“I dunno but that’s the best way, after all, youngster,” said Jerry. “Hand us the hatchet, and we’ll soon have a fire here.” We shortly had some splinters from a prostrate pine that lay near, and in a little while a brisk fire was burning, which we covered with pine brush to make the smoke more dense, and then retreated to watch the effect.

In a little time the flame and smoke appeared to die out, and we proceeded to make an examination for the cause. We found that the bear had advanced to the fire, and, with his paws, succeeded in scattering the brands.

Page 52

"He's an old fellow, and won't be ketched napping," said Jerry. "The only way is to meet him, on his own ground. I'll fix him! You get two or three of them splinters, and light 'em, and foller me."

We cautiously advanced upon Bruin, torches in one hand and revolvers in the other, but his low, angry growl caused us, even then, to hesitate a moment before venturing further.

"Now, you take this 'ere torch, youngster," said Jerry, addressing Ned, "and hold it so you kin see, and then I kin. My narves is steadier'n clock-work, and I'll do the shootin'."

Another forward movement, and another growl saluted our ears.

"Steady, there," said Jerry, "I see him;" and the next instant, he fired.

As soon as the almost deafening reverberations and din, caused by the discharge, had subsided, holding our torches so as to throw the light as far in advance as possible, we entered the cave, and in one corner found a large black bear—dead.

"Hurrah!" cried Ned. "We've got him! Ain't he a noble fellow?"

"Here's room enough for all," said Jerry, as the extent of the cave was made apparent. "We'll get our critters in, and have bar meat for supper, sure." The apartment in which we were standing was about twenty feet square, and nearly as many high, and, in one corner, we found a spring of clear, cool water.

"Nothing could be nicer than this," declared Ned. "I'd like to stay here for a month; it's just splendid," But Ned's enthusiasm soon died out, for we discovered unmistakable evidence that Indians were in the habit of visiting it. We determined to pass the night there, however, which we did without being disturbed, and the next morning again started for the mine, which we reached about two o'clock in the afternoon.

The mine consisted of a horizontal shaft, cut into the mountain-side, that had reached a depth of between two and three hundred feet; the ore being drawn up in large leathern buckets, by mule power, attached to a windlass. Such portions as were deemed sufficiently rich were at once conveyed to the smelting furnace, where the pure ore was melted down and extracted from the virgin fossil. If of inferior quality, it was submitted to the process of amalgamation.

We found much to interest us while examining the working of the mine, which was conducted upon the old Mexican plan. Ned was particularly pleased with the manner of packing the silver, which was in rough cakes, for transportation.

These were placed in sacks made of raw hide, which, when dry, shrunk, and thus pressed the contents so closely, that all friction was avoided. Two of these sacks, each

containing about fifteen hundred dollars' worth of the ore, constituted an ordinary mule-load.

We spent the entire day at the mine, watching the process of separating the ore, extracting the gold, roasting, grinding, *etc.*, and the following day returned to El Paso, with the intention of leaving for Fort Fillmore immediately.

Page 53

As soon as we arrived at this post, in company with Ned, I called upon Lieutenant Howland, then in command, and communicated to him the facts regarding the attack upon, and capture of a portion of our party, and from him learned the startling intelligence that a scout from Fort Stanton, had that day arrived at the post, reporting that, the day previous, he had discovered the fresh trail of a party of Indians near the eastern base of the Organos Mountains, who had with them, three white persons, one of whom, was a woman.

As soon as Ned heard the lieutenant make this statement, he started to his feet, exclaiming, "That's them! that's them! Hurrah! we'll find 'em, sure. Let's start now!" and away he went to carry the glad tidings to the camp.

CHAPTER X.

At my request, the scout was sent for. He proved to be a keen, shrewd Yankee, who had spent the last twenty years of his life, among the mountains of New Mexico.

His statement was clear and concise, and showed a familiarity with Indian manners and habits, that entitled his opinion to great weight. After a long interview, both Lieutenant Howland and myself became convinced that Hal and Juanita were with the party he described. So positive was the lieutenant that he volunteered to send a force in pursuit early on the following morning, with Tom Pope as guide.

When this determination was announced I hastened back to camp to consult old Jerry, and found all assembled around Ned, who was repeating over and over again, the story told by Tom. Even Patsey, whom I had scarcely noticed since he joined the train, was tossing his well-worn cap in the air, catching it upon the toe of a toeless boot, while executing a lively Irish jig, and exclaiming every time he drew a long breath,—

"Whoo-o-o-op! think of it now, will yez! The boss has got the byse, sure. Whoo-o-o-op now, whoo-o-op!"

In fact, all seemed delighted at the idea of our receiving even the meagre information we had obtained at the fort.

As soon as Jerry found a moment's leisure, I gave him a detailed account of the interview with Tom Pope, as well as Lieutenant Howland's opinion regarding it.

He expressed much satisfaction at the Lieutenant's intention to pursue the party, and asked, if I thought the guide would object to his accompanying him on the expedition.

While talking the matter over, we saw Tom himself approaching camp. Jerry at once recognized him as an old Comanche scout, whom he had once met in Texas; and the two were soon upon the most friendly terms. It was understood, that Jerry and myself

were to accompany Tom on the expedition, and finally I obtained permission to take Ned along.

I invited Tom to remain and take supper with us, and afterwards, while Jerry was making his preparations for the morrow's expedition, Ned and Patsey asked Tom for a story; but Tom said "he warn't no account at story tellin' and would let that job out to somebody else."

Page 54

Remembering Jerry's remark, that Tom was a Comanche scout, I asked him if he had had much experience with that tribe.

"Consid'able," answered he.

"Is it a fact, that the Comanches frequently cook their meat by placing it under the saddle and riding on it all day?" asked I.

"I 'spect 'tis," replied Tom; "leastways, I've seen 'em do it, and done it myself."

"Oh! tell us all about it Tom, will you?" cried Ned.

"Wall, I don't mind telling you about that, youngster, though I ain't much of a story-teller. You just wait till I get my pipe filled, and I'll spin a yarn for you, as they used to say down in New Bedford."

"Be gorra, now, ain't this fun?" exclaimed Patsey, as he and Ned settled themselves in a comfortable position by the fire, to listen to—

TOM'S STORY.

Having filled and lighted his pipe, he began.

"Six years ago this fall, I had been down to Mattamoras on the Rio Grande, and returning home, had camped for the night, in the ruins of an Old ranche on the San Saba. Wall, I was alone and pretty tired. I didn't think nothin' about Injuns, so I went ter sleep; and when I woke up I was a prisoner, with a dozen Comanches caperin' round me."

"I couldn't do nothin', 'cause they'd taken my rifle and my knife; so I jist made up my mind, that I'd better keep still and wait for my chance to come. They tied my hands behind me, and put me on a horse. Then we started, and I soon saw that they had been down into Mexico on a stealing expedition, and had had, good luck; for they had five scalps, and nearly a hundred head of Spanish mares, that they were a-driving home with 'em to their village, which was on the Clear Fork of the Brazos."

"In ten days, we got to within about a mile of their home, and then we halted; and one of the braves, all painted and fixed up in regular war style, started in to let 'em know we were there."

"Pretty soon one of their squaws came out to meet us, and then the Injuns, fixed to a long lance the five scalps they had taken, and we all started for the village, the squaw leading and carryin' the scalp-pole, all the while singing a war-song."



“Just before we got into their settlement we were met by a lot of the women folks, who joined in the procession. Then we went through the village. The squaws danced as they went along and made a great noise, singing songs about the brave deeds of their husbands and sons, who had taken so many scalps and stolen so many cattle.”

“I’d been wonderin’ all the time what they were going ter do with me. Then we stopped before the chief’s lodge,—Tabba-ken, or the Big Eagle, he was called,—and they motioned for me to dismount. I hadn’t hardly struck the ground, before I found what they were going to do with me; for would you believe it, every old squaw and pappoose in that village, that had strength enough, flew at me and commenced biting, and kicking, and scratching me. You see I couldn’t do much, for my hands were tied, but I made up my mind that Tom Pope would die like a man, even though he never had calculated to be bit and kicked to death, by a lot of Comanche squaws.”

Page 55

"So I jest set my teeth, and stood the pain the best I was able. After a while, they got tired of the fun, and quit; but you never see such a lookin' chap as I was when they got through. Why, there wasn't a spot on me as big as a five-cent piece, that didn't show some kind of a mark. I thought I had a pretty hard time in some of my travels, before, but t'warn't no tetch ter that Comanche village. I was sore for a month after it."

"Arter they'd got through with their fun, they set me to work and kept me at it, till I finally got away from 'em; though they treated me well enough after the first few days. When I got into Phantom Hill, the officers there told me, that they treated me as they always did all their prisoners. I had enough to eat, such as it was, and hain't no complaints to make on that score. They had two Mexican women who were prisoners there, and old Tabba-ken himself had married one of 'em."

"Do they have any particular ceremonies, when they start on the war-path, Tom?" asked I.

"I saw one party start out ter fight the Arapahoes; and I see 'em come back, too," replied Tom.

"One morning I see that a lot of the braves took their bows and arrows, and placed 'em on the east side of their lodges. They was all ornamented and fixed, and set where the sun's first rays should fall on 'em. That night a lot of the squaws commenced going around through the village, singing their war-songs, and making a great noise. They kept it up for three nights, so that I couldn't sleep a wink; and I asked one of the Mexican women what it all meant. She told me, that it was a war-party, getting ready for an expedition.

"I'd suspected as much, when I see the braves a-cavortin' around so lively on their horses, and makin' such a fuss as they did.

"She said, that they worshipped the sun, and their weapons was set out there for the sun to bless, and give them good luck against their enemies. They kept up these doin's for four or five days, and then they had a grand war-dance; and the next morning at sunrise (they always start on an expedition just at sunrise) a party of twenty braves, started off to the north."

"Do they make the squaws work, like the other Indian tribes, Tom?" asked Ned.

"Yes! Injuns is Injuns, wherever you find 'em," answered Tom. "The squaws allers do the hard work, and the men the heavy layin' round and talkin'."

"Oh! be gorra; don't I wish I was a Injin," exclaimed Patsey.

"Well," continued Tom, "after I'd been with 'em a couple of months or so, they kind er got a notion that I didn't care much about gittin' away, and didn't keep a very strict watch



over me; so, one night, when I see Carline (that was my old rifle) lyin' by one of the lodges, I made up my mind to scoot. They was havin' a big time that night, gittin' ready for another expedition, and I knew they'd be putty busy. As soon as 'twas dark, I picked up the rifle, and, kind er slowly, made my way down ter where their critters was feedin', and picked out the best hoss of the lot, put a saddle on him, and started down the river towards the fort at Phantom Hill. 'Twas a good hundred miles away; but I made up my mind I'd fetch it, if nothin' happened.

Page 56

"I rode putty hard all night; and, just after daylight, saw some deer on the prairie, and shot one, never thinkin' that I hadn't another charge for my rifle, and no way of buildin' a fire ter cook with.

"Yer see the Injuns always start a fire by rubbin' two dry sticks together, but I hadn't no time for that, 'cause I wanted to put as many miles as I could between me and ther village. While I was a-wonderin' what ter do, I happened to think about puttin' it under the saddle; so I hunted round and found a sharp stone, and managed to cut some putty fair slices out ev the leg, and clapped 'em under the saddle and rode on.

"I got pretty hungry by noon, so I stopped to let my horse eat a little, and looked at my steaks, and they was cooked just as nice as I ever see steaks cooked in my life; and they was good, too, you bet.

"I made a tip-top meal, and then thought I'd lay down and take a little nap. I slept for an hour or two, and then saddled up, and rode along. Putty soon I happened ter look round, and, blast my picter, ef there warn't eight Comanches a-comin' after me like the very devil.

"I just put the spurs to my hoss; and from the best calculations I could make, I made up my mind that they'd ketch me in just about ten miles further. I see they was a-gainin' on me, and I hadn't nothin' to defend myself with but a empty rifle, and that warn't no account agin bows and arrows; so I throwed it away, and made up my mind, if wost came to wost, I'd take my chances in the river, 'cause yer see the Comanches never let a prisoner get away the second time. I kept urgin' my hoss, and the critter kep' tryin', but I see he was about blowed, an' 'twarn't no use. I had just concluded I must take to the river, when I happened to look up and see a dozen soldiers coming right towards me. The Injuns see 'em as quick as I did, and the way they turned and put back was a caution to anything I ever see."

"What were the soldiers doing there?" asked Ned.

"Why, they was a scoutin' party out from the post, about twenty miles below where we was. They chased the Injuns, but the devils scattered and 'twarn't no use.

"I went in to the fort with 'em, and stayed thar about a week, and then went down to San Antonio with Major Neighbors, the Injun agent. Afterwards, I heard that the soldiers went up and cleaned the village out, but I don't know nothin' about that.

"There, youngsters, you've hed your story, and I reckon if you're goin' with me to-morrow, you'd better go ter bed and git some sleep, and I'll go back to the fort, and git ready, myself."

Ned was delighted with Tom's story, while Patsey declared that "he'd thry that way of cooking, steak the first blissid thing he did in the mornin',—that he would, sure."

With the first faint streak of light in the eastern sky, our little party were on their way to the fort. We found that Lieutenant Howland had detailed a squad of twenty of the "Mounted Rifles" under command of Lieutenant Jackson, and ordered them provisions, for ten days. They were to start at sunrise, and Tom Pope was to lead them directly to the *canon*, where he had seen the trail, which we were to follow, until we overtook the thieves.

Page 57

Promptly, as the morning gun, announced the sun's appearance above the horizon, Lieutenant Jackson, with the dragoons, rode into the parade-ground, ready for a start. The final orders were given, and we fell into line, and rode slowly forth in the direction of the mountains, followed, not only by the good wishes of every man in the post, but by Patsey's brogans, which he threw after us for "good luck, inyhow," with such force that one struck a soldier in the head, and nearly knocked him out of the saddle, much to his surprise and anger, and greatly to the amusement of the spectators.

We struck into a brisk canter, and were soon out of sight of the post and settlements. Our course lay to the east of north, over an elevated, arid plain, covered with a thick growth of prickly-pear, and scrubby mesquite.

The mesquite is a shrub that somewhat resembles our locust. Its wood is hard and close-grained, and its branches bear a long, narrow pod, filled with saccharine matter, which, when ripe, furnishes a very palatable article of food, that is relished both by men and animals.

The principal value of the mesquite, however, is for its roots, which are used for fuel and very fine fuel they make, quite equal to the best hickory.

