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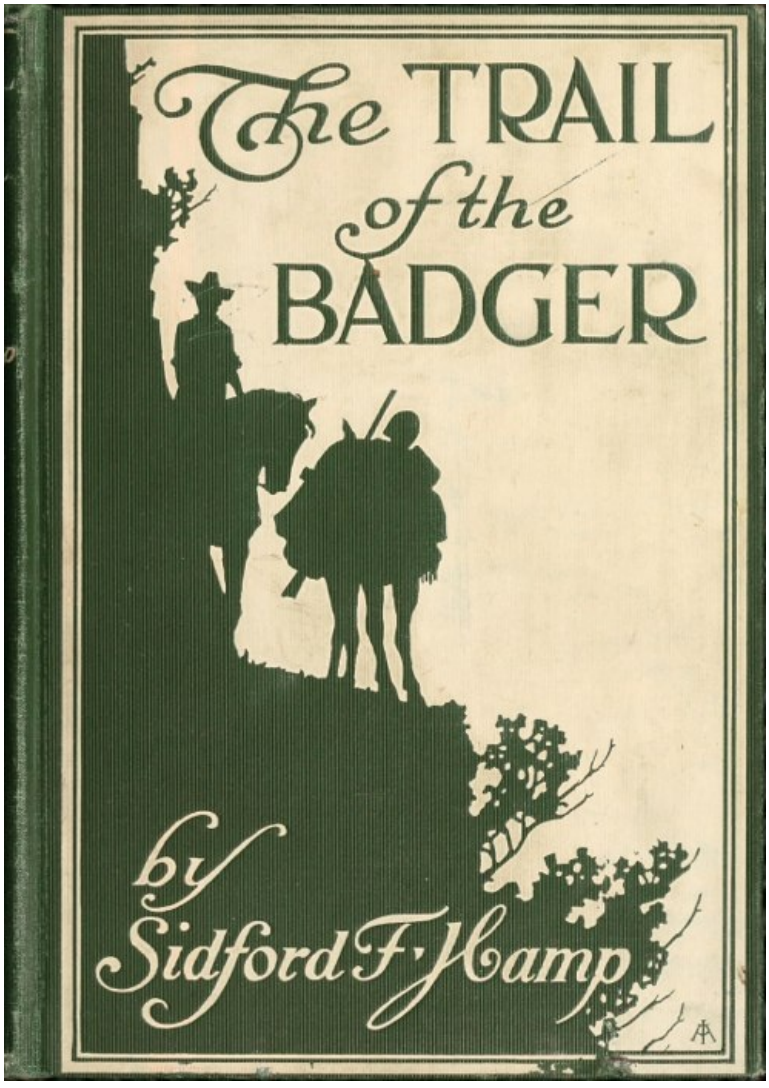

THE TRAIL OF THE BADGER

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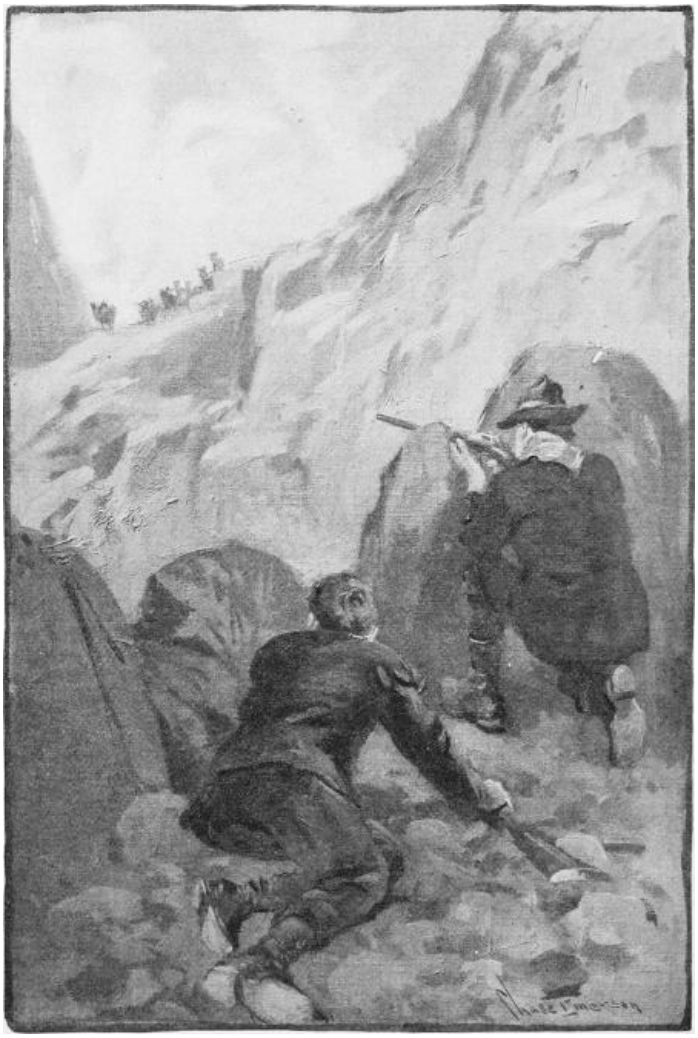

"DICK PUSHED HIS RIFLE-BARREL THROUGH A CREVICE IN THE ROCKS."

The Trail of The Badger

A STORY OF THE COLORADO BORDER THIRTY YEARS AGO

BY

SIDFORD F. HAMP

Author of "Dale and Fraser, Sheepmen," "The Boys of Crawford's Basin," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHASE EMERSON

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The Trail of The Badger

PREFACE

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In writing the adventures of the boys who followed "The Trail of the Badger" down into that part of Colorado where the fringes of two discordant civilizations overlapped each other—the strenuous Anglo-Saxon and the easygoing Mexican—the author has endeavored to show how two healthy, enterprising young fellows were able to do their little part in that great work of Desert Reclamation whose importance is now as well understood by the general public as it always has been by those whose lot has been cast to the west of meridian one hundred and five.

To some it may appear that the boys are ahead of their time, but to the author, whose introduction to "the arid region" dates back thirty years and more, remembering the conditions then prevailing, it seems no more than natural that they should recognize the unusual opportunity presented to them of making a career for themselves, and even that they should be dimly conscious of the fact that if they "could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before" they would be deserving well of the infant community of which they formed a part.

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That in making this attempt they would meet with adventures—in fact, that they could hardly avoid them—the author, recalling his own experiences in that country at that time, feels well assured.

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CHAPTER I
DICK STANLEY

"Look out! Look out! Behind you, man! Behind you! Jump quick, or he'll get you!"

It was a boy, a tall, spare, wiry young fellow of sixteen, who shouted this warning, his voice, in its frantic urgency, rising almost to a shriek at the end; and it was another boy, also tall, spare and wiry, to whom the warning was shouted. The latter turned to look behind him, and for one brief instant his whole body stiffened with fear—his very hair stood on end. Nor is this a mere figure of speech: the boy's hair did actually stand on end: he could feel it "creep" against the crown of his hat. *I know*—for I was the boy!

That I had good reason to be "scared stiff" I think any other boy will admit, for, not thirty feet [Pg 12] below me, coming quickly and silently up the rocks, his little gleaming eyes fixed intently upon me, was a grim old cinnamon bear, an animal which, though less dangerous than his big cousin, the grizzly, is quite dangerous enough when he is thoroughly in earnest.

But for my companion's warning shout the bear would surely have caught me, and my story would have come to an end at the very beginning of the first chapter.

It was certainly an awkward situation, about as awkward, I should think, as any boy ever got himself into; and how I, Frank Preston, lately a schoolboy in St. Louis, happened to find myself on a spur of Mescalero Mountain, in Colorado, with a cinnamon bear charging up the rocks within a few feet of me, needs a word of explanation.

I will therefore go back a few steps in order to give myself space for a preliminary run before jumping head-first into my story, and will tell not only how I came to be there, but will relate also the curious incident which first brought me into contact with my future friend, Dick Stanley; an incident which, while it served as an introduction, at the same time gave me some idea of the resourcefulness and promptness of action with which his very peculiar training had endowed [Pg 13] him.

It was in the last week of October, 1877, that I was seated one evening in my room in St. Louis, very busy preparing my studies for next day, when the door opened suddenly and in walked my Uncle Tom.

When, at the age of seven, I had been left an orphan, Uncle Tom, my mother's brother, though himself a bachelor, had taken charge of me, and with him I had lived ever since. He and I, I am glad to say, were the best of friends—regular chums—for, though twenty years my senior, he seemed in some respects to be as young as myself, and our relations were more like those of elder and younger brother than of uncle and nephew.

Uncle Tom was rather short and rather fat, and he was moreover one of the jolliest of men, being blessed with a disposition which prompted him always to see the bright side of things, no matter how dark and threatening they might look. Having at a very early age been pitched out into the world to "fend for himself," and having by square dealing and hard work done remarkably well, he had imbibed the idea that book-learning as a means of getting on in the world was somewhat [Pg 14] overrated; an idea which, right or wrong—and I think myself that Uncle Tom carried it rather too far—was to have a decided effect in shaping my own career.

As it was against the rule, laid down by Uncle Tom himself, for any one to disturb me at my studies, I naturally looked up from my books to ascertain the cause of the intrusion, when, with a cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, he came bulging in, half filling the little room.

That there was something unusual in the wind I felt sure, and my guardian's first act went far to confirm my suspicion, for, removing one hand from his pocket, he quietly reached forward and with his finger tilted my book shut.

"Put 'em away," said he. "You won't need them for a month or more."

As the fall term of school was then in full swing, this declaration was a good deal of a surprise to me, as any one will suppose, and doubtless I showed as much in my face.

"I have a scheme in my head, Frank," said he, with a knowing wag of that member, in reply to my look of inquiry.

"I know *that*," I replied, laughing; for there never was a moment when Uncle Tom had not a [Pg 15] scheme in his head of one sort or another.

"You spider-legged young reptile!" cried he, with perfect good humor, but at the same time shaking a threatening finger at me. "Don't you dare to laugh at my schemes; especially this one. For this is a brand-new idea, and a very important one—to you. I'm leaving to-morrow night for Colorado."

"Are you?" I cried, a good deal surprised by this sudden announcement. "When did you decide upon that?"

"To-day. I got a letter this afternoon from my friend, Sam Warren, the assayer, written from Mosby—if you know where that is."

I shook my head.

"I didn't suppose you did," remarked Uncle Tom. "It is a new mining camp on one of the spurs of Mescalero Mountain in Colorado, and in the opinion of Sam Warren—my old schoolmate, you know—it has a great future before it. So he has written me that if I have the time to spare I had better come out and take a look at it."

Uncle Tom's business was that of a mining promoter, the middle man between the prospector and the capitalist, a business in which his ability and his honorable methods had gained for him an enviable reputation. [Pg 16]

"So you have decided to go out, have you?" said I.

"Yes," he replied. "I leave to-morrow evening—and you are coming with me."

As may be imagined, I opened my eyes pretty widely at this unfolding of the "brand-new idea."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Look here, Frank, old chap," said he, seating himself on the edge of the table and becoming confidential. "You've stuck to your books very well—if anything, too well. Now, I've had my eye on you ever since the hot weather last summer, and it strikes me you need a change—you are too pale and altogether too thin."

Being fat and "comfortable" himself, Uncle Tom was disposed to regard with pity any one, like myself, whose framework showed through its covering.

"But——" I began; when Uncle Tom headed me off.

"Now you be quiet," said he, "and let me finish. I've had some such idea brewing in my head for some time; it isn't a sudden freak, as you imagine. I've considered the matter carefully, and I've come to the conclusion that you'll lose nothing by the move. In fact, what you will lose by missing a month or so of schooling will be more than made up to you by the eye-opener you will get in making this expedition." [Pg 17]

"How so?" I asked.

"You will make the acquaintance of a young State just learning to walk alone—for, as you know, it was only last year that Colorado came into the Union; you will see a new mining camp, and rub up against the men, good, bad and indifferent, who go to make up the community of a frontier town; and more than that, you will get at first hand, what you never could get by sitting here and reading about it, a correct idea of the country traversed by the explorers—Pike, Frémont and the rest of them.

"I am honestly of opinion, Frank," he went on, seriously, "that this is an opportunity not to be neglected. At the same time, old fellow, as it is your education and not mine that is under discussion, I consider that you have a right to a voice in the matter; so I'll leave you to think it over, and to-morrow at breakfast you can tell me whether you are coming or not."

With that, Uncle Tom slipped down from the table, walked out and shut the door behind him. That was his way: he was always as sudden as a clap of thunder. [Pg 18]

Anybody will guess that my books did not receive much more attention that evening. For an hour I paced up and down the room, considering Uncle Tom's proposition. It was true that I did feel pulled down by the effects of the hot weather, combined with a pretty close application to my books, and I had no doubt that the expedition proposed would do me a world of good; though whether my education would be benefited in like manner I was not so sure as Uncle Tom seemed to be.

But though I did my best honestly to consider the question in all its aspects, there can be little doubt that my inclinations—whether I was aware of it or not—colored my judgment, so that my final decision was just what might have been expected in any active boy of sixteen. As the clock struck ten I ran down-stairs and informed Uncle Tom that I was going with him.

It is not necessary to go into all the details of our journey, though to me, who had never before been a hundred miles from home, everything was new and everything was interesting. It is enough to say that, leaving the train at the foot of the mountains—for the railroad then went no further—we engaged places in the mail-carrier's open buckboard, and after a very rough and very tiring drive of a day and a half we at last reached our destination and were set down at the door of a house outside which hung a "shingle" bearing the legend, "Samuel Warren, Assayer and U. S. Dep. Min. Surveyor." [Pg 19]

It will be remembered that one of Uncle Tom's reasons for breaking into my school term was that I should rub up against the citizens comprising a frontier settlement. He could hardly have contemplated, however, that I should come in contact with quite so many of them quite so early in the day as I did.

We had hardly sat down to the refreshments spread before us by our host—a big, bearded man, clad in a suit of brown canvas—when we, in common with the rest of the community, were startled by the sudden shriek of a woman in distress. To rush to the door was the work of a moment, when, the first thing we caught sight of was a man, clad only in his nightshirt, running like a madman up the street, while far behind him, and losing ground at every step, ran a woman,

calling out with all the breath she had to spare—which was not much—"Stop him! Stop him!" [Pg 20]

"It's Tim Donovan!" shouted the assayer. "He's sick with the mountain-fever! He's crazy! Head him off! Head him off! The poor chap will die of exposure!"

Warren's house was near the upper end of the street, and just as we three jumped down the porch steps, the demented fugitive passed the door, going like the wind. At once we set off in pursuit, while behind us came all the rest of the population and most of the dogs, by this time roused to action by the cries of the sick man's wife.

Nobody knows until he has tried it how hard it is to run up-hill at an elevation of nine thousand feet, especially to one unaccustomed to such altitudes. Uncle Tom, who was not built for such exercise, fell out in the first fifty yards, while, of the others, the short-winded barroom loafers—of whom, as is always the case in a new camp, there were more than enough—gave out even more quickly, their habits of life being a fatal handicap in a foot-race. One by one, nearly all the rest came down to a walk, until presently the only ones left with any run in them were Jake Peters and Oscar Swansen, both timber-cutters from the hills, Aleck Smith, a wiry little teamster, and [Pg 21] myself.

As for me, having the advantage of a good start over everybody else, being only sixteen years old, and having a reputation at school as a long-distance runner, it seemed as though I ought to be able to catch the unfortunate fugitive, who, having run a quarter of a mile already, should by this time be out of breath.

Indeed, I believe I should have caught him at the first dash had he not resorted to tactics which made me chary of coming near him. Not more than thirty yards separated us and I was gaining steadily, when he, barefooted himself and making no noise, hearing the clatter of my shoes behind him, suddenly stopped, picked up a stone and hurled it at me. It would have taken me square in the chest had I not jumped aside; when, finding that the man was really dangerous, and knowing very well that I should have no chance whatever in a personal struggle with him—for he was a stout young Irish miner with a fore-arm like a leg of mutton—I contented myself with trotting behind and keeping him in sight; trusting to the able-bodied men following me to do the tackling when the opportunity should arise.

The town of Mosby consisted of one steep street about half a mile long and two houses thick; for [Pg 22] it was situated in a valley, or, rather, in a gorge, so narrow that there was no room for it to spread except at the two ends. In truth, there was no room for it to grow except southward, for at the upper, or northern, end the mountains came together, forming an inaccessible cañon through which rushed the little stream of ice-cold water coming down from Mescalero.

From the lower end of this cañon the stream fell perpendicularly into a great hole in the rocks—a sort of natural chimney, or well, about sixty feet deep. The down-stream side of this "chimney" was split from top to bottom, and through the narrow crack, only four or five feet wide, the water leaped foaming down in a series of miniature cascades. The only way of getting into this deep pit was by taking to the water, scrambling up the steep, step-like bed of the stream and passing through the crack, when, once inside, a man might defy the world to come and get him out.

This was exactly what Tim Donovan did. Seeing that he could follow the stream no further, I was wondering whether he would take to the mountain on the right or the one on the left, when he [Pg 23] suddenly jumped into the water, ran up the smooth, wet "steps," and disappeared from sight through the crevice. In ten seconds, however, he showed himself again. He had found in the driftwood a ragged branch of a pine tree about three feet long, and with this in one hand and a ten-pound stone in the other he stood at bay, regardless of the icy water which poured over his feet, or of the spray from the fall behind him, which in half a minute had wet his thin single garment through and through.

It was an impregnable stronghold. No one could get in from the rear, and the place could not be rushed from the front—the ascent was too steep and slippery and the entrance too narrow. If Tim were determined to stay there and perish with cold, it appeared to me that nobody could do anything to prevent him.

One by one the pursuers joined me before the entrance, when Mrs. Donovan, who was among the last to arrive, advanced as near as she could without getting into the water, and besought her errant husband to come down.

But Tim was deaf to entreaty; all the blandishments of his anxious wife were without effect, and if [Pg 24] she could not get him to come down it appeared as though nobody could.

Tim, though, was a popular young fellow, and it was not in the nature of a Colorado miner, or of an Irishman either—for they hold together like burrs in a horse's tail—to desert a comrade in distress. So, Mrs. Donovan having failed, there stepped to the front a short, thick-set, red-haired man, Mike O'Brien by name, Tim's partner and particular crony, who, talking pleasantly and naturally to him, as though his friend were quite sane and rational, stepped into the water and waded carefully up the steep slope.

"How are ye, Tim, me boy?" said he, with off-hand cordiality. "It's glad I am to see ye out again. It's me birthday to-day, Tim; I'm having a bit of a supper at home an' I come up to ask ye——"

Whack! came the stone from Tim's hand, breaking to pieces against the rocky wall within an inch of Mike's head. The invitation was declined.

Mike himself, in his effort to dodge the missile, missed his footing, fell on his back, and in a series of dislocating bumps was swept down the "steps" to the starting place, wet, as he declared, right through to his bones.

Up to this time the demented man had kept silence, but on seeing Mike go tumbling down- [Pg 25]
stream, he shook his fist after him and cried out:

"Come back and try again, ye devouring baste! Come on, the whole pack of yez! Don't stand there howling, ye cowardly curs; come up and get me out—if ye dare!"

"I believe he thinks we are a pack of wolves," said Mr. Warren.

"That's it, Mr. Warren, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Donovan, turning to the assayer. "That's it, entirely. He heard a wolf howl last night, and it was hard wor-rk I had to kape him from jumping out of his bed and running off right thin. He thinks it's a pack of them that's hunting him."

"Poor fellow! No wonder he refuses to come down. What are we going to do? We *must* get him out."

Then ensued an eager debate, in which everybody took a share except Uncle Tom and myself, who, standing a little apart from the rest on the sloping bank of the stream, were listening and looking on, when some one touched me on my arm, and a boyish voice said:

"What's the matter? What's it all about?"

Turning round, I saw before me a tall young fellow about my own age, with reddish hair, very [Pg 26]
keen gray eyes and a much-freckled face, carrying in one hand an old-fashioned, muzzle-loading rifle, nearly as long as himself, and in the other three grouse which he appeared to have shot.

Wondering who the boy might be, I explained the situation, when he cried:

"What! Tim Donovan! Why he'll die if he's left in there. Poor chap! We must get him out."

"Yes," said Uncle Tom. "That's just it. But how? The man won't be persuaded to come out, and no one can get in to drag him out—so what's to be done?"

The young fellow stood for a minute thinking, and then, suddenly lifting his head, he exclaimed, with a half laugh:

"I know! I know what we can do! He can't be persuaded out or dragged out, but he can be driven out."

"How?" asked Uncle Tom.

"If you'll come with me," replied the boy, "I'll show you in two minutes."

So saying, he jumped across the creek and set off straight up the almost perpendicular side of the mountain, we two following. Uncle Tom, however, finding the climb too steep for him, very soon [Pg 27]
turned back again, so we two boys went on alone.

About three hundred feet up my companion stopped, and it was well for me he did, for I could hardly have gone another step, so desperately out of breath was I.

"Not used to it, are you?" said the boy, who himself seemed to be quite unaffected. "Well, we don't have to go any higher, fortunately. Look over there. Do you see that stubby pine tree growing out of the rocks and overhanging the waterfall?"

"Yes, I see it," I replied. "And what's that big round thing hanging to it?"

"A wasps' nest."

"A wasps' nest?"

"A wasps' nest," repeated my new acquaintance with peculiar emphasis and with a twinkle in his eye.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, suddenly enlightened. "I see your little game. Good! You propose to knock down the wasps' nest into the 'well,' and then poor Tim will just have to vacate."

"That's my idea."

"Great idea, too. But, look here! Are the wasps alive at this time of year?"

"They are this year. We've had such a wonderfully warm season that they are just as brisk as [Pg 28]
ever."

"Well, but there's another thing: how are you going to do it? You can't get at it: the rocks are too straight-up-and-down; and you can't come near enough to knock it off with a stone. How are you going to do it?"

The young fellow smiled and patted the stock of his gun.

"Shoot it down!" I exclaimed. "Do you think you can? It won't be any use plugging it full of holes, you know; you'll have to nip off the little twig it hangs on. Can you do that?"

"I think I can."

"All right, then, fire away and let's see."

I must confess I felt doubtful. The boy did not look nor talk like a braggart, but nevertheless, to cut with a bullet the slim little branch, no bigger than a lead-pencil, upon which the nest hung suspended looked to me like a pretty ticklish shot.

My companion, however, seemed confident. Cocking his gun, he kneeled down, and using a big rock as a rest he took careful aim and fired.

It was a perfect shot. The big ball of gray "paper" dropped like a plumb, struck the rim of the "well," burst open, and emptied upon the head of the unfortunate Tim about a bucketful of venomous little yellow-jackets, each and every one of them quivering with rage, and each and every one bent on taking vengeance on somebody. [Pg 29]

The people below were still debating how to get the sick man out of his fortress, when the sound of the rifle-shot caused them all to look up; but only for an instant, for the echoes had not yet died away, when, with a startling yell, out came Tim, frantically waving his club above his head, seemingly more crazy than ever. Supposing that he was making a dash for liberty, half a dozen of his particular friends flung themselves upon him, and down they all went in a heap together.

But this arrangement was of the briefest. In another moment, with shrieks and yells and whirling arms, the whole population went charging down the street, Uncle Tom in the lead, running—breath or no breath—as he had never run before.

Never was there a more complete victory: besiegers and besieged flying in one general rout before the assaults of the new enemy. And never did I laugh so extravagantly as I did then, to see the enraged yellow-jackets "take it out" on an unoffending community, while the real culprits were all the time sitting safely perched on the mountainside looking down on the rumpus. [Pg 30]

"Well, we got him out all right," remarked my companion, as he calmly reloaded his rifle. "I thought we could. You're a newcomer, aren't you? My name's Dick Stanley; I live up-stream, just at the head of the cañon. Are you expecting to make a long stay?"

"Two or three weeks, I think," I replied. "My uncle, Mr. Tom Allen, is here to inspect the mines, and he brought me with him. We come from St. Louis. My name's Frank Preston. We're staying at Mr. Warren's house."

"Well, come up to our house some day. It is in a little clearing just at the head of the cañon—you can't miss it—and we'll go off for a day's grouse-shooting up into the mountains if you like."

"All right, I will. That would just suit me. To-morrow?"

"Yes, come up to-morrow, if you like. I'll be on the lookout for you. I suppose you are going home now," he continued, as we rose to our feet. "If I were you, I'd keep up here on the side of the mountain—the street will be full of yellow-jackets—and then, when you come opposite the assayer's house, make a bolt for his back door, or some of them may get you yet." [Pg 31]

"That's a good idea. I'll do it. Well, good-bye. I'll come up to-morrow then, if I can."

CHAPTER II [Pg 32]

Sheep and Cinnamon

"That was the funniest thing I ever saw," exclaimed Uncle Tom, laughing in spite of himself, while at the same time, with a comically rueful twist of his countenance, he rubbed the back of his neck where one of the wasps had "got" him. "The way poor Tim bolted out of his stronghold after defying the whole population to come and get him out, was the very funniest thing I ever did see. That was a smart trick of that young rascal; though I wish he had given me notice beforehand of what he intended to do. I'd have started to run a good five minutes earlier if I'd known what was coming. Who is the boy, Warren?"

"Well, that is not easy to say," replied our host, "for, as a matter of fact, he does not know himself. His history, what there is of it, is a peculiar one. He lives up here at the head of the cañon with an old German named Bergen—commonly known as the Professor—and his Mexican servant, a man of forty whom the professor brought up with him from Albuquerque, I believe. If Frank's object in coming here was to rub up against all sorts and conditions of men, he could hardly have chosen a better place. Certainly he cannot expect to find a more remarkable character than the professor. [Pg 33]

"The old fellow is regarded by the people here as a harmless lunatic—which, in a community like this, where muscle is at a premium and scientific attainments at a discount, is not to be wondered at—for it is incomprehensible to them that any man in his right mind should spend his life as the professor spends his.

"The old gentleman is an enthusiastic naturalist. He is making a collection of the butterflies, beetles and such things, of the Rocky Mountain region, and with true German thoroughness he has spent years in the pursuit. Choosing some promising spot, he builds a log cabin, and there he stays one year—or two if necessary—until that district is 'fished out,' as you may say, when he

packs up and moves somewhere else, to do the same thing over again."

"Well, that is certainly a queer character to come across," was Uncle Tom's comment. "But how about the boy, Sam? How does he happen to be in such company?"

"Why, about twelve or thirteen years ago, old Bergen was 'doing' the country somewhere [Pg 34]
northwest of Santa Fé, when he made a very strange discovery. It was a bad piece of country for snowslides, which were frequent and dangerous in the spring, and one day, being anxious to get to a particular point quickly, the professor was crossing the tail of a new slide—a risky thing to do—as being the shortest cut, when his attention was attracted by some strange object lodged half way up the great bank of snow. Climbing up to it, he found to his astonishment that the strange object was a wagon-bed, while, to his infinitely greater astonishment, inside it on a mattress, fast asleep, was a three-year-old boy—young Dick!"

"That was an astonisher, sure enough!" exclaimed I, who had been an eager listener. "And was that all the professor found?"

"That was all. The running-gear of the wagon had vanished; the horses had vanished; and the boy's parents or guardians had vanished—all buried, undoubtedly, under the snow."

"And what did the professor do?"

"The only thing he could do: took the boy with him—and a fortunate thing it was for young Dick [Pg 35]
that the old gentleman happened to find him. But though he inquired of everybody he came across—they were not many, for white folks were scarce in those parts then—the professor could learn nothing of the party; so, not knowing what else to do, he just carried off the youngster with him, and with him Dick has been ever since."

"That's a queer history, sure enough," remarked Uncle Tom. "And was there nothing at all by which to identify the boy?"

"Just one thing. I forgot to say that in the wagon-bed was a single volume of Shakespeare—one of a set: volume two—on the fly-leaf of which was written the name, 'Richard Livingstone Stanley, from Anna,' and as the boy was old enough to tell his own name—Dick Stanley—the professor concluded that the owner of the book was his father. Moreover, as the boy made no mention of his mother, though he now and then spoke of his 'Daddy' and his 'Uncle David,' the old gentleman formed the theory that the mother was dead and that the father and uncle, bringing the boy with them, had come west to seek their fortunes, and being very likely tenderfeet, unacquainted with the dangerous nature of those great snow-masses in spring time, they had been caught in a slide [Pg 36]
and killed."

"Poor little chap," said Uncle Tom. "And he has been wandering about with the old gentleman ever since, has he? He must be a sort of Wild Man of the West in miniature."

"Not a bit of it. The professor is a man of learning, and he has not neglected his duty. Dick has a highly respectable education, including some items rather out of the common for a boy: he speaks German and Spanish; he has a pretty intimate knowledge of the wild animals of the Rocky Mountains; and he is one of the best woodsmen and quite the best shot of anybody in these immediate parts."

"Well, they are an odd pair, certainly. I should like to go up and see the professor—that is, if he ever receives visitors."

"Oh, yes. He's a sociable old fellow. He and I are very good friends. I'll take you up there and introduce you some day. He is well worth knowing. If there is any information you desire concerning the Rocky Mountain country from here southward to the border, Herr Bergen can give it you. You are to be congratulated, Frank, on making Dick's acquaintance so early: he will be a fine companion for you while you stay here. You propose to go grouse-shooting to-morrow, [Pg 37]
do you? Well, you can take my shotgun—it hangs up there on the wall—and make a day of it; for your uncle and I are proposing to ride up to inspect a mine on Cape Horn, which will take us pretty well all afternoon."

I thanked our host for his offer, and next morning, gun in hand, I set off immediately after breakfast for Dick's dwelling.

Passing the "well" where Tim Donovan had taken refuge the day before, I ascended by a clearly-marked trail to the edge of the cañon, and following along it through the woods for about a mile, I presently came in sight of a little clearing, in which stood a neat log cabin of two or three rooms. Outside was a Mexican, chopping wood, while in the doorway stood Dick, evidently looking out for me, for, the moment I appeared, he ran forward to meet me.

"How are you?" he cried. "Glad you came early: I have a new plan for the day, if it suits you. I've been spying around with a field-glass and I've just seen a band of sheep up on that big middle spur of Mescalero; they are working their way up from their feeding-ground, and I propose that [Pg 38]
we go after them instead of hunting grouse. What do you say?"

"All right; that will suit me."

"Come on, then. Just come into the house for a minute first and see the professor, and then we'll dig out at once."

From the fact that Mr. Warren had so frequently spoken of the professor as "the old gentleman," I was prepared to see a bent old man, with a white beard and big round spectacles—the typical "German professor," of my imagination. I was a good deal surprised, then, to find a small, active man of sixty, perhaps, a little gray, certainly, but with a clear blue eye and a wide-awake manner I was far from anticipating. He was in the inner room when I entered—evidently the sanctum where he prepared and stored his specimens—but the moment he heard our steps he came briskly out, and, on Dick's introducing me, shook hands with me very heartily.

"And how's poor Tim this morning?" he asked, as soon as the formalities, if they can be called so, were over.

"He is all right, sir," I replied. "I went down there before breakfast this morning at Mr. Warren's request to inquire. In fact, Tim was so much better apparently that Mrs. Donovan declares that if [Pg 39] he ever gets the fever again she intends to apply iced water to his feet and wasp-stings to the rest of his anatomy, as being a sure cure. She is immensely grateful to Dick for having discovered and applied a remedy that has worked so well."

"Then if Tim is wise," remarked the professor, laughing, "he won't get the fever again, for I should think the cure would be worse than the disease. But you want to be off, don't you? Do you understand the working of a Winchester repeater? Well," as I shook my head, "then you had better take the Sharp's and Dick the Winchester. And, Dick, you'd better have an eye on the weather. Romero says there is a change coming, and he is generally pretty reliable. So, now, off you go; and good luck to you."

Leaving the cabin, we went straight on up the narrow valley for about three miles—the pine-clad mountains rising half a mile high on either side of us—going as quickly as we could, or, to be more exact, going as quickly as I could. For the elevation, beginning at nine thousand feet, increased, of course, at every step, and I, being unused to such altitudes, found myself much [Pg 40] distressed for breath—a fact which was rather a surprise to me, considering that in our track-meets at school the mile run was my strong point. I did not understand then that to get enough oxygen out of that thin mountain air it was necessary to take two breaths where one would suffice at sea-level.

We had ascended about a thousand feet, I think, when, at the base of the bare ridge for which we had been making, we slackened our pace, and my companion, who knew the country, taking the lead, we went scrambling up over the rocks and snow for an hour or more.

The quantity of snow we found up there was a surprise to me, for, from below the amount seemed trifling. There had been a heavy fall up in the range a month before, and this snow, drifting into the gullies, had settled into compact masses, the surface of which, on this, the southern face of the mountain, being every day slightly softened by the heat of the sun, and every night frozen solid again, made the footing exceedingly treacherous. Whenever, therefore, we found it necessary to cross one of these steep-tilted snow-beds we did so with the greatest caution.

We had been climbing, as I have said, for more than an hour, and were nearing the top of the [Pg 41] ridge, when Dick stopped and silently beckoned to me to come up to where he lay, crouching under shelter of a little ledge.

"Smell anything?" he whispered.

I gave a sniff and raised my eyebrows inquiringly.

"Sheep?" said I, softly.

My companion nodded.

"They must be somewhere close by," said he, in a voice hardly audible. "Go very carefully and keep your eyes wide open. If you see anything, stop instantly."

We were lying side by side upon the rocks, Dick considerately waiting a moment while I got my breath again, and were just about to crawl forward, when there came the sound of a sudden rush of hoofs and a clatter of stones from some invisible point ahead of us, and then dead silence again.

"They've winded us and gone off," whispered Dick. But the next moment he added eagerly, "There they are! Look! There they are! Up there! See? My! What a chance!"

