

THE WAR-TRAIL!

CHAPTER LXXXIX. THE TRAPPER'S COUNSEL.

"Now Bill Garey, an' you young fellur, jest clap yer eyes on thet ere campmint, an' see ef thur aint a road leadin' inter the very heart o' it, strait as the tail o' a skeert fox—'ee see it? eh?"

"Not under kiver?" replied Garey, interrogatively. "Under kiver—every step o' the way—the best o' kiver."

Garey and I once more scrutinized the whole circumference of the encampment, and the ground adjacent. We could perceive no cover by which the camp could be approached. Surely there was none.

What could Rube mean? Were there clouds in the sky? Had he perceived some portent of coming darkness? Had his words reference to this?

I raised my eyes, and swept the whole canopy with inquiring glances. Up to the zenith, around the horizon, east, west, north, and south, I looked for clouds, but looked in vain. A few light cirri floated high in the atmosphere, but these, even when crossing the moon's disc, cast no perceptible shadow. On the contrary, they were tokens of settled weather, and moving slowly, almost fixed upon the face of the heavens, were evidence that no sudden change might be expected. When the trapper talked of entering the camp under cover, he could not have meant under cover of darkness. What then?

"Don't see any kiver, old hoss, after a pause; 'neither bush nor weed."

"Bu-h!" echoed Rube, "who's talking about weeds and bushes? There's other ways o' hidin' yur karkidge 'sides stickin' it in a bush or under a weed. Your a gettin' durstion'd pumpkin-headed, Bill Garey. I 'gin to think yur in the same predicament as the young fellur hisself. You've been a humbuggin' wi' one o' them ur Mexican Moochachers."

"No, Rube, no." "Durn me ef I don't bleeve you hev, boy. I heern ye tell one o' 'em."

"What?" "Wagh! ye know well enough. Dida't 'ee tell one o' thur gurls at the rancherie that ye loved her as hard as a mule kud kick—sartintly ye did; them wur your preezact words, Billie."

"I was only jokin', hoss." "Pretty jokin' that will be, when I gits back to Bent's fort, an' tell yur Coco squaw—he—he—ho—ho—ho! Geohosophat! thur will be a rumpus."

"Nonsense, Rube, thar's nothen ov it." "Thar must a be—yur brain pau's out o' order—Bill, ye haint hed a clur idee for nine days back. Bushes and weeds too. Wagh! Who sayed thur wur bushes? What's yur eyes? d'ye see a bank?"

"A bank?" echoed Garey and I, simultaneously. "Ye-es," drawled Rube, "a bank. I guess there's a bank right after yur noses, ef both o' you aint as blind as the kittens o' a possum. Now, do 'ee see it?"

Neither of us made reply to the final interrogatory. For the first time, we began to comprehend Rube's meaning, and our eyes as well as our thoughts were suddenly directed upon the object indicated by his words—the bank of the stream—for to this he referred.

I have stated that the little river ran close to the Indian lines, and on one side formed the boundary of the camp.

We could tell that the current was towards us, for the stream, on reaching the hill upon which we were, turned sharply off and swept round its base. The Indian camp was on the left bank, though upon its right, when viewed up stream, as we were regarding it. Any one proceeding up the left bank must, therefore, necessarily pass within the lines, and through among the horses that were staked nearest to the water.

It need not be supposed that under our new scrutiny the stream had hitherto escaped observation. I myself had long ago thought of it as a means of covering my approach. Time after time had my eyes dwelt upon it, but without result. In its channel I could perceive no shelter from observation. Its banks were low, and without either rush or bush upon them. The green turf of the prairie stretched up to the very brink, and scarce twelve inches below its level was the surface of the current. This was especially the case along the front of the encampment, and for some distance above and below.

Any one endeavoring to enter the camp by stealing up the channel must have gone completely under the water—for ever a swimmer could have been observed upon its surface. Or even if a man could have approached in this way, there was no hope that a horse, could be taken near, and without the horse, what prospect of ultimate escape?

It had seemed to me impossible. More than once had I taken into consideration, and so often rejected the idea. Not so Rube. It was the very scheme he had conceived, and he now proceeded to point out its practicability.

"Now, then, 'ee see a bank, do 'ee?" "Taint much o' a bank," replied Garey, rather discouragingly. "No,—taint as high as Missoora Bluffs, nor the bluffs of Snake River—that nob'dy duries—but ef taint as high as it mount be, it u' every miint a-gettin' higher, I reck'n."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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L. B. ARCHIBALD, Superintendent, Railway Office Charlottetown, Nov. 23, 1881

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A. A. McLEAN, Administrator. Ch'town, 1st March, 1882.-3m law

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