The plain over which we were now travelling, was more than four thousand feet above the level of the sea. Notwithstanding its immense elevation, it was covered with a peculiar kind of grass called *grama*, which retains its nutritious qualities throughout the whole year. This grass is sometimes cut by the inhabitants, who use for the purpose a hoe. It will thus be seen, that, on these plains, wood is obtained with a spade and hay secured by the hoe.

A ride of seven hours brought us to the eastern side of the mountains, whose lofty, pinnacled peaks rose above us to the height of more than three thousand feet, strangely and perfectly resembling the pipes of an immense organ, from which fact the *Sierra de los Organos* takes its name.

As we approached this remarkable range, we found a thick growth of live-oak skirting its base, and could hardly resist the temptation, to enjoy the cool and delicious shade, which their thick branches afforded; but we pushed on, and in another hour reached the entrance to the *canon*, in which Tom had discovered the Indians' trail. Here we found it necessary to advance with the greatest precaution, as the dark pines and evergreens, growing in the narrow defile, afforded an excellent place for the concealment of our foes.

Jerry and Tom, rode a short distance in advance of the party, and we slowly made our way up the gorge for about four hundred yards, when we came to a large reservoir, or basin, into which the water from a spring high up on the mountain-side, slowly trickled.

The guides examined this place with great care, for Tom declared it had not been disturbed since he left it, two days before. We found evidence sufficient to substantiate Tom's opinion fully, for we discovered the tracks of three white persons, one of whom was a woman. Ned insisted that he recognized Hal's footprints, while Jerry identified the peculiar shape of one of the mule's tracks, by means of a shoe he himself fitted to the animal.

Page 58

Satisfied at last that we were on the right trail, the lieutenant decided to halt for a short time to feed and rest.

While Ned was strolling about the encampment, he accidentally trod upon a rattlesnake, and the venomous reptile, sounding his rattle, made a spring and fastened his teeth into the boy's pants, just below the knee. I chanced to be looking towards him at the moment, and saw him, without the least hesitation draw his sheath-knife, and sever its head from its body, with one stroke, leaving the head hanging to the leg of his pants. I hurried towards him, but the boy was not in the least disconcerted or frightened, although he could not tell if he had been bitten or not. An examination showed that the fangs of the snake had passed through the cloth and left their imprint upon the leather of his boot-leg, without penetrating it.

[Illustration: Snake Incident.]

We all congratulated him upon his narrow escape, and Lieutenant Jackson told him that few men would have shown more nerve or presence of mind under the circumstances than he had done. Tom Pope asserted the boy was a "born Injin hunter," and old Jerry declared that he was "willing to make a 'ception, so fur as Ned was concerned, though he'd be darned if he'd do it for t'other one; for boys like him hadn't no bizness on the plains, no how."

Once more mounting our horses, we emerged from the cool and grateful shade, out into the burning sunshine of the plain, when, making sure of the trail, our guides started at a brisk canter towards the north-east, followed by the entire party.

The trail was so plain and well-defined, that we were able to ride at a good round pace, which was kept up until long after the sun had set and darkness had fairly encompassed us. Finally we came to good grass, and the lieutenant ordered a halt.

Shortly after unsaddling our horses, Tom came to me, and said, "Be you pretty sure, judge, that them fellers was Comanches, that attacked you?"

I replied at once that I was.

"What makes you think so?" inquired Tom.

Up to this time I had not entertained a thought that they could be other than Comanches. Now that my reasons for the opinion had been asked, I saw that the only cause for it was the fact, that the attack had been made in the Comanche country, and so far towards the interior, that the possibility of their belonging to any other tribe had not entered my mind.

I replied, that I had no other reason for supposing them to be Comanches than the one above given.

“Well,” said Tom, “as me and Jerry was ridin’ along this arternoon, I found this ’ere thing along side ther trail, so I picked it up ter show yer.”

As he spoke, he produced an old, well-worn moccasin, which, at a glance, I recognized as having been made by the Apaches, its shape being entirely different from those manufactured or worn by any other tribe.

Page 59

For an instant I was speechless, utterly overwhelmed by the terrible revelation.

I thought of the warm-hearted, impulsive Hal, and the winsome, pretty Juanita, prisoners in the hands of the cruel and merciless Apaches, who were never known to surrender a captive alive. Then, as I thought of a worse fate than death, that was in store for the bright, beautiful girl, I thanked God that her old father was spared the anguish that such a knowledge would have caused him.

CHAPTER XI.

As soon as I dared trust myself to speak, I said, in a tone of voice that I was conscious must betray my anxiety to hear my own opinion condemned,—

“This is an Apache’s moccasin, isn’t it?”

“’Tis, for sartin,” said Tom. “No other red-skinned varmint but a devilish Apache, ever wore that moccasin.”

“And what do you argue from that, Tom?” inquired I.

“Ther ain’t nothin’ to argue,” sententiously answered Tom. “The gal’s been took by the Apaches instead of the Comanches, and that’s all there is of it; that moccasin tells the whole story. Ask Jerry. Me and him agreed on that pint, as soon as ever we see it.”

“It’s surer’n preachin’, judge,” said Jerry, as he came up to where we were standing; “and there ain’t no help for it.”

“Well, what can we do, Jerry?”

“Do! foller till we git ’em, if we foiler ’em to hell. We mustn’t leave the trail now, till we know the gal’s dead, for sartin. She’ll be safe, ez long ez they’re travellin’; but if they ever git to where they’re going,—well judge, I’d rather see the pretty little critter layin’ right here, dead, than to meet her, that’s sartin.”

I immediately sought the lieutenant, and informed him of the terrible facts I had just learned.

“I feared as much from the first,” said he, “for during all the years I’ve been stationed on this frontier, I’ve never known the Comanches to venture so far ‘up country’ as this, but have frequently known the Mescalleros to pass through the Comanche country into Mexico. I fear we shall find this to be a band of Mescallero Apaches, but I shall follow them, as long as my men and animals hold out. I have ordered a halt now, because, twenty miles from here, in the direction that we are travelling, we shall come to an extensive deposit of pure, white sand, in which we shall be liable to lose the trail at

night; and I want to reach there as near daybreak as possible, so as not to waste more time than is necessary in finding it. We shall rest here until midnight, so you'd better turn in and get what sleep you can."

Midnight found us once more in the saddle, and when, some hours later, we reached the deposit referred to, an examination showed, that, instead of crossing it, the trail skirted its southern edge for a couple of miles, and then took an easterly course towards the Sacramento Mountains, distant about twenty-five miles.

Page 60

Our course lay in the vicinity of two or three little *salinas*, or salt lakes, but over an arid, barren plain, destitute of any vegetation, except mesquite *chaparral*; and about three o'clock in the afternoon, we reached the timber that skirted the base of the mountains.

As the guides, who were some distance in advance, reached the extreme end of a spur, around which the trail led, we saw them pause for a few moments, and then hasten towards us.

Upon reaching us, old Jerry, in a voice husky with emotion, said, "They're there for sartin," pointing towards the end of the spur.

A retreat to the cover of the trees was instantly ordered, when the guides informed us, that upon reaching the point of rocks, they discovered several animals grazing in the meadow beyond, and that the Indians must be encamped in the immediate vicinity; but in order to make sure, would leave their horses with us, and return and make a *reconnaissance*.

They returned a couple of hours later, reporting that they had discovered the camp, but owing to its situation, could not get near enough to see into it, without running too much risk of discovery. There was one "wickey-up," [The name given by scouts to Apache huts.] however, made of brush, in which the girl was undoubtedly confined. From appearances they thought the Indians intended to remain there, long enough to recruit their stock, as the grass was very good; and that as soon as it should be dark, they would return and take a closer inspection of the camp. Nothing more remained for us to do therefore, but to "possess our souls with patience" until darkness came.

Now that we were so near the success or failure of the expedition for which we had endured so much fatigue and anxiety, it was impossible to remain quiet. Every moment seemed an hour. Ned was constantly on the move, apparantly unable to remain in one position an instant. He had anticipated accompanying us in the attack upon the Indian camp, but the lieutenant positively forbade it, saying, that he was not only too young, but too good a fellow to be shot by Apaches, that year.

This did not satisfy Ned, however, who came to me to intercede for him, saying, that he wanted so much to be the first one to greet Hal, and had come so far to do it, it was pretty hard to be disappointed then.

I spoke to the lieutenant in regard to the matter, but he was very decided in his refusal, saying that the boy must stay in camp, and if necessary, he should put him under guard.

Ned bore his disappointment with wonderful fortitude, I thought, for he made no remark, even when I spoke of the "guard" hinted at, except to say that "he wished it was all over;" a wish that I echoed from the bottom of my heart.

It was with a feeling of relief that I saw the guides start to once more reconnoitre the Indian camp.

Everything had been prepared in our own camp for an immediate movement— the guard had been detailed, horses saddled and bridled, ready for use, if needed, ammunition distributed, and every detail faithfully executed.

Page 61

The lieutenant and myself were lying on the ground, conversing together in low tones and waiting for the return of the guides, when suddenly the sharp, clear ring of a rifle from the other side of the spur, broke upon the evening air, followed by a confused noise and straggling discharge of firearms.

What did it mean?

The next instant, as though with one thought, every man, rifle in hand, was rushing pell-mell in the direction of the sound.

The Lieutenant and myself, among the first to reach the point of rocks, saw Jerry hurrying towards us, bearing in his arms a female form, clothed in white. Quicker than a flash, the soldiers, as though divining the situation by instinct, formed a line that completely shielded him from the weapons of Indians.

Seeing me, he rushed towards me and thrust the girl into my arms, saying, in an excited manner.

“Take keer o’ her, while I go back and give the red devils, hell!”

Taking the girl in my arms, I found it to be indeed Juanita, alive, and Apparently unharmed. I carried her to camp, when, finding she had fainted, I laid her on some blankets and hurried back to the assistance of the party.

Before I could reach it, the Indians, completely surprised, had fled; and the soldiers were in possession of the camp and a large portion of their stock.

While hastening towards it, I saw Hal and Ned, who, as soon as they discovered me, came running towards me, and the next moment, Hal was in my arms, sobbing as though his heart would break, while Ned, the tears running in a stream down his cheeks, could only jump up and down, like a little child, exclaiming,—

“Oh! I’m so glad! I’m so glad!”

As soon as Hal could speak he blubbered out,—

“Where’s Juanita?”

I informed him she was safe in camp, and off the two started to find her; and when, a short time afterwards, I reached camp myself, I found she had recovered from her swoon, and was anxiously watching my return.

Her first question was for her father, and when I assured her that he was well, but extremely anxious on her account, she said,—

“Ah! but I never expected to see him again on this earth.”

“But didn’t I tell you you would?” inquired Hal.

“Yes,” responded the girl, “you did; but I heard you and Anastacio—”

“By the way, where is Anastacio?” interrupted I. Poor fellow! He had been entirely forgotten by us; but, in a short time, the two guides appeared, escorting him between them.

There being no longer any reason why we should not enjoy the brightness and warmth of a camp-fire, we soon had one briskly burning, and by its ruddy light, I was enabled to see the faces of the rescued prisoners. I could scarcely believe that so great a change could have been made, in so short a time, as had been wrought in Juanita, during her captivity. Instead of the plump, rosy-cheeked, smiling *senorita* who entertained us so charmingly at Fort Davis, I saw a pale, wan-looking young lady, prematurely old, and so weak, as to be scarcely able to stand alone.

Page 62

Hal, on the contrary, declared that he was “tougher than a knot,” and “dirtier than any greaser,” a statement, which we readily believed when he informed us “that he hadn’t washed for ten days.”

I ordered supper prepared at once. The Lieutenant came in soon after, and reported that three of the Indians had been killed, and two, badly wounded. Besides this, fifteen animals had been captured, and all the camp equipage of the savages.

Looking around for Ned, he soon discovered him, and said,—

“You young rascal, you! I told you to stay in camp, and the first one I saw over there, was you.” Then, in a kinder tone, he inquired if he was much hurt?

Hurt! it was the first intimation I had that he had been hurt; and for a moment, my heart almost jumped into my throat, notwithstanding the boy insisted it was nothing.

An examination showed that an arrow had penetrated the fleshy part of his arm above the elbow, but without inflicting serious injury. The wound was soon dressed, supper eaten, Juanita made as comfortable as possible for the night, and then we gathered about the camp-fire to hear Tom Pope, relate the story of the capture, as follows:—

“Me’n Jerry, started from here, and crawled through the grass and underbrush, till we got pretty close to the varmints’ camp. We seed ten or a dozen of ’em layin’ about, some doin’ one thing and some another. All of a suddent we seed the gal, there, crawl out of the ‘wickey-up.’ She looked round as though she wanted to see somebody, for she started and walked out a little ways. Jest then, a big buck Injun, got up and follered her, but she walked on, right towards us, till she was within a dozen feet of where me’n Jerry lay hid.

“The Injun told her in Spanish, to go back, and took her by the shoulder to make her do it. Quicker’n lighntin’, Jerry made a spring, and, afore the Injun see him, he give him a blow with the butt of his rifle, that stunned him, and grabbed the gal and run.

“The Injun give a kind of grunt as he fell. One of the others started to see what was the matter, I s’pose, so I let Mertilda,” patting his rifle, “talk to him, and he laid right down without speakin’ a word.”

“As soon as the Injuns in camp heard Mertilda speak, eight or ten of ’em jumped up and started towards us. But yer see, Jerry’d got so fur, they couldn’t stop him. The sojers was right on to ’em, and give ’em ‘Hail Columby,’ and no mistake.

“That’s my report, Lieutenant. That youngster there,” pointing to Ned, “is real grit. I seed the arrer strike him, and he a-pullin’ of it out, runnin’ towards ’em all the time. Jest as sure’s yer live, yer can call Tom Pope a liar, if Jerry Vance didn’t save that gal’s life;

'cause, if we'd ever attacked the Injuns in camp, the first thing they'd 'a' done, would ha' been to killed the prisoners. I know the Apaches some, I reckon."

[Illustration: The Litter.]

Page 63

A consultation was now held as to the best manner of getting Juanita to the fort comfortably, and it was decided to construct a "mountain-litter." This was done the next morning, by procuring two stout poles, about twenty feet in length, and lashing them firmly to two short pieces of wood about three feet long and six feet apart: we then stretched a blanket between the poles, so as to form a comfortable bed. Two steady mules were selected and harnessed between the poles, in the front and rear of the bed, thus making a comfortable carriage.

Breakfast over, Juanita was placed in the carriage, and we started for the fort, travelling slowly and making frequent halts. Ned scarcely mentioned his wound; and, during the four days consumed on the trip, we were all delighted to see that Juanita was daily recovering her bloom, and buoyancy of spirits.