Immediately on our left was a deep gorge, so narrow and precipitous that we could not see the bottom of it from where we lay. The sheep, having seemingly got wind of us, with that agility [Pg 42] which is always so astonishing in such heavy animals, had rushed down one side of the precipitous gorge and up the other, and now, there they were, all standing in a row—eleven of them—on the opposite summit, looking down, not at us, but at something immediately below them.

"What do you suppose it is, Dick?" I whispered.

"Don't know," my companion replied. "Mountain-lion, perhaps: they are very partial to mutton. Anyhow," he continued, "if we want to get a shot we must shoot from here: we can't move without the sheep seeing us, and they'd be off like a flash if they did. You take a shot, Frank. Take the nearest one. Sight for two hundred yards."

"No," I replied. "You shoot. I shall miss: I'm too unsteady for want of breath."

"All right."

Raising himself a fraction of an inch at a time until he had come to a kneeling position, Dick pushed his rifle-barrel through a crevice in the rocks, took aim and fired. The nearest sheep, a fine fellow with a handsome pair of horns, pitched forward, fell headlong from the ledge upon [Pg 43] which he had been standing and vanished from our sight among the broken rocks below; while the others turned tail and fled up the mountain, disappearing also in a minute or less.

"Come on!" cried Dick, springing to his feet. "Let's go across and get him. Round this way. Don't trust to that slope of ice: you may slip and break your neck."

"But the mountain-lion, Dick," I protested. "Suppose there's a mountain-lion down there."

"Oh, never mind him!" Dick exclaimed. "If there was one, he's gone by this time. And even if he should be there yet, he'd skip the moment he saw us. We needn't mind him. Come on!"

Away we went, therefore, Dick in the lead, and scrambling quickly though carefully down the rocky wall, we made our way up the bed of the ravine until we found ourselves opposite the ledge upon which the sheep had been standing. Here we discovered that the wall of the gorge was split from top to bottom by a narrow cleft—previously invisible to us—filled with hard snow, and whether the sheep had been standing on the right side or the left of this crevice, and therefore on which side the big ram had fallen, we could not tell; for the wall of the gorge, besides being [Pg 44] exceedingly rough, was littered with great masses of rock against any of which the body of the sheep might have lodged.

"I'll tell you what, Frank," said my companion. "It might take us an hour or two to search all the cracks and crannies here. The best plan will be to climb straight up to the ledge where the sheep stood and look down. Then, if he is lodged against the upper side of any of these rocks, we shall be able to see him. But as we can't tell whether he was standing on the right or the left of this crevice, suppose you climb up one side while I go up the other."

"All right," said I. "You take the one on the left and I'll go up on this side."

It was a laborious climb for both of us—and how those sheep got up there so quickly is a wonder to me still—but as my side of the crevice happened to be easier of ascent than Dick's I got so far ahead of him that I presently found myself about fifty yards in the lead.

At this point, however, I met with an obstruction which at first seemed likely to stop me altogether. The fallen rocks were so big, and piled so high, that I could not get over them, and for a moment I thought I should be forced to go back and try another passage. Before resorting to [Pg 45] this measure, though, I thought I would attempt to get round the barrier by taking to the snow-bank, supporting myself by holding on to the rocks. To do this I should need the use of both my hands, so, as my rifle had no strap by which to hang it over my shoulder, I took out my handkerchief, tied one end to the trigger-guard, took the other end in my teeth, and slinging the weapon behind me, I seized the rock with both hands and set one foot on the snow.

It was at this moment that Dick, down below me on the other side of the crevice, while in the act of crawling up over a big rock, caught a glimpse of something moving over on my side, and the next instant, out from between two great fragments of granite rushed a cinnamon bear and went charging up the slope after me.

The bear—as we discovered afterward—had found our sheep, and was agreeably engaged in tearing it to pieces, when he caught a whiff of me. He was an old bear, and had very likely been chased and shot at more than once in the past few years—since the white men had begun to invade his domain—and having conceived a strong antipathy for those interfering bipeds which [Pg 46] walked on their hind legs and carried "thunder-sticks" in their fore paws, he decided instantly that, before finishing his dinner, he would just dash out and finish me.

And very near he came to doing it. It was only Dick's quick sight and his equally quick shout that saved me.

My companion's warning cry to jump could have but one meaning: there was nowhere to jump except out upon the snow-bank; and recovering from my first momentary panic, I let go my rifle and sprang out from the rocks.

My hope was that I should be able to keep my footing long enough to scramble across to the rocks on the other side; but in this I was disappointed. The snow-bed lay at an angle as steep as a church roof, and while its surface was slightly softened by the sun, just beneath it was as hard and as slippery as glass. Consequently, the moment my feet struck it they slipped from under me, down I went on my face, and in spite of all my frantic clawing and scratching I began to slide briskly and steadily down-hill.

The bear—most fortunately for me—seemed to be less cunning than most of his fellows. Had he paused for a moment to reason it out, he would have seen that by waiting five seconds he might [Pg 47] leap upon my back as I went by. Luckily, however, he did not reason it out, but the instant he saw me jump he jumped too, and he, too, began sliding down the icy slope ahead of me; for being, as I said, an old bear, his blunted claws could get no hold.

It was an odd situation, and "to a man up a tree," as the saying is, it might have been

entertaining. Here was the pursuer retreating backward from the pursued, while the pursued, albeit with extreme reluctance, was pursuing the pursuer—also backward.

It was like a nightmare—and a real, live, untamed broncho of a nightmare at that—but luckily it did not last long. Finding that no efforts of mine would arrest my downward progress, and knowing that the bear, reaching the bottom first, need only stand there with his mouth wide open and wait for me to fall into it, I whirled myself over and over sideways, until presently my hand struck the rocks, my finger-tips caught upon a little projection, and there I hung on for dear life, not daring to move a muscle for fear my hold should slip.

But from this uncomfortable predicament I was promptly relieved. I had not hung there five [Pg 48] seconds ere the sharp report of a rifle rang out, and then another, and next came Dick's voice hailing me:

"All right, Frank! I've got him! Hold on: I'm coming up!"

Half a minute later, as I lay there face downward on the ice, I heard footsteps just above me, a firm hand grasped my wrist, and a cheerful voice said:

"Come on up, old chap. I can steady you."

"But the bear, Dick! The bear!" I cried, as I rose to my knees.

"Dead as a door-nail," he replied, calmly. "Look."

I glanced over my shoulder down the slope. There, on his back among the rocks, lay the cinnamon, his great arms spread out and his head hanging over, motionless. As the snarling beast had slid past him, not ten feet away, Dick, with his Winchester repeater, had shot him once through the heart and once in the base of the skull, so that the bear was stone dead ere he fell from the little two-foot ice-cliff at the bottom of the slope.

As for myself, I had had such a scare and was so completely exhausted by my vehement struggles during the past couple of minutes, that for a quarter of an hour I lay on the rocks panting and [Pg 49] gasping ere I could get my lungs and my muscles back into working order again.

As soon as I could do so, however, I sat up, and holding out my hand to my companion, I said:

"Thanks, old chap. I'm mighty glad you were on hand, or, I'm afraid, it would have been all up with me."

"It was a pretty close shave," replied Dick; "rather too close for comfort. He meant mischief, sure enough. Well, he's out of mischief now, all right. Let's go down and look at him."

"I suppose," said I, "it was the bear that the sheep were looking down at when they stood up there on the ledge all in a row."

"Yes, that was it. If I'd known it was a bear they were staring at I'd have left them alone. A mountain-lion I'm not afraid of: he'll run ninety-nine times out of a hundred. But a cinnamon bear is quite another thing: the less you have to do with them, the better."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned," said I, "the less I have to do with them, the better it will suit me. If this fellow is a sample of his tribe I'm very willing to forego their further acquaintance: my first [Pg 50] interview came too unpleasantly near to being my last. Come on; let's go down."

CHAPTER III [Pg 51]

The Mescalero Valley

It had been our intention to take off the bear's hide and carry it home with us, but we found that he was such a shabby old specimen that the skin was not worth the carriage, so, after cutting out his claws as trophies, we went on to inspect our sheep. Here again we found that "the game was not worth the candle," as the saying is, for the bear had torn the carcass so badly as to render it useless, while the horns, which at a distance and seen against the sky-line, had looked so imposing, proved to be too much chipped and broken to be any good.

My rifle we found lying beside the bear, it also having slid down the ice-slope when I dropped it.

"Well, Frank," remarked my companion, "our hunt so far doesn't seem to have had much result—unless you count the experience as something."

"Which I most decidedly do," I interjected.

"You are right enough there," replied Dick; "there's no gainsaying that. Well, what I was going to [Pg 52] say was that the day is early yet, and if you like there is still time for us to go off and have a try for a deer. I should like to take home something to show for our day's work."

"Very well," said I. "Which way should we take? There are no deer up here among the rocks, I suppose."

"Why, I propose that we go up over this ridge here and try the country to the southwest. I've

never been down there myself, having always up to the present hunted to the north and east of camp; but I've often thought of trying it: it is a likely-looking country, quite different from that on the Mosby side of the divide: high mesa land cut up by deep cañons. What do you say?"

"Anything you like," I answered. "It is all new to me, and one direction is as good as another."

"Very well, then, let us get up over the ridge at once and make a start."

Having discovered a place easier of ascent than those by which we had first tried to climb up, we soon found ourselves on top of the ridge, whence we could look out over the country we were intending to explore.

[Pg 53] It was plain at a glance that the two sides of the divide were very different. Behind us, to the north, rose Mescalero Mountain, bare, rugged and seamed with strips of snow. From this mountain, as from a center, there radiated in all directions great spurs, like fingers spread out, on one of which we were then standing. Looking southward, we could see that our spur continued for many miles in the form of a chain of round-topped mountains, well covered with timber, the elevation of which diminished pretty regularly the further they receded from the parent stem. On the left hand side of this chain—the eastern, or Mosby side—the country was very rough and broken: from where we stood we could see nothing but the tops of mountains, some sharp and rugged, some round and tree-covered, seemingly massed together without order or regularity. But to the south and southwest it was very different. Here the land lying embraced between two of the spurs was spread out like a great fan-shaped park, which, though it sloped away pretty sharply, was fairly smooth, except where several dark lines indicated the presence of cañons of unknown depth. The whole stretch, as far as we could distinguish, was pretty well covered with timber, though occasional open spaces showed here and there, some of two or three [Pg 54] acres and some of two or three square miles in extent.

"Just the country for black-tail," said Dick, "especially at this time of year—the beginning of winter. For, you see, it lies very much lower on the average than the Mosby side, and the snow consequently will not come so early nor stay so late. It ought to be a great hunting-ground."

"It is a curious thing to find an open stretch like that in the midst of the mountains," said I. "What is it called?"

"The Mescalero valley. The professor says it was once an arm of the sea—and it looks like it, doesn't it? Over on the Mosby side the rocks are all granite and porphyry, tilted up at all sorts of angles; but down there it is sandstone and limestone, lying flat—a sure sign that it was once the bottom of a sea."

"Is the valley inhabited?" I asked.

"Down at the southern end, about fifty miles away, there is a Mexican settlement, at the foot of those twin peaks you see down there standing all alone in the midst of the valley—the Dos Hermanos: Two Brothers, they are called—but up at this end there are no inhabitants, I believe."

"Well, there will be some day, I expect," said I. "It ought to be a fine situation for a saw-mill, for [Pg 55] instance."

"I don't know about that. There would be no way of getting your product to market. Old Jeff Andrews, the founder of Mosby, told me about it once—he's been across it two or three times—and he says that the country is so slashed with cañons that a wheeled vehicle couldn't travel across it, and consequently the expense of road-making would amount to about as much as the value of the timber."

"I see. And, of course, the streams are much too shallow to float out the logs. Well, let us get along down."

"All right. By the way, before we start, there was one thing I wanted to say:—If we should happen to get separated, all you have to do is to turn your face eastward, climb up over the Mosby Ridge, and you'll find yourself on our own creek, either above or below the town. It's very plain; you can hardly lose yourself—by daylight at any rate. So, now, let's be off."

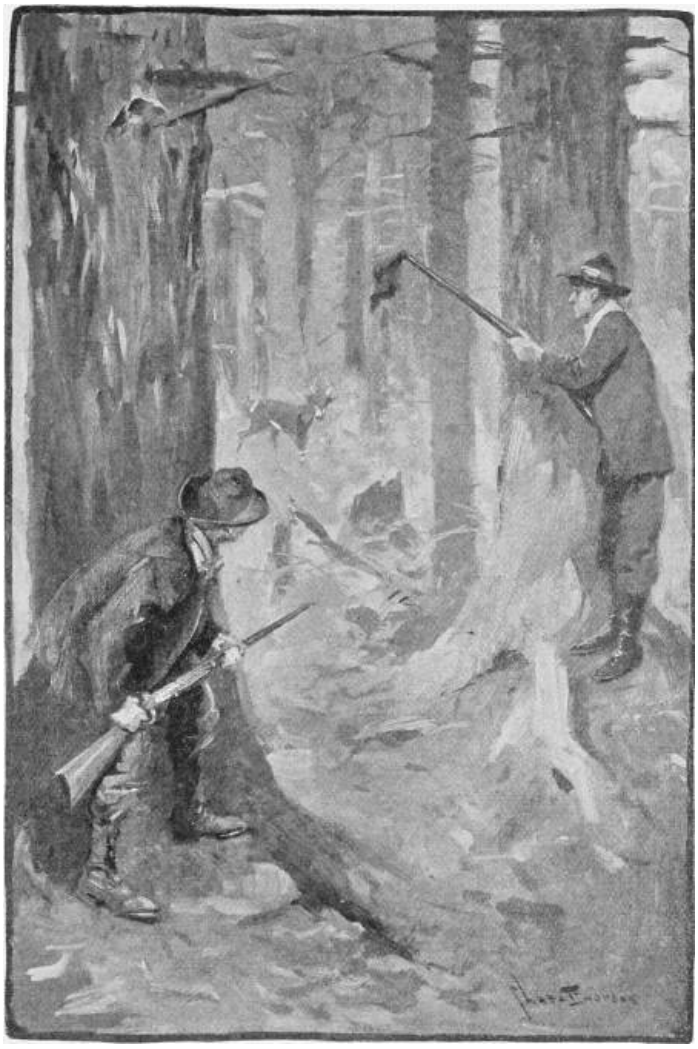
[Pg 56] The climb down on this side we found to be very much steeper than the climb up on the other had been. We dropped, by Dick's guess, about three thousand feet in the three miles we traversed ere we found ourselves in the midst of the thick timber, walking on comparatively level ground. Keeping along the eastern side of the valley, in the neighborhood of the Mosby Ridge, we made our way forward, steering by the sun—for the trees were so thick we could see but a short distance ahead—when we came upon one of the little open spaces I have mentioned. We were just about to walk out from among the trees, when my companion, with a sudden, "Pst!" stepped behind a tree-trunk and went down on one knee. Without knowing the reason for this move, I did the same, and on my making a motion with my eyebrows, as much as to say, "What's up?" Dick whispered:

"Do you see that white patch on the other side of the clearing? An antelope with its back to us. I'll try to draw him over here, so that you may get a shot."

So saying, Dick took out a red cotton handkerchief, poked the corner of it into the muzzle of his rifle, and standing erect behind his tree, held out his flag at right angles.

At first the antelope took no notice, but presently, catching a glimpse of the strange object out of

the corner of his eye, he whirled round and stood for a moment facing us with his head held high. [Pg 57] A slight puff of wind fluttered the handkerchief; the antelope started as though to run; but finding himself unhurt, his curiosity got the better of his fears, and he came trotting straight across the clearing in order to get a closer view. At about a hundred yards distance he stopped, his body turned broadside to us, all ready to bolt at the shortest notice, when Dick whispered to me to shoot.



"IT WAS A SPLENDID CHANCE; NOBODY COULD ASK FOR A BETTER TARGET."

It was a splendid chance; nobody could ask for a better target; but do you think I could hold that rifle steady? Not a bit of it! Instead of one sight, I could see half a dozen; and finding that the longer I aimed the more I trembled, I at length pulled the trigger and chanced it. Where the bullet went I know not: somewhere southward; and so did the antelope, and at much the same pace, if I am any judge of speed.

"Never mind, old chap," said Dick, laughing. "That is liable to happen to anybody. Most people get a touch of the buck-fever the first time they try to shoot a wild animal. You'll probably find yourself all right the next chance you get."

"I'm afraid there's not likely to be a 'next chance,' is there?" I asked. "Won't that shot scare all [Pg 58] the deer out of the country?"

"I hardly think so: the deer are almost never disturbed down here; it isn't like the Mosby side, where the prospectors are tramping over the hills all the time."

"Don't they ever come down here, then?"

"No, never. There is a common saying, as you know, perhaps, that 'gold is where you find it'; meaning that it may be anywhere—one place is as likely as another. But, all the same, the prospectors seem to think the chances are better among the granite and porphyry rocks on the other side, where the formation has been cracked and broken and heaved up on end by volcanic force. They never trouble to come down here, where any one can see at a glance that the deposits have never been disturbed since they were first laid down at the bottom of a great inlet of the ocean."

"I see what you mean: and as nobody ever comes down here the deer are not fidgety and suspicious as they would be if they were always being disturbed."

"That's it, exactly. They are so unused to the presence of human beings that I doubt if they would take any notice of your shot except to cock their ears and sniff at the breeze for a minute or two. [Pg 59] Anyhow, we'll go ahead and find out. Let us go across this clearing and see if there isn't a spring

on the other side. That antelope was drinking when we first saw him, if I'm not mistaken."

Sure enough, just before we entered the trees again, we came upon a pool of water around the softened rim of which were many tracks of animals.

"Hallo!" cried Dick. "Just look here! See the wolf tracks—any number of them. It must be a great wolf country as well as a great deer country—in fact, because it is a great deer country. I shouldn't like to be caught here in the winter with so many wolves about; they are unpleasant neighbors when food is scarce."

"Are they dangerous to a man with a gun?" I asked.

"Yes, they are. One wolf—or even two—doesn't matter much to a man with a breach-loading rifle; but when a dozen or twenty get after you, you'll do well to go up a tree and stay there. A pack of hungry wolves is no trifle, I can tell you."

"Have you ever had any experience with them yourself?"

"I did once, and a mighty distressing one it was, though it didn't hurt me, personally. I was out [Pg 60]
hunting with my dog, Blucher, a little short-legged, long-bodied fellow of no particular breed, and was up among the tall timber east of the house, going along suspecting nothing, when Blucher, all of a sudden, began to whine and crowd against my legs. I looked back, and there I saw six big timber-wolves slipping down a hill about a quarter of a mile behind me. They stopped when I stopped, but as soon as I moved, on they came again—it was very uncomfortable, especially when two of them vanished among the trees, and I couldn't tell whether they might not be running to get round the other side of me. I went on up the next rise, the wolves keeping about the same distance behind me, and as soon as we were out of their sight, Blucher and I ran for it. But it was no use: the wolves had taken the same opportunity, and when I looked back again, there they were, all six of them, not a hundred yards behind this time.

"It began to look serious; for though it was possible that they were after Blucher, and not after me at all, I couldn't be sure of that. So, first picking out a tree to go up in case of necessity, I [Pg 61]
knelt down and fired into the bunch, getting one. I had hoped that the others would turn and run, but the shot seemed to have a directly opposite effect: the remaining five wolves came charging straight at me.

"I gave the dog one kick and yelled at him to 'Go home!'—it was all I could do—dropped my rifle, jumped for a branch, and was out of reach when the wolves rushed past in pursuit of Blucher.

"Poor little beast! Though he was a mongrel with no pretence at a pedigree, he was a good hunting dog and a faithful friend. But what chance had he in a race with five long-legged, half-starved timber-wolves? It happened out of my sight, I am glad to say; all I heard was one yelp, followed by an angry snarling, and then all was silent again."

Dick paused for a moment, his face looking very grim for a boy, and then continued: "I've hated the sight and the sound of wolves ever since. Of course, I know they were only following their nature, but—I can't help it—I hate a wolf, and that's all there is to it."

"I don't wonder," said I. "Any one——"

"Hark!" cried Dick, clapping his hand on my arm. "Did you hear that? Listen!"

We stood silent for a moment, and then, far off in the direction from which we had come, I heard [Pg 62]
a curious whimpering sound, the nature of which I could not understand.

"What is it?" I whispered, involuntarily sinking my voice.

"Wolves—hunting."

"Hunting what?"

"I don't know; but we'll move away from here, anyhow. Come on."

Dick's manner, more than his words, made me feel a little uneasy and I followed him very willingly as he set off at a smart walk through the timber.

"You don't suppose they are hunting us, Dick, do you?" I asked, as we strode along side by side.

"I can't tell yet. It seems hardly likely—in daylight, and at this time of year. I could understand it if it were winter. If they are hunting us, it is probably because they, like the deer, are unacquainted with men, and never having been shot at, they don't know what danger they are running into. Still, I feel a little suspicious that it is our trail they are following. They are coming down right on the line we took, at any rate. We shall be able to decide, though, in a minute or [Pg 63]
two. Look ahead. Do you see how the trees are thinning out? We are coming to another open space, a big one, I think; I noticed it when we were up on the ridge just now."

"What good will that do us?" I asked.

"We shall be able to get a sight of them. Come on. I'll show you."

True enough, we presently stepped out from among the trees again and found ourselves on the edge of another open, grassy space, very much larger than the last one. It was about three hundred yards across to the other side, and a mile in length from east to west. We had struck it

about midway of its east-and-west length. Out into the open Dick walked some twenty yards, and there stopped once more to listen.

We had not long to wait. The eager whimper came again, much nearer, and now and then a quavering howl. I did not like the sound at all. I looked at Dick, who was standing "facing the music" and frowning thoughtfully.

"Well, Dick!" I exclaimed, getting impatient.

"I think they are after us," said he.

"And what do you mean to do? Not stay out here in the open, I suppose."

"Not we; at least, not for more than five minutes. Look here, Frank," he went on, speaking [Pg 64] quickly. "I'll tell you what I propose to do. We'll keep out here in the open, about this distance from the trees, and make straight eastward for the Mosby Ridge; it is only half a mile or so to the woods at that end of the clearing and we can make it in five minutes. Then, if the wolves are truly hunting us, they will follow our trail out into the open, when we shall get a sight of them and be able to count them. If they are only three or four we can handle them all right, but if there is a big pack of them we shall have to take to a tree. Give me your rifle to carry—my breathing machinery is better used to it than yours—and we'll make a run for it."

It was only a short half-mile we had to run—quite enough for me, though—and under the first tree we came to, Dick stopped.

"This will do," said he, handing back my rifle. "We'll wait here now and watch. Hark! They're getting pretty close. Hallo! Hallo! Why, look there, Frank!"

That Dick should thus exclaim was not to be wondered at, for out from the trees, scarce a hundred paces from us, there came, not the wolves, but a man! And such an odd-looking man, riding on such an odd-looking steed!

"What is he riding on, Dick?" I asked. "A mule?" [Pg 65]

"No; a burro—a jack—a donkey; a big one, too; and it need be, for he is a tremendous fellow. Did you ever see such a chest?"

"Is he an Indian?"

"No; a Mexican. An Indian wouldn't deign to ride a burro. I understand it all now. The wolves are not hunting us at all: they are after the donkey. And the man is aware of it, too: see how he keeps looking behind. What is that thing he is carrying in his left hand? A bow?"

"Yes; a bow. And a quiver of arrows over his shoulder."

"So he has! He doesn't seem to be in much of a hurry, does he? Evidently he is not much afraid of the wolves. Why, he's stopping to wait for them! He's a plucky fellow. Why, Frank, just look! Did you ever see such a queer-looking specimen?"

This exclamation was drawn from my companion involuntarily when the Mexican, checking his donkey, sprang to the ground. He certainly was a queer-looking specimen. If he had looked like a giant on donkey-back, he looked like a dwarf on foot; for, though his head was big and his body [Pg 66] huge, his legs were so short that he appeared to be scarce five feet high; while his muscular arms were of such length that he could touch his knees without stooping.

To add to his strange appearance, the man was clad in a long, sleeveless coat made of deer-skin, with the hairy side out.

We had hardly had time to take in all these peculiarities when Dick once more exclaimed:

"Ah! Here they come! One, two, three—only five of them after all."

As he spoke, the wolves came loping out from among the trees; but the moment they struck our cross-trail the suspicious, wary creatures all stopped with one accord, puzzled by coming upon a scent they had not expected.

This was the Mexican's opportunity. Raising his long left arm, he drew an arrow to its head and let fly.

I thought he had missed, for I saw the arrow strike the ground and knock up a little puff of dust. But I was mistaken. One of the wolves gave a yelp, ran back a few steps, fell down, got up again and ran another few steps, fell again, and this time lay motionless. The arrow had gone right through him!

Almost at the same instant Dick raised his rifle and fired. The shot was electrical. One of the [Pg 67] wolves fell, when the remaining three instantly turned tail and ran.

But not only did the wolves run: the Mexican, casting one glance in our direction, sprang upon his donkey and away he went, at a pace that was surprising considering the respective sizes of man and beast.

It was in vain that Dick ran out from under our tree and shouted after him something in Spanish. I could distinguish the word, *amigos*, two or three times repeated, but the man took no notice.

Perhaps he did not believe in friendships so suddenly declared. At any rate, he neither looked back nor slackened his pace, and in a minute or less he and his faithful steed vanished into the timber on the south side of the clearing.

The whole incident had not occupied five minutes; but for the presence of the two dead wolves one would have been tempted to believe it had never happened at all—solitude and silence reigned once more.

"Well, wasn't that a queer thing!" cried Dick.

"It certainly was," I replied. "I wonder who the man is. Anyhow, he's not coming back, so let's go and pick up his arrow."

CHAPTER IV [Pg 68]

Racing the Storm

Walking over to where the two wolves lay, we soon found the arrow, its head buried out of sight in the hard ground, showing with what force it had come from the bow. It was carefully made of a bit of some hard wood, scraped down to the proper diameter, and fitted with three feathers—eagle feathers, Dick said—one-third as long as the shaft, very neatly bound on with some kind of fine sinew.

"Looks like a Ute arrow," remarked my companion, as he stooped to pick it up; "yet the man was a Mexican, I am sure. I suppose he must have got it from the Indians."

"Do the Utes use copper arrow-heads?" I asked.

"No, they don't. They use iron or steel nowadays. Why do you ask?"

"Because this arrow-head is copper," I replied.

"Why, so it is!" cried Dick, rubbing the soil from the point on his trouser-leg. "That's very odd. I [Pg 69] never saw one before. I feel pretty sure the Indians never use copper: it is too soft. This bit seems to take an edge pretty well, though. See, the point doesn't seem to have been damaged by sticking into the ground; and it has been filed pretty sharp, too; or, what is more likely, rubbed sharp on a stone. It has evidently been made by hand from a piece of native copper."

"I wonder why the man should choose to use copper," said I. "Though when you come to think of it, Dick," I added, "I don't see why it shouldn't make a pretty good arrow-head. It is soft metal, of course, but it is only soft by comparison with other metals. This wedge of copper weighs two or three ounces, and it is quite hard enough to go through the hide of an animal at twenty or thirty yards' distance when 'fired' with the force that this one was."

"That's true. And I expect the explanation is simple enough why the man uses copper. It is probably from necessity and not from choice. Like nearly all Mexicans of the peon class, he probably never has a cent of money in his possession. Consequently, as he can't buy a gun, he uses a bow; and for the same reason, being unable to procure iron for arrow-heads, he uses [Pg 70] copper. I expect he comes from the settlement at the foot of the valley, for copper is a very common metal down there."

"Why should it be more common there than elsewhere?" I asked.

"Well, that's the question—and a very interesting question, too. The professor and I were down in that neighborhood about a year ago, and on going into the village we were a good deal surprised to find that every household seemed to possess a bowl or a pot or a cup or a dipper or all four, perhaps, hammered out of native copper—all of them having the appearance of great age. There were dozens of them altogether."

"How do they get them?" I asked.

"That's the question again—and the Mexicans themselves don't seem to know. They say, if you ask them, that they've always had them. And the professor did ask them. He went into one house after another and questioned the people, especially the old people, as to where the copper came from; but none of them could give him any information. I wondered why he should be so persevering in the matter—though when there is anything he desires to learn, no trouble is too much for him—but after we had left the place he explained it all to me, and then I ceased to [Pg 71] wonder."

"What was his explanation, then?"

"He told me that when he was in Santa Fé about fifteen years before, he made the acquaintance of a Spanish gentleman of the remarkable name of Blake——"

"Blake!" I interrupted. "That's a queer name for a Spaniard."

"Yes," replied Dick. "The professor says he was a descendant of one of those Irishmen who fled to the continent in the time of William III, of England, most of them going into the service of the king of France and others to other countries—Austria and Spain in particular."

"Well, go ahead. Excuse me for interrupting."

"Well, this gentleman was engaged in hunting through the old Spanish records kept there in Santa Fé, looking up something about the title to a land-grant, I believe, and he told the professor that in the course of his search he had frequently come across copies of reports to the Spanish government of shipments of copper from a mine called the King Philip mine. That it was a mine of importance was evident from the frequency and regularity of the 'returns,' which were kept up [Pg 72] for a number of years, until somewhere about the year 1720, if I remember rightly, they began to become irregular and then suddenly ceased altogether."

"Why?"

"There was no definite statement as to why; but from the reports it appeared that the miners were much harried by the Indians, sometimes the Navajos and sometimes the Utes, while the loss, partial or total, of two or three trains with their escorts, seemed to bring matters to a climax. Shipments ceased and the mine was abandoned."

"That's interesting," said I. "And where was this King Philip mine?"

"The gentleman could not say. There seemed to be no map or description of any kind among the records; but from casual statements, such as notes of the trains being delayed by floods in this or that creek, or by snow blockades on certain passes, he concluded that the mine was somewhere up in this direction."

"Well, that is certainly very interesting. And the professor, I suppose, concludes that the Mexicans down there at—— What's the name of the place?"

"Hermanos—called so after the two peaks, at the foot of which it stands."

"The professor concludes, I suppose, that the Mexicans' unusual supply of copper pots and pans [Pg 73] came originally from the King Philip mine."

"Yes; and I've no doubt they did; though the Mexicans themselves had never heard of such a mine. Yet—and it shows how names will stick long after people have forgotten their origin—yet, just outside the village there stands a big, square adobe building, showing four blank walls to the outside, with a single gateway cut through one of them, flat-roofed and battlemented—a regular fortress—and it is called to this day the *Casa del Rey*:—the King's House. Now, why should it be called the King's House? The Mexicans have no idea; but to me it seems plain enough. The King Philip mine was probably a royal mine, and the residence of the king's representative, the storage-place for the product of the mine, the headquarters of the soldier escort, would naturally be called the King's House."

"It seems likely, doesn't it? Is that the professor's opinion?"

"Yes. He feels sure that the King Philip mine is not far from the village; possibly—in fact, probably—in the Dos Hermanos mountains."

"And did he ever make any attempt to find it?" [Pg 74]

"Not he. Prospecting is altogether out of his line. It was only the historical side of the matter that interested him. All he did was to write to the Señor Blake at Cadiz, in Spain, telling him about it; though whether the letter ever reached its destination he has never heard."

"And who lives in the King's House now?" I asked. "Anybody?"

"Yes. It is occupied by a man named Galvez, the 'padron' of the village, who owns, or claims, all the country down there for five miles square—the Hermanos Grant. We did not see him when we were there, but from what we heard of him, he seems to regard himself as lord of creation in those parts, owning not only the land, but the village and the villagers, too."

"How so? How can he own the villagers?"

"Why, it is not an uncommon state of affairs in these remote Mexican settlements. The padron provides the people with the clothes or the tools or the seed they require on credit, taking security on next year's crop, and so manages matters as to get them into debt and keep them there; for they are an improvident lot. In this way they fall into a state of chronic indebtedness, [Pg 75] working their land practically for the benefit of the padron and becoming in effect little better than slaves."

"I see. A pretty miserable condition for the poor people, isn't it? And doesn't this man, Galvez, with his superior intelligence—presumably—know anything of the King Philip mine?"

"Apparently not."

"My word, Dick!" I exclaimed. "What fun it would be to go and hunt for it ourselves, wouldn't it?"

"Wouldn't it! I've often thought of it before, but I know the professor would never consent. He would consider it a waste of time. It's an idea worth keeping in mind, though, at any rate. There's never any telling what may turn up. We might get the chance somehow; though I confess I don't see how. But we must be moving, Frank," said he, suddenly changing the subject. "It's getting latish. Hallo!"

"What's the matter?" I asked, looking wonderingly at my companion, who, with his hand held up

to protect his eyes from the glare, was standing, staring at the sun.

"Why, the matter is, Frank, that the professor will say that I've neglected my duty, I'm afraid. You remember he told me to look out for a change of weather? I'd forgotten all about it." [Pg 76]

"Well," said I, "I don't see that that matters. There's no sign of a change, is there?"

"Yes, there is. Look up there. Do you see a number of tiny specks all hurrying across the face of the sun from north to south?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Snow."

"Snow!" I cried, incredulously. "How can it be snow, when there isn't a scrap of cloud visible anywhere?"

"It is snow, all the same," said Dick; "old snow blown from the other side of Mescalero."

"But how can that be, Dick? All the snow we found up there was packed like ice."

"Ah, but we were on the south side. On the north side, where the sun has no effect, it is still as loose and as powdery as it was when it fell."

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that. There must be a pretty stiff breeze blowing overhead to keep it hung up in the sky like that and not allow a speck of it to fall down here."

"Yes, it's blowing great guns up there, all right, and I am afraid we shall be getting it ourselves before long. We must dig out of here hot foot, Frank. I hope we haven't stayed too long as it is." [Pg 77]

It was hard to believe that there was anything to fear from the weather, with the unclouded sun shining down upon us with such power as to be almost uncomfortably hot; but Dick, I could see, felt uneasy, and as I could not presume to set up my judgment against his larger experience, I did not wait to ask any more questions, but set off side by side with him when he started eastward at a pace which required the saving of all my breath to keep up with him.

