

THE WAR-TRAIL!

CHAPTER LXIII.—(CONTINUED.)

"Sure—how kin I tell—I deed, how," replied Rube, a little nettled at our having questioned his judgment. "What the devil's your eyes good for—all o' yer? Lookee, hyur! and I'll show ee how I tell. Do'ee see the color o' thet water?—it ur as brown as a bufler in the Fall; thurfor its fresh kim down; and jest afore the shower, thur want more'n half o' it in the channel. Then the boss mout a waded 'cross hyur, easy as fallin off a log, and then the boss did wade across."

"He crossed before the rain?" "Shure as a shot from Targuts. Look at the tracks! Them wur made afore a drop o' rain kim down; ef they hedn't, they'd been a darned sight deeper in the sod. Wagh! the boss got safe across 'thout wetting a hair o' his hips. So far as drownin' goes, don't be skeerat 'bout thet, young tellur! the gurl's safe enough yet."

"And the wolves? Do you think they have followed across the stream?" "Ne'er a wolf o' hem—ne'er a one—the vamin's hed more sense. They knowd thur legs wadn't long enough, an thet ur current wud a sweep 'em a mile afo. e they kud a swim half way across. The wolves, they stayed on this side, I reck'n. Look hyur—hyur's thur tracks. Wagh! thur wur a wheen o' the filthy beasts. Geeshophur! the bank ur paddled like a sheep-pen."

We bent down to examine the ground. Sure enough, it was covered with the tracks of wolves. A numerous band had crowded together on the spot; and as the prints of their feet pointed in all directions, it was evident they had not gone forward, but brought to a stand by the torrent, had given up the chase and scattered away. Pray heaven it was no mere conjecture!

With Rube it was a belief; and as I had grown to put implicit reliance in the old trapper's wood-craft, I felt reassured. Rube's opinions, both as to the steed having safely crossed and the discomfiture of the wolves, were shared by the rest of my followers—not one of whom was a man authority on such a subject. Garey—second only to his older comrade in the working out of a prairie syllogism—gave Rube's statement his emphatic confirmation. The steed was yet safe—perhaps, too, the rider.

With lighter heart I sprang back into the saddle. My followers imitated the example and with eyes scanning the stream, we rode along the bank to seek for a crossing. There was no ford near the spot. Perhaps where the steed had passed over at low water; but now, during the fresher, the current would have swept off horse and man like so much cork-wood. The rocks—the black waves that rushed between them—the boiling, frothing eddies—discouraged any attempt at crossing there; we all saw that it was impracticable.

Some rode up stream, others went in the opposite direction. Both parties met again with blank looks; neither had found a crossing. There was no time to search further—at least my impatience would no longer brook delay. It was not the first time for both my horse and myself to cross a river without ford; nor was it the first time for many of my followers.

Below the rapids, the current ran slow, apparently ceasing. The water was still, though wider from bank to bank—a hundred yards or more. By the aid of the moonlight, I could tell that the bank on the opposite side was low and shelving. It could be easily climbed by a horse.

I stayed to reason no further. Many a hundred yards had Moro swum with his rider on his back—many a current had been cleft with his proud breast many times more rapid than that.

I headed him to the bank, gave him the spur, and went plunging into the flood. Plunge—plunge—plunge! I heard behind my back till the last of my followers had launched themselves on the wave, and were swimming silently over.

One after another we reached the opposite side, and ascended the bank. Hurriedly I counted our number as the men rode out; one had not yet arrived! Who was missing?

"Rube," answered some one: "I glanced back, but without feeling any uneasiness. I had no fear for the trapper; Garey alleged he was 'safe to turn up.' Something had detained him. Could his old mare swim?"

"Like a mink," replied Garey; "but Rube won't ride her across; he's afeard to sink her too deep in the water. See! yonder he comes!"

Near the middle of the stream, two faces were observed rippling the wave, one directly in the wake of the other. The foremost was the grizzled front of the old mustang, the other the unmistakable physiognomy of her master. The moonlight shining upon both rendered them conspicuous above the dark brown water; and the spectacle drew a laugh from those who had reached the bank.

ward over her hips, he took the tail in his teeth, and partly towed like a fish upon the hook, and partly striking to assist in the passage, he swam after. As soon as the mare again touched bottom, he drew himself up over the croup, and in this way regained his saddle. Mare and man, as they climbed out on the bank—the thin skeleton bodies of both reduced to their slenderest dimensions by the soaking water—presented a spectacle so ludicrous as to elicit a fresh chorus of laughter from his comrades. I stayed not till its echoes had died away; but pressing my steed along the bank, soon arrived at the rapids, where I expected to recover the trail. To my joy, hoof-marks were there, directly opposite the point where the steed had taken to the stream. He must have waded then. Thank Heaven! at least from that peril has she been saved!

TO BE CONTINUED.

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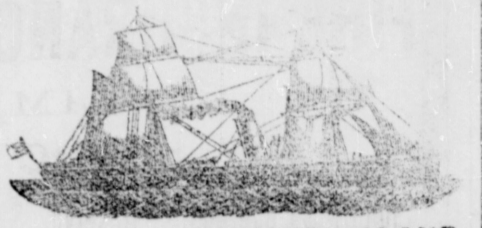
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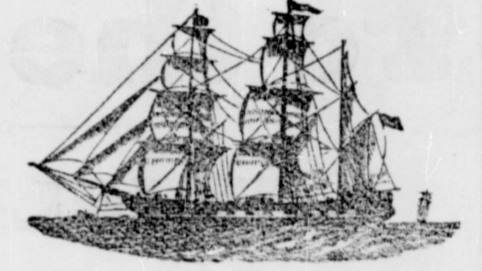
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TIME TABLE NO. 17. WINTER ARRANGEMENT. To take effect on the 1st Dec., 1881.

TRAINS OUTWARD.

Table with columns: STATIONS, MIXED, MIXED, MIXED. Rows include Ch'town, Royalty, N. Wiltch's, Hunter R't, Bradalbe's, Co'ty Line, Freetown, Kensington, Sann's side, Wellington, Port Hill, O'Leary, Bloomfield, Alberton, Tignish, Royalty, Bedford, Mt. Stewart, Cardigan, Georgetown, Mt. Stewart, Morell, St. Peter's, Bear River, Souris.

TRAINS INWARD.

Table with columns: STATIONS, MIXED, MIXED, MIXED. Rows include Ch'town, Royalty, N. Wiltch's, Hunter R't, Bradalbe's, Co'ty Line, Freetown, Kensington, Sann's side, Wellington, Port Hill, O'Leary, Bloomfield, Alberton, Tignish, Royalty, Bedford, Mt. Stewart, Cardigan, Georgetown, Mt. Stewart, Morell, St. Peter's, Bear River, Souris.

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