Upon reaching Fillmore, I dispatched Anastacio at once to Fort Bliss, informing Colonel Magoffin, of the result of our expedition, and asking him to send an ambulance through to Chihuahua with Juanita, in charge of Anastacio.

Two days later, the colonel's own carriage, with four good road-mules, arrived, with an invitation, asking Juanita to accept his hospitality at Fort Bliss, and promising that Anastacio should accompany her, to her father's *hacienda*.

Juanita decided to leave on the following morning; and, during the afternoon, I was surprised to learn, that Hal had ridden up to Las Cruces, six miles above the fort; but, shortly after his return, I noticed upon Juanita's finger, a little gold ring, that I had not seen before, so I ventured pleasantly to refer to it, in the course of conversation that evening, and was informed, with many blushes, that it was-only a memento, of their trip through the Apache country.

In the morning, however, I almost had a pitched battle with Hal, to prevent him from accompanying Juanita to her home; and it was only through compromising, and permitting him to ride a few miles in the carriage with her, that I avoided it.

We all bade her good-by, with hearts filled to overflowing with thankfulness, for her release from the hands of her cruel captors; and, wishing her all manner of good luck, and a happy reunion with her father, the carriage drove off, but not until Hal had climbed in and taken the vacant seat by her side.

When he returned, a few hours later, his face radiant with happiness, I made up my mind that it would not be his fault, if he did not again see the young lady, before many months had elapsed.

During the evening I was aroused from the revery into which I had fallen, by an unusual disturbance in camp; and, on proceeding to ascertain the cause, found that Hal, had been endeavoring to thrash Patsey. On calling the delinquents before me, I was

informed by Hal, that Patsey had spoken insultingly of Juanita, an offence that he had at once resented by attempting to chastise him.

Page 64

Upon inquiring as to the words used, Patsey said,—

“Sure, sur, I only axed him did Juanita look as tickled as he did, and he come at me wid his phists, so he did; but he’ll be aisy about sthriking me the nixt time. Dye’r moind that, noo, yer honor!”

“He’d no business to call her Juanita,” angrily exclaimed Hal.

“Phat would I call her, thin?” asked Patsey.

“Call her by her proper name, the Senorita Ortiz,” said Hal, with much dignity.

“And phat, would I be givin’ her that jaw-crackin’ name fur, when her name’s Juanita?”

“But her name isn’t Juanita to her inferiors, only to her intimate friends,” explained Hal.

“Infariors, sure! Ain’t an Irishman as good as a Mexican, any day? An’, if yez think I’m your infarior, jest come out here and thry it, sure; that’s all, Master Hal.”

I stopped the controversy at once, by telling Hal that Patsey had no intention of offending, and there was no occasion for his attempt to chastise him.

“Oh, he won’t thry it again, sur, niver fear,” interrupted Patsey. “If he does,” declared he in a tone intended only for Hal’s ear, “I’ll break ivery bone in his body, so I will.”

After Patsey had gone, I did not reprimand Hal, only sent him to his tent; for, judging from his crestfallen air, he had suffered physically as well as mentally in the encounter.

CHAPTER XII.

We remained in camp the next day, visiting the officers at the fort, and taking our farewell of them, with many regrets. Nor did we forget a generous reminder to Tom Pope, to whose keen observation, quick wit, daring bravery, and perseverance we owed, in so large a degree, the success of our expedition.

The following morning, we crossed the Rio Grande and found ourselves in the celebrated Mesilla valley, one of the most fertile and productive, in the Territory of New Mexico.

The town itself has a population of about one thousand souls, and was first settled in 1850, by colonists from Chihuahua. All land in this portion of the territory is cultivated by irrigation; and, as this was the first time Hal had ever seen it practiced to any extent, he asked permission to remain behind in town a little while, to witness the operation. Ned also expressed a desire to see it, and, after consulting Jerry, I assented to their request,

believing with him, “that they’d find mighty hard work to git inter any scrape in such a God-forsaken town as that was, anyhow.”

We crossed the valley, and then ascended the high lands west of the town, through which our road lay, expecting to make our camp about sixteen miles from the river, and get an early start in the morning, to enable us to reach Cook’s Springs, the following night.

As we rode along, I noticed that the distant range of blue mountains before us, seemed to have risen from the earth, and to be reposing upon the line of flickering heat that marked the horizon, and, in a short time, that groups of trees and huge rocks appeared, standing high in air, like islands in mid ocean.

Page 65

Calling Jerry's attention to their singular appearance, he pronounced it a *mirage*, which I watched with great curiosity; for it was the first time I had ever seen the phenomenon.

In a little while, the long line of trees connected themselves at each end, with the land below, and then we saw, a beautiful lake, with its white-capped waves gently driven before the breeze, rippling and dancing in the bright sunlight, like living things of life and beauty. The picture grew larger and larger as we rode, changing into a mighty ocean, with a grand old rocky shore, which appeared to be indented with scores of little bays and bayous, upon the banks of which, grew great live-oaks, their umbrageous tops casting a shade so refreshing, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could be persuaded that the scene was not a reality.

I could only console myself, however, with the wish that the boys were along to enjoy it with me; but they were in Mesilla, and Jerry was so accustomed to sights of the kind, that he merely gave the beautiful picture a passing glance, regarding it as one of the matter-of-course things, to be met with on a trip like ours.

We went into camp about four o'clock; and, just at twilight, the guard that had been stationed back on the road about a quarter of a mile, came riding furiously in, his swarthy face almost white from fright, shouting at the top of his voice,—

"Los Indios! los Indios! Los Apaches!"

In an instant the quiet camp became a scene of the utmost confusion. Jerry's first thought was for the animals; mine, for the absent boys. I stationed the men at what I deemed the best points for defense; and Jerry, as soon as he had secured the mules, hastened to my side. We then called the Mexican who had given the alarm, and found that the fellow had really not seen anything, but had heard strange noises, that he believed came from Apaches.

Jerry volunteered to ride back and ascertain, if possible, the cause of the disturbance. He had scarcely been gone five minutes, before one of the Mexicans rushed towards me, saying,—

"Don Jerry is shouting to El Senor from the rise of ground out back upon the road."

Springing upon my horse I rode rapidly toward the spot where he stood, when the sight that met my gaze, almost convulsed me with laughter.

Coming up the road were the boys. Ned was mounted upon his pony, and trying to lead Hal's mule. Like most Spanish mules, the animal had a will of its own, and would not be led; but on the contrary, pulled back so strongly upon the lariat, which Ned had attached to the pommel of his saddle, that the pony could scarcely move a step.



Hal's coat was off, his face black with dust and sweat, and he, tugging at a lariat drawn tightly over his shoulder, at the end of which was a small black bear, scarcely more than a cub. The animal insisted upon squatting on his haunches, and in that position, Hal was dragging him through the dust, the creature all the while expressing his disapprobation by low, snarling growls of defiance, and a vigorous shaking of himself between each growl.

Page 66

[Illustration: Boys and Bear.]

The strange medley of noises caused by the boys, the snarling bear, and the obstinate mule, had been heard in the still twilight for a long distance, by the guard, and mistaken for the approach of a party of Apaches.

"I wish you'd take this devilish bear," said Hal.

"And won't you take this plaguy mule?" exclaimed Ned.

Both looked so harassed and tired, that, although Jerry and I could not help laughing at their ludicrous situation, we nevertheless pitied them.

"Where in the world did you get that bear, Hal?" said I.

"Get him? I bought him of a Mexican at Mesilla, and I'm going to take him to California with me for a pet. He's tame."

"Well," exclaimed Ned, "if you don't get him along faster than you have to-day, you'll die of old age before you get there. We've been ever since eleven o'clock getting here, and I'm so hungry and tired I can hardly sit on my horse."

"Pooh!" retorted Hal; "this is nothing. You ought to be taken prisoner by the Apaches if you want to know what 'tis to be hungry and tired."

"How much did you pay for him?" inquired I.

"Only fifteen dollars," answered Hal.

"What's that?" ejaculated Jerry. "Fifteen dollars! Wall, I dunno which is the biggest fool, you or the bar. The greaser that swindled yer, ought to be thrashed; and I've a notion of goin' back and doin' it, for I've felt like thrashin' somebody for a good while. The bar ain't wuth fifteen cents, and won't be nothin' but a bother. Mebbe though he might be good for 'fresh,' if we git hard up."

"He won't be any bother, and you shan't use him for meat. He's just as tame as he can be. See here, now," said Hal, approaching the bear, and attempting to put his hand upon its head. But Bruin snapped so viciously that the boy jumped back in dismay, exclaiming, "Poor fellow! he's awful tired, I suppose!"

"Yes," said Jerry; "he'll be wus tired, though, afore you git him to Californy. You'll have to lead him, every step of the way. He shan't be hitched to no wagon, for the mules has got all the load they want to draw, now. But I reckon we'd better be gettin' back to camp, or the men'll think, we've been took by the 'Paches."

Supper was soon dispatched, after we reached camp, the events of the day talked over, we “turned in,” and in a short time were fast asleep.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by the most agonizing yells and screams.

Springing to my feet, I recognized Patsey’s voice, and, as I hurried in the direction of the sounds, I met the boy, half dead with fright, rushing towards my tent.

As soon as he recognized me, he fell upon his knees, and, crossing himself, besought me, in heartrending tones; to “protict him, for the Blissed Vargin’s sake. The divil himself, your honor, has intered the camp, and he got into bed wid me, to ate me up intirely!”

Page 67

All the time the boy was howling, and holding one hand under his arm, while he danced a hornpipe and protested, that, if I'd save him this time, he'd "niver stale another cint's worth as long as he lived, sure!"

The whole camp was roused, but no one appeared to understand the cause of Patsey's outbreak, and Hal finally suggested that he'd been dreaming.

"Dramin', is it! I wish it had been dramin' I wuz. Boo! hoo! Didn't I sae him wid me own eyes, shure?"

After we had partially quieted him he was able to tell us, that, as he was "slapin' paceably, he all ov a suddint felt somethin' in bed wid him, that wuz swallowin' him intirely. A big black thing wuz lyin' right by the side ov him, and wuz jest a-suckin' him in whole, for he had his arm in his throat clane up to his ilbow!"

"It's that cub of a bear!" exclaimed Ned, interrupting Patsey's story.

At the sound of the word "bear," all of Patsey's fears returned, with renewed power, and he again commenced calling for "protiction," in frantic tones.

Going to the wagon under which Patsey had spread his blanket for the night, we found that Hal had tied the bear near it. Getting rested from the fatigue of his forced journey, the animal had crawled beneath the wagon, and, attracted by the warmth of the blankets, placed himself by the side of the sleeping boy, and, finding his hand uncovered, commenced licking it.

Patsey, thus awakened, had seen the creature's glaring eyes and shaggy black coat, and, not knowing in his fright what it was, concluded his Satanic Majesty had come for him, on account of his many sins and transgressions.

[Illustration: Under the Wagon.]

Order was at last restored, and we retired once more, to be awakened some hours later by Jerry's voice calling the men to prepare for the day's journey. Our breakfast was soon cooked and eaten, and Hal having finally induced Jerry, to permit him to tie his bear to the hind wagon, we were on the road an hour before sunrise, encamping that night at Cook's Springs, and the next afternoon reaching the Membris River about three o'clock, where, with good water, and plenty of grass and wood, we made a very pleasant camp.

Immediately upon our arrival, Hal and Ned went out hunting; and in less than an hour returned with three fine, fat turkeys, which were soon cooking after the most approved style, in one of the large camp-kettles that adorned our fire.

Supper over, Jerry suggested that, as some repairs were necessary to one of the wagons, we should remain in camp, and make them the following day. This suggestion was received with so much pleasure by the boys, I at once determined to adopt it.

Hal proposed a hunting expedition for the morning, leaving Jerry and myself to attend to the wagon.

This we agreed to; and, about sunrise, the boys started, confident of their ability to furnish us with a fine quantity of game before night.

Page 68

As they mounted their ponies, Jerry gave them the following advice:—

“Be keerful ter keep yer eyes and ears open; foller the course of the river, and don’t git out’er sight of it, whatever yer do. There’s three kind ’er game in this country, yer want ter steer clear of, sartin: them’s Injins, bars, and painters. And be keerful to git back afore sundown, whatever else you do.”

“I shan’t steer clear of ‘painters’ or bears, you bet,” said Hal. “If I see one, I shall go for it, and as for Indians, I’ve had quite enough experience to know how to handle them, without any advice from you, Mr. Jerry. I guess we can take care of ourselves,” and away they rode.

“That boy knows less, for a fellow that thinks he knows so much, than anybody I ever see. Why, he don’t know nothin’, compared ter Ned, if he does talk ten times as much. I used ter think, when I was a boy, thet the feller thet hed the longest tongue, knowed the most; but them’s the ones that don’t know nothin’; and he’s one of ’em, sartin,” said Jerry.

I ventured to remark that Hal was a boy yet, and that we ought not to expect too much wisdom in one so young as he.

“But ain’t t’other a boy, ez well?” inquired Jerry; “and hain’t he got ten times as much sense? However, less go and look at that wagon, and see what’s got ter be done to it.”

The repairs kept Jerry and myself busy during the forenoon; and, after they were finished, Jerry proposed that we should take our rifles, and see if we couldn’t get some game on our own account.

This suggestion met my cordial approval; and, after giving directions concerning the camp, Jerry and myself started across the prairie, intending to strike the river some miles above, and follow its course down; hoping, in this way, to fall in with the boys, on their return.

We rode along for several miles without seeing any game, save a few antelope, and they at such a distance, that Jerry though it not best to follow them; and, after a time, decided to make our way to the river and follow it down to camp.

It was a beautiful day: such a one as always brings peace and quiet to the most restless mind. I felt its effects most sensibly, and remarked to Jerry, that I rarely had seen so perfect a day in any country, and it seemed almost too bad, that so lovely a section could be given over to the possession of savages and wild beasts.

“’Tis, sartin,” he replied; “both on ’em thrive here. I’m thinkin’, though, ’twon’t be many years afore white men’ll git in here, and then the Injuns and painters, and sich like’ll, hev to leave it. Why, there’s lots o’ gold jest above here. I’ve known plenty of scouts that

hev brung it in. The white folks'll git hold of it one of these days, and then the country'll fill up like Californy.

"Yer see thet little mountain right ahead of us, don't yer? Wall, I r'member thet place. There's a narrer pass through thet hill, thet we've got ter go through. I've been in it once afore, and it's a mighty pokerish place, I tell yer: however, we'll git along all right, I reckon."