We had been walking through the woods for about half an hour and were expecting to begin the ascent of the Mosby Ridge in a few minutes, when we were brought to a standstill by coming suddenly upon the edge of a deep cleft in the earth, cutting across our course at right angles. It was one of the many cañons for which the Mescalero valley was notorious.

Looking across the cañon, we could see that the opposite wall was composed of a thick bed of limestone overlying another of sandstone, the latter, being the softer, so scooped out that the limestone cap projected several feet beyond it. It appeared to be quite unscalable, and on our side it was doubtless the same, for, on cautiously approaching the edge as near as we dared, we could see that the cliff fell sheer for three hundred feet or more. [Pg 78]

"No getting down here!" cried Dick. "Up stream, Frank! The cañon will shallow in that direction."

Away we went again along the edge of the gorge, and presently were rejoiced to find a place where the cliff had broken away, enabling us, with care, to climb down to the bottom. The other side, however, presented no possible chance of getting out, so on we went, following up the dry bed of the arroyo, looking out sharply for some break by which we might climb up, when, on rounding a slight bend, Dick stopped so suddenly that I, who was close on his heels, bumped up against him.

"What's the matter, Dick?" I asked. "What are you stopping for?"

"Look up there at Mescalero," said he.

It was the first glimpse of the mountain we had had since entering the woods at the head of the valley, and the change in its appearance was alarming. The only part of it we could see was the summit, standing out clear and sharp against the sky; all the rest of it, and of the whole range as well, was shrouded by a heavy gray cloud, which, creeping round either side of the peak, was rolling down our side of the range, slowly and steadily filling up and blotting out each gully and ravine as it came to it. There was a stealthy, vindictive look about it I did not at all like. [Pg 79]

"Snow, Dick?" I asked.

"Yes, and lots of it, I'm afraid. See how the cloud comes creeping down—like cold molasses. I expect it is so heavy with snow that it can't float in the thin air up there, and the north wind is just shouldering it up over the range from behind. We've got to get out of here, Frank, as fast as we can and make the top of the Mosby Ridge, if possible, before that cloud catches us. Once on the other side, we're pretty safe: I know the country; but on this side I don't. So, let us waste no more time—we have none to waste, I can tell you."

Nor did we waste any, for neither of us had any inclination to linger, but pushing forward once more along the bottom of the cañon, we presently espied a place where we thought we might climb out. Scrambling up the steep slope of shaly detritus, we had come almost to the top, when to our disappointment we found our further progress barred by a little cliff, not more than eight feet high, but slightly overhanging, and so smooth that there was no hold for either feet or fingers. [Pg 80]

"Up on my shoulders, Frank!" cried my companion, laying down his rifle and leaning his arms against the rock and his head against his arms.

In two seconds I was standing on his shoulders, but even then I could not get any hold for my hands on the smooth, curved, shaly bank which capped the limestone. Only a foot out of my reach, however, there grew a little pine tree, about three inches thick, and whipping off my belt I lashed at the tree trunk with it. The end of the belt flew round; I caught it; and having now both ends in my hands I quickly relieved my companion of his burden and crawled up out of the ravine.

Then, buckling the belt to the tree, I took the loose end in one hand, and lying down flat I received and laid aside the two rifles which Dick handed up to me, one at a time. Dick himself, though, was out of reach, perceiving which, I pulled off my coat, firmly grasped the collar and let [Pg 81] down the other end to him, lying, myself, face downward upon the stones, with the end of the belt held tight in the other hand.

"All set?" cried Dick; and, "All set!" I shouted in reply. There was a violent jerk upon the coat, and the next thing, there was Dick himself kneeling beside me.

"Well done, old chap!" cried he. "That was a great idea. Now, then, let's be off. I'll carry the two rifles. It's plain sailing now. Straight up the Ridge for those two great rocks that stand up there like a gateway to the pass. I know the place. Only a couple of thousand feet to climb and then we begin to go down-hill. We shall make it now. Come on!"

The trees were thin just here, and as we started to ascend the pass we obtained one more glimpse of Mescalero—the last one we were to get that day. The bank of cloud had advanced about half a mile since we first caught sight of it, while it had become so much thicker as the wind rolled it up from the other side of the range, that now only the very tip of the mountain showed above it. Even as we watched it, a great fold of the cloud passed over the summit, hiding it altogether.

"See that, Dick?" said I.

"Yes," he replied. "A very big snow, I expect. Hark! Do you hear that faint humming? The wind in [Pg 82] the pines. We shall be getting it soon. Come on, now; stick close to my heels; if I go too fast, call out."

Away we went up the pass, pressing forward at the utmost speed I could stand, desperately anxious to get as far ahead as possible before the storm should overtake us. The ascent, though very steep on this side, presented no other special difficulty, and at the end of an hour we had come close to the two great rocks for which we had been making.

All this time the sun continued to shine down upon us, though with diminishing power as the hurrying snowflakes passing above our heads became thicker and thicker; while, as to the storm-cloud itself, we could not see how near it had come, for the pine-clad mountain, rising high on our left hand, obstructed our view in that direction. That it was not far off, though, we were pretty sure, for the humming of the wind in the woods—the only thing by which we could judge—though faint at first, had by this time increased to a roar.

The storm was, in fact, much nearer than we imagined, and just as we passed between the [Pg 83] "gateway" rocks it burst upon us with a fury and a suddenness that, to me at least, were appalling.

Almost as though a door had been slammed in our faces, the light of the sun was cut off, leaving us in twilight gloom, and with a roar like a stampede of cattle across a wooden bridge, a swirling, blinding smother of snow, driven by a furious wind, rushed through the "gateway," taking us full in the face, with such violence that Dick was thrown back against me, nearly knocking us both from our feet. Instinctively, we crouched for shelter behind the rock, and there we waited a minute or two to recover breath and collect our senses.

"Pretty bad," said Dick. "But it might have been worse: it isn't very cold—not yet; we have only about two miles to go, and I know the lay of the land. We'll start again as soon as you are ready. I'll go first and you follow close behind. Whatever you do, don't lose sight of me for an instant: it won't do to get lost. Hark! Did you hear that?"

There was a rending crash, as some big tree gave way before the storm. It was a new danger, one I had not thought of before. I looked apprehensively at my companion.

"Suppose one of them should fall on us, Dick," said I. [Pg 84]

"Suppose it shouldn't," replied Dick. "That is just as easy to suppose, and a good deal healthier."

I confess I had been feeling somewhat scared. The sudden gloom, the astonishing fury of the wind, the confusing whirl and rush of the snow, and then from some point unknown the sharp breaking of a tree, sounding in the midst of the universal roar like the crack of a whip—all this, coming all together and so suddenly, was quite enough, I think, to "rattle" a town-bred boy.

But if panic is catching, so is courage. Dick's prompt and sensible remark acted like a tonic. Springing to my feet, I cried:

"You are right, old chap! Come on. Let's step right out at once. I'm ready."

It was most fortunate that Dick knew where he was, for the light was so dim and the snow so thick that we could see but a few paces ahead; while the wind, though beating in general against our left cheeks, was itself useless as a guide, for, being deflected by the ridges and ravines of the mountain, it would every now and then strike us square in the face, stopping us dead, and the next moment leap upon us from behind, sending me stumbling forward against my leader. [Pg 85]

In spite of its vindictive and ceaseless assaults, though, Dick kept straight on, his head bent and his cap pulled down over his ears; while I, following three feet behind, kept him steadily in view. Presently he stopped with a joyful shout.

"Hurrah, Frank!" he cried. "Look here! Now we are all right. Here's a thread to hold on by: as good as a rope to a drowning man."

The "thread" was a little stream of water, appearing suddenly from I know not where, and running off in the direction we were going.

"This will take us home, Frank!" my companion shouted in my ear. "It runs down and joins our own creek about a quarter of a mile above the house. With this for a guide we are all safe; we mustn't lose it, that's all. And we won't do that: we'll get into it and walk in the water if we have to. Best foot foremost, now! All down-hill! Hurrah, for us!"

Dick's cheerful view of the situation was very encouraging, though, as a matter of fact, it was a pretty desperate struggle we had to get down the mountain, with the darkness increasing and the snow becoming deeper every minute. Indeed it was becoming a serious question with me [Pg 86] whether I could keep going much longer, when at the end of the most perilous hour I ever went through, we at last came down to the junction of the creeks, and turning to our right presently caught sight of a lighted window.

Five minutes later we were safe inside the professor's house—and high time too, for I could not have stood much more of it: I had just about reached the end of my tether. But the warmth and rest and above all the assurance of safety quickly had their effect, and very soon I found myself seated before the fire consuming with infinite gusto a great bowl of strong, hot soup which Romero had made all ready for us; thus comfortably winding up the most eventful day of my existence—up to that moment.

CHAPTER V [Pg 87]

How Dick Brought the News

"You ran it rather too close, Dick," said the professor, with a shake of his head, when we had told him the story of our race with the storm. "I was beginning to be afraid; not so much for you as for your companion: it was too big an undertaking for him, considering that it was his first day in the mountains; even leaving out the risk of the snow-storm."

"I'm afraid I was thoughtless," replied Dick, penitently; "especially in not looking out for a change of weather. It did run us too close, as you say—a great deal too close. But there is one thing I can do, anyhow, to repair that error to some extent, and I'll be off at once and do it."

So saying, Dick, who by this time had finished his supper, jumped out of his chair and began putting on his overcoat.

"Where are you off to, Dick?" I exclaimed. "Not going out again to-night?"

"Only a little way," replied Dick. "Down to the town to let your uncle know that you are all safe. [Pg 88] He'll be pretty anxious, I expect."

I had thought of that, but I could see no way of getting over it. I could not go myself, for even if I had dared to venture I had not the strength for it, and of course I could not expect any one else to do it for me. My first thought, therefore, when Dick announced that he was going, was one of satisfaction; though my next thought, following very quickly upon the first one, was to protest against his doing any such thing.

"No, no, Dick," I cried, "it's too risky—you mustn't! Uncle Tom will be worried, I know, but he will conclude that I am staying the night with you. And though I should be glad to have his mind relieved, I don't consider—and he would say the same, I'm pretty sure—that that is a good enough reason for you to take such a risk."

"Thanks, old chap," replied Dick; "but it isn't so much of a risk as you think. Going down wind to the town is a very different matter from coming down that rough mountain with the storm beating on us from every side. I've been over the trail a thousand times, and I believe I could follow it with my eyes shut; and, anyhow, to lose your way is pretty near impossible, you know, [Pg 89] with the cañon on your right hand and the mountain on your left. So, don't you worry yourself, Frank: I'll be under cover again in an hour or less."

Seeing that the professor nodded approval, I protested no more, though I still had my doubts about letting him go.

"Well, Dick," said I, "it's mighty good of you. I wish I could go, too, but that is out of the question,

I'm afraid: I should only hamper you if I tried. I can tell you one thing, anyhow: Uncle Tom will appreciate it—you may be sure of that."

In this I was right, though I little suspected at the moment in what form his appreciation was to show itself. As a matter of fact, Dick's action in braving the storm a second time that evening was to be a turning-point in his fortune and mine.

"Good-night, Frank," said he. "I'll be back again in the morning, I expect. Hope you'll sleep as well in my bed as I intend to do in yours. Good-night."

So saying, Dick, this time overcoated, gloved and ear-capped, opened the door and stepped out. Watching him from the window, I saw him striding off down wind, to be lost to sight in ten seconds in the maze of driving snow. [Pg 90]

"Are you sure it's all right, Professor?" said I, anxiously. "There's time yet to call him back."

"It is all right," replied my host, reassuringly. "You need not fear. Dick has been out in many a storm before, and he knows very well how to take care of himself. You may be sure I would not let him go if I thought it were not all right. And now, I think, it would be well if you took possession of Dick's bed. You have had a very hard day and need a good long rest."

To this I made no objection, and early though it was, I was asleep in five minutes, too tired to be disturbed even by the insistent banging and howling of the storm outside.

Meanwhile, Uncle Tom, down in the town, was, as I had suspected, fretting and fuming and worrying himself in his uncertainty as to whether I was safe under cover or not.

The storm had taken the town by surprise, for the morning had opened gloriously, clear and sharp and still, as it had done every day for a month past, and most people naturally supposed there was to be another day as fine as those which had gone before; little suspecting that the north wind, up there among the icebound peaks and gorges of the mother range, was at that moment marshaling its forces for a mad rush down into the valley. [Pg 91]

And how should they suspect? Of the three hundred people comprising the population, not one, not even old Jeff Andrews himself, the patriarch of the district, had spent more than two winters in the camp. In the year of its founding there were about a dozen men and no women who had braved the hardships of the first winter, but as the fame of the new camp extended to the outer world, other people began to come in, slowly at first and then in larger numbers, so that by this time the population numbered, as I said, about three hundred souls, including twenty-one women and two babies; while at a rough guess I should say there was about two-thirds of a dog to each citizen, counting in the twelve children of school age and the two babies as well.

These dogs, by the way, were the chief source of entertainment in the town, for during the hours of daylight there was always a fight going on somewhere, while at night most of them, especially the younger ones, used to sit out in the middle of the street barking defiance at the coyotes, which, from the hills all round, howled back at them in unceasing chorus. This part of the programme was changed, however, later in the winter, for one half-cloudy night the blacksmith's long-legged shepherd pup, seated in front of the forge door, was barking himself hoarse at the moon when a big timber-wolf came slipping down out of the woods and finished the puppy's song and his existence with one snap. After this the other dogs were more careful about the hours they kept. [Pg 92]

But to return to the human part of the population. Considering how few of them had spent a winter in this high valley; remembering that every one of the grown-up citizens had been born in some other State, and that the very great majority were newcomers in Colorado, it is not to be wondered at that the storm should have caught them unawares. For, in Colorado, if there is one thing almost impossible to forecast it is the weather, especially in the mountains where it is made, where the snow-storms and the thunder-storms, brewing in secret behind the peaks, bounce out on you before you know it.

So, on this sunshiny morning, most people went about their usual occupations unsuspicious of evil; it was only the few old-timers who divined what was coming, and their little precautions, such as shutting their doors and windows before leaving the house, merely excited a smile or a word of chaff from the "plum-sure" newcomers. For it is always the new arrival who thinks he can predict the weather; the old-stager, having had experience enough to be aware that he knows nothing about it for certain, can seldom be persuaded to venture a decided opinion. [Pg 93]

Tied to a hitching-post outside the assayer's door that afternoon were two ponies, and about two o'clock Mr. Warren, himself, and Uncle Tom, issued from the house, prepared for their ride up on Cape Horn—a big, bare mountain lying southeast of town. As they stepped down from the porch, however, Warren happened to notice old Jeff Andrews walking up the street, carrying over his shoulder a great buffalo-skin overcoat, which, considering the warmth of the day, seemed rather out of place.

"Hallo, Jeff!" the assayer called out. "What are you carrying that thing for? Are we going to have a change?"

Jeff, a gray-bearded, round-shouldered man of sixty, with a face burnt all of one color by years of life in the open, paused for a moment before replying, and then, knowing that the assayer was not one of those "guying tenderfeet," for whom, as he expressed it, "he had no manner of use," he [Pg 94]

answered genially:

"Well, gents, I ain't no weather prophet—I'll leave that business to the latest arrival—but I have my suspicions. Just look up overhead."

The old man had detected the hurrying snowflakes passing across the face of the sun, and though to Uncle Tom there was nothing unusual to be seen, the assayer understood the signs.

"Wind, Jeff?" said he.

"And snow," replied the old prospector. "Was you going to ride up on Cape Horn this evening, Mr. Warren? Well, if I was you, I wouldn't. Cape Horn lies south o' here, and if a storm from the north catches you up there on that bare mountain you may not be able to work your way back again. If I was you, I'd put the ponies back in the stable and lay low for a spell."

"Thank you, Jeff," responded the assayer. "I believe that's a good idea. I think we shall do well, Tom, to postpone our trip. No use running the risk of being caught out in a blizzard: it's a bit too [Pg 95] dangerous to suit me."

The ponies, therefore, were taken back to the stable and the two men, returning to the house, sat down on the sunny porch to await developments.

The snow-cloud was already half way down the range and it was not long ere the murmur of the wind among the distant trees began to make itself heard, giving warning of what was coming to a few of the more observant people.

"It looks pretty threatening, Sam," said Uncle Tom. "I don't like the way that cloud comes creeping down. I hope those boys will notice it in time."

"I don't think you need worry about them," replied the assayer. "Young Dick is well able to take care of himself. He knows the signs as well as anybody."

"Well, I hope he'll notice them in time. Going indoors, are you?"

"Yes; if you don't mind, I'll leave you for the present. I have some work I want to finish up. Let me know when it comes pretty close so that I may get my windows shut. It will come with a 'whoop' when it does come."

As the assayer rose to his feet, he observed across the street the proprietor of the corner grocery [Pg 96] standing in his doorway with his hands in his pockets.

"Hallo, Jackson!" he called out. "You'd better take in those loose boxes from the sidewalk if you want to save them: there's a big blow coming pretty soon."

"Oh, I guess not," replied the grocer, a fat-faced, self-satisfied man, one of those "dead-sure weather prophets" for whom old Jeff felt such supreme contempt. "I reckon I'll chance it."

He cast a glance skyward, and deceived by the sparkling brilliancy of the sun, he added under his breath, "Big blow! As if any one couldn't see with half an eye that there isn't a sign of wind in the sky."

"All right, Jackson, suit yourself," replied Warren; adding on his part, as an aside to Uncle Tom, "He'll change his mind in about half an hour, if I'm not mistaken."

For about that length of time Uncle Tom continued to sit on the porch watching the approaching cloud and listening to the increasing murmur of the wind, when, on the crown of a high ridge about a mile above town he saw all the pine trees with one accord suddenly bend their heads [Pg 97] toward him, as though making him a stately obeisance.

Springing out of his chair, Uncle Tom bolted into the house, slamming the door behind him and calling out: "Here it comes, Sam! Here it comes!"

It did. The roar of its approach was now plainly audible; there was a hurrying and scurrying of men and women, a banging of doors and a slamming down of windows; even the incredulous grocer, convinced at last, made a dive for his loose boxes—but just too late.

With a shriek, as of triumph at catching them all unprepared, the wind came raging down the street, making a clean sweep of everything. A young mining camp is not as a rule over-particular about the amount of rubbish that encumbers its streets, and Mosby was no exception to the rule, but in five minutes it was swept as clean as though the twenty-one housewives had been at work on it for a week with broom and scrubbing-brush.

Heralded by a cloud of mingled dust and snow, a whole covey of paper scraps, loose straw and a few hats, went whirling down the street, followed by a dozen or two of empty tin cans, while behind them, with infinite clatter, came three lengths of stove-pipe from the bakery chimney, [Pg 98] closely pursued by an immense barrel which had once contained crockery.

As though enjoying the fun, this barrel came bounding down the roadway, making astonishing leaps, until, at the grocery corner, it encountered the only one of the empty boxes which had not already gone south, and glancing off at an angle, went bang through the show window!

It was as though My Lord, the North Wind, aware of Mr. Jackson's incredulity, had sent an emissary to convince him that he *did* intend to blow that day.

From that moment the wind and the snow had it all their own way; not a citizen dared to show his nose outside.

It was an uneasy day for Uncle Tom. Knowing full well the extreme danger of being caught on the mountain in such a storm, he could not help feeling anxious for our safety, and though his host tried to reassure him by repeating his confidence in Dick Stanley's good sense and experience, he grew more and more fidgety as the day wore on and darkness began to settle down upon the town.

In fact, by sunset, Uncle Tom had worked himself up to a high state of nervousness. He kept [Pg 99] pacing up and down the room like a caged beast, unconsciously puffing at a cigar which had gone out half an hour before; then striding to the window to look out—a disheartening prospect, for not even the corner grocery was visible now. Then back he would come, plump himself into his chair before the fire, only to jump up again in fifteen seconds to go through the same performance once more.

At length he flung his cigar-stump into the fire, and turning to his friend, exclaimed:

"Sam, I can't stand this uncertainty any longer. I'm going out to see if I can't find somebody who will undertake to go up to the professor's house and back for twenty dollars, just to make sure those boys have got safe home. I'd go myself, only I know I should never get there."

The assayer shook his head.

"No use, Tom," said he. "You couldn't get one to go; at least, not for money. If it were to dig a friend out of the snow you could raise a hundred men in a minute; but for money—no. I don't believe you could get any of them to face this storm for twenty dollars—or fifty, either. They would say, 'What's the use? If the boys are in, they're in; if they're not——'"

"Well, if they're not—— What? I know what you mean. You chill me all through, Sam, with your [Pg 100] 'ifs.' Look here, old man, isn't there *anybody* who would go? Think, man, think!"

"We might try little Aleck Smith, the teamster," said the assayer, thoughtfully. "He's as tough as a bit of bailing-wire and plum full of grit. We'll try him anyhow. Come on. I'll go with you. It's only six houses down. Jump into your overcoat, old man!"

The two men turned to get their coats, when, at that moment, there came a thump upon the porch outside, as though somebody had jumped up the two steps at a bound, the door burst open and in the midst of a whirl of snow there was blown into the room the muffled, snow-coated figure of a boy, who, slamming the door behind him, leaned back against it, gasping for breath.

The men stared in astonishment, until the boy, pulling off his cap, revealed the face, scarlet from exposure, of Dick Stanley.

"Why, Dick!" cried the assayer. "What's the matter? Where's young Frank?"

"All safe, sir! Safe in our house, and in bed and asleep by this time."

"And did you come down through this howling storm to tell me?" cried Uncle Tom. [Pg 101]

"Yes, sir. But that wasn't anything so very much, you know: it was down-hill and downwind, too."

"Well, you may think what you like about it—but so may I, too; and my opinion is that there isn't another boy in the country would have done it. I shan't forget your service, Dick. You may count on that. I shan't forget it!"

Nor did he—as you will see.

CHAPTER VI [Pg 102]

The Professor's Story

What a change had come over the landscape when, at sunrise next morning, I jumped out of bed and went to the door to look out. Though the sky was as clear and as blue as ever, though Mescalero, swept bare by the wind, looked much as usual, all the lower parts of the range, except the crowns of the ridges, were buried under the snow. The woods were full of it; every hollow was leveled off so that one could hardly tell where it used to be; while the narrow valley itself was ridged and furrowed by great drifts piled up by freaks of the wind. It was cold, too, for with the falling of the wind and the clearing of the sky the temperature had dropped to zero. As so often happens in these parts, winter had arrived with a bang.

Closing the door, I hopped back to the jolly, roaring fire of logs which Romero had started an hour before, and there finished my dressing. While I was thus engaged, the professor came out of [Pg 103] the back room, where it was his custom to sleep—a queer choice—with a couple of thousand dead insects for company.

"Well, Frank," said he, cheerily. "Here's King Winter in all his glory. Rather a rough-and-tumble monarch, isn't he? When his majesty makes his royal progress, we, his humble subjects, do well to get out of his way and leave the course clear for him."

"That's true, sir," said I, laughing; and falling into the professor's humor, I added: "I never met a king before, and if King Winter is an example of the race I think we Americans were wise to get rid of them when we did."

"Oh," replied the professor, "you must not judge a whole order by one specimen: there are kings and kings, and some of them are very fine fellows. King Winter, though, is rather too boisterous and inconsiderate; and to tell you the truth, Frank, you had rather a narrow escape from him yesterday. I did not like to make too much of it before Dick; I did not want him to think I blamed him for what was, after all, merely an oversight; but as a matter of fact you ran a pretty big risk, as you may easily understand when you see the amount of snow that fell in about twelve hours; for the storm ceased and the sky cleared again about three o'clock this morning." [Pg 104]

"It was nip and tuck for us, sure enough," said I; "but if our getting caught in the storm was any fault of Dick's, there is one thing certain, sir: he got us out of it in great style. I wouldn't ask for a better guide. I was pretty badly scared myself, I don't mind owning"—the professor nodded, as much as to say, "I don't wonder,"—"but Dick," I continued, "did not seem to be flustered for a moment; he knew just what to do and pitched right in and did it. It seems to me, sir—though of course I don't set up to be a judge—that the most experienced mountaineer couldn't have done any better."

"Dick is a good boy," said the professor, evidently pleased at my standing up for his young friend; "and he seems to have a faculty for keeping his wits about him in an emergency. It has always been so, ever since he was a little boy. I suppose he has never told you, has he, how he once saved his donkey from a mountain-lion?"

"No, sir," I replied. "How was it?"

"He was about nine years old at the time, and as his little legs were too short to enable him to [Pg 105] keep up with me, I had given him a young burro to ride. We were camped one night on the Trinchera, not far from Fort Garland, when we were awakened by a great squealing on the part of the donkey, which was tethered a few feet away, and sitting up in our beds, which were on the ground under the open sky, we were just in time to see some big, cat-like animal spring upon the poor little beast and knock it over. Instead of crying and crawling under the blankets, as he might well have been excused for doing, little Dick sprang out of his bed—as did I also. But the youngster was twice as quick as I was, and without an instant's hesitation he seized a burning stick from the fire, ran right up to the mountain-lion—for that was what it was—and as the snarling creature raised its head, the plucky little chap thrust the hot end of his stick into its mouth, when, with a yell of pain and astonishment, the beast let go its hold and fled like a yellow streak into the woods again."

"Bully for Dick!" I cried. "That was pretty good, wasn't it? And was the donkey killed?"

"No; rather badly scratched; but Dick's promptness and courage saved it from anything more serious."

"Well, that was certainly pretty good for such a youngster," said I. "By the way, sir," I continued, [Pg 106] "there is one thing I should like to ask you, if you don't mind, about your life in the mountains, especially back in the 'sixties' and earlier, and that is, how you managed to escape being killed and scalped by the Indians."

My host laughed, and I could see by his face that he was thinking backward, as he slowly stirred his coffee round and round; for we were seated at our breakfast, Romero serving us.

"That *was* a serious question at first," he replied presently, "but I solved it very early in my wanderings; and now I—and Dick, too—may go among any of the tribes with impunity."

"Will you tell me about it, sir?" I asked, full of curiosity to know how he had worked such a seeming miracle.

The professor leaned back in his chair, stretched out his feet and folded his hands on the edge of the table.

"I will, with pleasure," he replied; "for it is rather a curious incident, I have always thought.

"Before I took up the profession of 'bug-hunting,' as the pursuit of entomology is irreverently termed by the people here, I had graduated as a physician—very fortunately for me, as it turned [Pg 107] out, for my knowledge of medicine was the basis of my reputation among the Indians. I was down in Arizona at one time, when, on coming to a little Mexican village, I found the poor people suffering from an epidemic of smallpox. Several had died, and the survivors, scared out of their wits, had given themselves up for lost. After my arrival, however, there were no more deaths, I am glad to say, and by the end of about a month I had succeeded in putting all my patients on the highroad to recovery.

"There was a little adobe ranch-house about a quarter of a mile up-stream from the village, the owner of which had died before my arrival, and this building I had utilized as a pest-house. I was on my way out to it one morning, with my little case of medicines in my hand, when I heard behind me a great crying out among the villagers, and looking back I saw them all scuttling for shelter, at the same time shouting and screaming, according to their age and sex, 'Apache! Apache!'

"The next moment, right through the middle of the village, riding like a whirlwind, came ten horsemen, who, paying no attention to the frightened Mexicans, made straight for me. Doubtless they had been hiding in the creek-bed among the willows since daylight, awaiting their opportunity to dash out and capture me—for, as I found later, it was I whom they were after. [Pg 108]

"To run was useless, to fight impossible, as I was unarmed, so, there being nothing else to do, I just stood still and waited for them. In a moment I was surrounded, when one of the Indians sprang from his horse and advanced upon me. He had, as I very well remember, his nose painted a bright green—a fearsome object. This apparition came striding toward me, and I supposed I was to be killed and scalped forthwith; but instead, my friend of the green nose, in halting Spanish, and with a deference which was as welcome as it was unexpected, explained to me that the fame of the great white medicine-man had extended far and wide; that the smallpox was ravaging their village; and that they had come to beg me to return with them and drive out the enemy.

"Greatly relieved to find that their mission was peaceful, I replied at once that I would come with pleasure, provided I were treated with the respect due to my quality, but that I must first visit the pest-house and leave directions for the care of my two remaining patients. To this—rather to my surprise—they readily consented, relying implicitly upon my promise to accompany them; an instance of trustfulness from which I could only infer, I regret to say, that they had had but little intercourse with white men. [Pg 109]

"The Indians had brought a horse for me, and after a long two-days' ride into the mountains, we reached the camp, consisting of about twenty lodges, where I found matters in pretty bad condition. I went to work vigorously, however, and again had the good fortune to rout the enemy without the loss of a patient; thereby, as you may suppose, gaining the lasting good will of every member of the tribe—with one exception.

"This exception—rather an important one—was the local medicine-man, who, having vainly endeavored to drive out the plague by the application of bad smells and worse noises, was not unnaturally consumed with jealousy of my superior success, and with the desire to discover what charms and spells I used to that end.

"On our way up from the Mexican settlement I had several times stopped to note the direction with a little pocket-compass I always carried about with me, on each of which occasions I had observed that the medicine-man, who was one of the party, had eyed the little instrument with a sort of fearful curiosity. Later, when my patients were all getting well, I had several times gone out to a distance from the camp and with the compass taken the bearings of the many mountain peaks visible in all directions, making a little map of the country. Every time I did this, the medicine-man was sure to come stalking by, watching my motions out of the corner of his eye. On one such occasion I called him to me, anxious to be on friendly terms, and showing him the instrument, tried to explain its use. But the Indian, seeing through the glass the unaccountable motion of the needle, was afraid to touch it, and my explanation, I fear, had rather the effect of misleading him, for his knowledge of Spanish was very small, while my knowledge of Apache was smaller, and eventually he went off with the idea that the compass, which I had tried to make him understand was my 'guide,' 'director' and so forth, was in fact nothing more nor less than the familiar spirit through whose aid I had ousted the evil spirit of the smallpox. [Pg 110]

"With this conviction in his mind, and supposing that the possession of the compass would confer upon him similar powers, he screwed up his courage to steal it—and a very courageous act it was, too, I consider, remembering how greatly he stood in fear of it. [Pg 111]

"It was on the eve of my departure that I discovered my loss, and going straight to my friend with the green nose I informed him of the fact, at the same time stating my conviction that the medicine-man was the thief. He was very wroth that his guest should have been so treated after having rendered such good service to the community, but feeling some diffidence about seizing and searching his medicine-man, of whom he was rather afraid, he suggested that I concoct a spell which should induce the thief to disgorge his plunder of his own accord; a course which would doubtless be a simple matter to a high-class magician like myself.

"This was rather embarrassing. I did not at all like to trust to the tricks of the charlatan, but being unable to devise any other plan by which to recover my compass, an instrument indispensable to me, and impossible to replace, in that wild country, I determined to employ a device I had once read of as having been adopted by an officer in the East India Company's service to detect a thieving Sepoy soldier. Even then I should not have resorted to such a measure had I not felt convinced that the medicine-man was the thief, and that his superstitious dread of my powers would cause him to fall into my trap. [Pg 112]

"I therefore desired Green Nose to summon all the men of the village, which being done, I addressed them through him as interpreter. I told them that one of their number was a thief, and that I was about to find out which one it was—a statement which I could see had an impressive effect.

"Taking two straws of wild rye, I cut them to exactly equal lengths, and then, holding them up so that all might see, I announced that the men were to come forward, one at a time, take one of the straws, step inside my lodge for a few seconds, and then bring back the straw to me. To those who were innocent nothing would happen, 'but,' said I, with menacing fore-finger, 'when the *thief* brings back the straw it will be found to have *grown one inch*!'

"I waited a minute to allow this announcement to have its full effect, and then requested that, in deference to his exalted position, my honored brother, the medicine-man, should be the first to test the potency of my magic. [Pg 113]

"I could see that he was very reluctant to do any such thing, but to decline would be to draw suspicion on himself, so, stepping from the line, he received the straw and retired with it to my lodge.

"There was a minute of breathless suspense, when back he came and handed over his straw to me. My own straw, together with the hand which held it, I had covered with a large, spotted silk handkerchief, in such a manner that it was concealed from view, and slipping the medicine-man's straw into the same hand, I perceived at once that the thief had betrayed himself, just as I had hoped and expected he would.

"Casting a glance along the line of silent Indians, and noting that they were all attention, I withdrew the handkerchief and held up the two straws. One of them was an inch longer than the other!

"In spite of their habitual stoicism, there was a murmur and a stir along the line; but the greatest effect was naturally upon the poor medicine-man. Thrusting his hand into his bosom, he drew out the compass from under his shirt, handed it to me, and then, pulling his blanket over his head, he crept away without a word and shut himself up in his lodge." [Pg 114]

"But how did you do it?" I interrupted. "How did his straw come out longer than the other? Did you break off a piece from your own?"

"No," replied the professor, smiling; "it was the medicine-man who broke off a piece from his. Knowing himself to be the thief, and fully believing that the straw would grow in his hand, he no sooner got into the shelter of my lodge than he bit off an inch from his straw, thus making sure, as he supposed, that its supernatural growth would bring it back to its original length. It was just what I had expected him to do. Nobody but myself, of course, could tell which straw was which, and when I held them up to view, one longer than the other, the whole assembly never doubted for an instant that the shorter one was mine and that it was the thief's straw that had grown—least of all the medicine-man, himself.

"He, poor fellow, conscious of guilt, and being himself a dealer in charms and incantations, was more than anybody in a proper frame of mind to put faith in my magic, and when he saw, as he supposed, that his straw, in spite of his precautions, had grown the promised inch, he collapsed at once; and thinking, very likely, that it was the compass itself that had betrayed him, he handed it back to me very willingly, glad to be rid of so pernicious a little imp." [Pg 115]

"And was that the end of the matter?" I asked.

