

THE WAR-TRAIL!

CHAPTER LXVII—(CONTINUED).

Coming out on the edge of a little glade, I became spectator to a strange scene—a battle between the red cougar and a band of javali.

The fierce little hoars were "ringing" the panther, who was fighting desperately in their midst. Several of them lay upon the ground, struck senseless or dead, by the strong paws of the huge cat; but the others, nothing daunted, had completely surrounded their enemy, and were bounding upon him with open mouths, wounding him with their sharp, shining tusks.

The scene aroused my hunter instincts, and suddenly unslingsing my rifle, I set my eye to the sights. I had no hesitation about the selection of my mark—the panther, by all means—and drawing trigger, I sent my bullet through the creature's skull, at once stretching him out in the midst of his assailants.

Three seconds had not elapsed, before I had reason to regret the choice I had made of a victim. I should have let the cougar alone, and either held my fire, or directed it upon one of his urchin-like enemies; for the moment he was hors du combat, his assailants became mischievous, transferring their "surround" to my horse and myself, with all the savage ferocity that had just exhibited towards the panther!

I had no means of punishing the ungrateful brutes. They had not given me time to reload my rifle before commencing the attack, and my pistols were both empty. My horse, startled by the unexpected assault, as well as by the strange creatures that were making it, snorted and plunged wildly over the ground; but go where he would, a score of the ferocious brutes followed springing against his sides, and scoring his shanks with their terrible tusks. Well for me I was able to keep the saddle; had I been thrown from it at that moment, I should certainly have been torn to pieces.

I saw no hope of safety but in flight, and spurring my horse I gave him full rein. Alas! through that tangled thicket the javali could go as fast as he; and after galloping a hundred yards or so, I perceived the whole flock still around me, leaping as fiercely as ever around the limbs of my steed.

The result might have proved awkward enough; but at that moment I heard voices, and saw mounted men breaking through the underwood. They were Stanfield, Quackenboss, and the rest of the rangers.

In another second they were on the ground; and their revolvers, playing rapidly, soon thinned the ranks of the javali, and caused the survivors to retreat grunting and screaming into the thicket.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE WOODS ON FIRE.

THE trappers were not among those who had rescued me—where were they? The others made answer, though I already guessed what they had to tell. Rube and Gary had followed the tracks of the steed, leaving the rangers to come after me. I was pleased with the ready intelligence of my comrades; they had acted exactly as they should have done. I was myself found, and I no longer entertained any apprehension that the trail would be lost.

By this time the trappers must be far upon it; more than an hour had elapsed since they and the others had parted company. My zigzag path had cost my followers many a bewildering pause.

But they had not ridden recklessly as I, and could find their way back. As it was impossible to tell in what direction Rube and Gary had gone, this course was the best to be followed; and under the guidance of Stanfield, an expert woodsman, we commenced returning to the prairie. It was not necessary to follow back our own crooked trail. The Kentuckian had noted the "lay" of the chaparral, and led us out of its labyrinths by an almost direct path.

On reaching the open prairie, we made no halt; but upon the tracks of Rube, Gary, and the steed, once more entered the chaparral.

We had no difficulty about our course; it was plainly traced out for us; the trappers had "blazed" it. In most places, the tracks of the three horses were sufficient indices of the route; but there were stretches where the ground was stony and upon the parched arid herbage, even the shod hoof left no visible mark. In such places, a branch of acacia broken and pendulous, the best flower-stem of an alce or the succulent leaves of the cactus slashed with a sharp knife, were conspicuous and unmistakable signs; and by the guidance of these we made rapid advance.

We must have gone much faster than the trappers themselves—for notwithstanding the freshness of the trail, there were dry spots and patches of cut rock over which it passed, and where it must have cost both time and keen perception to trace it.

As we were travelling so much more rapidly than Rube and Gary could have done, I looked forward to our soon overtaking them; with eager anticipation, I looked forward. Surely they would have some news for me, now that they had been so long in the advance. Surely by this time they must have come in sight of the steed?—perhaps captured him? Oh, joyous anticipation!

Or would they return with a different

tale? Was I to meet the report that he still hurried on—on for ever? That he had swam some rapid stream? or plunged over a precipice—into some dark abyss? Though hastening on after the trackers, there were moments when I feared to overtake them—moments when I dreaded to hear their tale!

TO BE CONTINUED.



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SECOND METHODIST CHURCH—Prince Street—Service and Sermon every Sunday at 10.30 a. m. and 6.30 p. m. Sunday School at 2 p. m. Week day service on Wednesday evening. Rev. William Tippett, Pastor.

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BAPTIST CHURCH—Cor. Prince and Fitzroy sts—Services and Sermon every Sunday at 11 a. m. and 6.30 o'clock p. m.; Sunday School at 2.30 p. m. Week day services—Monday at 7.30 p. m.; and Friday at 8 p. m. Rev. D. G. McDonald, Pastor.

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L. B. ARCHIBALD, Superintendent, Railway Office Charlottetown, Nov. 20, 1881.

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