Page 69

In a short time we reached the entrance to the *canon*, which was indeed a narrow pass. Huge rocks, hundreds of feet high, towered above and upon each side of us, their dark, moss-grown surface rendering the narrow passage so gloomy, that, in spite of myself, I felt a cold shiver run over me, that gave me an involuntary sensation of danger, which I could not throw off.

Turning to Jerry, I said, "Isn't there any danger here?"

"Danger!" repeated Jerry, "of course there's danger, everywhere in this country. We ain't out of danger a minute. Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed so loudly, that the rocks above us caught the sound and hurled it against the opposite side of the *canon*, where it seemed to be detained for a moment by some overhanging cliff, and then sent back, reverberating and re-echoing, now faint and indistinct, then clear and well-defined, to again die away in the distance, to once more approach nearer and nearer, louder and louder, until finally catching upon the sharp edge of some far-jutting crag, it shivered into a dozen, startlingly distinct peals of laughter, that seemed to my terrified senses like the shouts of demons, exulting at our temerity in venturing within their own well-chosen realms.

So terrifying was the effect upon me, that, for a few moments, I could not persuade myself that it was but an echo I heard. The blood surged to my heart and receded so suddenly, that I was hardly able to sit erect upon my horse. As soon as I could speak, I said,—

"Come, let us go back, Jerry. I want to get out of this, as soon as I can."

"We've got ter git ter camp, an' this's the nearest way; but, ef you're afraid, we'll turn back. That warn't nothin' ter hurt, though, it did sound kind er skeery. Ther shortest way's always ther best in this country, so let's go ahead," said Jerry.

"I don't know that we are any more likely to meet danger in this *canon* than we are out of it," said I; "but it's one of the most dismal and sunless places I ever was in."

"Well, 'twon't be many minutes afore we're out on the plains agin, so we'll ride along kind er midlin fast;" and, putting spurs to our horses, we soon emerged from the gloomy defile, out into the bright sunshine again.

Once clear of the shadows, I seemed to overcome the forebodings of danger, that had so oppressed me in the *canon*; and, in a few moments, the unpleasant sensations produced by the echo, entirely disappeared.

While thus riding along, the sound of a rifle-shot, a long distance away, fell upon our ears.

“That’s them boys, for sartin,” said Jerry. “They’re in better luck than we be, for they’ve seen somethin’ to shoot at,—an’ so do I,” continued he in a lower tone, pointing towards a little knoll a short distance away from the trail we were following.

I knew in an instant, from the tone of his voice, that he had made an unpleasant discovery, and was satisfied it was Indians. Still I looked, and saw, upon the top of the knoll, in bold relief against the sky, two Indians sitting upon their ponies.

Page 70

One of them held a hand in the air above his head, which Jerry at once said, was the Apache way of asking for a parley.

"We'll hev ter give it to 'em, though we must be mighty keerful," continued he, "'cause it's next to sartin, thet therain't no two on 'em out there alone. We'll find thet out for ourselves, though, afore we're many hours older. Keep your eyes wide open, and your finger on the trigger o' yer rifle, and we'll go and see what they want."

[Illustration: The Two Apaches.]

Upon coming up with them, they each extended, an exceedingly dirty hand, with fingernails that looked almost like bear's claws. After shaking hands with them, Jerry proceeded to have a talk in Spanish. This gave me an excellent opportunity to examine their personal appearance; one, that I did not neglect.

They were small in stature, with short, ugly faces, very dark complexions, little, snapping black eyes, low foreheads, with coarse, stringy, faded hair, that hung far down their backs, carrying in their faces that nameless, but unmistakable impress of treachery and low cunning, that constitutes so large a part of the Apache character.

Around their bodies was wrapped an old blanket, so filthy, it was almost impossible to detect any trace of its original color, which had undoubtedly been blue. Each carried a bow and arrows, but was destitute of either leggins or moccasins, although mounted upon very respectable-looking ponies.

After a short interview, which terminated with our presenting them all the tobacco we had, with a shake of the hands we parted.

As they rode away, Jerry said: "I wish them boys was well in camp."

"You don't anticipate any trouble with these fellows?" inquired I. "What did they say?"

"Say? why, they said they was particular friends of the Americans," replied Jerry. "Just what they all say; but they're treacherous cusses, and either one of 'em, would shake with one hand and scalp with t'other one, ef they got a chance. That little black cuss called himself *El Chico*,—that means The small,—and said he belonged to the copper-mines band, and hailed us to see if he couldn't get a little terbacker; but all he wanted, was to see how we was armed, and if we had any larger party. I filled him chock full, you bet; and mebbe we shan't see 'em again, though it's likely we shall. I see one of 'em eyin' that rifle o'your'n pretty sharp, and he didn't like the look of it much: I could see that."

We had ridden nearly a mile from the place of the interview, when Jerry exclaimed, "There they be again, sure'n shootin';" and, pointing to the mouth of a small *arroya*, that

made back from the river, I discovered six Apaches, coming towards us as fast as their horses would bring them.

We were within a quarter of a mile of a small mound, upon the top of which was a peculiar sandstone formation, not unlike, in shape, a huge bottle; and I suggested to Jerry, that we should ride to the top of this mound, and, sheltering our horses behind the rock, await their approach on foot.

Page 71

The suggestion seemed to be a good one, for it was no sooner made than adopted, and we had barely time to reach the desired location, ere they were upon us.

“Steady,” said Jerry; “let me give ’em one;” and taking deliberate aim’ he fired, killing one of the ponies, thereby forcing its rider to mount behind one of the others; but on they came towards us, as fast as their horses could bring them.

“Now’s your’ time,—fire!” said Jerry.

I brought my rifle to my face and blazed away; seemingly, however, without effect.

“That won’t do. If you can’t shoot surer’n that, you’d better load and let me do it,” said Jerry.

The Indians were now so close that several of their arrows fell about us, two or three striking the rock behind and shivering to pieces, and enabling us to recognize among them, the two who had hailed us but a short time before.

“The treacherous cusses,” said Jerry. “I’ll pay them fellows off, afore I git through with ’em, or my name ain’t Jerry Vance, sartin.”

The Indians appeared to be in no hurry to come within range of our rifles, but kept well out of the way, occasionally coming furiously to wards us, and as we raised our rifles to our faces, they would hastily throw themselves over upon the sides of their animals for protection, and ride rapidly away.

“They ain’t goin’ to hurt us much in this way,” said I to Jerry.

“No; but they’re going to tire us out, for it’ll soon be dark, and we’ve got neither water nor food here; besides them fellers’ eyes arc like cats’,—they kin see ez well in the dark, ez we kin in the daytime. We kin hold ’em safe enuff now, but we must git a way from here before dark. There goes for *El Chico*,” said Jerry, suddenly bringing his rifle to his face; and the next instant, an Indian fell heavily from his horse, and was instantly caught up from the ground by one of his companions, thrown across the horse before him and the party once more galloped out of range.

CHAPTER XIII.

“I reckon we’d better mount and ride slowly towards camp,” said Jerry. “Ef we do we shall get there some time ter-night, but ef we stay here we shan’t, that’s sartin.”

“Do you suppose they’ll follow us?” inquired I.

“Sartin sure,” responded Jerry; “but I reckon by good engineerin’ we kin keep ’em off, so that their arrers won’t hurt us much: it’s a mighty lucky thing they ain’t got no firearms.”

We immediately mounted our horses and rode out upon the plain. The instant the Indians saw us they began whooping and yelling, as though we had done the very thing, they most desired; but Jerry was strong in the opinion that it was our best course and we continued on.

Every few minutes they would make a rush towards us, and we would turn and bring our rifles up; and then they would wheel and rapidly ride away out of possible range, when we would continue our course towards camp.

Page 72

We made but little progress; and, after riding a couple of miles in this way, determined to make a stand, in hopes of inducing some of them to advance within rifle-range; but they were too wary to be caught in this manner, although they would approach much nearer than they had done before.

While we were debating as to the best course to pursue, we were startled by the report of a rifle-shot, far in the rear of the Indians, who, upon hearing the sound, rode rapidly away to the right, just as a party of four persons came in sight.

They were soon near enough for us to distinguish Hal and Ned among the number, and we at once rode towards them, glad enough to know they were safe. Their companions proved to be a Mr. Mastin, with his Mexican servant, on his way from the copper-mines to Mesilla.

He had fallen in with the boys, and, upon their invitation, was accompanying them to our camp; but, having heard the sound of our rifles, and anticipating an encounter, had hurried on to join us.

We were delighted to meet with the boys, safe and sound, and made good time towards camp, which we reached just about sundown.

We found Mr. Mastin a very intelligent American; and, as he informed us, the discoverer and part owner of the Pino Alto gold-mines, about fifty miles above, near the *Santa Rita del Cobre*. He had resided many years in the country, and was thoroughly acquainted with the Apaches, and familiar with their habits and customs.

We succeeded in making a very comfortable meal, notwithstanding our ill luck in procuring game; and, after supper was over, we seated ourselves around the camp-fire to hear Mr. Mastin discourse upon Apaches.

He had once met Mangas Colorado, the head chief of the tribe, who was called Red Sleeve, from the fact that he never failed to besmear his arms to the elbow, in the blood of his victims.

He described him as over six feet in height, with an enormously large head, a broad, bold forehead, large, aquiline nose, huge mouth, and broad, heavy chin. His eyes were small, but very brilliant, and, when under excitement, flashed like fire, although his demeanor was like that of a cast-iron man.

He said that Mangas was undoubtedly one of the ablest statesmen, as well as the most influential and sagacious of all the Chiefs of the Indian tribes of the southwest; and related many anecdotes illustrative of his character,—incidents that had come under his own observation,—which entertained us until a late hour, and gave us an insight into Apache life, that was both amusing and instructive.

Notwithstanding we had all been so much interested in Mr. Mastin's conversation, the boys begged him to tell them one more story before they retired; and, as he seemed perfectly willing to comply with their request, we filled our pipes and again gathered about him, while he related the following:—

“A couple of years ago, I had occasion to visit a *rancheria* of Pinal Apaches in the mountains just north of the copper mines.

Page 73

"While there, my attention was called to one of the warriors, a tall, well-proportioned and very dignified Indian, about forty years of age. He weighed nearly two hundred pounds, and, with his broad shoulders, deep chest, and splendid muscle, was one of the finest-formed men I ever saw, as well as one of the ugliest; for his face was certainly the most hideous I ever beheld, being terribly disfigured by a broad, livid scar, that extended from the corner of his mouth to his ear. Notwithstanding this, the fellow was a great dandy, spending many hours each day in greasing and arranging his long coarse hair, which he ornamented with plates of silver, bits of gaudy-colored cloth, bright feathers, and tinsel. Every hair was scrupulously plucked from his brows and eyelashes, and the lids of his eyes were painted a bright vermilion, giving to his face the expression of a demon rather than anything human.

"That he was hideously ugly, and never known to smile, were two indisputable facts; while it was equally sure that there was no greater favorite with the Apache belles, no braver warrior, more sagacious counselor, mighty hunter, or expert thief in the whole tribe.

"I learned that his name was Cadette, and that he obtained it in the following manner:—

"Upon the headwaters of the Rio Gila, in Arizona, is a vast forest, that has been the hunting-ground, as well as the home of the Apaches for centuries. Here they have never been disturbed by the visits of the 'White Eyes,' as they term all Americans.

"Occasionally a party of hardy prospectors, lured by reports of fabulous quantities of gold and silver in the possession of these Indians, would venture within the gloomy recesses of this unexplored region; but few of them ever returned.

"One day, while passing near the banks of the river, Cadette discovered the footprints of a very large lion in the sand. Though armed with no weapon but his spear, he at once determined to follow the trail. This he decided, after a careful examination, to have been made some four hours previous, in the early morning. It led towards a dense jungle, some two or three miles down the river, which he concluded was the creature's lair.

"As he drew near the thicket, he dismounted from his pony and approached the jungle with great caution. At this place, the river was quite narrow and very deep, and upon its bank stood a large cedar, whose wide, spreading branches, extending far over the stream, afforded him an excellent opportunity to examine the interior of the thicket.

"Into this tree the Indian climbed, and crawled out upon a large limb directly over the river, which he fancied would enable him to obtain a view of the supposed lair.

"While he was peering into the jungle, he became suddenly conscious of a movement in the thick branches over his head. Looking up, he discovered, lying upon a large limb

about ten feet above him, a panther. The animal was preparing to spring; and, in an instant, like a flash, it sprang towards him.

Page 74

“Almost as quick as thought itself, Cadette dropped from the limb into the water beneath, just as the panther landed upon the spot he had so recently vacated.

“Once in the water, the Indian swam silently and expeditiously beneath the surface, until he was some distance down the stream and out of sight of the tree, when he landed under the shelter of the bank.

“Just then a slight noise attracted his attention, and he discovered his enemy, partially concealed in the tall bottom grass, and evidently determined that his prey should not escape so easily.

“Cadette was brave, but he fully realized that an unarmed Apache, courageous as he might be, was no match for a panther; and the wary Indian began to look about him for some means of retreat from his unpleasant situation. While he was doing this, the creature worked himself into a position between the Indian and the river, thus effectually cutting off his only hope of escape.

“What should he do? The panther was not twenty feet away from him: he well knew that the animal could reach him at a single bound. Keeping his eye fixed steadily upon the crouching form, the Indian began to slowly retreat backwards.

“While he was retreating before the stealthy, cat-like approach of the panther, the most piercing cries, as of some human being in terrible agony, filled the air, startling the Indian, and causing the panther to rise from its crouching position, and listen intently for a moment with well-erected ears, and tail gently lashing the earth. The cries were repeated. The next moment the great creature turned, and slowly moved away in the direction from whence the noise came, while Cadette hastily returned to the foot of the tree where he had left his spear.

“After securing his weapon, he started for the place where he had left his pony; but, to his surprise, the animal was not there. Following its trail, he soon came upon bear tracks, and concluded that his horse had been attacked by the bear, and in his agony had uttered the cries that had so startled him, and attracted the attention of the panther.

“Continuing his search, he found the dead body of his pony upon the ground. Near it was the panther, crouched, as though about to make a spring; while, at a short distance, standing erect upon his hind-legs, with his back against a large rock, was a huge cinnamon bear, evidently at bay.

“The Indian crept cautiously forward, and concealed himself behind a great stone, from whence he could watch the approaching combat.

“The panther lay close to the ground, with his eyes fixed intently upon the bear, his huge fore-paws nervously contracted, while the long claws grappled the rocks and gravel.

Occasionally he uttered a low menacing growl that showed his gleaming white teeth and blood-red tongue, from which the saliva fell in great drops.

“Meanwhile, the bear remained on the defensive, apparantly fearing to move from his position, lest his more nimble adversary should take advantage of him.