"Yes, that was the end of it. Being all ready to go, I went, leaving behind me a reputation which was to be of great service to me on many a subsequent occasion; a reputation due, I am sorry to say, very much more to the clap-trap trick played upon the poor medicine-man than upon my really meritorious service in dealing with the smallpox epidemic. My fame gradually extended among all the mountain tribes, and since then I have been free to go anywhere with the assurance not only of safety but of welcome from any of the Indians, Apache, Ute or Navajo—a condition of affairs which, as you will readily understand has been of infinite service to me during my twenty years of wandering.

"Ah!" casting a glance out of the window as he rose from the table. "Here comes Dick, and somebody with him; a stranger to me—your uncle, I presume."

CHAPTER VII [Pg 116]

Dick's Diplomacy

Running to the door, I saw Dick striding down toward the cabin, while behind him on a stout pony rode Uncle Tom. Just as I stepped out, the pair approached one of the drifts of snow which ridged the valley, and into this Dick plunged at once. Though it was up to his waist, he pretty soon forced his way through, when it was Uncle Tom's turn.

Evidently it was not the first time the pony had tackled a snow-drift, for he showed no disposition to shirk the task, but wading in up to his knees, he did the rest of the passage in a series of short leaps, very like buck-jumping; a mode of progression extremely discomforting to his plump, short-legged rider.

"Oh! Ah!" gasped Uncle Tom at each jump. "Heavens! What a country! Dick, you imp of darkness, I thought you said it was an easy trail."

At this I could not help laughing, when Uncle Tom, who had not perceived me before, transferred his attention to me. [Pg 117]

"You young scamp, Frank!" cried he, shaking his fist at me as I ran forward to meet him. "This is a nice way to treat your respected uncle—first scare him half to death and then laugh at him.

Lucky for me there's only one of you: if you had been born twins I should have been worn to a rag long ago. How are you, old fellow?" he went on, reaching down to shake hands with me. "Any the worse for your adventure?"

"Not a bit," I replied. "Sound as a bell, thank you."

"Thank Dick, you mean. I'll tell you what, Frank," he continued, leaning down and whispering; Dick having walked on toward the house: "that's an uncommonly fine young fellow, in my opinion. His coming down in the storm last night to tell me that you were all safe was a thing that few boys of his age would have done and fewer still would have thought of doing. Ah! This is the professor, I suppose. Why, I've seen him before!"

So saying, Uncle Tom jumped to the ground, and hastening forward, held out his hand, exclaiming:

"How are you, Herr Bergen? I'm glad to meet you again. We are old acquaintances, though I had forgotten your name, if I ever heard it." [Pg 118]

"I believe you are right, Mr. Allen," responded the professor. "Your face seems familiar, though I am ashamed to say I cannot recall when or where we met."

"I can remind you," said Uncle Tom. "It was at Fort Garland, six or seven years ago. I was on my way to investigate an alleged gold discovery in the Taos mountains, when you rode into the fort to ask the cavalry vet to give you something to dress the wounds of a burro which had been clawed by a mountain-lion. I got into conversation with you, and learning that you also wanted some cartridges for a little Ballard rifle, I gave you a box of fifty. Do you remember?"

"I remember very well," replied the professor. "The cartridges were for Dick: he learned to shoot with a Ballard. Well, this is a great pleasure to meet an old acquaintance like this. Come in out of the cold. Romero will take your pony."

Soon we were all seated before the fire, Uncle Tom puffing away his aches and pains with the smoke of the inevitable cigar, when the professor, turning to him, asked: [Pg 119]

"And how long do you intend to stay in camp, Mr. Allen? Will this snow drive you out?"

"Not at all," replied Uncle Tom. "I expect to be here a couple of weeks, in spite of the snow. The drifts will settle in a day or two, and the miners will break trails to their claims, and then I shall be able to get about—there won't be any difficulty. Though if it were going to be as hard work as it was coming up here this morning I might as well go home again at once—it took us an hour to make the one mile from town."

"You came to inspect the mines, I understand. Do you confine yourself to silver mines, or do you deal in mines of all sorts?"

"Silver and gold," replied Uncle Tom. "Though, as it happens, I am on the lookout this time for a copper mine as well. Before I left St. Louis I notified a Boston firm, with whom I have frequent dealings, of my intention to come here, and received from them in reply a telegram, saying, 'Find us a good copper mine. Price no object.' There was no explanation, and I am rather puzzled to understand why they should suddenly branch out into 'coppers' in this way." [Pg 120]

"I expect the explanation is simple enough," remarked the professor.

"What is it, then?" asked Uncle Tom.

"To any one watching the progress of science," replied the professor, puffing away at his big porcelain pipe, "even to me, here on the ragged edge of civilization, it is obvious that a new era is close at hand; a new force rapidly coming to the front."

"Electricity?" asked Uncle Tom.

"Yes, electricity. The science is still in the egg, as you may say, but to those who have ears to hear, the shell is beginning to crack. I am convinced that before long we shall be lighting our streets with electricity and using it in a thousand ways as a mechanical power. The consequence will be an immense increase in the demand for copper; and that, I have no doubt, is why you have been asked to look out for a copper mine: they want to be ready when the time comes. What is this, Dick?"

At the first mention of the words, "copper mine," the thoughts of Dick and myself had, of course, instantly reverted to the King Philip mine, and I was on the point of introducing the subject, when Dick, catching my eye, signed to me to keep quiet. Rising from his chair, he stepped softly to the rack where the rifles hung and took down the Mexican's arrow, which he had put there the evening before. It happened that we had not mentioned the episode of the wolves and the Mexican when describing to the professor our struggle homeward through the snow-storm, and consequently, when my companion laid the arrow on the table close to his elbow, it was only natural that the old gentleman should exclaim, "What is this, Dick?" [Pg 121]

Very briefly, Dick related how he had come by it, merely stating that we had seen a Mexican shoot a wolf; that the Mexican had run away when we hailed him; and that we had gone and picked up his arrow. I wondered rather why he did not call attention to the copper arrow-head; but Dick knew what he was about, as I very soon saw: he intended to let the professor discover it for himself, which a man of his habits of close observation was certain to do. In fact, the old

gentleman had no sooner taken the arrow into his hands than he exclaimed:

"Why, this arrow-head is made of copper! A Mexican, you say? Then he probably came from Hermanos. You remember, Dick, how all the people down there—— Why, Mr. Allen, here's the very thing! You want a copper mine? Well, here is a copper mine all ready to your hand! All you have to do is——" [Pg 122]

"To find it," interjected Dick, laughing.

"That is true," the professor assented, laughing himself. "I had forgotten that little particular for the moment, Dick. I'm afraid it is not quite so ready to your hand as I was leading you to suppose, Mr. Allen; but that it is there, somewhere in the Dos Hermanos mountains, I feel sure."

Thereupon the professor proceeded to tell the story that Dick had already told me, giving some further details of the information he had derived from the Spanish gentleman, Don Blake.

"It appears to have been a mine of some consequence," said the professor. "The records covered a period of fifteen years, and during the last five years of the time the shipments were constant and large. It is fairly sure, I think, that the product was native copper——"

"Sure to be," interrupted Uncle Tom. "It would never have paid to ship any waste product so far. In fact, I am surprised that they should ship even native copper such a long distance."

"Yes; but as they did so, I think the inference is that the metal was plentiful and easy to mine." [Pg 123]

"That is a reasonable assumption," said Uncle Tom, thoughtfully nodding his head. "What beats me, though," he went on, "is that the memory of the spot should have been so totally lost. Considering that the mine was producing for fifteen years, there must be many traces of the work done, such as the waste dump, the old road or trail, and so forth: you can't run a mine for that length of time and leave no marks. It is a wonder to me that the place has never been rediscovered."

"I don't think there is anything surprising in that," replied the professor. "The villagers of Hermanos, agricultural people, seldom go five miles from home; it is only old Galvez' *vaqueros*, his cow-men, who would be likely to come across the traces of mining, and if they did, those peons are such incurious, unenterprising people they would pay no attention. Besides which, I gathered that even the cow-men never went up into the Dos Hermanos mountains: it is not a good cattle country—rough granite and limestone, little water and scant pasturage. Consequently, the cattle range southward toward the Santa Claras, instead of westward to the Dos Hermanos, and the Twin Peaks, therefore, remain in their solitary glory, untouched by the foot of man; and probably they have so remained ever since the King Philip mine was abandoned, a hundred and fifty years ago." [Pg 124]

For a full minute Uncle Tom remained silent, thoughtfully blowing out long spirals of cigar smoke, but presently he roused up again and said:

"There is one thing more I should like to ask you, Professor, and that is, why you conclude that the King Philip mine is in the Dos Hermanos mountains?"

"For this reason," replied our friend: "In the first place, many of the reports were dated from the *Casa del Rey*. Of course, it is likely enough that there are other *Casas del Rey* in other parts of the country, but besides the frequent mention of the King's House, there was also mention of Indian fights at different places: 'at the crossing of the Perdita,' for instance, and 'near the spring by Picture Buttes'; then there was the record of a snow-blockade on the Mosca Pass, in the Santa Claras; another of a terrible dust-storm on the Little Cactus Desert, 'with the loss of one man and three mules'; and so forth. Now, a line running through these and other places mentioned would bring you into the Mescalero valley at its southern end, and there is no doubt in my mind that the *Casa del Rey* named in the reports is the King's House down there at Hermanos." [Pg 125]

"It does seem so, doesn't it?" responded Uncle Tom. "Look here, professor," he went on, suddenly jumping out of his chair and casting his cigar stump into the fire, "I must make an attempt to find that copper mine. It does, as you say, seem all ready to my hand. But how to do it, is the question. I can't go myself—can't spare the time—so the only way, I suppose, is to hire some prospector, if I can."

"I don't think you can get one," said the professor, shaking his head; "at least, not here in Mosby. They are all too intent on hunting for silver, and I doubt if you could persuade one of them to waste a season in searching for a metal so commonplace as copper, the value of which is rather prospective than immediate. I doubt very much if you could get one to go."

"I suppose not," replied Uncle Tom. "And you can hardly blame them, either, when you consider that by the expenditure of the same amount of labor a man may come across a rich vein of silver, every ounce of which he knows to be worth a dollar and twenty cents." [Pg 126]

"Just so," the professor assented.

"What am I to do, then?" asked Uncle Tom. "Give it up? Seems a pity, doesn't it, when, more than likely, the old workings are lying there plain to view, only waiting for some one with his eyes open to pass that way. Still, if I can't get a man——"

"Take a boy," suggested Dick, cutting in unexpectedly.

Uncle Tom whirled round on his heels and stared at him; the professor removed his long pipe from his mouth and stared at him too; while Dick himself sat bolt upright in his chair, a broad and genial grin overspreading his countenance.

For some seconds they all maintained these attitudes in silence, when Uncle Tom suddenly broke into a hearty laugh.

"You young scamp!" cried he, shaking his forefinger at Dick. "I believe that's what you've been aiming at all the time."

"That's just what we have, Mr. Allen," replied my companion. "Frank and I were talking about it yesterday, saying what fun it would be to go and hunt for the old mine; though we never expected [Pg 127] to get the chance. But when you began to talk about copper mines, we cocked our ears, of course, thinking that here, perhaps, *was* a chance after all—and—and if you *can't* get a man, Mr. Allen, why not send a boy? Would you let me go, Professor?"

Our two elders looked at each other, and very anxiously we looked at our two elders. Not a word did either of them say, until the professor, rising from his chair and knocking out the ashes of his pipe upon the hearthstone, remarked quietly:

"Go out and chop some wood, boys. I want to talk to Mr. Allen."

Regarding this order as a hopeful sign, out we went, and for a long half-hour we feverishly hacked at the heap of poles outside, making a rather indifferent job of it, I suspect, until a tapping at the window attracted our attention and we saw Uncle Tom beckoning us to come in.

How anxiously we scanned their countenances this time, any one will guess. Both men were standing with their backs to the fire, Uncle Tom smoking a fresh cigar and the professor puffing away again at his pipe, both of them looking so solemn that I thought to myself, "It's no go," and my spirits fell accordingly; but looking again at Uncle Tom I detected a twitching at the corner of [Pg 128] his mouth which sent them up again with a bound.

"Well, Uncle Tom!" I cried. "What's it to be?"

"It is a serious matter," replied my guardian, with all the solemnity of a judge passing sentence. "The professor and I have discussed it very earnestly, and we have decided—that you shall go!"

CHAPTER VIII [Pg 129]

The Start

The delight with which this announcement was received by us two boys may be imagined, for though we had hoped for such a decision we had not dared to expect it. I, for my part, had feared that the matter of my interrupted education alone would form an insurmountable barrier; and indeed it was that subject which had proved the chief obstacle, as Uncle Tom presently informed me. All the other objections were minor ones and we discreetly refrained from asking for their recapitulation lest, in going over them again, something not thought of before should crop up to interfere. We were quite content to accept the decision without knowing how it had been arrived at.

As to my interrupted schooling, though, that was a serious matter, as Uncle Tom, in spite of his original ideas about education, clearly understood.

"The main question with me, you see, Frank," said he, "was whether you would benefit or [Pg 130] otherwise by missing so much schooling, and though I believe pretty strongly in the value of learning by practice and experience, I should have felt obliged to decide against this expedition if the professor had not come to the rescue. It is to him you owe our decision to let you boys go."

I looked gratefully at Herr Bergen, who serenely waved the stem of his pipe in our direction, though whether to intimate that the obligation was nothing to speak of, or as a sign to Uncle Tom to go on, I could not decide.

"I find," continued the latter, "that the winter is Dick's school-time; and the professor has offered to take you in, Frank, and let you share in Dick's work, undertaking to bring you on in your mathematics in particular—which is your weak spot, you know. In the spring, when the snow clears off, you are to start for the Dos Hermanos and make a thorough search for this old copper mine; and as you will be doing it on my account, I shall bear all expenses. There, that is all, except—well, it is not necessary to mention that—but I was going to say that I rely on you, old fellow, to make the most of your opportunity and in your own person to prove the correctness of [Pg 131] my theory that a boy may sometimes learn more out of school than in it."

"I believe you may count on me, Uncle Tom," said I. "I'll do my level best. And I'm tremendously obliged to you, Herr Bergen——"

"Not at all," interrupted the professor, "not at all. The fact is, I am very glad to have a companion for Dick; and as to the schooling, the obligation is not all on one side by any means, for to me it is one of the greatest pleasures possible to teach a boy who really desires to learn. I anticipate a most pleasant winter."

Thus was this odd arrangement made by which I, who by right should have been attending a public school in St. Louis, became the private pupil of an eminent German professor, pursuing my studies in a little log cabin tucked away in a snow-encumbered valley of the Rocky Mountains—about as queer a piece of topsyturviness, to my notion, as ever happened to a boy, and one very unlikely to happen to any other boy, unless he chanced to be endowed with an Uncle Tom cut out on the same pattern as mine.

"There's one thing, Frank," said my guardian, as we made our way down to camp later in the day, "there's one thing I didn't mention in Dick's presence, and that is that the professor laid great [Pg 132] stress on the pleasure and advantage it would be to Dick to have a companion of his own age for once, and it was that which turned the balance with me—after the educational question had been got out of the way. For I owe Dick a good turn if I can do him one without hurting anybody else; I told him I wouldn't forget his service in coming down through the storm yesterday, and I haven't forgotten. I'm uncommonly glad to think that in consenting to your taking part in this expedition—which I believe will be a great thing for you, mentally as well as bodily—we shall be doing a service to Dick and to the old professor at the same time."

"Well, Uncle Tom," said I, "you may be sure I am glad enough to stay, and I hope it will not only prove a good thing for Dick and me, but for you as well."

"I hope so, too. And it will, if you can locate that old copper mine, and if it should prove to be anywhere near as good as it sounds."

As things turned out, I was destined to begin my winter's schooling somewhat earlier than we had expected, for, five days after the storm, Uncle Tom received from his Boston employers a [Pg 133] telegram, forwarded by mail from the end of the line, saying, "Come here at once. Important," when, without demur, he forthwith packed up his things and away he went; while I, taking leave of our kind host, the assayer, moved up to Herr Bergen's house.

I need not go into the details of our daily life on Mosby Creek; it is enough to say that the winter was one of the pleasantest I had ever spent. Time flew by, as was only natural, for there was not an idle moment for either of us. Herr Bergen proved to be a most able instructor, not only in the matter of scholarship but in general training as well. He had served in the German army in his younger days, and the habits of orderliness, precision and promptness remained with him. We boys were made to toe the mark, and no mistake; there was a time for work and a time for play, and whether for duty or pleasure, we had to be on hand to the minute.

I do not wish to imply that the professor was harsh, or anything of the sort; very far from it: he was most considerate of our shortcomings, which were doubtless plentiful enough, and with infinite patience would go over the ground again and again whenever Dick or I got ourselves [Pg 134] tangled up; a condition of things which happened on the average about once a day to each of us. Then, every marked advance we made in any of our studies was so obviously gratifying to the kindly old gentleman that that fact alone was enough to spur a fellow on to doing his extra-best. As a consequence, I, for my part, made very notable progress, and it was with great pleasure, as you may suppose, that I was able later on to write to Uncle Tom my conviction that I had gained rather than lost by my winter's work.

One thing, at least, which I should not have acquired in school, I gained by my association with the professor's household: I learned to speak Spanish. Herr Bergen made a great point of it that I should do so, as it would be pretty sure to come in useful during the ensuing summer. He and Dick—and Romero, of course—all spoke it very well, so that my opportunity for picking it up was excellent, and I made rapid progress; my knowledge of Latin, which, though very far from profound, was up to the average of a schoolboy of my age, being an immense help.

All this time we did not lack exercise—the professor was just as particular about that as he was [Pg 135] about our work—and Dick and I had many a jolly outing on our snow-shoes, the management of which was another thing I learned. I should not omit to mention also that I spent a good deal of time and a liberal number of cartridges practising with a rifle, thereby becoming a very fair shot; though, of course, I could not compete with Dick, who, having learned as a mere child, seemed, almost, to shoot straight by nature.

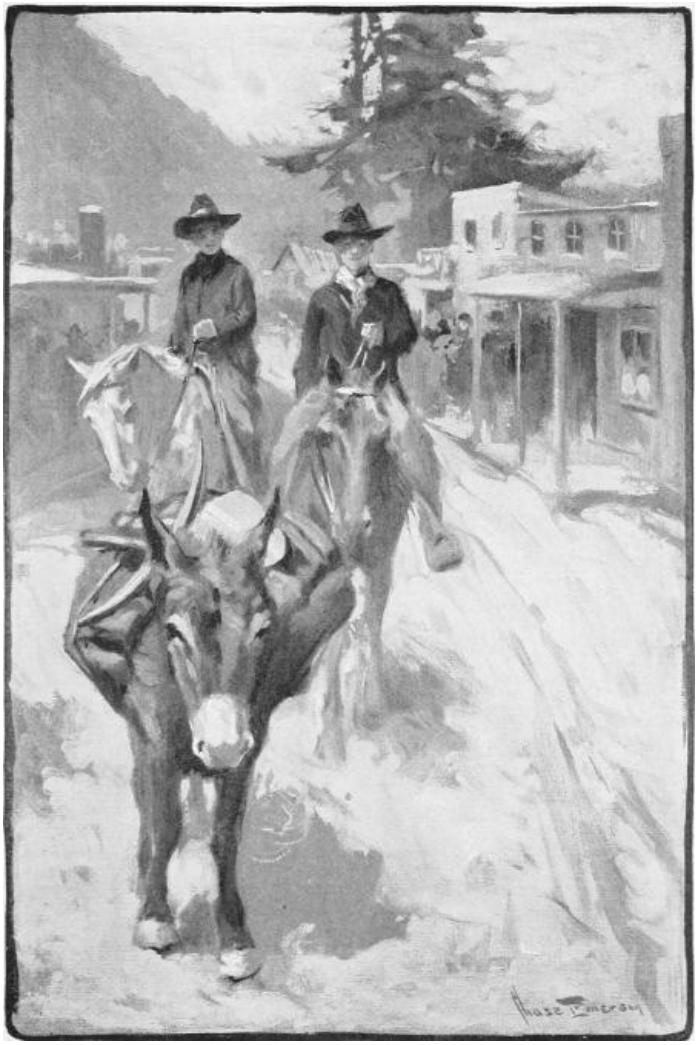
The weather on the average was splendid that winter, and there were but few days when we could not get out. Four or five times, perhaps, during the months I spent in the valley a snow-storm came raging down on us, shutting us up for a day or two, after which the jovial sun would turn up smiling again just as though nothing had happened.

It was toward the end of April that Dick and I began to get ready to leave. The increasing power of the sun had cleared off all the snow below eleven thousand feet, the green grass was beginning to show in many places, and it was fair to suppose that by the time we reached the Dos Hermanos we should find pasturage enough for our animals—two ponies and a mule.

Dick already had his own pony, while the mule, a tough little beast by name Uncle Fritz, was [Pg 136] provided by the professor, both animals having passed the winter on a ranch about a couple of thousand feet lower down. Before he left, Uncle Tom had suggested hiring them for the season, but the professor would not consent to his paying anything, saying that the animals might just as well be put to some use as to waste their time doing nothing all summer. Consequently, about the only expense to which my guardian was put, besides furnishing provisions and tools for the expedition, was the purchase of a pony and a rifle for me. This was a very moderate outlay, and I was glad to think that Uncle Tom would get off so cheaply, if our search should turn out a failure;

and no one was more ready to recognize that possibility—probability, I should rather say, perhaps—than Uncle Tom himself, to whom the many stories in general circulation of lost Spanish mines of fabulous richness were familiar, and who knew very well how little foundation there was for most of them. The present case, though, was different from the generality, in that there existed documentary evidence that there had been such a mine; a fact which altered the conditions entirely. For it is safe to say that without such documentary evidence Uncle Tom would never have consented to our undertaking such an enterprise, and Dick and I, in consequence, would never have run into the series of adventures which were destined to befall us before we were many weeks older. [Pg 137]

It was on the first day of May that we at last took leave of our good friend, Herr Bergen, and rode off down the valley, passing on our way through the town of Mosby, where our appearance on horseback, driving our pack-mule before us, excited among the citizens much speculation as to our destination; a matter concerning which we had said not a word to anybody. That it was a prospecting expedition any one could see, for the pick and shovel could not very well be concealed, but where we were bound for nobody knew, Uncle Tom having cautioned us that if we let a word escape about an old Spanish mine we should have a hundred men at our heels in no time; the very idea of such a thing having an irresistible fascination for some people, especially for the inexperienced newcomer.



"PASSING ON OUR WAY THROUGH THE TOWN OF MOSBY."

Our reason for taking our way through town rather than crossing the Mosby Ridge, back of the professor's house, and going down the Mescalero valley, was that the latter course, cut up by many deep cañons, would be much the more difficult of the two; for by following down the eastern side of the ridge, as we proposed to do, we should presently come to a point where that barrier, which up near Mescalero began as a mountain range, became first a line of round-topped hills, and then, about forty miles below town, came to an end altogether in a little conical eminence known as The Foolscap. We could therefore pass round its southern end without difficulty, when we should find ourselves in the Mescalero valley at its wide part, and by heading southwestward should arrive in about another twenty miles in the neighborhood of the village of Hermanos—a route somewhat longer, but very much easier for the animals, than the other one. [Pg 138]

About five miles below town we abandoned the road, which there turned off to the left to join the main stage-road, and continuing our southward course up and down hill over the spurs of the Mosby Ridge we made camp early in the afternoon; for our animals being as yet in rather poor condition, we thought it advisable to give them an easy day for the first one.

Selecting a sheltered nook among the pine trees, we unpacked the mule and unsaddled the ponies, and then, while Dick cooked our supper, I busied myself cutting pine boughs for our beds [Pg 139]

and chopping fire-wood. Soon after sunset we rolled ourselves in our blankets, and in spite of the novelty of the situation—for I had never before gone to bed with no roof overhead nearer than the sky—I slept soundly until Dick's voice aroused me, crying, "Roll out, old chap! Roll out! The sun will catch you in bed in a minute," when I sprang up, fresh as a daisy and hungry as a shark, as one always seems to do after sleeping out under the stars in the keen, pine-scented air of the mountains.

Continuing our journey, we presently rounded the end of the Mosby Ridge, and turning to the right saw before us the twin peaks of the Dos Hermanos, standing there, as it seemed to me, like two faithful sentinels guarding the secret of the King Philip mine.

"Now, Frank," said my companion, as we sat at supper on the little hill with which the Ridge terminated, "we have a tough day of it before us to-morrow. The valley down at this end, you see, is just a sage-brush plain; there are no cañons down here like there are at the upper end; and there is no water either, unfortunately—this side of the mountains, I mean. The streams which [Pg 140] come down from Mescalero and the Ridge take a westerly turn and go off through a deep gorge to the north of the peaks—you can see the black shadow of it from here."

"What do the people at Hermanos do for water, then?" I asked.

"There is a little stream which comes down from the saddle between the Dos Hermanos peaks and runs eastward through the village. But it sinks into the soil soon afterward, for the country down that way becomes very sandy; it is the beginning of the Little Cactus Desert, across which the pack-trains and the soldier escort used to travel, you remember, headed for the Mosca Pass—that low place in the Santa Claras that you see down there, due south from here."

"I see. So the nearest water is the stream running through the village. Do you propose, then, to make for Hermanos?"

"No, I don't," replied Dick. "We want to avoid the village, if possible: it is no use exciting the curiosity of old Galvez, if he happens to be there. What I propose is that we make straight from here to the north side of the peaks, leaving the village three or four miles on our left; find a good [Pg 141] camping-place, and make it a base for our preliminary operations."

"That's all right," I assented. "But how much of a day's ride will it be to the north side of the peaks? Further than to Hermanos, I suppose, and that is over twenty miles."

"Yes," replied Dick, "twenty-five miles certainly and perhaps thirty—a long stretch without water. But we can do it all right. I propose that we get off by four in the morning, which ought to bring us to the foothills of the Dos Hermanos by two or three o'clock in the afternoon."

"That's a good idea," I responded. "And if, by bad luck, we should find that we can't make it, we can always turn off and head for the village if we have to."

"Yes. So let us get to bed early. It will be a hard day at best, and we may as well get all the sleep we can."

As my companion had predicted, the morrow did turn out to be a tough day, and it began early, too. It was about half-past three in the morning that I was awakened by the crackling of the fire, and sitting up in my blankets, I saw Dick squatted on his heels, frying bacon over some of the hot embers.

"Time to turn out, Frank," said he. "Breakfast will be ready in two minutes; feeling pretty hungry [Pg 142] this morning?"

By way of reply, I opened my mouth with a yawn so prodigious that Dick laughingly continued:

"Hungry as all that, eh? Well, old man, if the size of your mouth is an indication of the size of your appetite, I'll slice up another half-pound of bacon!"

At this I laughed too, and jumping up, I ran to the creek, where I soused my head and face in the cold water, which wakened me up effectually.

By four o'clock we were under way, steering by compass; for, though the stars were shining and the waning moon, then near its setting, furnished some light, there was not enough to enable us to distinguish objects at any distance. Our progress at first was pretty slow, for horses and mules do not like traveling by night, but presently there came a change, the sky behind us took on a rosy hue, and pretty soon there appeared on the western horizon two glowing points, like a pair of triangular red lamps hung up in the sky for our guidance—the summits of the Dos Hermanos caught by the rising sun.

It was an inspiring sight! The very animals, seeming to feel its influence, brisked up at once and [Pg 143] stepped out gaily, while Dick and I, who had been "mouching" along in silence, straightened up in our saddles and fell to talking.

"I've been thinking, Dick," said I, "about what our first move should be after we have found a good camping-place. My idea is that we should ride down to the neighborhood of Hermanos and see if there is any sign of an old trail leading from the village to the mountains."

"That's a good idea," Dick responded. "It is pretty certain that the copper was brought down from the mine on the backs of burros, and the supplies carried up in the same way, and if that was kept up for several years there must have been a well-defined trail worn in this soft soil, which

may be visible yet."

"On the other hand," was my comment, "as the travel ceased so long ago, isn't it probable that the trail will have been blown full of sand and covered up?"

"That is likely enough—in many places, at least," replied my companion, "though it is very possible, I think, that there may be some traces left, for it is surprising how long such marks on the ground continue to show. At any rate, we'll try it. Here's the sun; it's going to be pretty hot, I [Pg 144] expect."

Slowly we plodded along, hour after hour, until presently we had come opposite the village, the mud-colored buildings of which, though not more than three miles away, were barely distinguishable against the gray-tinted plain upon which they stood. The green fields and gardens surrounding the houses we could not see, they being below the general level, but that they were there, and that the Mexicans were at that moment engaged in irrigating them, we felt very sure. A light wind was blowing from the south, and Dick declared that he could "smell the wet"; but though I sniffed and sniffed, I could not conscientiously say that I could detect it myself.

Our animals, however, very evidently smelt it, for they evinced a decided inclination to bear to the left, and we had a good deal of difficulty in keeping their heads straight—the slightest inattention on our part, and they were off the line in a moment. As is so often the case, they had not cared to drink in the cool of the morning before we started, and consequently, what with the heat of the sun and the alkali dust they kicked up, they had become eager for water and would [Pg 145] have made a straight shoot for Hermanos if we had let them.

But we were nearing the mountains, an hour or two more and we should reach water, probably, so, though it was painful to deny the poor beasts, we kept right on, until about four in the afternoon—for it had taken us longer than we had anticipated—when all three of them suddenly lifted their heads, pricked their ears and wanted to run forward. They smelt water ahead of them.

Pressing on at an increased pace, we were presently brought to a halt by coming upon the brink of a cliff, at the base of which was a large pool of clear water. The pool lay in a little grass-covered valley about half a mile long, encompassed on all sides by the precipitous wall of rock. We could not see that there was any way of getting down.

In order to get a better view, Dick and I dismounted and walked to the edge, when the first thing we saw was a little bunch of half-a-dozen scrawny Mexican cattle down near the pool.

"Then there is a way down," cried Dick. "Whoop!" he yelled, clapping his mouth with his hand.

The cattle looked up, and seeing two horseless human beings on the sky-line above them, away [Pg 146] they went up the valley, vanished for an instant among the fallen rocks at the foot of the cliff, and in another moment appeared again on our level, going off southward with their tails in the air, wild as deer.

"Come on!" cried Dick, jumping upon his horse. "Where they came up we can get down."

Riding forward, we presently found the cow-trail, when, dismounting once more, for it was too steep to ride without risk of breaking one's neck, we led our horses down. Within another half-hour Dick and I, comfortably seated in the shade of the rock, were enjoying a much-needed dinner, while the three animals, their waist-lines enormously distended with the gallons of water they had swallowed, were eagerly snapping up the young green grass with which the valley was covered—all the troubles of the day completely forgotten.

CHAPTER IX [Pg 147]

ANTONIO MARTINEZ

As we wished to give the animals a good rest, we decided to stay where we were for the remainder of that day and on the morrow move to the foot of the mountain and look out for a good camping-place from which to make our preliminary explorations.

The spot where we were then encamped would not serve, for we were yet at least three miles from the lowest spurs of the twin mountains. The stream beside which we were seated issued from the northernmost of the two peaks, and after running out into the plain for some distance made a great bend and went back almost to the point of departure, when, turning to the northward, it poured its waters into the deep cañon cut by the streams which came down from Mescalero and the Ridge. It was just at the bend that we had struck it.

"What we want, Frank," said my companion, "is a good place in the foothills, and when we have [Pg 148] found one, I propose that we take our ponies, skirt along the base of the mountains from north to south, and see if we can't cut across that old trail we were talking about this morning. It is extremely important that we should do so; it might save us weeks of useless searching."

"Yes," I assented, "it would be a great help, of course; though all we can hope to find is some mark in the soil which will point us generally in one direction or another."

"Yes; and that's just it. If we can find any indication of the direction the trains used to take when

they started from the King's House, it will lighten our task tremendously. Look here," taking a pointed stick and drawing a rough plat of the country in the sand. "Here are the two peaks, lying north and south of each other; here, between them, the creek comes down which runs two or three miles out on to the plain to the village here. Now, when the trains used to start out from the *Casa del Rey* they took to the right of that stream or they took to the left of it, one or the other, and if we can do no more than find out which it was it will be a great help."

"Of course," I responded. "I see that. It would show us whether it was the north mountain or the south mountain that we had to explore." [Pg 149]

"That's it, exactly. And if you stop for a moment to consider, you will see that that would be a pretty big item all by itself. The two mountains cover a space about fifteen miles long by, perhaps, ten miles wide—a hundred and fifty square miles—a pretty big piece of country, old man, for you and me to scramble over; but if we can find a trail which will show us which of the two mountains is the right one, that hundred and fifty miles will be chopped in half at one blow—and if that isn't a pretty big item all by itself, I should like to know what is."

With that, Dick, who was sitting cross-legged on the ground, stuck his stick point downward into the middle of his map, planted his hands on either knee, and with a defiant jerk of his head, challenged me to deny his conclusion.

I could not help laughing at his emphatic manner, but I could not help, either, admitting that his point was a good one.

"It certainly would make an immense difference," said I, "and it will pay us to find that old trail if it takes us a week to do it. So, let us dig out first thing to-morrow, Dick, and find a good camping-place as a base."

Accordingly we broke camp again early next morning, and following along the rim of the cañon we presently drew near the foothills. As we approached the mountain we were able to distinguish with more clearness the details of its form, and the more clearly we could distinguish them the more were we impressed with the difficulty and the magnitude of the task we had undertaken. It was not going to be the simple, straightforward matter I had at first imagined. [Pg 150]

Seen from a distance the north peak looked smooth and symmetrical, but when you came close to it you found that it was broken up into cliffs and cañons, some of them of great height and depth. On its northern face, a thousand feet or so below the summit, our attention was drawn to a great semicircular precipice which looked very like the upper half of an old volcanic crater, the lower half, presumably, having broken away and fallen down the mountain.

