

THE WAR-TRAIL!

CHAPTER LXIV (CONTINUED.)

Directly in front of us, the sword was cut and scored by numerous tracks. Not four, but four hundred hoof-prints were indented in the turf—all of them fresh as the trail we were following—and amidst these the tracks of the steed, becoming intermingled, were lost to our view.

"A drove of wild horses," pronounced the guides at a glance; they were the tracks of unshod hoofs, though that would scarcely have proved them wild. An Indian troop might have ridden past without leaving any other sign; but these horses had not been mounted, as the trappers confidently alleged; and among them were the hoof-marks of foals and half-grown colts, which proved the drove to be a caballada of mustangs.

At the point where we first struck their tracks they had been going in full speed, and the trail of the steed converged until it closed with theirs at an acute angle.

"Ye-es," drawled Rube, "I see how 'tis. They've been skeat at the awkward look o' the boss, an hev put off. See! thur's his tracks on the top o' all o' them; he's been running arter 'em. Thur" continued the tracker, as we advanced—"thur he hev overtuk some o' 'em. See! thur! the varmints hev scattered right and left! Hyur agin, they've galloped together, some ahint, and some afore him. Waghl! I guess they know him now, an ain't any more afeerd o' him. See thur! he's in the thick o' the drove."

Involuntarily I raised my eyes, fancying from these words that the horses were in sight; but no; the speaker was riding forward, leaning over in his saddle, with look fixed upon the ground. All that he had spoken he had been reading from the surface of the prairie—from hieroglyphics to me unintelligible, but to him more easily interpreted than the page of a printed book.

I knew that what he was saying was true. The steed had galloped after a drove of wild horses; he had overtaken them; and, at the point where we now were, had been passing along in their midst!

Dark thoughts came crowding into my mind at this discovery—another shadow across my heart. I perceived at once a new situation of peril for my betrothed—new, and strange, and awful.

I saw her in the midst of a troop of neighing wild horses—stallions with fiery eyes and red steaming nostrils; these perhaps angry at the white steed, and jealous of his approach to the manada; in mad rage rushing upon him with open mouth and yellow glistening teeth; rearing around and above him, and striking down with deadly desperate hoof—Oh, it was a horrid apprehension, a fearful fancy!

Yet, fearful as it was, it proved to be the exact shadow of a reality. As the mirage refracts distant objects upon the retina of the eye, so some spiritual mirage must have thrown upon my mind the image of things that were real. Not distant, though then unseen—not distant was the real. Rapidly I ascended another swell of the prairie, and from its crest beheld almost the counterpart of the terrible scene that my imagination had conjured up!

Was it a dream; was it still fancy that was cheating my eyes? No; there was the wild-horse drove; there the rearing, screaming stallions; there the white steed in their midst—he too rearing erect—there upon his back—

"O God, look down in mercy—save her! save her!"

CHAPTER LXV.

SCATTERING THE WILD STALLIONS. SUCH rude appeal was wrung from my lips by the dread spectacle on which my eyes rested.

I scarcely waited the echo of my words; I waited not the counsel of my comrades, but, plunging deeply the spur, galloped down the hill in the direction of the drove.

There was no method observed, no attempt to keep under cover. There was not time either for caution or concealment. I acted under instantaneous impulse, and with but one thought—to charge forward, scatter the stallions, and, if yet in time, save her from those hurling heels and fierce glittering teeth.

If yet in time—ay, such provisory parenthesis was in my mind at the moment. But I drew hope from observing that the steed kept a ring cleared around him; his assailants only threatened at a distance.

Had he been alone, I might have acted with more caution, and perhaps have thought of some stratagem to capture him. As it was, stratagem was out of the question; the circumstances required speed.

Both trappers and rangers, acting under like impulse with myself, had spurred their horses into a gallop, and followed close at my heels.

The drove was yet distant. The wind blew from them—a brisk breeze. We were half way down the hill, and still the wild horses neither heard, saw, nor scented us.

I shouted at the top of my voice: I wished to startle and put them to flight. My followers shouted in chorus; but our voices reached not the quarrelling caballada.

A better expedient suggested itself: I drew my pistol from its holster, and fired several shots in the air.

The first would have been sufficient.