Page 75

"The savage creatures maintained their relative positions, eyeing one another for several minutes. Then the panther gave a tremendous leap, and grappled the bear. It was a frightful contest: each animal uttering the most piercing cries, biting, hugging, and tearing one another as they rolled over and over in the dust.

"It was evident to the Indian that this fearful struggle could last but a short time; and soon the animals, as if by mutual agreement, separated, and, moving a short distance from one another, lay down and began to lick their wounds.

"While thus engaged, the panther became by some means, aware of Cadette's presence. As though angry at such an interruption, he turned, and, with a fierce growl, sprang towards him, instead of the bear.

"Unexpected as was the movement, it did not find the Indian unprepared. Planting the handle of his spear firmly in the earth, he so adroitly held it that the panther alighted upon its sharp iron head, which passed directly through the creature's heart; not, however, before the maddened animal had dealt Cadette the blow that crushed his face, and inflicted a wound the scar of which, had so terribly disfigured him for life.

"As soon as the Indian recovered from the effect of the blow, he succeeded in withdrawing his spear from the carcass of the panther, and went in search of the bear, who had retreated to some distance, and was engaged in licking the wounds he had received in his encounter with the panther.

"Cadette at once attacked the creature so vigorously with his spear, that he soon succeeded in killing him; and, although suffering great pain, managed to remove the skin from both animals; and, taking them upon his back, bore them in triumph to the *rancheria*, more than twenty miles distant, as trophies of his prowess in the chase."

After thanking Mr. Mastin for a very pleasant evening, we all retired, and were soon asleep, nor did we awake the next morning until the sun was far up in the heavens.

Breakfast over, we bid our guest a hearty farewell; and, with good wishes for our safe arrival upon the Pacific Coast, he left us to pursue our journey still further into the Apache country.

It was after we were comfortably seated about our camp-fire, in the evening, that I bethought myself that we had not as yet, heard Hal's story of his capture and adventures with the Apaches. So I called him, with the request he would narrate what had befallen him, from the time he left our camp at Dead-Man's Hole until his release by us in the Sacramento Mountains.

Hal, who had evidently been expecting the invitation for some time, at once seated himself, and, with Jerry, Ned and myself as listeners, commenced as follows:—

“When Anastacio and I started for Fort Davis, we hadn’t been on the road fifteen minutes, before five Indians set upon us, from a thicket by the road side.

“They followed up the attack so briskly, that before we had time to think, they had our revolvers, and our hands tied behind us. They then took our horses and mounted us upon two of their own. We travelled over the roughest, hardest country I ever saw in my life, until daybreak, when they stopped at a spring to water.

Page 76

"Here they stripped us of most of our clothes, and made us ride bare-backed until noon, when they stopped for a few minutes. I noticed that, whenever they halted, one of them always rode to the top of the highest hill near, and remained on the lookout there, until we were ready to start again.

"Before we had been long at this last place, the lookout signaled, and, in about an hour, eight more Indians joined us, with Juanita.

"She was very tired and terribly frightened, but when she saw me she just cried for joy, and I tried to comfort her as much as I could; but, while I was talking to her, a great, greasy-looking fellow came up to me, and, taking me by the collar, pulled me away, and, putting the muzzle of my own revolver to my head, made signs that, if I dared to speak
"—

Here Patsey came running up, yelling at the top of his voice,—

"The bear's gone! The bear's gone!" Hal and Ned jumped to their feet, exclaiming,—
"Which way did he go?" and, without waiting for a reply, darted off in search of him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I hope they won't git the critter: he ain't nothin' but a cussid nuisance, no how," said Jerry, as Hal disappeared in the gloaming.

"It's so dark they won't be very likely to," was my reply.

"I 'spect the Irishman had a hand in startin' him," continued Jerry. "He's owed the critter a grudge ever since he tarred his clo'es so, the other night."

"How was that, Jerry?" inquired I.

"Why, yer see the boy had been a-proddin' the critter with a sharp stick; and, arter he got through, he was a-standin' by the wagon, and the bar made a jump and ketched him right by his trousers-leg. This kind er scart the feller, and he made a leap, and left the biggest part of his breeches in the critter's mouth. Ned laughed, and told him, that one bar(e) in camp was enough, and he'd better go an' mend up—thar he is, now," pointing towards one of the wagons.

I called him, and he came towards me, looking decidedly guilty. I said to him, "Patsey, how did the bear get away?"

"He runned away, sure, sur."

"Yes; but how did he get loose?"

"He aited the rope aff, I suppose, sure. I seed him goin', and thought it'd be no harm to spake to the boys, sur."

"That was all right, Patsey; but you didn't turn him loose, did you?"

"I turn him loose, sur! Phat would I be doin' that fur?"

"Well, why didn't you go out and help find him?"

"I was afraid, sur;" examining the huge rent in his pantaloons.

"Afraid!" said I. "What under the sun was you afraid of? your bare legs?"

"Will, sur, I didn't know what the quinisquences might be if two bears (bares) happened to mate in the woods."

Just here Jerry gave one of his peculiar chuckles; and, seeing that I got but little information from the boy, I dismissed him with the remark, that, when we got to Tucson, he should have a suit of clothes.

Page 77

"That'll *suit* me, your honor," was the reply, as he moved briskly off.

The boys soon returned, after an unsuccessful search for the bear.

Hal was disposed to blame everybody but himself for the escape, while Ned, with whom the bear had never been a great favorite, was inclined to laugh at the matter, to Hal's great disgust.

His ill nature reached its culminating point, however, when Jerry suggested, that, "if he lied fifteen dollars more to git rid of, he'd better bury it than give it for a cussid, good-for-nothin' bar, that warn't nothin' but a infernal nuisance to everybody, anyway."

Hal accepted the gauntlet thus thrown down by Jerry, and was about to reply in no very polite language, when I changed the conversation, by requesting him to finish the narrative of his visit to the Apaches; and, after a little hesitation, he resumed his story as follows:—

"The Indian told me, that, if I spoke to Juanita again, he'd send a bullet through my head; so Anastacio said, for the Indian spoke in Spanish.

"I didn't talk to her any more for several hours, but rode all the afternoon by her side. When we got to the top of the bluff from which we could see the Rio Grande, Juanita cried, and said that her home was there, and Anastacio felt so bad for her that he led her horse all the way after that.

"When we got to the river, instead of crossing, the Indians rode into it; and they made us all wade through the water for three or four miles, though the whole party came out on the same side. From here we struck into the prairie again; and, after riding for two or three hours, we camped.

"Juanita was so tired, she dropped to sleep as soon as we stopped; but Anastacio and I kept awake, and saw the Indians cast a mule, and open his veins and suck the warm blood from them. After this, they cut off portions of the flesh and roasted it over the coals, and made motions to us, that, if we wanted any, we must cook for ourselves.

"We were both hungry, but we couldn't eat mule meat, then, although we had to come to it in a little time.

"We started by daybreak the next morning; and Juanita became so exhausted, that, before night, she asked me two or three times to kill her. Finally, she appealed to Anastacio; and I heard him promise her, on a little cross she wore around her neck, that, if worse came to worse, he would do it.

"That day one of the Indians killed an antelope, and we all ate heartily of it, but Anastacio. He took the meat they gave to him, and saved it for Juanita. He carried it in

his hand all day, and walked beside her horse, telling her stories in Spanish, and trying to cheer her. He was as kind to her as he could be, during the whole seventeen days we were together.

“One night we slept in a great cave in a mountain,[Probably the Waco Mountain, thirty miles east of El Paso.] where there were four or five deep pools, of nice, clear water. Juanita was so delighted at the sight of them that she sat on the brink of one and put her feet in it, to ‘rest them,’ she said. When the Indians saw her do this, one of them struck her with his quirt [A small, heavy whip.] over the shoulders.

Page 78

"Anastacio sprang at him like a wild beast, and I believe would have killed him, but the other Indians took him off. They seemed greatly amused at the fight; but said they were only saving us for their squaws to torture, after they got us home.

"After this they made us all walk; although Juanita's feet and ankles were swelled so terribly that she could scarcely move: whenever Anastacio got the chance though, he carried her in his arms.

"One day one of the Indians brought her some fresh mule's blood to drink, and, because she wouldn't take it, he threw it in her face, and told her in Spanish, that, when they got to their village, he should make her his squaw. This made her cry terribly; and I heard Anastacio tell her he'd certainly kill her, before the Indians should have her. After that I thought she seemed happier, and repeatedly said, if she could only see her dear old father once more, she should be glad to die.

"We all suffered terribly from fatigue and thirst; for, after they thought Juanita was going to drown herself in the pool, they were very cross to us, and used to make us do all their work about the camp. If we refused, they stuck sharp-pointed knives into us, and struck us with their quirts; though, after Anastacio made the fuss, they didn't strike Juanita any more.

"The night you rescued us was the first time they hadn't put a guard out, since we were captured.

"You see, they always sent one of their party back a mile or two, to watch the trail, so as to avoid being surprised; but they had got so near home, they didn't dream of being pursued, I suppose.

"That day Anastacio told me they were talking of having a big dance when they got to the village, and he was going to kill Juanita before we reached it. He cried about it, and wanted to know if I supposed the Blessed Virgin would forgive him if he did it. We'd just been talking about it, when we heard the crack of Tom's rifle, and saw the Indians run towards the wood.

"I tell you what it was, when I heard that shot, I felt that it wasn't an Indian's gun (it didn't sound a bit like one), and my heart jumped right up into my mouth.

"The Indians appeared so anxious about Juanita, that they seemed to forget Anastacio and I, when they heard the rifle. We both run for the hut, and saw that she wasn't there, and supposed the Indians had taken her. Then we heard the soldiers' guns, and run towards them; and, the next I knew, I met Ned, and was hugging and kissing him just like a girl, I was so glad to see him. I tell you 'twas jolly, though; and, when I found that Juanita was all right, I felt like dancing and crying in the same minute.

“One thing is certain: you saved Anastacio from killing Juanita, for she never would have gone into that village alive.”

“Wall, youngster,” said Jerry, “I’ve heered you through; and now I’d like ter know what you think of the ’Paches; ’cause, you see, we’ve got ter travel a good many hundred miles through their country, and I’d like ter hev your opinion of ’em.”

Page 79

"Why, I think they are a cruel, cowardly, treacherous tribe, as Mr. Mastin said; and the dirtiest things I ever saw."

"Tell me, Jerry, do you know much about them?" interrupted I. "If you do, tell us something of their character and habits, as you've seen them."

"Wall, I've been through their country seven times, and I've met a heap of 'em, one way and another; but I hain't got no better opinion of 'em than Mr. Mastin hed. They're the smartest, wickedest and cunningest, Injins I ever seed. A Comanche ain't a touch to 'em, and I've never yet seed a white man smart enuff to beat 'em."

"You don't exactly mean that, do you, Jerry?" inquired I.

"That's exactly what I do mean: no more and no less," was the reply. "You'll hev a chance ter see for yourself, afore we git through this trip, I'm thinkin, or you'll be the only man thet ever travelled through their country that hain't; that's my idee, sartin. Why, the cusses'll telegraph to one another all over the country, and know just what's goin' on a hundred miles away.

"Americans can't understand 'em, and never will. No one ever saw a white man look at a country as a 'Pache does: he'll see everything. Ther ain't a ravine, gully, rock, bush, or tree, a foot high, thet he don't hev his eye on. Now, a white man don't look at a country in that way, does he?

[Illustration: Apache Trailing.]

"Jest ez likely ez not, there's a Injin within a dozen yards of us; but we wouldn't think it."

"A dozen yards of us!" exclaimed Hal, looking around; "why, where could he hide, I'd like to know?"

"That's jest it, youngster. We might go within ten feet of him, and never see him. Why, I've knowed 'em to hide behind a brown-bush, clump er cactus, or a rock, so mighty cunnin' thet ther ain't one scout in fifty would see 'em, let alone a stranger.

"They'll kiver therselves with grass, and lay on the ground all day, without movin', waitin' for a party to pass. I've been within ten foot of one myself, and seed him, too, and thought 'twas a part of the rock he was lying agin.

"I tell yer, them fellers's smarter'n a whip! They be, sartin, now."

"Well," said Ned, who had been listening attentively to Jerry's description of the Apache character, "if I'd had any idea these Indians were half as smart as you say they are, I'd rather have stayed in Texas than started on the trip."

"I wouldn't," declared Hal. "I've had about as much experience with 'em as anybody in the party, and I don't believe they're half as smart as you make 'em out. At any rate, I wouldn't be afraid to put my brain against theirs."

"Put your what, youngster?" inquired Jerry, in such an incredulous tone, that we all burst into a hearty laugh, in the midst of which Hal retired, leaving Jerry, Ned, and myself to continue the Apache question alone.

"You may depend on't, we ain't a-goin' ter git through this blasted country without more'n one brush with them fellers; and my way is ter keep our ears and eyes open, our rifles and pistols well loaded, and meet 'em when they come;—for come they will, sartin," said Jerry.

Page 80

"Well, you must adopt such precautions and make such rules as you think proper," was my reply. "We'll all obey them."

"I'll set ther guard ter-night, and yer may ez well turn in now, 'cause we must make a early start."

We had hardly been on the road an hour the next day, before we observed one of the remarkable signal-smokes (used by the Apaches to give warning of the approach of strangers into their country), suddenly shoot up into the air from a spur of the mountains several miles distant.

Although the morning was windy, the smoke arose in a straight column to a great height, then spread out like a huge umbrella at the top, and, in the twinkling of an eye, was gone.

"That means 'look out,' plain enuff, don't it?" asked Jerry. "That's what I call telegraphin'. Now, putty soon you'll see some more answerin' of 'em."

"Do you know what that means?" inquired Ned.

"That means, 'Strangers is comin'.' If they'd repeated it three or four times, it would have said, 'The party's a big one, and wants watchin'.' But they're so fur off, I reckon they'll send two or three spies in ter see how many thar is of us, afore we shall hear from 'em. Hilloa! there they go," continued he, pointing to three more of the signals that were suddenly sent up in different directions. "We're in amongst 'em, sure, boys; so let's keep our eyes open."

Notwithstanding we maintained the utmost vigilance during the entire day's journey, we saw nothing of Indians, or any signs indicating their presence; but, upon camping at night, we so disposed our wagons, that we should be able to make a vigorous resistance in case of attack. The guard was posted, to be relieved every two hours. Our camp was on an open plain, with no shrubbery save an occasional brown-bush or *yucca* near us; and we retired, feeling as safe as we had any time since crossing the Rio Grande.