"A pretty tough piece of country, Frank," said my companion, "and a pretty large stretch of it, too, for us to tramp over; for, by the look of it from here, our horses won't be much use to us—at least, when we get up above the lower spurs. Let us try this gully to the left: there's probably water up there; I see the tops of two or three cottonwoods." [Pg 151]

Turning in that direction, therefore, we presently came upon a diminutive stream which ran down and fell into the cañon, and passing between two high rocks, which looked as though they had been split apart with a wedge to let the water out, we found ourselves in a little park-like valley, flanked on either side by high ridges.

"This ought to do, Dick," said I, "at any rate for the present; plenty of grass, plenty of wood and plenty of water. Just the place."

"Yes, this is all right; couldn't be better. Let's unsaddle at once, make our camp, and after dinner we'll ride down in the direction of Hermanos and do a little prospecting."

Having chosen a good spot, we arranged a comfortable camp, and after a hasty dinner we started out; first picketing Uncle Fritz to keep him from coming trailing after us.

Immediately to the south of our camping-place, forming one of the boundaries of the little ravine, in fact, there stretched down from the mountain a great, bare rib of granite, almost devoid of vegetation, which projected a long way out into the valley, and as it lay square across our course we decided, instead of going round the end of it, to ride up to the top in order to get a good lookout over the country we proposed to examine. From the summit of this ridge, at a point about four hundred feet above the plain, we were able to get a very good view of all the wide stretch of comparatively level ground below us, including the village of Hermanos and the green irrigated fields around it, which from this elevation were distinctly visible. Except for this tiny oasis, the whole plain, bounded on the east by the Mosby Ridge, and on the south by the Santa Clara mountains, appeared to be one uniform, level stretch of sage-brush desert—dull, gray and uninviting. [Pg 152]

"What a pity," remarked Dick, "that there is no water here. If only one could get water upon it, this sage-brush plain could be turned into a wheat-field big enough to supply the whole State with bread, besides furnishing labor and subsistence for a good-sized population of farmers."

"It would be fine, wouldn't it?" I assented. "And I don't see why it has never been done: there must be many streams coming down from these mountains."

"Yes, no doubt; but the difficulty is that all the streams of any consequence have cut cañons for themselves and are too far below the general level to be of any use. To get water out upon the [Pg 153]

surface of this valley one would have to go high up on the mountain, find some good-sized stream, head it off—building a dam for the purpose, perhaps—and then conduct the water down here by a ditch several miles long possibly. Far too big an undertaking, you see, for these penniless, unenterprising Mexicans."

"I see. It would take a great deal of work and a great deal of money, probably, but it would be a fine thing to do, all the same."

"Yes, it would; and some day it will be done. It won't be so very many years before all the 'easy water' in the State will have been appropriated, and then people will begin to look out for a supply in the more out-of-the-way places, building reservoirs to catch the rainfall which now runs to waste after every thunder-storm, and carrying the water long distances to sell it to the ranchman. The professor says that some day the business of catching and distributing irrigation water will be the most important industry in the State, and that a good ever-flowing stream will be more valuable than any silver mine."

"I can understand that," I replied. "The best mine will some day come to an end, for when the [Pg 154] silver is once dug out it is gone—you can't plant more; whereas, a good stream of water applied on the soil will go on producing forever and ever."

"That's it, exactly. And some day that is what will happen here. This fine stretch of level land, which now grows only grass enough to support about three cows and a burro, won't always lie idle. Some enterprising fellow will come along, climb up into this mountain, catch one of those streams which now go running off through the cañons, turn it down here, and a couple of years later this worthless desert will be converted into farms and orchards."

"A fine undertaking, too!" I exclaimed. "I should like to have a try at it myself."

"So should I. But our object in life just now is 'copper,' so come on, old chap, and let us ride down to the point of this ridge. What is that black speck down there toward the village? Man on horseback? Ah! He has disappeared again. Well, come on now, Frank. Let's get started."

Getting down upon the plain again, we turned southward, skirting the base of the mountain, [Pg 155] winding our way through the sage-brush, which was large and very thick, when, after riding barely a quarter of a mile in that direction, Dick suddenly pulled up.

"Frank!" he exclaimed. "Look here! Doesn't it seem to you that there is a depression in the soil going off to the right and the left? Look away a hundred yards and you will see what I mean. It seems to lead straight up into the mountain one way, and straight out upon the plain the other way."

At first I could not detect anything of the sort, but on Dick's pointing it out more particularly it did appear to me that there was a depression going off in both directions.

"Let us turn to the left, Dick," said I, "and follow it—if we can—out into the valley and see what becomes of it."

"All right," responded my companion. "Let's do so."

The mark on the ground was by no means easy to follow, it was so overgrown with sage-brush, and in many places altogether obliterated by drifting sand, but, though we frequently lost it, by looking far ahead we always caught the line again. Presently we found that it went curving off to [Pg 156] the right in the direction of Hermanos, and our hopes rose.

"Dick!" I cried. "This is no accidental mark in the soil! It is a trail, as sure as you live!"

"It does begin to look like it," replied my more cautious friend. "I believe it—— Hallo! Who's this coming?"

As he spoke, I saw about half a mile away a horseman coming toward us at an easy lope from the direction of the village. He was riding a handsome gray horse, very superior to the little bronchos we ourselves bestrode.

"He rides well," said I. "I wonder how he got so close to us on this flat country without our seeing him."

"The country is probably not quite so flat as it looks," replied my companion. "I expect the man has been keeping in the hollows so that he might slip up on us unobserved. It is probably old Galvez coming to find out what we are doing prowling around his domain. He must be the horseman I saw just now, and I've no doubt he saw us, too, cocked up on that bare ridge—for all these Mexicans have eyes like hawks."

Meanwhile the rider continued to approach, and as he came nearer we observed, rather to our [Pg 157] relief, that it could not be the padron, for the stranger was a well-dressed young Mexican, only three or four years older than ourselves, a handsome, intelligent-looking young fellow, too, with a trim little black moustache and bright black eyes—evidently one of a class superior to the ordinary cow-man or farm-hand.

Watching him closely as he came up, wondering what sort of a reception we should get from him, it appeared to me that he, too, looked both surprised and relieved when he perceived that instead of the two rough and sturdy prospectors he had probably expected to meet, it was only a couple of boys, younger than himself, with whom he had to deal.

And it is likely that he did feel relieved, for at that time the white men—or, at least, very many of them—dwelling on what was then the outer edge of civilization, were apt to look down upon all Mexicans as people of an inferior race, frequently treating them in consequence in a rough, overbearing manner by no means calculated to promote friendly feeling.

The young Mexican doubtless "sized us up" favorably; at any rate, no sooner had he come near enough to see what we were like than he rode straight up to us, and addressing us politely in Spanish, said: [Pg 158]

"Good-day, sirs. Are you going down to Hermanos? I shall be glad to ride with you if you are."

It happened that I was the one to whom he addressed this salutation, Dick being a little further back. Now, though I had acquired enough of the language to understand and speak it fairly well, the Spanish I had learned was good Castilian, whereas the young Mexican spoke a kind of *patois*, such as is commonly used among all the natives of these outlying settlements. The unexpected difference of pronunciation, though slight, caused me to hesitate an instant in making reply—I have no doubt, too, my face looked rather blank—whereupon the young fellow instantly jumped to the conclusion that we did not speak Spanish at all, and he therefore repeated his remark in English.

It was without any thought of misleading him that I replied, very naturally, in the tongue which came easiest to me, and as the stranger spoke English quite as well as I did, it was very natural again that the conversation should be continued in that tongue. Thus it happened that we accidentally deceived him—or, rather, he deceived himself—into the belief that we did not understand any language but our own, and as no opportunity cropped up during our talk for setting him right, he continued in this mistaken idea; a fact which, a little later, caused us considerable satisfaction—not on our own account, but on his. [Pg 159]

Replying to his question therefore in English, I said:

"No, we were not bound for Hermanos in particular. We have come down here to do a little prospecting, and were just riding around a bit to take a look at the country. Do you live here?"

"No," he replied, "I live in Santa Fé. My name is Antonio Martinez. I am on a visit here to my uncle, Señor Galvez, the padron of Hermanos. He is my mother's brother, and as she had not seen him for many years, and as he has always declined to come to us, she sent me here to make his acquaintance. For myself, I had never even seen him until I arrived here two weeks ago, and ——"

He checked himself suddenly, looking a little confused; I had an idea that what he was going to say was that he did not much care if he never saw him again.

"And are you expecting to stay here?" asked Dick. [Pg 160]

"No, I go back in a day or two. Where do you, yourselves hail from, if I may ask? From Mosby?"

"Yes, from Mosby," replied Dick. "We came down, as my friend said, to do some prospecting up in one or other of these two peaks—we don't know which one yet. How is the country up there? Pretty accessible? You've been up, I suppose."

"No, I haven't," replied the young Mexican. "You think that rather strange, don't you? And naturally enough. Here have I been for two weeks hanging around this village with absolutely nothing to do; I should have been glad enough to make an expedition up into the mountains—in fact, I had a very particular reason for wishing to do so—but when I suggested the idea to the padron, explaining to him why I was so anxious to go, he not only refused emphatically for himself, but declined to let me go either."

"Why, that seems queer!" cried Dick.

"It does, doesn't it? And his reason for refusing will appear to you queerer still—he's afraid!"

"Afraid!" we both exclaimed. "Afraid of what?" [Pg 161]

"Afraid of The Badger," replied the young fellow, breaking into a laugh as he noted the mystified look which came over both our faces.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Why should he—or anybody—be afraid of a badger?"

"I said *The* Badger," replied our friend. "You have never heard of him, evidently—El Tejon, The Badger."

We both shook our heads.

"What is he?" I asked. "A man?"

"Yes—or a wild beast. It is hard to say which. He is a Mexican who once lived in the village here, I believe. For some reason which I cannot understand—for my uncle won't talk about it, though I have asked him several times—for some reason The Badger conceived a violent hatred for the padron; whether he went crazy or not, I don't know, but anyhow he committed a murderous assault upon him, hurting him badly—knocked out all his front teeth with a stone, for one thing—and then escaped into the mountains. That was twelve years ago, and as far as any one knows he is there yet, if he is still alive."

"And wasn't any attempt ever made to capture him?" asked Dick. [Pg 162]

"Once," replied Antonio. "According to the padron's story, he went out with six of his cow-men to try to run The Badger to earth; but the attempt was a failure, as was only to be expected, for the cow-men were very unwilling to go. They trembled at the very name of El Tejon, who was a man of immense strength and a great hunter, and they feared that instead of catching him, he would catch one of them. And the event showed that they had reason. They had been out several days, had ridden all over the lower part of the north mountain without seeing a sign of their man, and were coming back, single file, down a narrow gully, when the padron's horse suddenly, and seemingly without cause, fell down, stone dead. The rider, of course, fell too, and striking his head against a stone he lay for a moment stunned. No one could think what had happened to the horse, until presently one of the men noticed blood upon the rocks, and turning the animal over they were all scared out of their wits by seeing the head of an arrow sticking out between his ribs."

"An arrow!" we both cried.

"Yes, an arrow," continued the narrator, not noticing the glance Dick and I exchanged. "They [Pg 163] knew well enough where it came from, for The Badger had always hunted with a bow and arrow, with which he was extraordinarily expert. The instant the cow-men saw what had happened they stuck spurs into their horses and away they all went, helter-skelter, leaving their leader lying on the ground."

"That was a pretty shabby desertion," said I. "How did the padron escape?"

"That is one of the things I can't understand," replied Antonio. "Why the man, having him so entirely in his power, didn't kill him at once is a puzzle to me. As it was, when the padron recovered his senses, he found El Tejon calmly seated on the carcase of the horse, waiting for him to wake up. He quite expected, he says, to be murdered forthwith, but instead, the man merely held up the arrow, which he had drawn out of the horse's body, and said: 'For you—next time'; and with that he arose and walked off. The padron is no coward, but he knows when to let well enough alone: he has never been up on the mountain since."

"That's a curious story," said Dick. "What sort of a looking man is this El Tejon?"

"I've never seen him myself, of course," replied our friend, "but the padron describes him as a [Pg 164] very remarkable man to look at: less than five feet high, with an immense body, very short legs and very long arms."

Dick and I exchanged glances again.

"Whether the man is yet alive," continued the young fellow, "nobody knows. It is nearly twelve years ago that this happened, and since then he has never been seen nor heard of. The chances are, I expect, that he has been long dead."

"On that point," remarked Dick, "we can give *you* a little information. He is not dead—at least he wasn't last fall."

CHAPTER X [Pg 165]

The Padron

"What do you mean?" cried Antonio. "How do you know? I thought you said you had never heard of him."

"We hadn't," replied Dick, "until you mentioned his name, but from your description we have no doubt we saw him some months ago up here at the head of the valley."

With this by way of preface, my companion related to our new acquaintance the particulars of our "interview" with the "little giant," as he called him.

"It must be the same man," said Antonio. "I wonder what he was doing so far away from his own mountain. You say he shot the wolf with a copper-headed arrow? That's something I should like to investigate, if only the padron were not so dead set against my going up into the mountain. Where does he get his copper? In fact——" He paused to consider, and then went on: "Yes; I don't see why I shouldn't tell you—my uncle won't go himself, and he won't let me go, so I may as well [Pg 166] tell *you*. The truth is that the reason why I was so anxious to make an excursion up there was just that—to find out where El Tejon gets his copper. And not only he, but the villagers down here. Every house in Hermanos has its copper bowl and dipper. They are hammered out of lumps of native copper; some of them must weigh five or six pounds. Where did they come from? Lumps of copper of that size were not washed down the streams—they were dug up. But by whom, and where?"

I felt a great inclination to tell him. He had been so friendly and communicative that I began to feel rather uncomfortable at the thought that we were drawing all this information from him under what might be regarded as false pretences.

I was pretty sure that Dick would be feeling much the same—for among boys, as I have many a

time noticed, there is nothing more catching than open-heartedness—and I was right; for, glancing at him to see what he thought, I caught his eye, when he immediately raised his eyebrows a trifle, as much as to say, "Shall I tell him?"

"Yes," said I, aloud. "I think so. Though we must remember, Dick, that it isn't altogether our [Pg 167] secret."

Dick nodded, and turning to the young Mexican, who was gazing at us open-eyed, wondering what we were talking about, he said:

"Senor Antonio, my friend and I agree that it isn't quite fair to you to let you go on telling us these things without our telling you something in return. As Frank says, it is not altogether our own secret, but at the same time we don't think it is quite a square deal to get all these particulars from you and to keep you in the dark about ourselves. I can tell you this much, anyhow: that our object in coming down here was to find out where those same lumps of copper did come from."

"Why, how did *you* know anything about them?" cried Antonio, opening his eyes wider still.

"I passed through Hermanos about eighteen months ago," replied Dick, "in company with a German naturalist, Herr Bergen, when we noticed the great number of copper bowls and things, and the sight of them reminded the professor of a story he had heard of an old copper mine, abandoned more than a hundred years ago, supposed to be somewhere down in this country. The [Pg 168] story the professor told us is the story which we think we have no business to repeat, but I can tell you this much, at least, that it seemed to indicate the Dos Hermanos as the site of the old mine; and so we got leave to come down here to see if we couldn't trail it up."

"Is that so? What fun you will have. I wish I could go with you. But that, I know, is out of the question: the padron would not consent, and I could not go against his will. But if I can help you I shall be very glad. Does the story you refer to indicate which of the two peaks is the right one?"

"No, it doesn't," replied Dick. "We suppose that the copper used to be brought down to the *Casa* on pack-burros, and we thought there might be the remains of a trail down here in the valley. That is what we were doing when you rode up:—looking for the trail; and we thought perhaps we had found it when we discovered this indentation in the soil that we have been following."

"And I believe you have!" cried Antonio. "That's just what you have! It goes on straight southward from here, very plain, to within half a mile of the *Casa* and then seems to die out for some reason. But, that it is the old trail I feel certain. Your copper mine is up there on the north peak as sure [Pg 169] as——"

He stopped short, his enthusiasm suddenly died out, and pulling a long face, he gazed at us rather blankly.

"Well?" asked Dick.

"I was forgetting. There's something else up there on the north peak."

"What's that?"

"The Badger!"

"That's so!" cried Dick. "I'd forgotten him, too. Do you suppose he would interfere with us?"

"That's more than I can say. From what the padron has told me, I imagine it is only to him that El Tejon objects, and perhaps also to me as one of the family; but I'm not sure about that. Look here! I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll just ride home and ask him what he thinks. You stay here. I'll be back in half an hour."

"You are very kind," said my partner. "But why should we trouble you to come back here? We'll ride down with you."

To our surprise the young fellow flushed and looked embarrassed, but recovering in a moment, he said:

"Come on, then. But before we go, let me tell you something. The reason I hesitated was that I [Pg 170] feared you might not receive a very hearty welcome from the padron. The truth of the matter is—to put it plainly, once for all—he hates strangers, and above all he hates the Americans. I am sorry it should be so, but so it is. The feeling is not uncommon among the older Mexicans: those who went through the war of '46; and if you stop to think of it, it isn't altogether unreasonable. According to the padron's view of the matter, his native country was invaded without cause or justice; he, himself, fought against the invader; his own brother and many of his friends were killed; and finally, he saw the land where he was born torn away from its old moorings and attached to the country of the enemy."

This defence of his fellow-countryman, which the young Mexican delivered with much earnestness and feeling, was a revelation to me. Hitherto I had only considered the war with Mexico from our side, glorying in our success and admiring—very rightly—the bravery of our soldiers. That the Mexicans, themselves, might have a point of view of their own had never occurred to me, until this young fellow thus held up their side of the picture for me to see.

"That's a matter I never thought of before," said I; "but when you do stop to think of it, it is *not* [Pg 171]

surprising that the older generation of Mexicans should have no liking for us."

"No," Dick chimed in; "and I don't think you can blame them, either."

"I'm glad you see it that way," said Antonio. "It makes things all comfortable for me. So, now, let us get along. And if the padron doesn't seem best pleased to see you, you will know why."

Following along the line of the supposed trail, which continued in general to be pretty plain, we presently passed alongside of a high bank of earth to which our guide called our attention.

"Just ride up here a minute," said he. "Now, do you see how this earth-bank forms a perfect square, measuring about two hundred yards each way? What do you make of that?"

"It was evidently built up," said I; "it can't be a natural formation. But what the earth was piled up for, I can't see."

"I think I can," remarked Dick. "If I'm not mistaken, this is the site of an old pueblo."

"Just what I think," responded Antonio. "An old pueblo which probably stood here before ever the Spaniards came to the country, and has been melted down to this shapeless bank by the rains of centuries. This valley must have supported a good-sized population once—very much larger than at present." [Pg 172]

"It looks like it," Dick assented. "I wonder where they got their water from—for I suppose they lived mostly by agriculture, as the Pueblos do still. Hasn't the padron ever tried to find the old source of supply?"

The young Mexican shook his head. "No," said he. "The source of supply, wherever it was, was up in the mountains somewhere, and in spite of the fact that if he could find it, it would increase the value of the grant a thousand times, he daren't go to look for it."

"My! What a chance there is here"—Dick began, when he suddenly checked himself. "Here's some one coming," said he. "Is this the padron?"

"Yes; he must be coming to see who you are. I hope he won't make himself unpleasant."

As Antonio spoke, there came riding toward us a square-set, gray-haired Mexican, at whom, as he approached, we gazed with much interest. He was a man of fifty, or thereabouts, harsh-featured and forbidding, who scowled at us in a manner which made me, at least, rather wish I had not come. To put it shortly and plainly, the Señor Galvez had, in fact, the most truculent countenance I had ever seen; and his first remark to his nephew, as the latter advanced to meet him, was on a par with his appearance. [Pg 173]

"What are you bringing these American pigs here for, Antonio?" he growled, in Spanish. "You know I will have nothing to do with them."

Poor Antonio flushed painfully under his brown skin. He half raised his hand with a deprecatory gesture, as though to beg the speaker to be more moderate, while he glanced uneasily at us out of the corner of his eye to see if we had understood.

It was then that Dick and I congratulated ourselves on having accidentally deceived our friend into the belief that we did not speak Spanish. Suppressing our natural desire to bandy a few compliments with the churlish padron, we put on an expression of countenance as stolid and vacant as if we had been indeed the American pigs aforesaid—immensely to the comfort of the younger man, as it was easy to see.

"Do not be harsh, señor," said he. "They are only boys, and they are doing no harm here. Moreover," he went on, "they have brought you a piece of information which you will be glad to have:—El Tejon is still alive." [Pg 174]

The elder man started; his weather-beaten face paled a little.

"How do they know that?" he asked, suspiciously.

Antonio briefly told him our story.

"Hm!" grunted the padron, glowering at us from under his bushy eyebrows. "But what are these boys skulking around here for? They don't pretend, I suppose, that they have come all the way down from Mosby just to tell me they have seen El Tejon."

"Not at all," replied Antonio, with considerable spirit. "They are gentlemen, and they don't pretend anything. That bigger one of the two, the freckled one with the hook-nose and red hair"—it was Dick he meant, and intense was my desire to wink at him and laugh—"that one passed through here before; he noticed how every house contained its copper bowl and dipper—just as I did—and he has come down here with his friend—just as I wanted to do—to try to find out where the copper came from. We have had a long talk about it, and we have concluded that it probably came from somewhere up on the north peak. What I brought them down here for was to ask you whether you thought The Badger would let them alone if they went up there—that's all." [Pg 175]

"That's all, is it? Well, perhaps it is. But I'm suspicious of strangers, Antonio, especially since——"

He paused, seemingly considering whether he should or should not mention the subject he had in mind, but at length—evidently supposing that we could not understand what he was saying—he

went on:

"I had not intended to say anything to you about it, but three days ago—the day you rode over to Zapatero to spend the night—something occurred here which makes me rather uneasy. I had been away all day myself that day and on my return I found a young man in the village who had come, he said, from Santa Fé. For a young man to come to this out-of-the-way place, all alone, from Santa Fé, or from anywhere else, for that matter, was a strange thing: it made me suspicious that he was after no good. And I became more than suspicious when I found that he had spent the day going from one house to another inquiring after El Tejon!" [Pg 176]

"Inquiring after El Tejon!" repeated Antonio. "That was strange; especially considering that El Tejon has been practically dead for a dozen years. Did he offer any explanation?"

"No. To tell the truth, I did not give him the opportunity. When I found out what he was doing, how he had slipped into the village during my absence and had gone prying about among these ignorant peons, asking questions concerning my enemy, I was so enraged that I threatened to shoot him if he did not depart at once. I made a mistake there, I admit; if I had curbed my anger, I might have found out what his object was. But I did not, so there is no more to be said."

"That was unfortunate," said Antonio; "but, as you say, it can't be helped now. So the stranger went off, did he? Did he return to——"

"No, he didn't," Galvez interrupted, "or, at any rate, not immediately. I'll tell you how I know. I was so distrustful of him that I followed his trail next morning—it was dark when he left, and I couldn't do it then. It was an easy trail to follow, for his horse was shod, and ours, of course, are not. It led eastward for a mile and then turned back, circled round the village and went up into the north mountain. I have not seen him, nor a trace of him since." [Pg 177]

"It is a strange thing," said Antonio, thoughtfully. "What was the young man like? How old? Was he a Mexican or an American?"

"I don't know. He looked like an American, though he spoke Spanish perfectly. He might be twenty years old. It is an odd thing, Antonio—and it is that, perhaps, which made me speak so sharply when I first saw these new friends of yours—but the young man was something like the bigger one of these two boys: the same hook-nose and light-gray eyes, though his hair was black instead of red."

"A strange thing altogether," said Antonio, reflectively. "I don't wonder you feel a little uneasy."

"As to these boys here," the padron went on, jerking his head in our direction, "you may tell them that they need not fear The Badger. It is only I who have cause to fear him, and perhaps you, as my nephew. These boys may go where they like without danger. The chances are they won't see El Tejon—they certainly won't if he doesn't want to be seen. And, Antonio, just thank them for bringing me their information, and then send them off." [Pg 178]

So saying, old Galvez turned his unmannerly back on us and rode away.

The interview, if it can be called such—for the padron had not addressed a single word to us—being plainly at an end, we shook hands with our friend, Antonio, and having thanked him very heartily for his service, we set off for camp, riding fast, in our hurry to get back before darkness should overtake us.

CHAPTER XI [Pg 179]

The Spanish Trail

"Dick," said I, as we sat together that evening beside our camp-fire, "what do you make of it? That was a queer thing, that young fellow coming inquiring for El Tejon. I confess, for my part, I can't make head or tail of it."

"I can't either," replied Dick; "at least, as far as this stranger is concerned. I'm quite in the dark on that point. As to the padron and The Badger, though, that seems to me simple enough. It is some old feud between the two which concerns nobody but themselves."

"That is how it strikes me. You don't think, then, that there is any danger to us?"

"No, I don't. In fact, I feel sure of it. It is just a personal quarrel of long standing between those two—that's all. I have no more fear of El Tejon than I have of any other Mexican. All the same, old chap, if you have any doubt about it, I'm ready to quit and go home again."

"No," I replied, emphatically. "I vote we go on. And I'll tell you why, Dick. For one thing, I always did hate to give up." [Pg 180]

My partner nodded appreciation.

"For another thing, I have gathered the notion that this Badger is not a bad fellow; not at all the kind that would murder a man in his sleep or shoot him from behind a rock. The fact that he let old Galvez go that time when he had him helpless, seems to me pretty good evidence that he is a man of some generosity and above-boardness."

"That's a fact," Dick assented; "it was rather a fine action, as it seems to me. And unless I'm vastly mistaken, Frank," he went on, "if the cases had been reversed, and the padron had caught The Badger as The Badger caught the padron, it would have been all up with El Tejon. I never saw a harder-looking specimen in my life than old Galvez. I know, if he were my enemy, I should be mighty sorry to fall into his hands."

"So should I; and the less we have to do with him the better, to my notion. I think we shall do well to steer clear of him."

"Yes; and there won't be any temptation to go near him, anyhow, especially as Antonio won't be there to act as a buffer. So, we decide to go on, do we?" Dick concluded, as he arose to put two [Pg 181] big logs on the fire for the night. "All right. Then we'll get out to-morrow morning. We'll take the line of the old trail and follow it up into the mountain as far as it goes—or as far as we can, perhaps I should say."

"Very well," I agreed. "And we may as well abandon this camp, take old Fritz and all our belongings with us, and find another place more suitable higher up the mountain."

"Yes; so now to bed."

We were up betimes next morning, and having packed our traps away we went, Dick in the lead, Fritz following, and I bringing up the rear. Climbing over the big ridge from whose crest we had surveyed the valley the day before, we rode down its other side to the line of the old trail, and there, turning to the right, we followed it as it gradually ascended, until presently at the head of the ravine the trail, greatly to our perplexity, came to an end altogether.

The ravine itself had become so narrow and its sides so precipitous that there appeared to be no way of climbing out of it, and we began to have our doubts as to whether it could really be an old trail that we had been following after all, when Dick, spying about, discovered a much-washed- [Pg 182] out crevice on the right-hand side, so grown up with trees and brush as to be hardly distinguishable.

"Frank," said he, "they must have come down here—there's no other way that I can see. Wait a moment till I get up there and see if the trail isn't visible again up on top."

It was a pretty stiff scramble to get up, but as soon as he had reached the top my partner shouted down to me to come up—he had found the trail once more.

If it had been a stiff climb for Dick's horse, it was stiffer still for old Fritz with his bulky pack. But Fritz was a first-rate animal for mountain work, having had lots of practice, and being allowed to choose his own course and take his own time he made the ascent without damaging himself or his burden.

As soon as I had rejoined him, Dick pointed out to me the line of the trail, which, bearing away northward now, was much more distinct than it had been down below. For one thing, the ground here was a great deal harder; and for another, being well sheltered by the pine woods, the trail had not drifted full of sand as it had out on the unprotected valley. There were, it is true, frequent places where the rains of many years had washed the soil down the hillsides and [Pg 183] covered it up, but in general it was easily distinguishable as it went winding along the base of the mountain proper, at the point where the steeper slopes merged into the great spurs which projected out into the valley.

The distinctness of the old trail was, indeed, a surprise to me, its line was so much easier to follow than I had expected. If it continued to be as plain as this, we should have no trouble in keeping it; and so I remarked to my companion.

"That's true," Dick assented, adding: "I'll tell you what, Frank: this must surely have been a government enterprise. Just see how much work has been expended on this trail—and needlessly, I should say—no private individual or corporation would have taken the trouble to make a carefully graded road like this—for that is what it really was apparently. It must have been some manager handling government funds and not worrying himself much about the amount he spent."

"I shouldn't wonder," said I.

"Just notice," Dick continued, pointing out the places with his finger. "See what useless expenditure they made. Whenever they came to a dip, big or little, instead of going down one side [Pg 184] and up the other, as any ordinary human being would do, they carried their road round the end of the gully—just as though a loaded burro would object to coming up a little hill like this one, for instance, here in front of us."

"It does seem rather ridiculous," I assented. "And they must have laid out their line with care, too, for, if you notice, Dick, it goes on climbing up the mountain with a grade which seems to be perfectly uniform as far as we can see it. It is more like a railroad grade than a trail. It isn't possible, is it, Dick," I asked, as the thought suddenly occurred to me, "it isn't possible that they can have used wheeled vehicles?"

"Hm!" replied my companion, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "No, I think not. It would be extremely improbable, to say the least. No, I think it is more likely to be as I said: some lordly government official, spending government funds, and not troubling himself whether the income would warrant the expenditure or not."

"I suppose that was probably it," said I. "There's one thing sure, Dick," I added: "if the income did warrant the expenditure, that old copper mine must have been a staver and no mistake." [Pg 185]

"That's a fact. Well, come on; let us go ahead and see where the trail takes us."

This following of the trail was a perfectly simple matter; the animals themselves, in fact, took to it and kept to it as naturally as though even they recognized it as a road. So, on we went, climbing gradually higher at every step, when, on rounding the shoulder of a big spur, we were brought to a sudden and most unexpected halt by coming plump upon the edge of a deep and very narrow cañon. Right up to the very brink of this great chasm the trail led us, and there, of necessity, it abruptly ended.

This gorge, which was perhaps a thousand feet deep, and, as I have said, extremely narrow—not more than thirty feet wide at the point where we had struck it—came down from the north face of the mountain, and, as we could see from where we stood, ran out eastward into the plain. It was undoubtedly the stream upon which we had camped when we had come across the valley two days before.

Looking the other way—to the left, that is: up stream—our view was limited, but from what we could see of it, the country in that direction bade fair to be inaccessible, for horses, at least; while as to the cañon itself, it curved first to the left and then to the right in such a manner that we could not see to the bottom. Moreover a large rock, rising from the edge of the gorge, and in fact overhanging it a little, cut off our view up stream. [Pg 186]

On the opposite side of the chasm the ground rose high and rocky, an exceedingly rough piece of country; for though it was in general well clothed with trees, we could see in a score of places great bare-topped ridges and pinnacles of rock projecting high above the somber woods.

"Dick," said I, "this looks rather like the end of things. What are we to do now?"

"The end of things!" cried Dick. "Not a bit of it! Don't you see, on the other side of the cañon, exactly opposite, that little ravine which goes winding up the mountain until it loses itself among the trees? Well, that is the continuation of the trail. Come down here to the edge and I'll show you."

Dismounting from our horses, we advanced as near the rim of the chasm as we dared, when Dick, pointing across to the other side, said:

"Look there, Frank, about a foot below the top. Do you see those two square niches cut in the face of the rock? This place was spanned by a bridge once, and those two niches are where the ends of the big stringers rested." [Pg 187]

"It does look like it!" I exclaimed. "If there are other similar niches on this side, that would settle it. Take hold of my feet, will you, while I stick my head over the edge and see?"

With Dick firmly clasping my ankle by way of precaution, I crept to the rim and craned my neck out over the precipice as far as I dared venture. As we had expected, there were the two corresponding niches, while about ten feet below them were two others, the existence of which puzzled me. Squirming carefully back again, I rose to my feet and told Dick what I had seen.

"Two others, eh?" said he. "That's easily explained. Look across again and you will see that there are two in the face of the opposite cliff to match them. Those people not only laid two big stringers across the cañon, but they supported them from below with four stays set in those lower holes."

"That must be it!" I exclaimed. "They did things well, didn't they—it is on a par with the work they expended on the trail. The trail itself, of course, went on up that little ravine and has since been washed out by the rains." [Pg 188]

"Yes; and the bridge has rotted and fallen into the stream; unless they destroyed it purposely when they abandoned the mine."

"Well, Dick," said I. "It seems fairly sure that the mine was over there, somewhere in the rough country on the other side of the cañon. The question is, how are *we* to get over there?"

"Yes, that's the question all right. We can't get down here. That is plain enough. We shall have to find some other way. And that there is another way is pretty certain. See here! This cañon comes down from the north side of the mountain, runs out into the valley to the point where we struck it day before yesterday, doubles back, and joins the streams coming down from Mescalero, as well as those others which flow down from the north side of the peak."

"Well?"

"Well, this piece of country before us is therefore a sort of island, surrounded, or nearly surrounded, by cañons."

I nodded. "Yes," said I. "Or more like a fortress with a thousand-foot moat all round it."

"Well," continued my partner, "the original discoverers of the mine, whether Indians or Spaniards, did not cross here by a bridge, of course; they climbed up from the bottom of one of these cañons somewhere, and at first, probably, brought out the copper the same way, until, finding how much easier it would be to come across here, they built a bridge and made this road [Pg 189]

for the purpose."

"That sounds reasonable," I assented. "So if we want to find the place where they used to get up, we must climb down into the bottom of the cañon ourselves and hunt for it."

"Yes," replied Dick. "And from the look of it, I shouldn't wonder if we don't have to go all the way back to our old camping-place in order to get down!"

"Hm!" said I, puckering up my lips and rubbing my chin. "I hope we don't have to go that far; but if we must, we must. Anyhow, Dick, before we go all the way down to the bottom of the mountain again, let us climb up above this big rock here and take a look up stream. It is just possible there may be a way down in that direction."