Its report was heard, despite the opposing wind; and the mustangs, affrighted by the sound, suddenly forsook the encounter. Some bounded away at once; others came wheeling around us, snorting fiercely, and tossing their heads in the air; a few galloped almost within range of our rifle, and then uttering their neighing, turned and broke off in rapid flight. The steed and his rider alone remained, where we had first observed them!

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Brutal Contest.

(Max Adeler, in Our Continent)

The prize fight between Jones and Brown was just over, and it was fully reported in the evening paper. Mr. Smyth was lying on the sofa when Mrs. Smyth picked up the journal for the purpose of glancing over it.

"I see there has been another disgusting prize fight," said Mrs. Smyth. "Isn't it horrid for two brutes to pound each other in that way?"

"Disgusting," said Mr. Smyth. "And it is disgraceful for a decent paper to devote so much space to describing it. The report is two columns long."

"Outrageous," said Mr. Smyth. "I'll write to the Editor to-morrow protesting against his sending such stuff into respectable families."

"I would if I were you. I see that the fight took place near New Orleans."

"I heard it was to do so. Does the paper say who whipped?"

"There were fifteen rounds. Both men were in fine condition, and Jones won the toss."

"Doesn't give the names of the trainers?"

"I don't see them."

"I wonder who they were. I'll look in the New York Herald in the morning. It will tell."

"Jones jumped into the ring at 11.30, and Brown immediately followed him."

Mrs. Smyth here relapsed into silence, reading to herself.

"Well, go on," said Mr. Smyth, sitting half-way up on the sofa. Who does it say whipped?"

"Bets were freely offered against Jones, with few backers. Just as the men faced each other a cry was raised that the Sheriff was coming, whereupon the crowd seat—"

"Pshaw?" said Mr. Smyth, lying down on the sofa again. "No fight after all. Pity the thing was not brought to some conclusion."

"But," continued Mrs. Smyth, reading, "it was a false alarm, and the combatants began. After some skirmishing Jones got Brown's head in his arm and pounded him until the blood came. Horrible! I'd better not read any more."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Smyth, sitting up again; "as long as you've gone this far you might as well keep on. Does it not say which of them won?"

"When the second round began Jones came up fresh, but Brown seemed considerably the worse for the wear. After some wild hitting on his part, Jones knocked him down and he was hauled into his corner."

Mr. Smyth rose from the sofa and came over and sat on a chair by Mrs. Smyth while she read the description of the succeeding nine rounds.

At the conclusion of the eleventh round, Mrs. Smyth observed:

"Henry, this is almost sickening. Is it worth while to read every line of it?"

"Not every line; but I wouldn't skip much of it. If the newspapers will thrust these brutalities upon us we are almost forced to take some notice of them. And Jones won the victory, did he?"

"When the twelfth round began Brown was nearly senseless. He was put on his feet by his trainer, but was totally blind, so that—Isn't it awful, Henry?"

"Revolted; and Jones, he came up, smiling, and—go on; let's hear the result. Who whipped?"

"Jones knocked him down again, and as Brown failed to respond when time was called Jones was declared victor."

"Good for Jones!" exclaimed Mr. Smyth. "I knew he'd win," said Mrs. Smyth, with a smile. "But how infamous it all is!"

"A disgrace to a civilized country?" said Mr. Smyth, going back to the lounge and stretching himself out on it. "There ought to be a law to forbid newspapers from publishing the loathsome details of such contests. Let's see, dear, does the paper say whether Jones is going to give a sparring exhibition in this city?"

"No; I can't see that it does."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Smyth, "then I won't have a chance to see him."

Then Mrs. Smyth resumed her sewing, and Mr. Smyth went to sleep.

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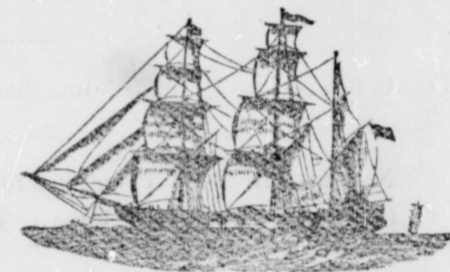
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TIME TABLE NO 17.

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L. B. ARCHIBALD, Superintendent Railway Office Charlottetown, Nov. 29, 1881 [67, wkly]

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