The night passed quietly; and, just as the grey dawn began to make objects visible about camp, I awoke.

I saw the guard sitting over the smoldering fire, the mules hitched to the wagon-wheels as usual, and the remainder of the party wrapped in their blankets, apparantly sleeping soundly; so I determined to take another nap before rising.

While thus lying, half awake and half asleep, I dreamily turned my eyes towards a small bush that stood a few yards from the place where I was lying, and, to my horror, discovered a pair of bright eyes peering at me from between the branches.

My first thought, that it was some animal, was speedily dissipated by discovering the fingers of a human hand holding aside the branches so as to give its owner an uninterrupted view of our camp; and it required but little stretch of the imagination to plainly see the features of a swarthy, ugly face behind them.

In an instant I remembered the conversation with Jerry the day previous, and decided that it must be the face of an Apache spy, and that I had better remain quiet; knowing, that, if my surmise was correct, we need not fear an attack from him or his companions, at that time.

Page 81

I lay for some moments,—it seemed hours,—spell-bound, watching the face, but not daring to move even an eyelid, lest the discovery of the fact that I was awake, should be the signal for my own destruction. I expected every moment to hear the twang of a bow-string, and feel the head of an arrow penetrate my flesh; for I felt confident the spy was not alone.

I remember watching the eyes, so steadily gleaming from between the boughs, and comparing them to those of a tiger, about to spring upon its prey, and then, I found myself speculating as to whether a flint arrow-head would cause more pain than an iron one.

While these thoughts were passing through my mind, I noticed the branches almost imperceptibly resume their natural position and the eyes disappear from view.

My first impulse was to spring to my feet and alarm the camp. Then I bethought myself of the well-known cunning of the Apaches, and determined to remain quiet for a few moments, lest a ruse had been adopted to ascertain if their presence had been discovered.

Just at this moment, the guard, who had been sitting over the dying embers of the camp-fire, arose, drew his coat closer about him to shield him from the chill morning air, and, after taking a look around, again sat down. As he did so, I saw the branches once more cautiously pushed aside, and two pairs of eyes, instead of one, survey the scene.

What should I do? A cold sweat started from every pore of my body, and my heart almost ceased to beat, as I realized that the least movement of either of my sleeping companions might precipitate upon us a foe, of whose numbers I could form no estimate.

Conscious that I had acted wisely in doing nothing myself to hasten it, I felt equally certain I could have done nothing to avert it.

There I lay waiting, I knew not for what. The suspense became terrible. It seemed as though every moment had become a long hour,—as though I dared not breathe, lest the breath should be my last.

Suddenly, I felt that the boughs had again resumed their natural position, and the eyes were gone. Yes! they were there no longer. Once more I breathed freely.

Why I did not instantly arouse the camp, I cannot tell. I waited several minutes, then quietly cocked my rifle beneath my blankets, and touched Jerry on the shoulder. The instant he felt it, he started; but my low “s-h” apprised him of danger, and he again resumed his old position.

In a low tone, I told him what I had seen. He waited a few moments and then aroused the camp.

No one was aware, that, during the night, Indians had been so near us, nor did the camp show any evidence that they had entered it; but the ground in the vicinity of the bush, which had concealed the foe revealed very plainly the track of four moccasined feet. Although we found it difficult to tell in what direction they had gone, yet it was quite evident that we might, at any time, expect a visit from our Apache friends, and our only course was to be ready when they appeared.

Page 82

Hal and Ned were disposed, at first, to imagine that the visitors of the night previous were the creation of a dream; but the sight of their footprints in the sand, soon dissipated that theory, while they plainly told them the necessity of greater caution.

Breakfast dispatched, we got under way once more; and, during the next three or four days crossed several spurs of the Burro and Pelloncillo ranges of mountains, and over that portion of the great Madre Plateau, that lies along the thirty-second parallel,—but saw no Indians.

This fact gave Hal a good opportunity to laugh at what he termed my vision; nor did he fail to improve the opportunity.

Jerry and I often consulted together, and wondered why it was that we heard nothing more from the spies that had visited us; for, as Jerry wisely said, “If they’d come along and have it out with us, one way or t’other, he wouldn’t keer; but ter keep us always expectin’ ’em, is what wears a feller out. By’m by, when we git keerless, they’ll ketch us nappin’, and then, God help us, that’s all.”

Our route, the next day, passed through a fertile *cienega*, [Valley.] thence over an alkali plain. It was while crossing this latter, that I met with an adventure, the most desperate we encountered on the trip. Our route carried us over this vast plain, strongly impregnated with alkali, and sparsely covered with dwarfed mesquite with an occasional cluster of *yuccas*, scarce two feet in height; and was so level, we could see for miles over it in any direction.

The road was thickly covered from five to six inches deep, with an impalpable dust, so fine that the lightest footstep, or breath of air, sent it in clouds above our heads. So dense was it, that it completely enveloped our whole party, making it impossible for us to distinguish one another, at a distance even of three or four feet.

Jerry and myself had been riding a few rods in advance of the wagons; but he returned to them for the purpose of giving some order, while I continued on. So open was the plain, that it seemed impossible for any foe to be concealed upon its surface; and we naturally abated somewhat, the vigilance we should have maintained, had we been passing through a rocky *canon*, or wooded defile. We therefore rode carefully along, shrouded in dust, but not dreaming of danger.

Suddenly, without the least warning, three or four muskets, and a shower of arrows, were discharged upon us from a spot not twenty yards away.

A clap of thunder from a clear sky would not have astonished me more.

The thought, that Hal or Ned might have been killed, passed like a flash of lightning through my mind; for the dust was so dense, I could not distinguish friend from foe; but I

heard Jerry shout, "*Adelante! Adelante hombres!*" and forgetting for the moment that I was already in the advance, in obedience to the order, I spurred my horse forward, just as the Apache war-whoop sounded, apparantly upon all sides of me.

Page 83

The spot selected for the ambush was at a point where the road passed through a large body of prickly-pear, the terrible thorns of which, in connection with the sharp-pointed leaves of the Spanish-bayonet, formed a natural *chevaux-de-frise* that no living creature could penetrate.

I soon discovered this; and, in the expectation of reaching the train, turned my horse's head and rode blindly back through the thick dust, although unable to see more than a few feet from me in any direction.

Suddenly I found myself surrounded by Indians. One stout, sinewy fellow, naked, with the exception of a breechcloth, seized my horse by the bits, and by main strength, forced him back upon his haunches, and in the twinkling of an eye, I lay upon my back in the dust of the road, deprived of my weapons, with an Apache, whose nude body had been well smeared with grease, sitting squarely astride me, with a knee upon each arm.

It was impossible for me to move; and I gave myself up for lost, as I noticed the wicked, fiendish expression upon the hideously painted face of the savage, and heard him mutter a malediction in Spanish through his closed teeth. The next instant, the welcome crack of three or four rifles greeted my ears. The Indian gave a start, and I saw the blood spurt from his side.

He gnashed his teeth, uttered a harsh, fierce exclamation of rage, and seized my throat with one hand, while he made a desperate attempt, with the other, to grasp my knife, which, in the struggle, had fortunately fallen just beyond his reach.

As he stretched forward, I felt his hold upon my throat relax; and, making a tremendous effort, I succeeded in pitching him over my head; then, springing to my feet, ran like a race-horse in the direction of the shots just fired; and, the next moment, was with Jerry and the boys.

I was so excited and bewildered, that, for a few seconds, I could hardly realize what had passed. I soon learned, however, that, immediately upon the attack being made, Jerry had halted the wagons, and, as he was unable in the dense dust to form any estimate of the number of the foe, was advancing with the men on foot, at the time they so opportunely fired the volley which rid me of my foe.

The Apaches left two dead bodies upon the ground; and we, three horses, while ever after I followed the advice I had so frequently given Hal and Ned, and kept with the wagons.

My adventure furnished a fruitful theme for conversation around the camp-fire for many nights. Jerry, Hal, Ned, Patsey, and even the Mexican teamsters had a theory as to the course they should pursue under the same circumstances; and I believe it is an

unsettled question to this day, whether I did right in turning back instead of riding forward, after I heard the order given.

The evening of the succeeding day brought us to the entrance of the Apache Pass, the only *canon* through which we could cross the Chirichui range of mountains, that for many years had been the home of Cochise's band of Apaches, one of the worst that ever infested the country. Here, it was necessary to exercise the greatest caution; for the place was notoriously the most dangerous upon the entire route.

Page 84

Extra guards were sent out, the animals securely corralled, each man required to sleep upon his arms, and every precaution taken to enable us to repel an attack at a moment's notice.

The night passed without any alarm, and Jerry chuckled at the thought that we should probably get through without being molested. Just as we were starting, however, it was found that one of our wagons required repairs, that would cause a delay of several hours. As the water was good and the grass luxuriant, we concluded to run the risk of an attack, and to remain for the day where we were and give our animals, which were sent to graze a limit a mile from camp, a much-needed rest.

Jerry undertook the repair of the wagon; and, as the day was bright, the boys determined to do some washing.

I had thrown myself upon my blanket, and was lazily admiring the beauties of an Arizona landscape, when Patsey approached me, and, pulling off his brimless hat, said, "Ef yer plase, sur, the byze wants to git some sooaap."

"What is it, Patsey?" said I.

"It's the sooaap, sur. Where'll the byze git the sooaap ter wash wid?"

"Tell them to take a spade, and go and dig some," was my reply.

Patsey looked at me a moment, as though half inclined to think I had suddenly taken leave of my senses, and then exclaimed, in tones of astonishment,—

"Dig sooaap! Where'll they go to dig it, shure?"

"Right there," said I, pointing to a small palmilla,[The palmilla is a species of palm, known as the soap-plant, whose roots, when bruised in water, make a very thick and remarkably soft and white lather. The plant is much used by the natives for cleansing clothes, and is far superior to any manufactured soap for scouring woolens. It also makes an admirable shampoo mixture.] numbers of which were growing all about us.

Patsey looked in the direction indicated; and, seeing nothing that resembled soap, regarded me attentively for a moment, and then wheeled and darted away.

Presently I saw the three boys coming towards me, and Ned laughingly remarked that he and Hal wanted some soap to wash their shirts with.

I answered, that I had just sent them word by Patsey, to go and dig some.

Evidently Ned was as much surprised at my answer as Patsey had been; but he mustered courage enough to inquire where he should find it.

"There, there, and there!" replied I, pointing in rapid succession to the plants that were growing around us. Ned stood spell-bound for a moment, and then slowly turned towards Hal and Patsey, who were standing at a little distance.

As he approached them, Patsey caught him by the arm, and, with a most knowing look on his broad, Irish face, exclaimed, "Didn't I tell yez the boss wuz crazy, an' I wouldn't git my new clo'es, any how?"

Wishing them to learn the merits of this truly wonderful plant that grows so common throughout this region, I rose from the ground. Patsey beat a hurried retreat, taking refuge with Jerry, saying, the "Boss had gone as crazy as a bidbug, wid his diggin' soop and givin' clo'es away, to be shure."

Page 85

Sending Ned for a spade, I soon unearthed one of the large bulbous roots, which I divided into pieces, and, accompanying the boys to the spring, practically demonstrated its remarkable saponaceous qualities, leaving them delighted with the experiment; but had hardly returned to my blanket again when I was startled by the report of two rifles, that came from below us, near the base of the mountains where our animals were grazing.

However commonplace this incident may appear to the reader, to us it was the tocsin of danger. Before the lofty crags above us had ceased to reverberate the echoes, every man was on the alert.

The boys came running to the spot where I stood, their bare arms dripping with soap-suds, while the men rushed to the wagons to procure their firearms and ammunition.

Before we had time to fully equip ourselves, the sight of one of the herders, rapidly approaching, told the story. He rode near enough to make himself heard, then, checking his horse so suddenly as to almost throw him upon his haunches, he brandished his revolver and shouted,—

“Los Indios! Los Apaches!” and, turning, rode rapidly in the direction whence he came.

CHAPTER XV.

Jerry sprang upon a horse; and shouting, “Take care er the camp!” rode rapidly in the direction of the herd.

Telling Hal and Ned to climb the rocks and report what they saw, I ordered the wagons to be drawn up in a line parallel with the foot of the bluff, thus improvising a sort of corral.

The boys, by this time, had discovered eight or ten Indians following the herders, who were driving the animals towards camp. I immediately rode out to assist them. At the moment I reached the plain, a little puff of white smoke rose on the air, far to the rear of the herders. A second after, I saw a riderless horse galloping wildly towards the herd, where he was lost to view. I urged my horse forward; and, by our combined exertions, the animals were safely brought into camp and corralled.

These secured, we turned our attention to the Indians, who were coming down upon us like a whirlwind.

“Don’t a man fire till I give the word,” said Jerry; “and remember not to throw away a bullet.”

The Indians had paused upon the plain, nearly half a mile from our camp; and, sitting upon their horses, were evidently considering the best plan of attack. Suddenly, two of their number turned, and rode back towards the spot where we had first seen them.

“What can they be going back for?” asked Hal, who, rifle in hand, was standing by Jerry’s side, evidently anxious for an opportunity to wipe out old scores.

“What are they going back for?” repeated Jerry; “why, to scalp that poor cuss they shot, I reckon. Judge,” continued he, turning toward me, “jest you try a crack at them fellers with yer new-fashioned ‘dust-raiser,’ will yer?” pointing to my Sharpe’s carbine.

Page 86

"I don't believe that I can reach them: it will only be throwing away a cartridge, to make the attempt," replied I.

"Well, jest try it," continued he; "'cause, if yer could hit one of 'em, they'd leave mighty sudden, and save us considerable trouble."

"Yes, you can reach 'em," said Ned. "I wish you would try."

Dismounting, and resting the carbine over the back of my horse, I took careful, deliberate aim, and fired.

That the bullet did reach them, and they were badly frightened, was evident from the suddenness with which they wheeled, and galloped over the plain, in an opposite direction.

The next moment, Jerry grasped my shoulder, and shouted, "You hit one of the devils, sartin."

Bringing my glass to bear, I saw one of the Indians reel in his saddle, then recover himself a little, again waver, and finally fall to the ground, while his horse continued on with the remainder of the party, who, after riding some distance, stopped.

In a little time, they were joined by the two who had previously left them. Then three of their number rode towards the spot where their fallen comrade lay; and, securing his body, one of them took it before him on the horse, and the whole party galloped off.

"That ere shot of yourn was a good one," said Jerry. "Tit for tat is my rule for them varmints; an' we're even with 'em on this arternoon's work. I reckon we'd better take a shovel along, an' bury that poor feller that's a-lyin' there."