"Very well," replied my partner. "I don't suppose there is, but we'll try it anyhow."

Leaving our horses standing, we went back a little way along the trail, and climbing upward, [Pg 190] presently reached a point level with the top of the big rock which rose above the edge of the gorge. There we found several little gullies leading down to the ravine, and Dick taking one of them and I another, we thus became separated for a few minutes. Only for a few minutes, however, for very soon I heard my partner hailing me to come back. From the tone of his voice I felt sure he had discovered something.

"What is it, Dick?" I asked. "Found a way down?"

"That's what I have, Frank, I'm pretty sure. Come here and look!"

CHAPTER XII [Pg 191]

The Badger

A short distance down Dick's gully was a great slab of stone standing on edge, which, leaning over until its upper end touched the opposite wall, formed a natural arch about as high as a church door. Through this vaulted passage Dick led the way. In about twenty steps we came out again upon the brink of the chasm, and then it was that my partner, with some natural exultation, pointed out to me the remarkable discovery he had made.

In the face of the cliff was a sort of ledge, varying in width from ten feet to about double as much, which, with a pretty steep, though pretty regular pitch, continued downward until it disappeared around the bend in the gorge. Unless the ledge should narrow very considerably we should have no trouble in getting down, for there was room in plenty not only for ourselves but for our animals also—even for old Fritz, pack and all.

"Why, Dick!" I cried. "We can easily get down here! I wonder if this wasn't the original road taken [Pg 192] by the pack-trains."

"It was," replied Dick; "at least, I feel pretty sure it was—and it was used for a long time, too."

"Why do you think so?" I asked. "You speak as though you felt pretty certain, Dick, but for my part I don't see why."

"Don't you? Why, it's very plain. Look here! Do you see, close to the outer edge of the shelf, a sort of trough worn in the rock? Do you know what that is? If I'm not very much mistaken, it is the trail of the pack-burros. There must have been a good many of them, and they must have gone up and down for a good many years to wear such a trail; though, of course, it has been enlarged since by the rain-water running down it."

"Well, Dick," said I, "I still don't see why you should conclude that this is the trail of a pack-train. It seems to me much more likely to be due to water only. In the first place, though there is room enough and to spare on the ledge, your supposed trail is on the very outer edge, where a false step would send the burro head-first into the cañon; and in the next place, it keeps to the very edge, no matter whether the ledge is wide or narrow."

"That's exactly the point," explained Dick. "It is just that very thing which makes me feel so sure [Pg 193] that this is the trail of a pack-train. You've never seen pack-burros at work in the mountains, have you? Well, I have lots of times: they are frequently used to carry ore down from the mines. If you had seen them, you could not have helped noticing the habit they have of walking on the outside of a ledge like this, where there is a precipice on one side and a cliff on the other. A burro may be a 'donkey,' but he understands his own business. He knows that if he touches his pack against the rock he will be knocked over the precipice, and he has learned his lesson so well that it makes no difference how wide the ledge may be—he will keep as far away from the rock as he can. As to a false step, that doesn't enter into his calculations: a burro doesn't make a false step—there is no surer-footed beast in existence, I should think, excepting, possibly, the mountain-sheep."

"I never thought of all that," said I. "Then I expect you are right, Dick, and this is an old trail after all. What is your idea? To follow it down, I suppose."

"Yes, certainly. Our animals won't make any bones about going down a wide path like this. They [Pg 194] are all used to the mountains. So let us get them at once and start down."

Dick was right. Our horses, each led by the bridle, followed us without hesitation, while old Fritz, half a burro himself, took at once to the trail which one of his ancestors, perhaps, had helped to make.

Without trouble or mishap, we descended the steeply-pitching ledge down to the margin of the creek, crossed over to the other side, and continued on our way up stream over the slope of decomposed rock fallen from the towering cliff which rose at least a thousand feet above us—the cliff being now on our right hand and the stream on our left.

This sloping bank was scantily covered with trees, and among them we threaded our way, still following the trail, which, however, down here had lost any resemblance to a made road, and had become a mere thread, more like a disused cow-path than anything else.

Presently, we found that the cañon began to widen, and soon afterward the cliff along whose base we had been skirting, suddenly fell away to the right in a great sweeping curve, forming an immense natural amphitheatre, enclosing a good-sized stretch of grass-land, with willows and [Pg 195] cottonwoods fringing the nearer bank of the stream.

As we sat on our horses surveying the scene, we found ourselves confronting at last the imposing north face of the mountain. Up toward its summit we could see the great semi-circular cliff which we supposed to be the upper half of an old crater, while the country below it, bare, rocky and much broken up, was exceedingly rough and precipitous.

Starting, apparently, from the neighborhood of this crater, there came down the mountain a second very narrow and very deep gorge, whose waters, when there were any, emptied into the stream we had been following; the two cañons being separated by a high, narrow rib of rock—a mere wedge. Curiously enough, however, this second cañon did not carry a stream, though we could see the shimmer of two or three pools as they caught the reflection of the sky down there in the bottom of its gloomy depths.

"Well, Dick," said I, "I don't see any sign yet of a pathway up to the top of this 'island' of yours. This basin is merely an enlargement of the cañon; the walls are just as high and just as straight-up-and-down as ever."

"Yes, I see that plainly enough," replied Dick. "Yet there must be a way up somewhere. Those [Pg 196] pack-trains didn't come down here for nothing. We shall find a break in the wall presently—up in that gorge, there, it must be, too. So let us go on. Hark! What's that?"

We sat still and listened. The whole atmosphere seemed to vibrate with a low hum, the cause of which we could not understand. It kept on for five minutes, perhaps, and then died out again.

"What was it, Dick?" said I. "Wind?"

"I suppose it must have been," replied my companion; "though there isn't a breath stirring down here. If the sky had not been so perfectly clear all morning I should have said it was a flood coming. It must have been wind, though, I suppose."

Satisfied that this was the cause, we thought no more of it, but, taking up the trail once more, we followed it down to the mouth of the second cañon, and there at the edge of the watercourse all trace of it ceased.

"That seems to settle it," remarked Dick. "You see, Frank, the walls of this cañon are so steep and its bed is so filled with great boulders that even a burro could get no further. The copper must [Pg 197] have been carried down to this point on men's backs, and if so, it was not carried any great distance probably. The mine must be somewhere pretty near now; we shan't have to search much further, I think, for a way up this right-hand cliff. Let us unsaddle here, where the horses can get plenty of grass, and go on up on foot."

The ascent of the chasm was no easy task, we found, but, weaving our way between the boulders which strewed its bed, up we went, until presently we came to a place where some time or another a great slice of the wall, about an eighth of a mile in length, falling down, had blocked it completely, forming an immense dam nearly a hundred feet high. It must have been many years since it fell, for its surface was well grown up with trees, though none of them were of any great size. It seemed probable, too, that the base of the dam must be composed of large fragments of rock, for, though there was no stream in the bed of the gorge, it was very plain that water did sometimes run down it. If so, however, it was equally plain that it must squeeze its way through the crevices between the foundation rocks, for there was no sign at all that it had ever run over the top.

Scrambling up this mass of earth and rocks, we went on, keeping a sharp lookout for some sign [Pg 198] of a pathway up the cliff on our right, but still seeing nothing of the sort, when presently we reached the upper face of the dam, and there for a moment we stopped.

Beneath us lay a stretch of the ravine, forming a basin about two hundred yards long, in the bottom of which were three or four pools of clear water. At the upper end of this basin was a perpendicular cliff, barring all further advance in that direction, over which, in some seasons of the year, the water evidently poured—sometimes in considerable volume apparently, judging from the manner in which the sides of the basin had been undermined. The sides themselves continued to be just as unscalable as ever; in spite of Dick's assurance that we should find a way up, it was apparent at a glance that there was neither crack nor crevice by which one could

ascend.

"Well!" cried my partner, in a tone of desperation. "This does beat me! I felt certain that the trail would lead us to some pathway up the cliff; but, as it does not, what does it come down here for at all?"

"There is only one reason that I can think of," I replied, "and that is that they must have come down here for water—there is probably none to be found up on top of the 'island.'" [Pg 199]

"That must be it, Frank. Yes, I expect you've struck it. And in that case the pathway we have been hunting for must be down stream from the site of the old bridge after all."

"Yes. So we may as well go back to-morrow morning, I suppose, and start downward. It is rather late to go back now—and besides, there is no water up there: we had better camp here for to-night, at any rate."

"That's true. Well, as we have some hours of daylight yet—if you can call this daylight down here in this narrow crack—let us climb down the face of the dam and examine the basin before we give up and go back, so as to make quite sure that there is no way up the side."

Accordingly, having clambered down, we walked up the middle of the basin, our eyes carefully scanning the wall on our right, when, having traversed about three-quarters of its length, we suddenly heard again that humming noise which we had taken for a wind-storm among the pines. With one accord we both stopped dead and listened. The noise was decidedly louder than it had been before, and moreover it appeared to be increasing in volume every second. [Pg 200]

"Frank!" exclaimed my companion. "I don't like the sound of it! It seems to me suspiciously like water! Let us get out of here! This is no place to be caught by a flood!"

We turned to run, but before we had gone five steps we heard a roar behind us, and casting a glance backward, we saw to our horror an immense wall of water, ten feet high, leap from the ledge at the end of the basin and fall to the bottom with a prodigious splash.

In one second the whole floor of the basin was awash. In another second our feet were knocked from under us, when, without the power of helping ourselves, we were tumbled about and swept hither and thither at the caprice of the rapidly deepening flood.

Happily for myself, for I was no swimmer, I was carried right down to the dam, where, by desperate exertions, I was able to scramble up out of reach of the water. Dick, however, less fortunate than I, was carried off to one side, and when I caught sight of him again he was being swept rapidly along under the right-hand wall—looking up stream—in whose smooth surface there was no chance of finding a hold. As I watched him, my heart in my mouth, he was carried back close to the fall, where the violence of the water, now several feet deep, tossed him about like a straw. [Pg 201]

Half paralyzed with fear lest my companion should be drowned before my eyes, I stood there on the rocks, powerless to go to his aid, hoping only that he might be swept down near enough to enable me to catch hold of him, when, of a sudden, there occurred an event so astounding that for a moment I could hardly tell whether I ought to believe my own eyes or not.

Out from the wall on the left, up near the fall, there shot a great dark body, which, with a noiseless splash, disappeared under the water. The next moment a man's head bobbed up, a big, shaggy, bearded head, the owner of which with vigorous strokes swam toward Dick and seized him by the collar. Then, swimming with the power of a steam-tug, he bore down upon the dam, clutched a projecting rock, drew himself up, and with a strength I had never before seen in a human being, he lifted Dick out of the water with one hand—his left—and set him up on the bank.

Running to the spot, I seized hold of my partner, who, almost played out, staggered and swayed about, and helped him further up out of reach of the water. Then, turning round, I was advancing to thank his rescuer, when, for the first time, I saw that the man was almost a dwarf—in height, at least—though his astonishing strength was indicated in his magnificent chest and arms. [Pg 202]

"The Badger!" I cried, involuntarily.

At the sound of that name the man turned short round, and without a word leaped into the water again. Sweeping back under the right-hand wall, he presently turned across the pool and struck out for the opposite side. Ten seconds later he had disappeared, having seemingly swum through the very face of the cliff itself!

CHAPTER XIII [Pg 203]

The King Philip Mine

I think it is safe to say that Dick and I were at that moment the two most astonished boys in the State of Colorado.

Where had the man sprung from? And how had he disappeared again? There must be, of course, some opening in the rock which we had failed to notice; a circumstance easily explained by the

fact that we had not gone far enough up the basin, and by the added fact that our attention had been fixed upon the opposite wall.

Then, again, though the identity of the man could hardly be doubted, why should he take offence, as he seemed to do, at being addressed as "The Badger"?

This was a question to which we could not find an answer; and, indeed, for the moment we postponed any attempt to do so, for our attention was too much taken up by the action of the water, which, continuing to rise with great rapidity, forced us to retreat higher and higher up the dam.

For about half an hour it thus continued to rise, until there must have been at least fifteen feet of [Pg 204] it in the basin, by the end of which time we noticed a sudden diminution in the amount coming over the fall. A few minutes later the flow had ceased altogether, when the water in the pool at once began to subside again, though far less rapidly than it had risen.

Our first impulse after our narrow escape from drowning had been to run to the other end of the dam and get back forthwith to our horses, but this we had found to be rather too risky an undertaking to attempt, for the water, coming out from under the dam, was rushing down the bed of the cañon, seething and foaming between the obstructing boulders in such a fashion that we decided that discretion would be a good deal the better part of valor—that it would be an act of wisdom to wait a bit.

Moreover, when the flood, leaping from the cliff, had bowled us over in such unceremonious style, we had had our rifles in our hands, and as those indispensable weapons were at that moment lying under fifteen feet of water, there was nothing for it but to wait till the pool drained off if we wished to recover them.

As there was no telling how long we might have to wait, and as we were both wet through and [Pg 205] very cold—Dick being besides still shaky from his recent buffeting—I collected a lot of dead wood and started a roaring fire, before whose cheerful blaze our clothes soon dried out and our spirits rose again to their normal level.

It was then that I first fully appreciated the value of my partner's habit of carrying matches in a water-tight box—a habit I strongly recommend to anybody camping out in these mountains.

For three hours we waited, by which time as we guessed there remained not more than a foot of water in the pool. I had gone down to measure it with a stick, and was leaning with my hand against the smooth, wet wall on my right, when I heard sounds as of a human voice speaking very faintly and indistinctly. The sounds seemed to come from the rock where my hand rested, and putting my ear against it, I plainly heard a strange voice say, "Hallo, boys!"

"Hallo!" I called out, at the top of my voice, startled into an explosive shout. "Who are you? Where are you?"

"Who's that you're talking to?" cried Dick, springing to his feet and looking all about.

"I don't know," I replied. "Come here and put your ear to the rock." [Pg 206]

Dick instantly joined me, when we both very clearly heard the voice say:

"You needn't shout. I can hear you. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," said I; and repeating my question, I asked: "Who are you, and where are you?"

"Before I tell you that," replied the voice, "I want to ask *you* a question, if you please. Are you Americans?"

"Yes," I replied. "Two American boys."

"Thank you. One more question, please: Did old Galvez send you up here?"

"No!" I replied, with considerable emphasis. "We never saw old Galvez till yesterday."

"Good! Then I'll come down if you'll wait a minute."

It was less than a minute that we had to wait, when from behind a slight bulge in the left-hand wall, up near the head of the basin, there appeared the figure of a young fellow, seemingly about twenty years old, who, with his trousers tucked up, carrying a rifle in one hand and his boots in the other, came wading down to us.

With what interest we watched his approach will be imagined. Neither of us doubted that it was [Pg 207] the young fellow whom Galvez had mentioned as having visited Hermanos during his absence, and as soon as he had come near enough for us to distinguish his features, I, for one, was sure of it, for, with his hook nose and his gray eyes, he did indeed bear a curious resemblance to my partner.

Standing on the bank at the edge of the water, we waited for him to come near, when, having advanced to within six feet of us he stopped and eyed us critically. He was a good-looking young fellow, not very big, but with a bright, intelligent face which at once took our fancy. Apparently his judgment of our looks was also favorable, for, smiling pleasantly, he said:

"Good-evening, boys. Which of you is Dick?"

"I am," replied the owner of that name.

"I just wanted to congratulate you, that's all, on your escape just now. It might have gone hard with you if it hadn't been for my good friend, Sanchez."

"Sanchez?" I repeated, inquiringly. "Is that The Badger's proper name?"

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Pedro Sanchez. The name of El Tejon was bestowed upon him by old Galvez, and consequently he objects to it. Your use of that name just now made him suspicious [Pg 208] that you might be emissaries of the padron, and it was that which caused him to jump back into the water so suddenly."

"I see. I'll take care in future. Here! Give me your hand"—seeing that he was about to come up the bank.

"Thank you," replied the stranger, reaching out his hand to me and giving mine a shake before he let go—a greeting he repeated with Dick. "I'm very glad to find you are a couple of American boys and not a pair of Mexican cut-throats, as we rather suspected you might be. Let us go up to your fire there and sit down. The water will take another half-hour yet to drain off completely."

Accordingly, we walked up to the fire, where the stranger dried his feet and pulled on his boots again.

"Why did you suspect us of being Mexican cut-throats?" asked Dick. "Did you think that old Galvez had sent us up here on a hunt for you or for El—for Sanchez, I mean?"

"Yes, that was it. We've been watching you for two days past. We saw you go down to Hermanos yesterday and start up the trail this morning. From the fact of your having gone down to the [Pg 209] village, Pedro was inclined to believe you were hunting him or me; but, for my part, I rather inferred from your actions that you were hunting the old copper mine."

"The old copper mine!" we both cried.

"Yes. Did I make a mistake? Weren't you?"

"No, you didn't make any mistake," replied Dick. "What surprised us was that you should know anything about it."

The young fellow laughed. "Do you suppose, then," said he, "that you are the only ones to notice the pots and pans down there at Hermanos?"

"No, of course not," replied Dick. "The professor was right, you see, Frank," he continued, turning to me, "when he said that the first white man who came along would notice those copper utensils and go hunting for the mine."

"Yes," said I; and addressing the stranger again, I added: "So it was the copper mine you were seeking after all, was it? Old Galvez thought you came up here looking for Sanchez."

Thereupon I related to him what the padron had said on the subject, when the young fellow, [Pg 210] smiling rather grimly, remarked, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice:

"Nice old gentleman, the Señor Galvez. So he professed not to know my name, did he? He's a bad lot, if ever there was one. He was right, though, in supposing that I came up here to look for Pedro. That was my main object, though I intended at the same time to keep an eye open for the old mine."

"And have you seen any indication of it?—if we may ask."

"Oh, yes," he replied, with unaccountable indifference. "There was no trouble about that. Pedro discovered it years ago and he took me straight to it."

At this unlooked-for blow to all our hopes and plans, Dick and I gazed at each other aghast. At one stroke apparently, our expedition was deprived of its object. We might just as well turn round and go home again, as far as the King Philip mine was concerned. Our hopes had been so high; and here they were all toppled over in an instant. Intense was our disappointment.

For half a minute we sat there speechless, when our new acquaintance, observing our crestfallen looks, remarked:

"I'm afraid that is a good deal of a disappointment to you, isn't it? But, perhaps you will be less [Pg 211] disappointed when I tell you that the old mine is valueless to me or you or anybody else."

"How's that?" exclaimed Dick.

"Why, it's—— But come and see for yourselves," he cried, springing to his feet. "That's the best way. You'll understand the why and the wherefore in five minutes."

"What! Is it near here, then?" asked my partner.

"Yes, close by. Behind the bulge in the wall on the left here."

"On *that* side!" cried Dick. "Not on the right, then, after all? Well, that is a puzzler!"

"Why is it a puzzler?" asked the stranger. "I don't understand you."

"Why, if the mine is on the *left* of the creek, what was that bridge for up above here, crossing over to the *right*?"

"Bridge! What bridge? What do you mean?"

Upon this we told him of the niches in the rock up above, which we supposed to have been receptacles for bridge-stringers.

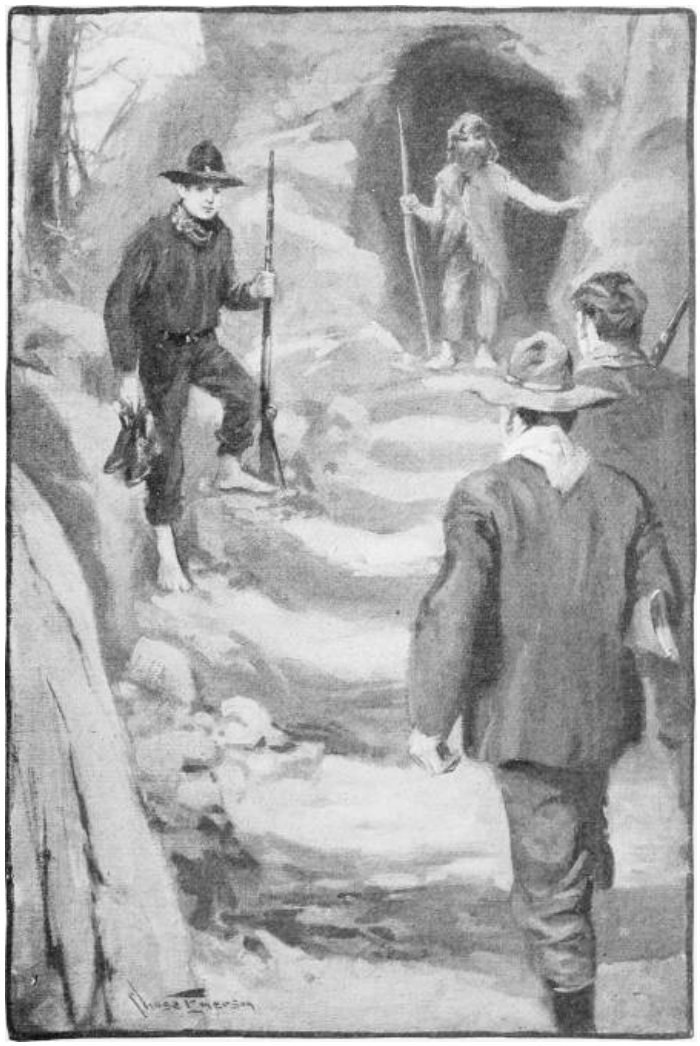
"That's queer," remarked our friend. "I had not heard of those before. I wonder if Pedro knows anything about it. It is a puzzler, as you say." [Pg 212]

"Yes, I can't make it out," continued Dick; and after standing for a minute thinking, he repeated, with a shake of his head: "No, I can't make it out. I can't see what that bridge was for. Well, never mind that for the present; let's go and see the old mine."

"Come on, then. But before we go, I'll just speak to Pedro, or he may be going off and hiding himself somewhere up in the old workings. Do you notice," he asked, "how smoothly the swirl of the water has scoured out a sort of half-arch at the base of the cañon-wall all the way from the end of the dam here, under the waterfall, round to the bulge on the other side? It forms a perfect 'whispering gallery.' Hallo, Pedro!" he called out, putting his face close to the rock. "It is all right. We are coming up now."

Descending to the bed of the pool, whence all the water except three or four permanent puddles had now drained away, we first searched for our rifles, and having recovered them, followed our guide around the bulge in the wall, and there found ourselves confronting the old mine-entrance.

About ten feet above the floor of the pool was a big hole in the rock, evidently made by hand—for it was square—leading up to which were several roughly-hewn steps, more or less rounded off and worn away by the water. On top of the steps, framed in the blackness of the opening behind him, stood the squat figure of Pedro Sanchez—in his rough shirt of deer-skin representing very well, I thought, the badger in the mouth of his hole. [Pg 213]



"BEHIND HIM, STOOD THE SQUAT FIGURE OF PEDRO SANCHEZ."

"Pedro," said our new friend, "these gentlemen were seeking the old mine, as I thought. You have nothing to fear from them."

"On the contrary," cried Dick, bounding up the steps and holding out his hand, "we have to thank you for your good service just now!"

Stretching out his long arm, the little giant smiled genially, showing a row of big white teeth.

"It is nothing," said he; adding, with a twinkle in his eye: "The señores will remember that I owed

to them some return for their assistance against the wolves."

"That's a fact!" cried Dick. "I'd forgotten that. So you remember us, do you? I wonder at that—you didn't stay long to look at us."

"No, señor," replied Pedro, laughing. "I was out of my own country and was distrustful of strangers." [Pg 214]

Turning to our new friend, who was wondering what all this was about, Dick explained the circumstances of our former meeting with Pedro, adding:

"So, you see, we are old acquaintances after all. In fact, if we had not met Pedro before we should not be here now, for it was his copper-headed arrow which brought us down, oddly enough."

"That was odd, certainly. Well, Pedro, get the torch and show your old friends over the mine. We must be quick, or it will be getting dark before we can get back to our camp."

Pedro disappeared into the darkness somewhere, while we ourselves climbed up into the mouth of the tunnel. It was very wet in there: we could hear the *drip*, *drip* of water in all directions.

"Were you in here when the flood came down?" asked Dick. "How is it you weren't drowned—for I see the water stood five feet deep in the tunnel?"

"Oh," replied the other, "there was no fear of drowning. There are plenty of places in here out of reach of the water. Wait a moment and you'll see." [Pg 215]

True enough, we soon heard the striking of a match, and next we saw the Mexican standing with a torch in his hand in a recess about ten feet above us.

"That is where we took refuge," said our friend. "Far out of reach of the water, you see. Come on, now, and I'll show you how this old mine was worked, and why it was abandoned."

Leading the way, torch in hand, he presently stopped, and said:

"The place where we came in was the mouth of the main working-tunnel. It follows the vein into the rock for about a thousand feet, which would bring it, as I calculate, pretty near to the other cañon—for the rock between the two cañons is nothing more than a spit, as you will remember. Above the tunnel they have followed the vein upward, gouging out all the native copper and wastefully throwing away all the less valuable ore, until there was none left. If you look, you can see the empty crevice extending upward out of sight."

"I see," said Dick, shading his eyes from the glare of the torch. "It seems to have been pretty primitive mining."

"It was—that part of it, at least. But having exhausted all the copper above, they next began the more difficult process of mining downward. Come along this way and I'll show you." [Pg 216]

Walking along the tunnel some distance, our guide pointed out to us a square pool in the floor, measuring about eight feet each way.

"This," said he, "was a shaft. There is another further along. How deep they are, I don't know."

"But, look here!" cried Dick. "How could they venture to sink shafts, when at any moment a flood might rush in and drown them all?"

"Ah! That's just the point," said our friend. "Come outside again and you'll understand."

Returning once more to the bed of the pool, we faced the hole in the wall, when our guide continued:

"Now, you see, the floor of the tunnel is about ten feet above the creek-bed, and before the cliff fell down, forming the dam, the water ran freely past its mouth. But some time after the miners had got out all the copper overhead and had begun sinking shafts, this cliff came down, blocked the channel, and caused the water to back up into the workings. As you remarked just now, it filled the tunnel five feet deep, and, as a matter of course, filled the shafts up to the top." [Pg 217]

"I see," said Dick. "You think, then, that the cliff fell in comparatively recent times. I believe you are right, too. That would account for there being no trees of any great size upon the dam."

"Yes. And as a consequence the mine was abandoned; for it would have taken years to dig away this dam, and as long as it existed it would be impossible to go on with the work with the water coming down and filling up the tunnel once every three days, or thereabouts."

"Every three days!" we both exclaimed. "Is this a regular thing, then, this flood?"

"Why, yes. I'd forgotten you didn't know that. Yes, it's a pretty regular thing, and a very curious one, too. Pedro says that up in that old crater near the top of the mountain there is a great intermittent spring which every now and then rises up and spills out a great mass of water. The water comes racing down this gorge, and half an hour later leaps over the fall here, fills up the pool and the mine, and gradually drains off again under the dam."

"That certainly is a curious thing," Dick responded. "And it also furnishes a reason good enough to satisfy anybody for abandoning the mine. Well, Frank," he went on, "this looks like the end of our expedition. We've done what we set out to do:—found the King Philip mine; and now, I [Pg 218]

suppose, there's nothing left but to turn round and go home again."

"I suppose so," I assented, regretfully. "I hate to go back; but I'm afraid we have no excuse for remaining."

"You think you must go back, do you?" asked our friend. "I'm sorry you should have to do so, but if you must, why shouldn't we travel the first stage together? I start back to Santa Fé to-morrow, and from there home to Washington."

"You live in Washington, do you?" said Dick. "Then, why do you go round by way of Santa Fé? It would be much shorter to go to Mosby—and then we could ride all the way together."

"I wish I could, but I have to go the other way. I left my baggage there, for one thing; and besides that I have some inquiries to make there which my mother asked me to undertake."

Dick nodded. "And then you go straight back to Washington?" he asked. [Pg 219]

"Yes. Then I must get straight back home as fast as I can and report to my father. I had two commissions to perform for him:—one was to look into the matter of this old mine; the other concerned the present condition of the Hermanos Grant. The first one I consider settled, but the other, I find, is a matter for the lawyers: it is too complicated a subject for me, a stranger in the land and a foreigner."

"A foreigner!" I cried. "Why, we supposed you were an American."

"No," said he. "I am a Spaniard."

"A Spaniard!" we both exclaimed this time.

"Yes," laughing at our astonishment. "A Scotch-Irish-Spaniard—which seems a queer mixture, doesn't it? Though I was born in Spain, my forefathers were Irish, my mother is Scotch, and I have lived for several years first in Edinburgh and then in London; and now my father, who is in the Spanish diplomatic service, is stationed in Washington."

"And what——?" I began, and then stopped, with some embarrassment, as it occurred to me that it was not exactly my business.

"And what am I doing out here? you were going to say. I'll tell you. My father was out in this part of the world a good many years ago, having business in Santa Fé, where he got track of this old copper mine; but his idea of its whereabouts was very vague until, about a year ago, a gentleman whom he had met when he was out here wrote him a letter telling him of the number of copper utensils to be found down there at Hermanos—— What's the matter?" [Pg 220]

That he should thus exclaim was not to be wondered at if the look of surprise on my face was anything like the look on Dick's.

"Well, of all the queer things!" exclaimed the latter; and then, advancing a step and addressing our friend, he said, smiling: "I think we can guess your name."

"You do!" cried the young fellow. "That seems hardly likely. What is it?"

"Blake!" replied Dick.

CHAPTER XIV [Pg 221]

A Change of Plan

If the young Spaniard had provided us with two or three surprises during the day, I think we got even with him in that line when Dick thus disclosed to him the fact that we knew his name. For a moment he stood gazing blankly at us, and then exclaimed:

"How in the world did you guess that?"

"I don't wonder you are puzzled," replied Dick, "but the explanation is very simple. The Professor Bergen who wrote to your father—that's the right name, isn't it?"

Young Blake nodded. "That was the name signed to the letter," said he. "'Otto Bergen.'"

"Well, this Professor Bergen is my best and oldest friend; I have lived with him for thirteen or fourteen years. We left his house to come down here less than a week ago. It was he who told us of his meeting with a Spaniard of the remarkable name of Blake, who, while hunting through the records in Santa Fé, had come across mention of this old mine. And when he and I passed through Hermanos last year and saw all those old copper vessels there, the professor wrote at once to your father to tell him about them. I mailed the letter myself." [Pg 222]

"Well, this is certainly a most remarkable meeting!" cried our new acquaintance. "Why, I feel as if I had fallen in with two old friends!"

"Well, you have, if you like!" cried Dick, laughing; whereupon we shook hands all over again with the greatest heartiness.

"My first name," said young Blake, "is Arturo—Arthur in this country—the name of the original Irish ancestor who fled to Spain in the year 1691, and after whom each of the eldest sons of our family has been named ever since. But not being gifted with your genius for guessing names," he continued, with a smile, "I haven't yet found out what yours are."

"That's a fact!" cried Dick. "What thoughtless chaps we are! My friend here, is Frank Preston of St. Louis; my own name is——"

"Señores," said Pedro, cutting in at this moment, "with your pardon, we must be getting out of this cañon: it will be black night down here in another ten minutes."

"That's true!" our friend assented. "So come along. We camp together, of course. How are you off for provisions? We have the hind-quarter of a deer which Pedro shot three days ago; pretty lean and stringy, but if you are as hungry as I am we can make it do." [Pg 223]

"Hungry!" cried Dick. "I'm ravenous. We've had nothing to eat since six o'clock this morning. How is it with you, Frank?"

"I'll show you," I replied, snapping my teeth together, "as soon as I get the chance."

With a laugh, we set off over the dam, and half an hour later were all busy round the fire toasting strips of deer-meat on sticks and eating them as fast as they were cooked, with an appetite which illustrated—if it needed illustration—the truth of the old saying, that the best of all sauces is hunger.

Our supper finished, we made ourselves comfortable round the fire, and far into the night—long after Pedro had rolled himself in his blanket and had gone to sleep—we sat there talking.

The reasons for our own presence in these parts were briefly and easily explained, when our new friend, Arthur—with whom, by the way, we very soon felt ourselves sufficiently familiar to address by his first name—Arthur related to us the motives which had brought him so far from home. [Pg 224]

"It was not only to hunt up this old mine," said he; "in fact, that was quite a secondary object. My chief reason for coming out was to look into the condition of the Hermanos Grant, and to find out why it was we had been unable for the past twelve years to get any reports from there."

"Why *you* hadn't been able to get reports!" exclaimed Dick. "What have *you* got to do with the Hermanos Grant, then?"

"It belongs to my father," replied Arthur, smiling.

We stared at him with raised eyebrows.

"But what about old Galvez, then?" asked my partner. "We supposed it belonged to him. In fact, his nephew told us as much, and he evidently spoke in good faith, too."

"I dare say he did," replied Arthur. "All the same, the grant belongs, and for about a century and a half has belonged, to our family. It was my ancestor, Arthur the First, who 'bossed' the King Philip mine and who built the *Casa del Rey*. Old Galvez is just a usurper. I did not even know of his existence till I reached the village three days ago. It is a long and rather complicated story, but if you are not too sleepy I'll try to explain it before we go to bed." [Pg 225]

It was a long story; and as our frequent questions and interruptions made it a good deal longer, I think it will be wise to relate it, or some of it, at least, in my own words, to save time.

The original Arthur Blake having rendered notable service in the great battle of Almanza, the king of Spain rewarded the gallant Irishman by making him "Governor" of the King Philip mine, at the same time, in true kingly fashion, bestowing upon him a large tract of land, comprising the village of Hermanos with the inhabitants thereof, as well as the desert surrounding it for five miles each way.