"Certainly, Jerry; but wouldn't it be better to bring the body in, and bury it here?" asked I.

"We don't want the men to see it, ef we kin help it. It allus makes 'em skeery; for there ain't nobody that wants to be cut and hacked to pieces, ef they be dead, as them red devils have sarved that poor Mexican, sartin."

Directing Patsey to bring a shovel, Jerry and I started on our sad errand. After riding about a mile, we came upon the body of the dead man, stretched upon the green grass, naked, scalped, and terribly mutilated.

For a few moments we sat upon our horses, silently gazing upon the horrible spectacle, too much shocked to speak. The silence was broken by Jerry, who exclaimed,—

“Ef them ‘Paches ain’t devils, then thar ain’t no use of havin’ any, that’s all I’ve got to say. A pictur like that ain’t a very appetizin’ thing for a Traveller that’s like to git ketched the same way, any day; so I reckon we’d better git it under kiver.”

A grave was soon dug; and, wrapping the poor mutilated body in my saddle-blanket, we laid it within the narrow walls, and hastily covered it from sight; then, remounting oar horses, silently rode back to camp.

No question was asked upon our return, and neither Jerry nor myself felt much like talking; for the scene we had just witnessed impressed upon us more strongly than words could have done, the responsibility as well as constant watchfulness and care necessary in travelling through a country so full of peril.

Page 87

The miserable fate of poor Gonzales seemed to throw a gloom over the entire camp; for it forced all to realize how beset with danger was every step we took, and how easily it might have been one of us, lying cold in death, instead of the poor Mexican.

We retired early, after taking every precaution possible to guard against surprise, and I soon fell asleep, but was aroused a few hours later, by terrific screams and howls from Patsey, who was capering around the camp in the most ridiculous manner, executing as many singular and grotesque gyrations as an Apache in celebrating the scalp-dance. The entire camp was roused: even the guards rushed in from their posts to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

[Illustration: Patsey and the Snake.]

Neither Jerry, Hal, nor Ned could discover the cause of Patsey's terror; for, in response to our many inquiries, he would only scratch his leg through the rent in his trousers, and constantly jump up and down, as though standing upon a hot griddle, all the while howling at the top of his lungs.

Becoming, at last, thoroughly angry, I seized the boy by the collar, and gave him such a shaking that I finally succeeded in getting an answer to the question, as to what was the matter.

"Mather!" roared Patsey. "Mather enuff, God knows! Shnakes is the mather!" making a desperate dive down into the leg of his pants. "I'm bited to death wid a shnake, so I am. Can't yez all sae I'm a did mon?"

Now, as far as appearances went, Patsey was a long way from being a dead man, for he still indulged in more lively contortions than a corpse was ever known to execute; each movement accompanied by a yell almost loud enough to wake the dead.

An examination revealed the fact, that the boy had heedlessly spread his blanket over the entrance to the home of a colony of large black ants, and the little fellows, angry at his presumption, had attacked him, in the most spiteful manner, through the rents in his trousers. Patsey, awakened out of a sound sleep by their stings, and remembering Ned's adventure in the Organos mountains, had fancied himself the unfortunate victim of a like attack. We finally succeeded in convincing him that he was not dead, nor likely to die; and then, the camp resumed its usual quiet.

Early in the morning, before we were ready to start, Jerry called my attention to several "bighorns,"—or, more properly speaking, Rocky-Mountain sheep,—that stood perched upon a high cliff which overhung our camp several hundred feet in the air. As these were the first we had seen upon the route, I at once called Hal and Ned to witness the sight, who immediately proposed to make the attempt to capture one.

Jerry assured them it was impossible; for it would take hours to reach the spot where they stood, or even to get within rifle-range of them. This fact alone would prevent starting on a hunt, as we were exceedingly anxious to get through the pass without being obliged to spend another night in so dangerous a locality.

Page 88

This animal is somewhat larger than the common sheep, is covered with brownish hair instead of wool, and is chiefly remarkable for its huge spiral horns, resembling those of a sheep, but frequently three feet in length, and from four to six inches in diameter at the base.

It is very agile; and, secluding itself among the most inaccessible mountain-craggs, delights in capering upon the very verge of the most frightful precipices, and skipping from rock to rock across yawning chasms hundreds of feet in depth.

I have been assured by old hunters, that, if pursued, it will leap from a cliff into the valley a hundred feet below, where, alighting upon its huge horns, it springs to its feet, uninjured, its neck being so thick and strong, that it endures the greatest shock without injury.

This animal more closely resembles the *chamois* than any other species found upon this continent, and is almost as difficult to capture.

After leaving the pass and coming out upon the open plain, west of the mountains, we saw, in the distance, a wild ox.

Now the boys had, for some time, fancied that they were very expert in the use of the lasso; and, upon seeing this ox, became seized with the insane desire to capture him with that weapon, after the most-approved style of the Mexican *lazador*. Remonstrance was in vain. They knew they could do it; and away they went on their ponies, eager for the sport, leaving the remainder of the party to watch them from a distance.

Upon their approaching near to the old fellow, he threw up his head, elevated his tail, brandished his long horns, and, with a loud bellow of defiance, started directly for them. The boys evidently had not anticipated this, for they slackened their pace at the sight, riding very slowly towards him.

As they approached, he commenced shaking his head, pawing the earth, and bellowing furiously. Then he began to move slowly around in a circle, throwing clouds of dust high in the air, and almost making the ground shake with his angry bellowings; finally turning, however, he galloped slowly away over the plain.

Away went the ox, and away went the boys after him: it was a run for life on the one side; on the other, a chase for glory.

Hal, who was a short distance in advance of Ned, anxious to get his rope first over the horns, finally made a cast with his lasso. At the same moment, his pony stumbled, and away went Hal over his head, landing some feet nearer the ox than he expected to do when he made the cast.

Ned, who was just behind, now thundered past with lasso in hand, ready raised to take advantage of Hal's mishap. He threw it; but the noose fell short of the object aimed at, and encircled a stout *yucca*, that *would* stand directly in the way.

And now the ox, as though understanding the misfortunes that had befallen his pursuers, turned, and made a furious charge in the direction of the already discomforted *lazedors*. Seeing him coming towards them, with lolling tongue, protruding eyes, and angry bellowings, they began to realize, that, in their case at least, discretion was the better part of valor. Both turned and fled, leaving pony, lasso, and their courage, behind them.

Page 89

The race now assumed another phrase: it was for safety on the one side, and revenge on the other.

On came the boys, Ned in the lead, on his pony, and Hal bringing up the rear on foot; behind them, the ox, whose bellowing each moment grew louder and more furious. Suddenly, Hal disappeared behind a clump of mesquite; but the ox kept on in his efforts to overtake Ned, whose pony was straining every nerve to reach the wagons in advance of his pursuer.

When the animal came within rifle-range, Jerry quietly stepped out and shot him through the head. Ned rode up breathless, upon his panting pony, and said to one of the Mexicans,—

“Say, Juan, how do you throw a lasso? I thought I knew all about it; but I reckon I don’t.”

Hal soon came in, his hands full of thorns, his eyes full of dust, and his clothes much the worse for his encounter with the ground, protesting, however, that, if his pony hadn’t stumbled, he should have had the old fellow, sure.

“But your pony did stumble, and you didn’t get him; nor I, either,” remarked Ned. “And I don’t think you and I had better brag any more about lassoing until you can catch your pony down there in the *chaparral*,” and Hal went for his pony.

The evening of the third day from the pass brought us to the head of Quercos *canon*, where we came upon a party of Mexicans and Papago Indians, engaged in manufacturing *mescal*, the native whiskey of the country.

This beverage is made from the roots of the *maguey*, a plant common to this region. The roots are bulbous, and are gathered in large quantities, and thrown into pits containing red-hot stones.

These being filled, they are covered with grass or brush, over which blankets are spread. The roots are allowed to remain until thoroughly steamed, when they are taken out, placed in sacks of rawhide and crushed, the juice escaping into earthen vessels. It is afterwards fermented in the sun, when it becomes an intoxicating liquor, very closely resembling Irish whiskey in taste, smell, and effect upon the brain.

Patsey enjoyed its pungent, smoky *aroma*, with the keenest pleasure, and, after several times tasting it, pronounced it quite “aquil to the bist rale ould Irish whiskey,” an opinion that we all endorsed after witnessing his condition a few hours later.

While encamped here, Ned came to me and reminded me of my promise to Patsey; saying, that one of the Mexicans had a splendid suit of buckskin, that he would dispose of very cheap. I traded for it, and Ned arrayed Patsey in it. Never did king, clothed in robes of royal purple, exhibit greater pride than did Patsey in his buckskin suit. But,

alas! pride must have a fall; and, within a very few hours, I saw him sitting on the ground, clothed in his new suit, and protesting with maudlin earnestness that he was the “veritable Bryan O’Linn himsilf.”

Three days later, we reached the old Mission of *San Xavier del Bac*, one of the most interesting relics of the ancient Spanish rule, to be found in this country.

Page 90

It was built by the Jesuits nearly two hundred years ago, and is one of the finest specimens of Saracenic architecture to be found on this continent. It is located on the lands of the Papago Indians, in whose charge it now is.

We encamped beneath the shadow of this massive pile, surrounded by the thatched huts of the Papagos, who cluster about its cruciform walls as though confident of its power to protect them, as it did their ancestors, from the contaminating influences of the outside world.

These Indians are a simple, honest, industrious tribe, quite superior to their present situation, and claim that their ancestors have occupied the country for more than a thousand years, and were far more civilized than themselves.

Many of them are as black as negroes, and nearly all are fine specimens of physical beauty. Still, as a race, they, like the old church, are but a wreck of former greatness.

A ride of eight miles brought us to the town of Tucson, through which our wagons passed to the Pico Chico Mountain, five miles beyond, where we made our camp.

This was formerly an old Mexican fort, and was abandoned in 1853, after the survey of the boundary line between Mexico and the United States.

We were here informed, that the Apaches had attacked and captured a small train that was travelling over the route we were following, only the week before; consequently, our chances of getting through unmolested were very good; a piece of information that we received gladly.

The boys and myself spent several hours in Tucson, looking about the town, and its many curiosities, being especially interested in several half-naked, dirty Apaches, which were lounging about, with large nuggets of gold tied up in their filthy rags.

Horse-racing, wrestling, gambling, drinking mescal, and shooting people, seemed to be the principal occupation of its inhabitants, who, as a whole, were about as villainous a looking set of cut-throats as could be found west of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XVI.

Tucson is located in the heart of the great silver and gold bearing regions of Arizona, and it was exceedingly difficult to prevent the boys from loading themselves with specimens of the many ores offered for sale, by every loafer, greaser, and Indian, that we met on the street.

Hal managed to absent himself for a short time; and, when I found him, had traded Ned's watch for about as small and lively a specimen of a Mexican mule as I ever saw, which, he assured me in good faith, he had bought for Patsey's exclusive use.

I afterwards learned from Ned, that, ever since the boy had become the owner of a buckskin suit, he imagined that it little comported with the dignity of a person who could sport "sich an illegant suit, to ride in wagins, or walk afoot, whin he ought to ride on horseback, like a gintilmon;" promising, that, if Hal would procure him a mule in Tucson, he would pay him double price on reaching California.

Page 91

The bargain had been made, and the mule delivered, and all I could do was to make the best of it. I was extremely glad to get out of town so cheaply, however; and, as it was, it became very dark before we reached camp; for the new purchase would not be driven, and only consented to be led, because Hal's pony was the stronger.

Jerry's opinion of the animal was given in words more forcible than elegant; and Hal's purchase was laughed at by all. Many were the bets offered, that Patsey couldn't ride him; but Patsey stoutly asserted he'd "ridden mules in the ould country, and why couldn't he do it in Ameriky?"

Shortly after leaving camp, the road crossed a small stream, which we knew could be easily forded. Jerry, with an eye to some sport, ordered Patsey, who, mounted upon his mule, was feeling very grand, to lead the way; and Patsey, nothing loth, started; but, alas! the animal refused to take the water.

Four times did he attempt to force him, and four times he was unseated and violently hurled to the ground: at each overthrow, however, he returned to the charge with fond hopes, fresh courage, and a stronger determination to make the animal enter the stream.

Upon the fifth trial, somewhat to our surprise and Patsey's delight, the mule quietly approached and entered the stream, without the least reluctance.

We all shouted our congratulations at the boy's well-deserved victory; while Patsey himself was so elated at his success, that he could not resist manifesting his exultation by digging his heels into the animal's sides, with a vindictiveness, that could not fail to stir up all its vicious propensities; while he kept up a running tirade of abuse, after the Mexican style, as follows:—

"So yez thought yez wouldn't cross the wathers, did yez (a dig with his heels). I'm the bye that'll show yez, that, whin Patsey McQuirk's aboard (another dig), and say's crass, ye'll crass, so yez will (dig). Ye moight jist ez well done it first ez last, so yez moight (dig, dig), but ye'll understand it next time, so yez will (dig, dig)."

The mule waded on, apparently in meek submission, until he had nearly reached the middle of the stream, when, without the least warning, he laid back his ears, lowered his head, and elevated his heels so quickly, that Patsey went flying, heels over head into the stream, far towards the opposite shore, amid the shouts and laughter of the whole party.

He floundered about in the water for some minutes, completely bewildered. Occasionally he would disappear; then come to the surface, half suffocated, to again stumble, fall, and disappear; all the time calling for "Hilp! hilp! hilp!"

He finally reached the bank, the most woe begone, discouraged Irish boy ever seen clothed in a buckskin suit; nor did our screams of laughter tend to console him for his unwelcome bath: on the contrary, he began to look about him for some one upon whom to vent his anger.

Page 92

Seeing the mule meekly standing by, looking both sorrowful and innocent, he approached him quickly, and seized the bridle, when the animal started back so suddenly that Patsey measured his length upon the ground.

At this point the boy was evidently very willing to give up the contest; but, knowing the laugh that would be raised at his expense, he determined to make one final effort to conquer him.

"Ye cussid lithle hay then," cried Patsey to the mule; "I'll taych yez to sarve an honist b'y sich a thrick ez thet, noo. Ye'll just sae how yez'll loik the batin' ye'll get, noo;" and he proceeded to cut a stick with which to administer the "batin';" but Jerry interrupted, and ordered Patsey to once more mount the mule, then, riding his own horse into the water, the mule followed without the least difficulty.

After we had all crossed, and were again on the road, I asked Patsey what the trouble seemed to be with his mule.

"Faith," said he, "don't I know well enuff? The craythur's bin put up to thim thricks by min as ought to know bother; but I'll be avin wid some one, if it takes a wake's wages, whin I git to Californy."

From this point the face of the country was covered by a low, scrubby growth of mesquite, interspersed with magnificent specimens of the *Cerus Grandes*, a remarkable species of cactus, called by the Indians *Petahaya*, which grows to the height of forty or fifty feet, and measure from eighteen to twenty inches in circumference. It is fluted with the regularity of a Corinthian column, and bears a fruit that resembles a fig in shape, size, and flavor, which is extensively used by the natives as an article of food.

The road was fine, and we hurried on as fast as the oppressive heat would permit; but, with our best exertions, evening found us still several miles from our intended camping-ground.

Shortly after sunset a dark bank of clouds arose in the south, which, in an incredibly short space of time, spread over the face of the heavens, completely shutting in every ray of light. The darkness was so intense, that it was with much difficulty we could make any progress, and finally, Jerry reluctantly gave the order to encamp.

Before we had time to unharness the mules the storm burst, and the rain descended in perfect torrents, accompanied by clouds of sand and vivid lightning. The thunder was terrific. As peal after peal echoed and reverberated over the vast plain, it sounded like the discharge of a park of artillery. So nearly above our heads did the sounds come, that we involuntarily cringed, while the animals became almost frantic with fear, and plunged and struggled to escape from the men.



Before we could possibly shelter ourselves, we were drenched to the skin, and forced to take refuge under the wagons. No attempt was made to light a fire or prepare supper; and we passed a most uncomfortable night.

Morning came at last, and, with the sunshine and a good breakfast, our wonted equanimity was restored; and we again set out, hoping to reach the Pimo villages, on the Gila, before night-fall.

Page 93

We had heard many accounts of this remarkable tribe of Indians, who, for the past eight or ten centuries, have resided upon, and cultivated the same land. High as our expectations had been raised, we were in no measure disappointed upon meeting them. We found them friendly, and disposed to treat us with great kindness, freely furnishing such articles of food as we were in need of.

The Pimos raise fine crops of cotton, corn, wheat, melons, and vegetables. The women weave, spin, make blankets, grind the corn, and gather mesquite-beans. Besides doing such work, they attend to their children, and bring all the water from the river on their heads, in large earthen jars, frequently holding six or seven gallons, which they balance so perfectly that they rarely spill a drop.

The boys were much pleased with the primitive but comfortable houses, made of poles, bent at the top to a common centre, and wattled in with straw and corn-shucks. Each house was situated in a separate enclosure, and surrounded by a small garden.

The only weapon these Indians use is a bow and arrow, with which they are very expert.

While stopping here, we were much amused by watching a party of them engaged in hunting ducks in one of the lagoons making up from the Gila.

Placing a number of gourds in the water upon the windward side of the lagoon, they were gently propelled by the wind to the opposite shore, where they were picked up, carried back, and again sent adrift.

At first the birds exhibited no little fear at these singular objects floating about among them; but eventually became so used to the sight, that they paid no attention to them.

Observing this, each Indian cut, in a large gourd, holes for his eyes, nose, and mouth, and then fitted it upon his head. Taking with him a long bag, he entered the water, until nothing was seen but the gourd on his head. Then the peculiar bobbing motion of the gourd was imitated so exactly, that the wily hunter easily approached near enough to the birds to seize them by the feet and drag them suddenly under the water.

Scores of them were thus captured, and securely stowed in the bags that they carried.

So nicely and naturally was this done, and so great was the admiration expressed by us all at the dexterity displayed by the hunters, that Patsey, who had been remarkably quiet since his experience with the mule, ventured to whisper to Ned, that "he'd often hoonted dooks that way, in the ould country."

This statement, coming to the ears of Hal, by way of a joke, he proposed that Patsey should give him a lesson in the art of gourd-hunting. The boy at once assented to the suggestion, provided he would keep the matter a secret from all but Ned. To this Hal

agreed, at the same time taking good care that Ned should inform us of the intended sport.

After the Indians had obtained all the game they desired for themselves, and we had all left the ground, Hal borrowed one of the gourds for Patsey. This the boy fitted to his head, and, bag in hand, boldly started into the water, just as Jerry and myself arrived upon the field of observation.

Page 94

He waded some distance down the lagoon without meeting with any mishap; but, just as he came near to a large flock, unfortunately stepped into a hole, and at once disappeared from sight.

The next moment he rose to the surface with arms extended, thrashing the water like the paddles of a side-wheel steamboat, and making a noise not unlike the first attempt of a young mule to bray.

This strange performance of course frightened the birds, who rose in a body, with a tremendous flapping of wings. This, joined to our own shouts of laughter, so terrified Patsey, that he started for the shore, floundering about in the water like a porpoise.

He finally reached the bank; and then we discovered that the gourd had slipped down under his chin, and turned completely around, with the holes at the back of his head, in which position it was stuck fast.

Patsey groped blindly about for a few minutes, greatly incensed at our roars of laughter; and then, convinced of his inability to get rid of the mask unaided, seated himself upon the ground, and quietly submitted to have it removed by breaking it with rocks.

The instant it was off, he flew at Hal, and would have soundly thrashed him, "for the thrick he had put upon him," had not Jerry interfered to prevent. This adventure, however, completely cured Patsey of boasting; for not once again during the entire trip did he indulge in what had heretofore been a favorite pastime. Nor was Patsey the only one who learned a lesson while at the Pimo villages. Master Hal, who was determined to try his hand at trading with the natives, found it anything but a profitable business; for he disposed of nearly his entire share of the stock of goods, for articles that were utterly useless to us, and which we were obliged to abandon before getting through.

Five days from the Pimo villages, we reached Fort Yuma, at the junction of the Gila and Colorado rivers; but, with the thermometer at 118 deg. in the shade, we remained at this post only long enough to cross our wagons over the Colorado, when we found ourselves upon the borders of the great California desert, which extends in all directions as far as the eye can reach, except towards the south-west, where, fifty miles away, a mountain-range is to be seen, its blue peaks towering high in mid-air.

The entire country, for hundreds of miles, is covered with a loose, shifting, blinding, white sand, and is entirely destitute of vegetation or water.

We fancied we were well prepared for the journey over this vast plain; but, notwithstanding the care taken, we suffered all the torments that thirst can inflict, while our poor animals almost famished by the way. Our route was plainly marked, the entire distance, by the bleached bones and dried carcasses of mules, oxen, and sheep,

interspersed with abandoned wagons and whitened skeletons of emigrants, who had perished on the way. At one place, we came upon a train

Page 95

of seven abandoned wagons, loaded with household goods. The harnesses remained where they had been thrown, after removing them; provisions were lying exposed upon a box, as though the family had been obliged to leave before finishing the meal; but not a living creature was in sight and, from the general appearance of the scene, we judged it must have been deserted for weeks. It was a sad sight: such a picture of desolation, as I care never again to witness.

Who the owners were, from whence they came, whither they were bound, or what was their fate,—must stand one of the secrets of the desert, until revealed at the final day.

After three days of terrible suffering, we reached the banks of Carrizo Creek. It would be impossible to describe the eagerness with which all, men and animals, plunged down its steep banks, or how we laughed and shouted as the murmur of its sparkling waters fell upon our ears, or with what pleasure we laved our burning flesh in its coolness.

This oasis in the desert is deserving a more extended description than I can give here; for it probably has not its equal in the world. The stream rises in sand, flows through sand, and disappears in sand; having worn for itself a channel about a mile in length, fifteen or twenty feet deep, and nearly thirty in width. The water is clear, and deliciously cool and sweet.

Here, under the benign influence exerted by this spring, we all for a time forgot our troubles: even Patsey so far forgave Hal for the “thricks he had put upon him,” that I saw them sitting together, waist-deep in the water; the Irish boy utterly oblivious of the fact that he had neglected, before taking his bath, to remove the “buckskin suit,” which had already become considerably shrunken and curtailed, of its fair proportions, by reason of its previous wettings.

During the night we encamped here, I suddenly awoke from a very sound sleep, and saw the form of old Jerry, standing in bold relief in the moonlight upon the top of the bank, and Apparently gazing far out into the desert.

He stood so long motionless, that I thought him asleep; but, upon speaking, to my surprise he came and seated himself by my side, and said, “Look here, judge, I want to tell yer a story. Will yer hear it?”

I told him I would, with pleasure; and he began as follows:—

“It was nine year ago this spring, and the first trip I ever made across this desert. We hed been six days from Yuma to this place: the sun all the time like a ball of fire, and

the sand so hot it burnt one's naked feet to a blister. Not a drop of water hed we hed for our animals for three days, and only a teaspoonful for ourselves.

“On the mornin’ of the sixth day, my thirst became so great, that I determined to start out by myself, and find water. I give my mule the rein, and he brought me to the edge of this gully; and, when I looked down into it and see the clear, cold water sparklin’ and shinin’ like diamonds, why, I burst right out into a loud laugh.

Page 96

"After I stopped laughin', and was a-gittin' down towards the water, I heerd a kind of noise from the other side of the creek, and looked up; and, the first thing I see, settin' on the edge on t'other side, was a boy about twelve years old, tryin' ter call to me.

"At first I couldn't believe my own eyes; but I shut 'em up for a minute, and looked again, and there he was, as plain as day, and not another livin' creeter but my old hoss in sight.

"Well, I was beat, an'no mistake. Bless me! I kin see the little feller jest as I seen him that morning,—and a perfect little gentleman he was too. Yes, and I've seen his pale, thin face and great starin' brown eyes a-lookin' into mine, a thousand times since that day.

"I went right over to where he was, and spoke ter him. The little feller smiled when I came up, and shook his head, as much as to say, that he couldn't speak. I asked him where he came from, and where his folks was, and how they come ter leave him alone on the plains, with nobody to look out for and take care of him; but he only shook his head, and looked up into my face so piteous and sorrowful like, that I felt my heart go right out to him. I couldn't understand how the little feller got there; for his clothes were all new,—the soles of his little boots warn't even stained.

[Illustration: A Mystery.]

"Well, I talked to him a long time afore I remembered I hadn't had a drink myself; so I asked him if he wanted water, and he nodded his head. I went down to the creek there, and filled my hat, and warn't away more than three minutes; but, when I got back, he was gone."—"Where did he go to, Jerry?" asked Ned, who, unperceived, had been listening to the story.

"Go to," echoed Jerry, "ther ain't anybody kin tell that. Why, I hunted every foot, for a mile around, and couldn't find a sign of his trail; and I never have seen or heerd of him since. Now, judge, I seen him, felt him, talked to him, and know he was there; and thar hain't never been a doubt in my mind as to what become of him."

"Well, Jerry, how do you account for his disappearance?" inquired I.

"Angels!" was the sententious reply.

"Pooh!" remarked the matter-of-fact Ned; "angels don't wear clothes and boots."

"How do you know?" inquired Jerry.

"Why, I never heard they did," answered Ned.

"Did you ever hear they didn't?" continued the old man. "I never believed in 'em much afore then, and I sartin hain't bed no reason to, on this trip, so far as I know. Now,

judge, you're the first one I ever told that story to; and it's true, every word of it. What do yer reckon become of him, if 'twain't angels?"

"I can't say, Jerry," was my reply. "That is one of the secrets of the desert, which I cannot answer."

"Well, I reckon I've talked, about as long as I ought to, at this time of night; but I've never come this way since then, without thinkin' thet perhaps I might see him again. I never shall, though, I reckon; and I s'pose I'd better give up all hopes of it, and may as well go to bed again."

Page 97

As soon as he had gone, Ned crawled over to my side, and said, "Do you really believe that it was an angel Jerry saw?"

I endeavored to explain to the boy, that Jerry had been the victim of one of those strange illusions defined in Sanskrit, as "The thirst of the gazelle," which is frequently experienced by travellers in the desert, causing them to imagine they see those objects in which their souls most delight, but which exist only, in their imaginations. Nor is it possible, ever after to convince the beholder, that the vision was not real.

The following day's journey carried us out of the arid, desert country, through magnificent groves of oak, over beautiful green prairies, and by ranches, whose cattle were, in truth, "feeding on a thousand hills." The contrast was as surprising, as it was graceful and pleasing; and, when at last we reached the summit of the high land that overlooked the beautiful blue waters of the Pacific, and saw, cozily nestled on the plain below us, facing the sea, the quaint old town of San Diego, with its magnificent date-palms, and rare old architecture, we all fairly shouted for joy.

The dangers and perils we had passed through, the privations we had suffered, the petty jealousies that had arisen, the unkind words spoken, —all were alike forgiven and forgotten in the rapture caused by the sight of that "shining shore" we had travelled so many weary miles to see.

Our arrival at San Diego was most opportune, for there was a great scarcity of goods in the market, which enabled us to dispose of ours, at such prices that we realized a handsome profit, after paying the expenses of our entire trip.

Indeed, we found ourselves in the possession of so much money, that we deemed it advisable to hold a consultation, as to the best manner of investing it.

Hal declared, that he would speculate with it; and thereby take the chance of doubling the capital in a few weeks, perhaps days.

Ned was for purchasing a stock of goods in San Francisco, and going into general merchandise.

Jerry declared for a stock-ranche, and I—why, I decided with Jerry, of course.

"And what do you say, Patsey," called out Ned.

"Well, I'd take the money, an' buy me a new buckskin suit, and stharta back for the ould country, shure. Divil a day would yez kitch me stoppin' in a counthry like this, iny longer thin it would take to git out of it."

After properly canvassing the matter, we decided to purchase a ranche, stock it well with cattle, and place it in charge of old Jerry, with Hal and Ned as assistants, and Patsey as "general utility boy."

The ranche, under old Jerry's management, has become a valuable piece of property, branding over a thousand calves the last spring.

Hal, who, since his arrival here, has corresponded regularly with Juanita, is now on a visit to Chihuahua, and the last letter I received from him spoke of his marriage as a settled thing in the coming fall. After that interesting event is over, he proposes to bring his wife home with him.

Page 98

Ned is one of the most respected and honored citizens of San-Diego county, and Patsey is growing rich from the profits of a small country store.

Old Jerry is alive, and insists upon having his camp-fire lighted every night, smoking his pipe by the cheerful blaze, and telling a story. Then he spreads his "painter-skin," and "turns in;" for nothing will induce the old man to sleep within the four walls of a house. He says "it chocks him right up, so, he can't; fur the life of him, he don't see how a white man can stan' it."

And now, my dear readers, having crossed the Continent together, and at last found a home upon the shores of the beautiful Pacific, you and I must part; but, if you ever chance to visit San Diego, come and see us at the Buena-Vista stock-ranche, and you shall hear old Jerry tell a "story of the road," beside his camp-fire, and receive from Hal and Ned a genuine Western welcome.