The mine having ceased to be workable, for the reason we had seen, Arthur the First was preparing to return to his adopted country, when he died out there, alone, in that far-off land of exile. In course of time the existence of the King Philip mine passed entirely out of everybody's recollection, as would probably have been the case with the Hermanos Grant itself, had not the agent or factor, or, as he was locally called, the *mayordomo*, placed in charge by the old Irishman, continued from year to year to send over to the representative of the family in Spain certain small sums of money collected in the way of rents. [Pg 226]

They were an honest family, these factors, the son succeeding the father from generation to generation, and faithfully they continued to send over the trifling annual remittances, until the year 1865, when the payments suddenly and unaccountably ceased.

It was two or three years before this that Señor Blake, having the opportunity to do so, had come out to Southern Colorado to take a look at the old grant, which, since the discovery of gold in the territory, might have some value after all.

As a part of this trip he visited Santa Fé, with the object of searching through the records for some copy of the original royal patent; for what had become of that document nobody knew. It was possible that it had been destroyed when the French burnt the family mansion during the Peninsular war; again it was possible that old Arthur the First had brought it with him to America

for the purpose of submitting it to the inspection of the Mexican authorities—for that part of Colorado was in those days under the rule of the viceroy of Mexico. [Pg 227]

In the limited time at his disposal, however, Señor Blake had found no trace of it; a circumstance he much regretted, for though hitherto there had never been any question as to the title, should the tract some day prove of value, such question might very well arise, when the Blake family might have difficulty in proving ownership.

For about three years after his visit things continued to jog along in the old way, until, as I said, in the year 1865 the annual remittances suddenly ceased and all communication with Hermanos appeared to be cut off—for reasons unknown and undiscoverable.

Such was the state of affairs when the elder Blake took up his residence in Washington, when Arthur, having solicited permission from his father, came west to find out if possible what was the matter.

"When I got to Hermanos," said Arthur, continuing his story, "I found the people in such a down-trodden, spiritless condition that I had great difficulty in getting any information out of them—they were afraid to say anything lest evil should befall. By degrees, however, I gained their [Pg 228] confidence, when I found that the Sanchez family, by whom, for generations past, the office of *mayordomo* had been held, was extinct, except for a certain Pedro, a member of a distant branch, and that the present owner of the grant was one, Galvez, who, seemingly, had come into possession about twelve years ago.

"As I could not understand how this could be, and as nobody seemed able to enlighten me, I decided, of course, to wait till Galvez came home in order to question him.

"Meanwhile, I inquired about this man, Pedro Sanchez, who, I was told, was the only one likely to be able to explain, meeting with no difficulty in ascertaining where he was to be found; for, though Galvez himself did not know whether Pedro was alive or dead, every other inhabitant of the village knew perfectly well, and always had known, not only that he was alive but where to find him.

"Presently, about dusk, Galvez came riding in, when I at once made myself known to him. At the mention of my name he appeared for a moment to be rendered speechless, either with fear or surprise, and then, to my great astonishment, with a burst of execration, he snatched a revolver out of its holster. Luckily for me, he did it in such haste that the weapon, striking the pommel of [Pg 229] the saddle, flew out of his hand and fell upon the ground; whereupon I ran for it, jumped upon my horse and rode away.

"After riding a short distance, I bethought me of Pedro, so, circling round the village, I came up here, and following the directions of the peons, I easily found him next morning. Through Pedro, as soon as I had succeeded in convincing him of my identity, I quickly got at the rights of the case."

"Wait a minute," said Dick, who, together with myself, had been an attentive listener. "Let me put some more logs on the fire. There!" as he seated himself once more. "That will last for some time. Now, go ahead."

Leaning back against a tree-trunk and stretching out his feet to the fire, Arthur began again:

"Did you ever hear of the Espinosas?" he asked.

"No!" I exclaimed, surprised by the apparently unconnected question; but Dick replied, "Yes, I have. Mexican bandits, or something of the sort, weren't they?"

"Yes," said our friend. "They were a pair of Mexicans who, in the year '65, terrorized certain parts [Pg 230] of Colorado by committing many murders of white people. This man, Galvez, who then lived in Taos, hated the Americans with a very thorough and absorbing hatred, and the exploits of the Espinosas being just suited to his taste, he decided to join them. But he was a little too late; the two brigands were killed, and he himself, with a bullet through his shoulder, would assuredly have been captured had he not had the good fortune to fall in with Pedro Sanchez.

"Pedro had been a soldier, too, and coming thus upon a comrade in distress he packed him on his burro, and by trails known only to himself brought him down to Hermanos, entering the village secretly by night.

"The occupant of the *Casa* at that time was another Pedro Sanchez, a forty-second cousin or thereabouts of our Pedro. He was a very old man, the last of his immediate family, a good, honest, simple-minded old fellow, who for thirty years or more had been factor for us. With him Pedro sought asylum for his comrade—a favor the old man readily granted to his namesake and relative.

"It was pretty sure that there would be a hue and cry after Galvez, so, to avoid suspicion as much [Pg 231] as possible, they arranged to give out that it was Pedro who lay sick at the *Casa*, while Pedro himself went off again that same night up into the mountain to hide till Galvez thought it safe to move. He had done everything he could think of for his friend, and how do you suppose his friend requited him? It will show you the sort of man this Galvez is.

"For six weeks the latter lay hidden, when in some roundabout way he got word that his description was placarded on the walls of Taos and a reward offered for his capture. This cut him

off from returning home and he was in a quandary what to do, when one day his host, who, as I said, was a very old man, had a fall from his horse and two days later died.

"Then did Galvez resolve upon a bold stroke. He came out of his hiding-place, and without offering reasons or explanations calmly announced that he had become proprietor of the Hermanos Grant, and that in future the villagers were to look to him for orders! The very impudence of the move carried the day. The ignorant peons, accustomed for generations to obey, accepted the situation without question; and thus did Galvez install himself as padron of [Pg 232] Hermanos, and padron he has remained for twelve years, there being nobody within five thousand miles to enter protest or dispute his title."

"Well!" exclaimed Dick. "That was about the most bare-faced piece of rascality I ever did hear of. And your father, of course, over there in Cadiz or London or wherever you were then, was helpless to find out what was going on in this remote corner."

"That's it exactly; and at that time, too, this corner was far more remote even than it is now—there were no railroads anywhere near then, you see."

"That's true. Well, go on. What about his treatment of Pedro?"

"Why, Galvez, as padron of Hermanos—a place almost completely cut off from the rest of the world—felt pretty sure that he would never be identified as Galvez of Taos, the man wanted for brigandage; for the villagers had no suspicion of the fact. The only danger lay in Pedro."

"I see. Pedro being the one person who did know the facts."

"Exactly. Well, Galvez was not one to stick at trifles, and understanding that the simplest way to [Pg 233] secure his own safety would be to get rid of this witness, he came riding up into the mountain one day, found Pedro, and while talking with him in friendly fashion, pulled out a big flint-lock horse-pistol, jammed it against his benefactor's chest and pulled the trigger. Luckily the weapon missed fire; Pedro jumped away, picked up a big stone and hurled it at his faithless friend, taking him in the mouth and knocking out all his front teeth. Then he, himself, fled up into his mountain; and that was their last meeting, except on the occasion when Galvez came up to hunt for him and Pedro shot his horse with the copper-headed arrow.

"There!" Arthur concluded. "Now you have it all. That's the whole story!"

"And a mighty curious and interesting story it is, too!" exclaimed Dick; adding, after a thoughtful pause: "That man, Galvez, is certainly a remarkable specimen; and a dangerous one. He is not an ordinary, every-day, primitive ruffian. That move of his in declaring himself padron of Hermanos was a stroke of genius in its way. It won't be a simple matter to get him out of there, if that is what you are after."

"That is what I am after," replied Arthur. "But, as I said, the question of how to do it is too [Pg 234] complicated for me. I know nothing of American law, but it strikes me that, in spite of the fact that he plainly has no right there, we may have considerable difficulty in getting him out, for, as we can show neither the original patent nor a copy of it, we have only our word for it that such a thing ever existed."

"That's true," said I. "And Galvez being in possession, it may be that he would not have to prove *his* rights: it would rest with you to prove *yours.*"

"I should think that was very likely," remarked Dick. "It is a complicated matter, as you say. What do you suppose your father will do? Have you any idea?"

"Yes, I have," replied Arthur, very emphatically. "I know exactly what he will do. When I tell him how the grant has been 'annexed' by this man—and such a man, too—he will never rest until he has got him out. It may be that the old brigandage business may serve as a lever—that, I don't know—but whatever is necessary to be done he will do, however long it may take and however much it may cost."

"As to the cost," said I, "that is likely, I should think, to be pretty big. Is the grant worth it? [Pg 235] Suppose, on investigation, your father should find that the expense of getting Galvez out would be greater than the value of the property—what then?"

Arthur laughed. "You don't know my father," said he. "The value of the grant—which, in truth, is nothing, or nearly nothing—makes no difference whatever. It's the principle of the thing. To permit a robber like Galvez to remain quietly in possession would be impossible to my father. He will regard it as his duty to society to right the wrong, and he will do it, if it takes ten years, without considering for a moment whether the grant is worth it or not."

"Good for him!" cried Dick, thumping his knee with his fist. "The law in this new West is weak—naturally—and here in this out-of-the-way corner there is none at all, but a few such men as your father would soon stiffen its backbone. I hope he'll succeed; the only thing I'm sorry for is that the grant has so little value."

"That is unfortunate," replied Arthur; "though, as it happens, that particular concerns my father less than it does me."

"Is that so? How is that?" [Pg 236]

"It is an old custom in the family to bestow the Hermanos Grant on the eldest son on his coming

of age. I am the eldest son, and I come of age next August, when, according to the custom, I shall become the owner of this valueless patch of desert—if Galvez will be graciously pleased to allow me."

"What are the limits of the grant?" asked Dick.

"North, south and east," replied Arthur, "it extends five miles from Hermanos, but on the west it stops at the foot of the mountains."

"So the only part of it which produces anything is that little patch of cultivated ground surrounding the village."

"Yes; and as the water-supply is very limited the place can never grow any larger. In fact, it produces little more than enough to feed the villagers; and even as it is, the boys as they grow up have to go off and get work elsewhere as sheep-herders and cowmen, there being no room for them at home. It is the padron's custom, I was told, to hire them out, their wages being paid to him, in which case you may be sure it is precious little of their earnings they ever get themselves."

"He's a bad one, sure enough," remarked Dick. "But to go back to that water-supply. Isn't there any way of increasing it?" [Pg 237]

"I'm afraid not," replied Arthur. "I wish there were: a plentiful supply of water would make the place really valuable. There is land enough, and excellent land, too; all that is needed is water. But that, I'm afraid, is not to be had. I've talked to Pedro about it; he knows every stream on these two mountains, but he says that they all run in cañons from five hundred to two thousand feet deep, and there is no possible way of getting any of them out upon the surface of the valley. What are you thinking about, Dick?"

My partner, who had been sitting with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, frowning severely at the fire, started from his revery, and turning toward his questioner, he replied, speaking slowly and thoughtfully:

"If any one ought to know, it's Pedro; but, all the same, I believe Pedro is wrong. I believe there *is* a way of turning one of these streams somewhere and bringing it down to Hermanos—if only one could find the right stream."

"Why do you think so?" asked Arthur.

"I know it looks ridiculous for me to be setting up my opinion against Pedro's," replied my partner, "but I can't help thinking that there is such a stream. Look here!" he cried, jumping up, walking to and fro between us and the fire once or twice, and then stopping and shaking his finger at us as though he were delivering a lecture to two inattentive pupils. "Where did those old Pueblos get their water from, I should like to know? Up in these mountains somewhere, didn't they? Of course they did: there's no other place. There was a big irrigation system down there once, enough to support a population of three or four thousand people probably. Well! What has become of that supply? That's what I want to know. They had it once—where is it now?" [Pg 238]

For some seconds Dick stood in front of Arthur, pointing his finger straight at him, while Arthur sat there in silence gazing steadfastly at Dick. Suddenly, the young Spaniard jumped up, stepped forward, and slapping my partner on his chest with the back of his hand, exclaimed:

"Look here, old man! I believe you are right. I believe there is a stream somewhere which those old Pueblos used for irrigating their farms. It has somehow been switched off and lost. It ought to be found and brought back. Now, look here! I can't stay here to hunt for it myself: I *must* get home right away. But I'll make a bargain with you:—You find that stream and provide a way of getting the water back to Hermanos, and I'll give you a half-interest in the grant—when I get it. There, now! There's a chance for you!" [Pg 239]

"Do you mean that?" cried my partner.

"I certainly do," replied Arthur. "The grant is without value as it stands: if you can get water on to it and give it a value, it would be only just that you should have a share in the profits. Yes, I mean what I say, all right. If you'll supply the water, I'll supply the land. There! What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

For a moment Dick stood staring thoughtfully at our friend, and then, turning to me, he exclaimed sharply:

"Frank! Let's do it! Here we are, out for the summer. It's true we came out to hunt for a copper mine, but that scheme being 'busted' at the very start, let us turn to and hunt for water instead. What do you think?"

"I'm agreed!" I cried.

"Good! Then we'll do it! And the very first move——" [Pg 240]

"The very first move," interrupted Arthur, laughing, "the very first move is—to bed! It's after eleven!"

"Phew!" Dick whistled. "I'd no idea it was so late. To bed, then; and to-morrow we'll work out a plan of action. This has been a pretty long day, and a pretty eventful one, too. So let's get to bed

at once, and to-morrow we'll start fair."

In spite of the long day and the lateness of the hour, however, I could not get to sleep at once. Dick, too, seemed to be wakeful. I heard him stir, and opening my eyes, I saw him sitting up in bed with his arms clasped around his blanketed knees, gazing at the fire. Suddenly, he gave his leg a mighty slap with his open hand, and I heard him chuckle to himself.

"What's the matter, Dick?" I whispered. "Got a flea?"

"No," he replied, laughing softly. "I've got an idea. Go to sleep, old chap. I'll tell you in the morning."

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 241]

Dick's Snap Shot

The sun rose late down in that deep crevice, and for that reason, added to the lateness of the hour at which we had gone to bed, we did not wake up next morning till after six o'clock. We found, however, that Pedro had been up a couple of hours at least, for he had a good fire going, had made everything ready to start breakfast, and moreover he had been up on the mountain and had brought down Arthur's horse and his own burro from the little valley where they had been left at pasture.

When I, myself, awoke, I found that Dick was ahead of me. He was standing by the fire, warming himself—for the mornings were still cold—and talking to Pedro, who, I guessed, was explaining something, for he was waving his long arms energetically, first in one direction and then in another.

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"Well, Dick," said I, as we sat cross-legged on the ground, eating our breakfast, "what is this idea of yours? Does it still look as favorable as it seemed to do last night?"

"Better," replied Dick, with his mouth full of bacon. "A great deal better. I felt pretty confident last night that I was on the way to earn that half-interest in the Hermanos Grant, and this morning, since talking with Pedro, I feel more confident still."

"Is that so?" cried Arthur. "I hope you're right. What is it you think you have discovered?"

"In the first place," replied Dick, "I have discovered that we are a lot of wiseacres: we have been going around with our eyes shut."

"How?" we both asked.

"If we hadn't had our heads so full of the old copper mine, and if we hadn't been so bent on finding the trail to it, we should never have made the mistake we did."

"What mistake?" I asked. "Hurry up, Dick! Don't take so long about it. What are you driving at?"

"Why, this!" replied my partner, suddenly sitting up straight and wagging his finger at us. "This trail we have been following, all the way from Hermanos up to the edge of the cañon, was not a trail at all—it was a ditch!"

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"A ditch!" we both exclaimed.

"Yes, a ditch. A ditch dug by those old Pueblo Indians to carry water down to that wide, level stretch of ground at the back of the *Casa*. I'm sure of it. If you give up the idea of a trail and consider it as a ditch, all its peculiarities will be explained at once. It will account for its uniform grade, for its unexpected distinctness, and more than everything else, it will account for the fact that the 'trail' never once dipped down a hill or climbed one either, but always—invariably—went round the head of every gully, deep or shallow, that came in its way."

"Upon my word, Dick!" cried Arthur. "I believe you *have* made a discovery! I believe that it is the line of an old ditch, after all; though the pack-trains doubtless used it as a convenient road as far as the top of the cañon and then switched off down here by that shelf in the wall."

"That's my idea," said Dick, nodding his head.

"But, look here, Dick," Arthur went on, after a moment's thoughtful pause. "Suppose it is an old ditch—where did the water come from? That's the question. A ditch without water isn't much use."

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Dick laughed. "No," said he. "I understand that well enough. The water came from this 'island,' up here above our heads, and was carried across the cañon in a flume!"

"Ah!" I cried. "I see! What we at first supposed to have been a bridge up there, built for the accommodation of the pack-trains, was in reality a flume for carrying water."

"That's what I believe," replied Dick.

"Well, but see here, Dick," remarked Arthur again. "Suppose that there was a flume there for carrying water—where's the water now? That's the point. That's what I want to know."

"Ah!" replied my partner. "And that was what I wanted to know, too. That was the very question that bothered me until I talked to Pedro about it just now. I asked him if he had ever seen or heard of a stream of water coming down from the top of this high land, and I can tell you he eased my mind of a load when he told me he had. He says there is a good big waterfall which jumps off the cliff on the north side of the 'island' and falls into this stream we are camped upon now, but about twelve or thirteen miles below this point, following the bends of the creek."

"Is that so? Then the chances are that that is the stream from which the Pueblos used to get their water. Did you ask Pedro if he knew of any way of getting up there?" [Pg 245]

"Yes, I did, and I'm sorry to say he doesn't know of any. He says that this 'island' is really an island, being compassed about on all sides by cañons of varying depths; that it includes a large tract of country, part mountain and part plain; and that to the best of his knowledge, no man has ever set foot on it. In that, though, I'm pretty sure he's mistaken. In fact, it is as certain as anything can be that there is a way up somewhere, or else, how did the Pueblos get over there in the first place? They didn't fly across this gorge; and yet they must have worked from both sides at once when they built their flume."

"That's true. Well, Dick, it does look as though you had made a genuine discovery, and one likely to be of great value. What's your idea, then? You and Frank will stay here and hunt for the old Pueblo ditch-head, I suppose, while I dig out for home by myself. I wish I could stay and hunt with you, but there's no knowing how long it may take, and meanwhile my father and mother will be worrying themselves to know what has become of me. I've been here now a good bit longer than I intended. I must get back at once and——" [Pg 246]

"Look here, Arthur," Dick interrupted. "Excuse me for cutting in, but I'd like to make a suggestion. There is just a possibility—I don't expect it, I own, but there is a possibility—that if Galvez were informed that you know how he came to be padron of Hermanos, and also of his connection with the Espinosas, he might get scared and skip out of his own accord—which would simplify matters for you very much. Now, here's what I propose—if you really are bound to leave at once."

"Yes," Arthur interjected. "I mustn't stay a minute longer than I can help."

"Well, then, I propose that before you go—it will only make a difference of a couple of hours—before you go, Frank and I will ride down to Hermanos, see old Galvez, tell him what you have told us, and recommend him to take his departure. Perhaps he'll be scared and skip out; but if he won't, why, then you'll know where you stand. How does that strike you?"

"Hm!" muttered Arthur, doubtfully. "I don't much like the idea of running you into danger. Galvez is such a treacherous fellow, there's no knowing what he might do to you."

"That's true enough," said Dick; "though I don't think he would attempt anything on two of us at once, and in broad daylight, too. It might be to his advantage to get rid of you or Pedro or both, but he would surely have sense enough to see that he wouldn't gain anything by hurting either of us." [Pg 247]

"That's a fact. Well, suppose you go, then. But be careful."

"We'll be careful," replied my partner. "You needn't worry yourself on that account."

By this time we were ready to start, and accordingly we all rode together up the ledge until we came out again at the point where the old flume used to be—where we pointed out to Arthur the sockets in the rock—and thence, continuing to the foot of the mountain, Dick and I, leaving the others to wait for us, galloped off toward Hermanos.

By good fortune, as we approached the village, we saw Galvez himself down near the creek, where he was directing three of his *vaqueros* who were engaged in cutting out cows from a bunch of wild Mexican cattle.

Further down stream, only a short distance from the houses, we noticed half-a-dozen Mexican children, very busy making mud pies, quite unconcerned, apparently, at the proximity of the herd of cattle. It happened, however, that just as we came riding up to where Galvez sat on his horse, shouting orders to his men, a gaunt, wild-eyed, long-horned steer broke out of the bunch on the down-stream side. One of the cowmen dashed forward to turn it, when, to his astonishment, the steer, instead of running back into the bunch or attempting to dodge him, charged the rider and knocked him and his little broncho over and over. Then, wildly tossing its head, the beast made straight for the group of unsuspecting and defenceless children. [Pg 248]

"Loco! Loco!" shouted Galvez. "Rope him, one of you!"

The two other men galloped forward, swinging their lariats, but the locoed steer, going like a scared antelope, had such a start that it looked as though it would surely reach the children before the men could catch it. Seeing this, Galvez pulled out his revolver and fired six shots at it in quick succession. Whether he hit the steer or not, I cannot say, but even if he did the range was too great for a revolver to be effective—unless by a lucky chance.

The children, hearing the shots, looked up, saw the steer coming, and scattered like a flock of sparrows—all but one of them, that is to say. He, a brown-bodied little three-year-old, without a scrap of clothing upon him except a piece of string tied round his middle, stood stock still, with [Pg 249]

his little hands full of mud, seemingly too frightened to move, and straight down upon this little bronze statue the crazy beast went charging.

It looked as though a tragedy were imminent!

It was at this moment that my partner and I came riding up behind Galvez, who, sitting on his horse with his back to us, his body interposed between us and the steer, had not seen us yet. It was no time for ceremony. Without wasting words in greetings or explanations, Dick jammed his heels into his pony's ribs; the pony sprang forward; Dick pulled him up short, leaped to the ground, threw up his rifle and fired a snap shot. Down went the steer, heels over head, gave one kick and lay dead—shot through the heart!

It was a grand shot! The three *vaqueros*, two on their horses and one on foot, carried away by their enthusiasm, forgot for once their habitual dread of the padron, and waving their hats above their heads joined me in a shout of applause; while as for Galvez, himself, he sat on his horse with [Pg 250] his empty revolver in his hand, gazing open-mouthed first at Dick and then at the dead steer, seemingly rendered speechless for the moment.

At length he turned to me, who had come up close beside him, and said:

"Can he always do that?"

"Just about," I replied, with a nod. "He is one of the best shots in the State."

"Hm!" remarked the padron, sticking out his lower lip and thoughtfully scratching his chin with his thumb-nail; and though that was all he did say, the muttered exclamation conveyed to me as much meaning as if he had talked for five minutes.

That Dick's remarkable shot had made a great impression on him I felt certain, and it was a matter of much satisfaction to me to think that it had; for if at any time he should entertain the idea of resorting to violence against any of us, the recollection of how that steer had pitched heels over head would probably cause him to think again.

The whole episode had not occupied more than two minutes, at the end of which time Galvez, recovering himself, turned to us and said, in his usual gracious manner:

"Well, you two, what have you come back here for?" [Pg 251]

"We have come down to speak to you," replied Dick, as he slipped another cartridge into his Sharp's rifle. "We have just parted with Señor Blake and El Tejon."

The padron scowled at the mention of the two names.

"Oh, you have, eh? Well, what then?" he asked.

"Señor Blake," my partner continued, "wished us to say that he has learned how you came to be padron of Hermanos. Pedro has told him the whole story—everything—the Espinosa business and all."

"Oh! And is that all?"

"That's all," said Dick.

The padron, I have no doubt, had been expecting some such communication and had made up his mind beforehand what to say, for, after sitting for a few seconds looking at Dick without a word, he smiled an unpleasant, toothless smile, and said:

"That's all, is it? Well, you go back to your Señor Blake and tell him that here I am and here I stay, and if he thinks that three beardless boys and a shiftless, half-crazy peon can make me [Pg 252] move, why, he's welcome to try. There! That's all on my side." He started to ride off, but after a few steps stopped again to add: "Except this:—I recommend you two boys to get along back home as fast as you can and leave this young Blake—if that is really his name—to manage his own affairs. You may find it dangerous to be mixed up with them."

He said this in an aggressive, menacing tone; but I noticed, all the same, that his eye wandered involuntarily toward the dead steer, and I congratulated myself again on the lucky chance that had given Dick the opportunity to show his skill with a rifle. Galvez, I was convinced, would be exceedingly careful how he provoked a quarrel with any one who could shoot like that.

"Very well, señor," said Dick. "We will deliver your message. That is all we came for." And with that we turned round and rode away again.

In the course of an hour we were back at the foot of the mountain, where we found Arthur sitting on the ground waiting for us.

"Well, what luck?" he cried. "What did Galvez have to say?"

We told him all about our interview with the padron, not forgetting the episode of the wild steer, [Pg 253] at hearing which Arthur expressed much gratification.

"That was a very fortunate chance," said he. "Galvez may profess to despise three beardless boys, but after seeing one of them shoot a running steer at three hundred yards, I expect he will think twice before he stirs up a fuss with them. It is just the sort of thing—and the only sort of thing,

too—to make an impression on a man like that. What is your idea, Dick? Do you think he intends to stick it out, or was he only 'bluffing'?"

"I don't know," replied my partner. "I'm afraid he means to hold on. But though at present he puts on 'a brag countenance,' as the saying is, when he has had time to reconsider he might change his mind and skip. My impression is, though, that he means to hold on."

"I think so, too," said I. "What is Pedro's opinion?"

"Ah! Yes. Let us ask Pedro."

"Señores," said the Mexican, when Arthur had explained the whole matter to him in Spanish, "the padron is a pig, a mule. He will not move."

"Then that settles it!" cried Arthur, jumping up, walking away a few paces and coming back again. "I never really expected that Galvez would move, though it was worth trying. So now I'll be off at once. As for that old ditch-head, though I should have liked very much to stay and help hunt for it, you three can, as a matter of fact, make the search just as well without me. And whether you find it or whether you don't, makes no difference in one way—the business of getting Galvez out of Hermanos will have to proceed regardless of that or any other consideration. We have two things to do, you see:—To turn out Galvez and to find that ditch-head. The first is my business; the second is yours; and the sooner I get about mine the better, if I am to give you a clear title to your half-interest when you are ready to claim it." [Pg 254]

"As to that," remarked Dick, "I don't think we ought to hold you to that bargain. It was made more or less in joke, anyhow."

"No, no, it wasn't!" cried Arthur, emphatically. "Not a bit of it! I meant it then and I mean it still. I'm quite content. You provide the water and I'll provide the land, as I said. It's a fair bargain. I don't want to be let off. But before I can perform my part of it I must prove my own title, and as I can't do it at this end of the line I'll waste no more time here, but get right back home as fast as I can and report the conditions to my father." [Pg 255]

"Well," said Dick, after a moment's thoughtful silence, "I believe you are right. I believe that is the best way after all, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless we abandon the whole thing."

"Abandon——!" cried Arthur; but he got no further, for Dick, holding up his hand, said, laughingly:

"All right, old man! All right! You needn't say any more. I only suggested it just to see what you would say. So you are determined to go through with this thing, are you? Very well, then, you may count on us to do our part if it's doable. Eh, Frank?"

I nodded. "We'll find that ditch-head," said I, "if we have to stay here till snow flies."

"Good!" cried Arthur. "Then that does settle it. I'll be off this minute. Bring my horse, Pedro: I'm going to start at once."

"Look here, Arthur," remarked Dick. "I think it would be a good plan if Frank and I were to escort you to the other side of Hermanos. Galvez, I expect, guessed what you were after when you first told him your name, and now he'll be sure of it, and it might be pretty dangerous for you if you should meet him alone; so we'll just ride part way with you and see you safely started." [Pg 256]

"Thanks," replied Arthur. "I shall be glad of your company. Well, let us get off, then. Good-bye, Pedro. I expect you'll see me back here before very long. *Adios!*"

Thus taking leave of the burly Mexican, Arthur started off, Dick and I riding on either side of him.

Keeping about a mile to the north of Hermanos, we circled round that village, and were making our way southeastward toward the Cactus Desert, when we saw off to our right a great cloud of dust, and in the midst of it a bunch of cattle accompanied by three men.

At first we were suspicious that Galvez might be one of them, but pretty soon we discovered that they were the three *vaqueros* we had seen that morning. They, on their part, quickly detected us, when one of them immediately turned his horse and came riding toward us.

As soon as he had come pretty close I saw that it was the one whose horse had been knocked over by the locoed steer. This man, advancing to Dick, pulled off his hat, and speaking with considerable feeling, said: [Pg 257]

"I wish to thank the señor who shoots so straight. It was my little boy who was in danger."

"Was it?" cried Dick. "I'm very glad, then, that I happened to make such a good shot. The steer was locoed, of course."

"*Si, señor*," replied the man. "It happens sometimes. This one was very bad. It should have been killed long ago, but the padron would not. I am grateful to the señor, and if I can serve him at any time I shall be glad."

"Thank you," said Dick. "What is your name?"

"José Santanna," replied the man.

"Well, José," continued Dick, "I'm much obliged to you for your offer, and if I need your help at any time I'll come and ask you."

"*Gracias, señor*," replied the man; and with that he turned and galloped after his companions.

"That's a good thing for us," remarked Arthur. "We may find it very handy to have an ally in the enemy's camp. And now, you fellows," he continued, "you may as well turn back. I'm safe enough now, and there is no need for you to come any further. I hope it won't be long before you see me [Pg 258] back again. Meanwhile you'll search for that ditch-head, and if there is anything you can do toward getting the water down, you'll go ahead and do it. That's the plan, eh?"

"That's the plan," repeated my partner.

"Very well. Then, good-bye, and good luck to you!"

CHAPTER XVI [Pg 259]
The Old Pueblo Head-Gate

It was about two in the afternoon that we parted with our friend, and wishing him the best of success, we watched him ride away until the shimmering haze drawn by the heat of the sun from the surface of the valley, finally obscured him from our view altogether. Then, turning our ponies, we rode back up the mountain and once more descended to our camp, where we found Pedro waiting for us.

As it was then too late to begin any fresh enterprise, especially one so difficult as the attempt to climb the cañon-wall was likely to be, we determined to postpone the expedition until next morning. In order, too, that we might be in good fettle for the adventure, we went to bed that night as soon as it got dark; no more late hours for us; late hours at night not being conducive to clear heads in the morning—and it was more than likely that clear heads might be very essential to the success of the task in hand.

About an hour after sunrise we set off on foot down the left bank of the stream, making our way [Pg 260] along the steep slope of stone scraps, big and little, which bordered its edge, and after a pretty rough scramble we reached a spot about a mile below camp where Pedro had told us he thought there was a possible way up—a narrow cleft in the rocky wall, none too wide to admit the passage of the Mexican's big body—and following the sturdy hunter, who acted as guide, we began the ascent.

There was no great difficulty about it at first, for the crevice, though still very narrow, was not particularly steep. After climbing up about three hundred feet, however, the ascent became much more abrupt, and presently we came to a place where the bed of the dry watercourse was blocked entirely by a smooth, water-worn mass of rock, twenty feet high, filling the whole width of the crevice, and overhanging in such a manner that even a lizard would have had difficulty in climbing up it.

We were looking about for some means of surmounting this obstacle, when Pedro, who had stepped back a little to survey it, called our attention to what appeared to be a number of steps, or, rather, foot-holes in the rock about ten feet up, just above the bulge.

"Hallo!" cried Dick. "This looks promising. Those holes were made with a purpose. I believe we've [Pg 261] struck the original Pueblo highway after all."

"It does look like it," I agreed. "But how are we going to get up there?"

"Señor," said Pedro to Dick, "if you will stand on my shoulders, I think you can reach those holes."

"All right," replied Dick. "Let's try."

It was simple enough. Dick easily reached the lower steps, which, it was hardly to be doubted, had been cut for the purpose, and scrambled up to the top. Then, letting down the rope we had brought for such an emergency, he called to me to come up. With a boost from Pedro, and with the rope to hold on by, I was quickly standing beside my partner, when up came Pedro himself, hand over hand.

If this was really the road by which the Pueblos originally came up—and from those nicks in the rock we felt pretty sure it was—it was the roughest and by long odds the most upended road we had ever traveled over. It was, in fact, a climb rather than a walk: we had to use our hands nearly all the time.

We had come within a hundred feet of the top, when, looking upward, I was startled to see on an [Pg 262] overhanging ledge a large, tawny, cat-like animal calmly sitting there looking down at us.

"Look there, Dick!" I cried. "What's that?"

"A mountain-lion!" exclaimed my partner. "My! What a shot!"

It happened, however, that we were at a point where it was necessary to hold on with our hands to prevent ourselves from slipping back; it was impossible to shoot. The "lion" therefore continued to stare at us and we at him, until Dick shouted at him, when the beast leisurely walked off and disappeared round a corner.

"Well!" remarked my companion. "I never saw a mountain-lion so calm and unconcerned before. As a rule they are the shyest of animals."

"All the animals up here are like that," remarked Pedro. "Many times since I have lived on the mountain I have seen them come down to the edge of the cañon to look at me—deer and even mountain-sheep and wolves; yes, many times wolves. They have no fear of man."

"That's queer," said I. "I wonder why not." [Pg 263]

"Señor," replied Pedro, looking rather surprised at my lack of intelligence, "it is simple: since the days of the Pueblos there has been no man up here."

"Why, I suppose there hasn't!" cried Dick. "That didn't occur to me before, either. It will be interesting to see how the wild animals behave, Frank. It will be like Robinson Crusoe on his island."

He spoke in Spanish, as we always did when Pedro was in company, not wishing him to feel that he was left out. It was Pedro who replied.

"I know not," said he, "the honorable gentleman, Señor Don Crusoe, of whom you speak, but for ourselves we must have care."

"Why, Pedro. What do you mean?"

"The wolves up here are many, and they will surely smell us out."

"Well, suppose they do, Pedro. What then?" asked Dick, jokingly. "You are not afraid of wolves, are you?"

This seemed a reasonable question, remembering how boldly he had faced them that time at the head of the Mescalero valley.

"Most times I have no fear," replied Pedro, simply, "but up here it is different. These wolves know [Pg 264] not what a man is; they will smell us out, and they will think only, 'Here is something to eat;' they do not know enough to be afraid."

"I suppose that is likely," Dick assented. "You are quite right, Pedro: we must take care. I don't suppose there will be anything to fear from them during daylight, but we'll keep a sharp lookout, all the same. Come on, let us get forward."

In another ten minutes we had reached the top, when, turning up-stream, we presently came to the dry gully which led down to where the old flume once stood. Thence, turning "inland," as one might say, we followed up the bed of this gully, finding that it had its head in a little grassy basin which looked as though it had once been a small lake. In crossing this basin we stirred up from among the bushes a band of blacktail deer, which ran off about fifty yards and then stood still to look at us; these usually shy animals being evidently consumed with curiosity at the sight of three strange beasts walking on their hind legs. Undoubtedly, we were the first human beings they had ever encountered.

We did not molest them, but pursuing our course across the little basin, we were about to [Pg 265] proceed up a narrow, stony draw at its further end, when a sudden scurry of feet behind us caused us to look back. The band of deer had vanished, and in their stead were four wolves, which, when we turned round, drew up in line and stood staring at us!

As Dick had said, the wild animals up here were making themselves decidedly "interesting."

Pedro had an arrow fitted to his bow in an instant, while Dick and I simultaneously cocked our rifles and stood ready. The wolves, however, remained stationary; it was evidently curiosity and not hunger that inspired them. Seeing this, I picked up a pebble and threw it at them, just to see what they would think of it. The stone struck the ground close under their noses, making them all start, passed between two of them and went hopping along the ground, when, to our great amusement, the whole row of them turned, ran after the stone, sniffed at it, one after the other, and then came back to the old position. It looked so comical that Dick and I burst out laughing; whereupon the wolves, who had doubtless never heard such a sound before, retreated a few [Pg 266] paces, where they once more turned round to stare at us.

"Well, Pedro!" cried Dick. "They don't seem to be very dangerous. If all the wolves up here are like that we needn't be afraid of them."

"They are not hungry just now," replied Pedro, so significantly that our merriment was checked; "and you see for yourselves," he added, "that a man is a new animal to them. They know not what to make of us. It is that which makes me uneasy. A big pack of hungry wolves would be very dangerous, for the reason that they have never learned that we are dangerous, too. For me, I am afraid of them."

Such an admission, coming from such a man, one who, we knew, was not lacking in courage, was impressive; so, in order that he should not regard us as merely a pair of careless, light-headed boys, Dick assured him in all earnestness that we had no intention of treating the matter lightly; that we fully understood and agreed with his view of the matter.

"You are quite right, Pedro," said he. "We can't afford to be careless. A pack of wolves is dangerous enough when you know what to expect of them, but when you don't——! It will pay us [Pg 267] to be careful, all right; there's no doubt about that. Come on, now. Let us get ahead. Those beasts back there have gone off—to tell the others, perhaps."

Proceeding up the stony draw for about half a mile, we presently came upon a most unexpected sight:—a little lake, covering perhaps a space of twenty acres, its surface, smooth as a mirror, reflecting the trees and rocks surrounding it, and dotted all over with hundreds of wild ducks and geese.

"Here's the head of the ditch!" cried Dick, exultingly. "Here's where the Pueblos got their water! They drew from this lake down the gully we have just come up. The mouth of the draw has been blocked by the caving of the sides, you see, but it will be an easy job to dig a narrow trench through the dam, and then the pitch is so great that the water will soon scour a channel for itself. Don't you think so, Pedro? The water must have run down here, filled the grassy basin where the deer were, flowed out at its lower end down the gully to the flume, and then by the ditch over the foothills to the valley. Wasn't that the way of it, Pedro?"

It was natural that Dick should address his question to the Mexican rather than to me, for Pedro, [Pg 268] one of a race that had followed irrigation for centuries, knew far more of its practical possibilities than I did, and his opinion was infinitely more valuable than mine was likely to be. In reply, he nodded his big head and said, gravely:

"That is it. It is not possible to doubt. The Pueblos drew their water from the lake at this point. That is very sure. But——"

"But what?" asked Dick.

"This lake is small, and I see nowhere any stream coming into it," replied Pedro.

"That's a fact," Dick assented. "Perhaps it is fed by underground springs. Let us walk round the lake and see where the water runs out and how much of a stream there is. That is what concerns us. Where it comes from doesn't matter particularly—it's how much of it there is."

Our walk round the little lake, however, resulted in a disappointment which staggered us for the moment. There was no outlet. The lake was land-locked; the one insignificant rivulet we found running into it being evidently no more than enough to counterbalance the daily evaporation.

"Well," remarked Dick, after a long pause, "there is one thing sure: the Pueblos never built a [Pg 269] flume and dug that big, long ditch to carry this trifling amount of water. This lake, after all, was not the source of supply, as we were supposing. It was a reservoir, perhaps, but nothing more. The real source was somewhere higher up."

If Dick was right—and there could be hardly a doubt that he was—the most promising direction in which to continue our search would be on the west side of the lake, whence the little rivulet came down. An examination of the ravine in which the stream ran showed evidence that it had at one time carried much more water than at present, so, with hopes renewed, we set off at once along its steep, stony bed.

The country on that side was very rough and precipitous, and the ravine itself, reasonably wide at first, became narrower and narrower, and its sides more and more lofty, until presently it became so contracted that we might have imagined ourselves to be walking up a very narrow lane with rows of ten-story houses on either side. The sky above us was a mere ribbon of blue.

After climbing upward for about half a mile, we began to catch occasional glimpses ahead of us of [Pg 270] a frowning cliff which bade fair to bar our further progress altogether, and we were beginning to wonder whether we had not chosen the wrong ravine after all, when suddenly, with one accord, we all stopped short and cocked our ears. There was a sound of running water somewhere close by!

There was a bend in the gorge just here, and we could not see ahead, but the instant we detected the sound of water, Dick, with a shout, sprang forward, and with me close on his heels and the short-legged Pedro some distance in the rear, dashed up the bed of the ravine and round the corner.

What a wonderful sight met our gaze! Out of the great cliff I mentioned just now there came roaring down a magnificent stream, which, falling into a deep pool it had worn for itself in the rocks, went boiling and foaming off through a second ravine to the right—a fine thing to see!

But what was finer, and infinitely more interesting, was the original Pueblo head-gate, so set in the narrow gorge in which we stood that the water, which, if left to itself, would have flowed down our ravine, was forced to run off through the other channel.

It was a remarkable piece of work for such a primitive people to have performed, considering [Pg 271] especially the very inferior tools they had to do it with. The walls of the gorge came together at this point in such a manner that they were not more than five feet apart and were so straight-up-

and-down that they looked as though they had been trimmed by hand—as possibly they had been to some extent. Taking advantage of this narrow gap, the Pueblos had cut a deep groove in the rocks on either side of the ravine, and in these grooves they had set up on end a great flat stone about five feet high and three inches thick—it must have weighed a thousand pounds or more.

Against this stone head-gate, on its inner side, the water stood four feet deep, and it was obvious that when the gate was raised the flood would go raging down the gorge we had just ascended into the little lake below, leaving the bed in which it now ran high and dry.

Undoubtedly, it was this stone door with which the Pueblos used to regulate their water-supply, prying it up and holding it in position, perhaps, with blocks of wood, which, after the Indians deserted the valley, had in time rotted away, allowing the gate to fall, thus shutting off the water entirely.

However that may have been, one thing at any rate was certain:—Whenever our flume and our ditch were ready, here was water enough for thousands of acres only waiting to be let loose. [Pg 272]

For a long time Dick and I stood with our hands resting on the top of the head-gate and our chins resting on our hands, watching the water as it went foaming and splashing down the other ravine, and as we stood there, there came over us by degrees a sense of the real importance to us of this discovery. We were only boys, after all, and we had gone into this enterprise more or less in the spirit of adventure, but now it gradually dawned upon us that we had in reality arrived at a point where the roads forked:—Here, ready to our hands, was work for a lifetime, and we had to decide whether we were going into it heart and soul or whether we were not. Every boy arrives at this fork in the roads sooner or later, and when he does, he is apt to feel pretty serious. I know we did.

With us, however, the question seemed to settle itself, for Dick, presently straightening up and turning to me, said:

"Frank! What will your Uncle Tom say? Will he be willing that you should stay out in this country and take to wheat-raising and ditch-building and so forth?" [Pg 273]

"If I know Uncle Tom," I replied, "he'll be not only willing but delighted. If we make a success of this thing—as we will if hard work will do it—just imagine how proudly he will point to us as proofs of his theory that a fellow may sometimes learn more out of school than in it. In fact, if I'm not much mistaken, he will be eager to help; and if we need money for the work, as we certainly shall, I shan't hesitate to ask him for it. I shall inherit a little when I come of age, and I'm pretty sure Uncle Tom will advance me some if I need it. But how about the professor, Dick? How will he fancy the idea of your settling down in this valley? For if we *do* go into this thing in earnest, that is what it means."

"I know it does," replied my companion, seriously. "And I'm glad of it. I'll let you into a little secret, Frank. For some time past the professor has been worrying himself as to what was to become of me: what business or occupation I was fit for with my peculiar bringing-up—for there is no getting over the fact that it has been peculiar—and the professor, considering himself responsible for it, has been pretty anxious about the result. Now, here is an occupation all laid out for me, and nobody will be so pleased to hear of it as the professor. It will take a burden off his mind; and I'm mighty glad to think it will." [Pg 274]

"I see," said I. "I should think you would be: such a fine old fellow as he is. So, then, Dick, it is settled, is it, that we go ahead? What's the first move, then?"

"Why, the first move of all, I think, is to get back to the lake and eat our lunch, and while we are doing so we can consult as to what work to start upon and how to set about it. What time is it, Pedro?"

"Midday and ten minutes," promptly replied the Mexican, casting an eye at the sun; while I, pulling out my watch, saw that he had hit it exactly, as he always did, I found later.

"Then let us get back to the lake," said Dick. "Hark! What was that? The water makes so much noise that I can't be sure, but it sounded to me like wolves howling."

Pedro nodded his big head. "It will be well to go down to where there are some trees," said he. "This arroyo, with its high walls, is not a good place."

As we walked down the ravine and got further away from the water, we could hear more distinctly the cry of the wolves. Pedro stopped short and listened intently. [Pg 275]

"There is a good many of them," said he. "I think they come hunting us. Let us get up on this rock here and wait a little."

In the middle of the ravine lay a great flat-topped stone, about six feet high, and to the top of this we soon scrambled—there was plenty of room—and there for a minute or two we waited. The cry of the hunting wolves grew louder and louder, and presently, around a bend a short distance below, loping along with their noses to the ground, there came a band of sixteen of them. At sight of us they stopped short, and then—showing plainly that they knew of no danger to themselves—with a yell of delight at having run down their prey, as they supposed, they came charging up the ravine!

CHAPTER XVII
The Bridge

[Pg 276]

As the pack came racing up the gulch, we waited an instant until a narrow place crowded them into a bunch, when Dick called out, "Now!" and we all fired together into the midst of them. Three of the wolves fell, two dead—I could see the feather of Pedro's arrow sticking out of the ribs of one of them—and one with its back broken.

I had hoped that the strange thunder of the rifles would send them flying—but no. They all stopped again for a moment, and then, maddened seemingly at the sight of the broken-backed wolf dragging itself about and screeching with pain—poor beast—they all fell upon the unfortunate creature and worried it to death. Then, with yells of rage, on they came again.

The pause had given us time to re-load. Dick and Pedro, quicker than I, fired a second shot, and once more two wolves fell writhing among the stones. The next moment we were surrounded, and for a minute or two after that I was too much engaged myself to note what the others were doing.

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A gaunt, long-legged wolf sprang up on the rock within three feet of me. I fired my rifle into his chest. Another, close beside him, was within an ace of scrambling up when I hit him across the side of his head a fearful crack with the empty rifle-barrel and knocked him off again. Then, seeing a third with his feet on top of the rock, his head thrown back in his straining efforts to get up, I sprang to that side, kicked the beast under his chin and knocked him down.

Meanwhile my companions had been similarly engaged and similarly successful. Pedro in particular, having dropped his bow and taken in one hand the short-handled ax he always carried with him, while in the other he held his big sheath-knife, had laid about him to such effect that he had put four of the enemy out of the fight—two of them permanently.

Dick was the only one who had received any damage, and that was to his clothes and not to himself. His rifle being empty, he had used it to push back the wolves as they jumped up. In doing so he had stepped too near the edge of the rock, and one of the watchful beasts, springing up at that moment, had caught the leg of his trousers with its teeth, tearing it from end to end and coming dangerously near to pulling my partner down. Pedro, however, quick as a flash, had delivered a back-handed "swipe" with his ax at the wolf's neck, nearly cutting off its head, and Dick was saved. It was an unpleasantly close thing, though.

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It was a short, sharp tussle, and at the end of it nine of the sixteen wolves lay scattered about the bed of the ravine, dead or helpless. This seemed to take the fight out of the remaining seven—as well it might—who retreated down the arroyo, turning at the corner and looking back at us with their lips drawn up and their teeth showing, seeming to convey a threat, as though they would say, "Your turn this time—but just you wait a bit."

Such unexpected fierceness and such determination on the part of the wolves—by daylight, too—scared me rather; Dick also, I noted, looked pretty sober, as, turning to the Mexican, he said:

"You were right, Pedro: these wolves *are* dangerous—a good deal more so than I had supposed. Our chances would have been pretty slim if we hadn't had this rock so handy. If this sort of thing is going to happen at any time, day or night, it will add very much to the difficulty of the work up here. We shall have to be continuously on the lookout; it won't do to separate; and wherever we are at work, we shall have to prepare a place of refuge near at hand. I don't like it. I've seen wolves by the hundred, but I never saw any before so savage and so persistent as these. I tell you, I don't half like it."

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"And I don't either," said I, glad to find that I was not the only one to feel uneasy. "Did you notice, Dick, how thin they all were? I've often heard the expression, 'gaunt as a wolf,' and now I know what it means. They seemed half-starved."

"That is it, senor," remarked Pedro. "The wolves up here are very many—too many for the space they have. Here they are, the cañons all round them, they cannot get away. All the time they are half-starved, all the time they hunt for food, all the time they are dangerous. Often in winter they eat each other. It is well if we move away from here. Pretty soon there will come another pack to eat up these dead ones."

"Let us get out, then!" I cried. "I've had enough of them for one day!"

The others were quite ready to move, so, jumping down from our fortress we started along the ravine again, this time keeping our ears wide open for suspicious sounds, and feeling a good deal relieved when, on the edge of the lake, we sat down to our lunch with an old low-branching pine tree close by, up which we could go in a jiffy if need be.

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But though the presence of so many wolves on the "island" was something we had not anticipated, something, moreover, which was likely to add very much to the difficulty of our undertaking, we did not for a moment contemplate its abandonment. It meant the use of great caution in going about the work, but as to backing out, I do not think the idea so much as occurred to either of us.

As soon as we had sat down to our lunch, therefore, we began the discussion of the best method of procedure.

"It is a big undertaking, Dick," said I, "a very big undertaking; but it looks like a straightforward piece of work; and it seems to me that what has been done once can certainly be done again, especially as we have our line already laid out for us. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I certainly think so," replied my partner. "What those Pueblos accomplished with their poor implements, we can surely do again with our superior tools. And some of it, at least, we can do ourselves, I believe—with our own hands, I mean. When it comes to digging out the ditch on the other side of the cañon, it will pay us to hire Mexicans; but the preliminary work of bringing the water down to the cañon, and, perhaps, the building of the flume, I believe we can do ourselves." [Pg 281]

"The building of the flume," said I, "is likely to be a pretty big job by itself. We can undoubtedly get the water down that far—that is simple—but the building of the flume is quite another thing. A small flume won't do; it has to be a big, strong, solid structure, and it strikes me that the very first thing to be done—the laying of the two big stringers across the cañon—is going to take us all we know, and a trifle over. In fact, I don't see myself how we are to do it."

"I think I do," rejoined my partner; "but we shall need tools for the purpose. We can't build a big, solid flume with one pick, one shovel and two axes."

"No, we certainly can't," I replied.

"We shall need, too, a large amount of lumber," continued Dick, "heavy pieces, besides boards for floor and sides—two inch planks, at least—three inch would be better. We shall need several thousand feet altogether." [Pg 282]

"Well?"

"Well, there is no lumber to be had nearer than Mosby, and to bring it from Mosby is out of the question. In the first place it would cost too much; and in the second place it is too far to pack it on mule-back."

I nodded. "You mean we shall have to cut it out ourselves, here on the spot."

"Yes; and to do that we shall need a long, two-handled rip-saw, and a saw-pit to work in. Besides this, the other tools we shall require, as far as I can think of them on the spur of the moment, are two or three pulley-blocks for placing the big timbers, hammers, nails, cross-cut saws and a big auger; for I propose that we pin the heavy parts together with wooden pins: it will save the carriage on spikes, and be just as good, if not better. Don't you think so, Pedro?"

Pedro approved of the idea, and we were about to continue the discussion, when there broke out a great yelling and snarling of wolves up the arroyo. Dick and I sprang to our feet, and instinctively cast an eye up into the adjacent tree in search of a convenient limb; but Pedro, unconcernedly continuing his meal, remarked: [Pg 283]

"It is only that they eat the dead ones."

"Well, they're a deal too close to be pleasant," said Dick. "I vote we move on down to the cañon and get a little further away from them."

As I was heartily of the same opinion, we moved down accordingly, and there on the brink of the gorge surveyed the scene of our future labors.

"Look here," said Dick. "Here's where we shall have to cut our timbers—on this side. See what a splendid supply there is right at hand."

He pointed to a scar on the mountain close by where a landslide had brought down scores of trees of all sizes.

"When did that come down, Pedro?" he asked.

"Only last spring, señor," replied the Mexican. "And the trees are sound and good."

"Mighty lucky for us," continued my partner; "for, you see, on the other side trees are scarce and they average rather small. But on this side, there are not only seasoned trees of all sizes in abundance, but it will be a down-hill pull to get them into place—a big item by itself. Besides that, just back here on this little level spot we can dig our saw-pit very conveniently. The only question to my mind is, whether we should not move our camp over to this side. If it were not for the wolves I should certainly say, 'Yes'; but as it is, I feel rather doubtful. The nearest water is up there at the lake, and if we did move over to this side that is where we should have to make our camp." [Pg 284]

"It's a long way up to the lake, Dick," said I, "and it might be dangerous going to and from our work—especially going back in the evening. In fact, it might easily happen that we couldn't get back at all."

"That's what I was thinking of," replied my partner.

"On the other hand," I continued, "if we keep our present camp, it will be very inconvenient, and will waste a great deal of time, to come to our work every day by way of those stone steps we climbed this morning."

"Yes, that's it. But there's yet another way which, I think, would get us over both difficulties; one which would combine all the advantages and at the same time do away with the danger—or, to

say the least, the inconvenience—of being harried by the wolves, and that is to build a bridge here. Then, if we move our camp to that little 'park' just below here, where we found that spring yesterday, it would only take us five minutes in the morning to come up here, cross the bridge and go to work. How does that strike you? What do you think, Pedro?" [Pg 285]

"It is good," replied Pedro. "First thing of everything a bridge; and that is easy. We make it to-day before the sun set."

"We do, do we?" cried Dick, laughing. "That will be pretty expeditious; but if you think you know how, Pedro, go ahead and we'll follow."

Pedro's eye twinkled. "The señor means it?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Dick.

"*Bueno*," said Pedro, briefly.

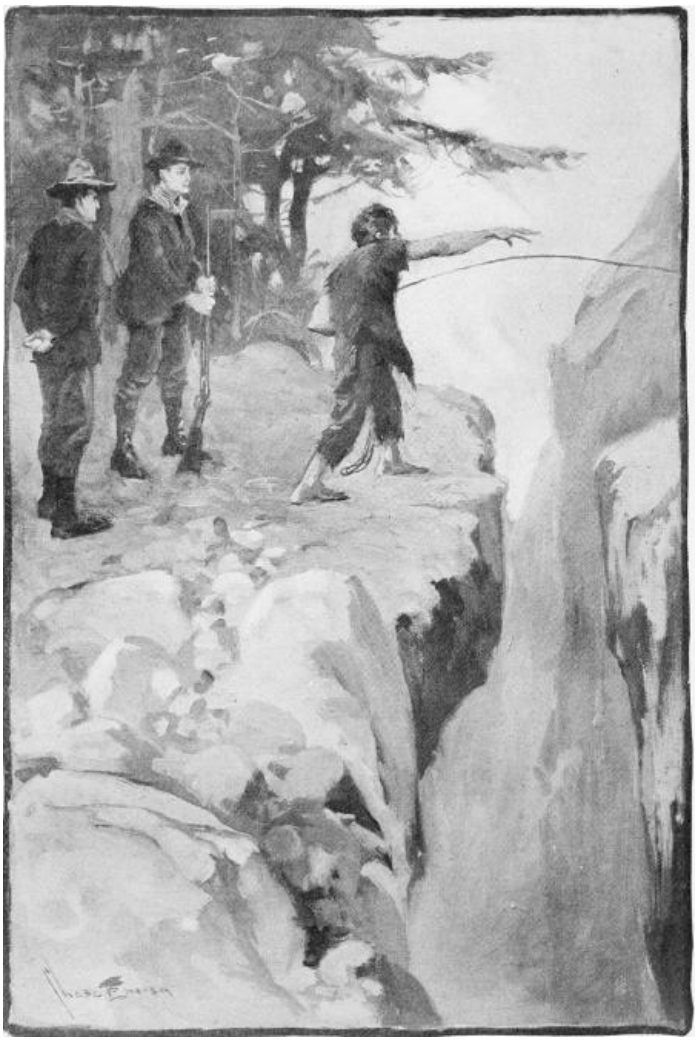
There was a little pine tree growing just on the brink of the chasm, and without another word the Mexican drew his ax from his belt, stepped up to the tree and cut it off about four feet from the ground, allowing the top to fall from the precipice into the stream below.

"What's that for, Pedro?" I asked, in surprise.

Pedro grinned. "I show you pretty quick," said he. "Come, now. We go back to the other side." [Pg 286]

Though we could not fathom his plan, having voluntarily made him captain for the time being we could not do less than obey orders; so away we went at a brisk walk back to the crack in the wall, down the steps in the rock, along the bank of the creek to camp—where we picked up our own ax—then up the ledge to the point opposite the one we had just left—a two-mile walk to accomplish thirty feet.

Here, the first thing Pedro did was to take his lariat, a beautifully-made rawhide rope strong enough to hold a thousand-pound steer, tie a stone to one end and throw the stone across the cañon. I could not think what he was doing it for, until I saw that he was measuring the width. We made it about twenty-seven feet, its remarkable narrowness being accounted for by the great overhang of the cliff on our side.



"I COULD NOT THINK WHAT HE WAS DOING IT FOR."

"Now," said Pedro, "we go up the mountain here a little way and cut some poles. It is just close by up here."

We soon found the place, and there we cut off three poles about thirty feet long and eight inches [Pg 287]

thick at the small end. These we trimmed down to about the same thickness at the butt, and having roughly squared them, we dragged them down to the edge of the gorge.

So far it had been a simple proceeding, but what puzzled me was how Pedro proposed to lay these sticks across the cañon. This, too, as it turned out, proved to be a simple matter, but its first step was one to make your hair stand on end to look at, nevertheless.

It was now we found out why Pedro had cut off the little tree on the other side. Taking his lariat, he swung the loop above his head a time or two and cast it across the gorge. The loop settled over the tree-stump, when the Mexican pulled it tight and then proceeded with great care to tie the other end of the rope to a tree which stood very convenient on our side.

What was he up to?

Dick and I stood watching him in silence, when he stepped to the edge of the cliff, took hold of the rope with both hands, and swung himself off into space!

My! It gave me cold shivers all down my back to see him hanging there with nothing but that thread of a rope to prevent his falling on the rocks a thousand feet below!

Motionless and breathless, Dick and I watched him as he went swinging across, hand over hand— [Pg 288]
the rope sagging in the middle in an alarming manner—and profound was our relief when he drew himself up and stepped safely upon the opposite wall.

But though this tight-rope performance had given us palpitation of the heart, Pedro himself appeared to be absolutely unaffected. With perfect calmness and unconcern, he turned round and said in the most matter-of-fact tone:

"Now undo the rope and tie it to the end of one of those poles."

As Pedro evidently regarded his feat of gymnastics as nothing out of the common, we affected to look upon it in the same light, so, following his directions, we tied the rope to one of the poles, when the Mexican began pulling it toward him, we pushing at the other end. Presently the pole was so far over the edge that it began to teeter, when Pedro called to us to go slowly. Then, while we pried it forward inch by inch, Pedro retreated backward up the gully until the end of the pole bumped against the wall on his side, when he came forward, keeping the rope taut all the time, lifted the pole and set its end on the rocks. The first beam of our bridge was laid. [Pg 289]

The other two poles we sent across by the same process, and then, scraping a bed for them in the sand and gravel, we laid them side by side, two with their butt-ends on our side, the other—the middle one—reversed.

Pedro then took from his pocket a long strip of deer-hide with which he bound the three poles together, when we, at his request, having once more tied the rope to the tree, he laid his hand upon it, using it as a hand-rail, and walked across to our side, where with a second buckskin thong he bound the poles together at that end.

Next he walked back to the middle of the bridge, and holding the rope with both hands, jumped up and down upon the poles, to make sure of their solidity, and finding them all right, he went to the far end, loosened the loop from the tree-stump, threw it across to us, and then, without any hand-rail this time, walked back across the flimsy-looking bridge to our side!

What a head the man must have had! The bridge at its widest did not measure thirty inches, and yet the Mexican—barefooted, to be sure—walked erect across that fearful chasm without a [Pg 290]
thought of turning dizzy. I suppose he was born without nerves, and had never cultivated any, as we more civilized people do by our habits of life. For years he had lived out-of-doors, always at exercise, used to climbing in all sorts of dangerous places, and what perhaps may have counted for as much as anything else, he was one of the few Mexicans I have known who abjured that habit so common among his people—the habit of smoking cigarettes.

I know very well that I, though I did not smoke cigarettes either, and though I thought myself pretty clear-headed, would never have dared such a thing, unless under pressure of great and imminent danger.

"What did you untie the rope for, Pedro?" I asked. "Why not leave it for a hand-rail?"

"Because the wolves will eat it," replied Pedro. "We will bring one of your hempen ropes and tie there: the wolves will not trouble that."

"By the way, Pedro!" cried Dick. "How about those wolves? Won't they come across the bridge?"

"I think not," the Mexican answered. "They are wary and suspicious—it is the nature of a wolf—and I think they will fear to venture."

At that moment the sun set behind the peak, and as though its setting had been a signal, there [Pg 291]
arose in three or four different directions the howls of wolves. They were coming out for their nightly hunt.

"Señores," said Pedro, "we will see very soon if the wolves will cross the bridge. It will not be long before they find our trail and then they will come down here. Let us hide us and watch. Up here, behind these rocks, is a good place."

A little way up the bank, only a few steps back from the edge of the gorge, we lay down and waited. Presently, from the direction of the lake, there suddenly arose a joyous chorus of yelps, which proclaimed that our trail had been discovered. And not to us only was the "find" proclaimed. A second pack, hearing the call, hastened to join the hunt, hoping for a share in the spoil; we caught a glimpse of them as they came racing down one of the slopes which bordered the gully. The swelling clamor drew nearer and nearer, and pretty soon, with a rush of pattering feet, the wolves appeared; there must have been thirty of them.

Down to the edge of the cañon they came, and there they drew up. One of them, a big, gray old fellow, the leader of one of the packs, probably, advanced to the end of the bridge, sniffed at it and drew hastily back. One after another, other wolves came forward, sniffed and withdrew. It was evident that Pedro had guessed right: they dared not cross. [Pg 292]

At this balking of their hopes they set up a howl of disappointment. Poor things! I felt quite sorry for them. They were *so* hungry; and yet they dared not cross. Nevertheless, though I might feel sorry for them, I was more than glad that they feared to venture, for against such a pack as that our chances would have been small indeed.

"Señores," whispered Pedro, "I try them yet a little more. It is quite safe. Stay you here and watch."

With that, taking his ax in his hand, he rose up in full view of the pack and walked down to the end of the bridge.

Such an uproar as broke forth I never heard. Many of the wolves ran up the banks on either side of the gully in order to get a sight of Pedro, and every one of them, those in front, those behind and those on the sides, lifted their heads and yelled at the man calmly standing there, scarce ten steps away.

But they dared not cross.

One of them, indeed, crowded forward against his will by those behind, was pushed out on to the bridge a little way, when, striving to get back, his hind feet slipped off. I thought he was gone, but by desperate scratching he succeeded in saving himself, when, rendered crazy by fright and rage he attacked the nearest wolves, fought his way through to the rear and fled straight away up the gully. [Pg 293]

This seemed to settle the matter. The whole pack, as though struck with panic, turned and pursued him. In ten seconds not one of them was to be seen.

As Dick and I rose up from our hiding-place, Pedro came back to us.

"You see," said he, "we are quite safe."

"Yes," replied Dick. "It is evident we have nothing to fear from them on this side—and I'm mighty glad of it. Well, let us get down to camp. I think we've done a pretty good day's work, taking it all round, and I shall be glad of a good supper and a good rest."

"So shall I," was my response. "And as to our day's work, Dick, I'm much mistaken if it isn't by long odds the most important one to us that either you or I ever put in."

CHAPTER XVIII [Pg 294]

The Big Flume

As the first step in restoring the old Pueblo irrigation system, we moved camp next morning as arranged. Packing our scanty belongings upon old Fritz, we rode up the ledge, past the site of the proposed flume, and down the mountain a short distance to a point between two of the big claw-like spurs, where, two days before, in riding down to speak to Galvez, we had come across a little spring which would furnish water enough for ourselves and our animals.

Thence, walking back to the bridge, taking with us, besides our rifles, the two axes and one of our long picket-ropes, Pedro first tied the latter to the tree on our side, and then, taking the other end in his hand, he walked across and fastened it to the stump on the far side.

It was now our turn to cross, and very little did either of us relish the idea. Dick, who had volunteered to go first, took hold of the rope, set one foot on the bridge, and then—he could not resist it—did just what he ought not to have done:—looked down. The inevitable consequence was that he took his foot off again and retreated a few steps. [Pg 295]

"My word, Frank!" said he. "You may laugh if you like, but I'll be shot if I'm going to walk across that place. Crawling's good enough for me."

So saying, he again approached the bridge, and going down on his hands and knees, crawled carefully over.

For myself, I found it equally impossible to screw up my courage far enough to attempt the passage on foot. In fact, even crawling seemed too risky, so I just sat myself astride of the three poles and "humped" myself along with my hands to the other side, where the grinning Pedro gave

me a hand to help me to my feet again.

It was ignominious, perhaps, to be thus outdone by an ignorant, semi-savage Mexican; but, as Dick said, "You may laugh if you like": I was not going to break my neck just to prove that I was not afraid—when I was.

At that hour in the morning the wolves, I suppose, were all asleep. At any rate we heard nothing of them. But knowing very well that they might turn up again at any moment, we wasted no time [Pg 296] in starting our first piece of work, namely, preparing a place of refuge against them.

Choosing a spot on the level near the point where we expected to dig our saw-pit, we cut a number of good, heavy logs, with which, after carefully notching and fitting them, we erected a pen, seven feet high and about ten feet square inside. It was the plainest kind of a structure: merely four walls, without even a doorway; but as it was not chinked it would be a simple matter for us to clamber up and get inside; whereas, for a wolf to do the same—with safety—would be far from simple with us waiting in there to crack him on the head with an ax as soon as he showed it above the top log.

It may be that we were unnecessarily cautious in providing this refuge. If the wolves should molest us—a contingency pretty sure to occur some time or other—it was probable that we should hear them coming in time to retreat by the bridge, which was not more than a hundred yards distant. But on the other hand, if they should not give us timely notice of their approach, it might be very awkward, not to say dangerous—for Dick and me, at least.

"For Pedro it might be all right," was my partner's comment, "but for us—no, thank you. I have no [Pg 297] desire to be hustled across that bridge in a hurry. Just imagine how it would paralyze you to try to crawl across those poles, knowing that there was a wolf standing at the far end trying to make up his mind to follow you. No, thank you; not for me. We'll have a refuge here on 'dry land.'"

It was a long day's work, the building of this pen, for we were careful to make it strong and solid; indeed, we had not yet quite finished it, when, about four in the afternoon, we heard the first faint whimperings of the wolves, a long way off somewhere. So, fearing they might come down upon us before we were quite ready for them, we postponed the completion of the job until the morrow, and re-crossing the bridge in the same order and the same manner as before, we went back to camp, where we spent the remaining hours of daylight in making things comfortable for a lengthened stay.

To this end we built a little three-sided shelter of logs about four feet high, the side to the east, facing down the mountain, being left open. This we roofed with a wagon-sheet we had brought with us in place of a tent, dug a trench all round it to drain off the rain-water, covered the floor [Pg 298] with a thick mat of pine-boughs, and there we were, prepared for a residence of six months or more, if necessary.

"Now, Frank," said my partner, as we sat by the fire that evening, "we have about got to a point where we have to have tools. One of us has got to go to Mosby to get them, while the other stays here with Pedro. The question is, which shall go. Take your choice. I'll stay or go, just as you like."

"Then I think you had better go, Dick," I replied. "You know better than I do what tools we shall need; you are far more handy at packing a mule than I am; and besides all that, it will give you an opportunity to see the professor."

"Thanks, old chap," said Dick, heartily. "That is a consideration. Yes, I shall be glad to go, if you don't mind staying here with Pedro."

"Not a bit," I replied. "He's an interesting companion; and if one needed a protector it would be hard to find a better one. No; I'll stay. I don't at all mind it."

"Very well," said Dick. "Then I think I'll dig out the first thing in the morning. It will take me, I expect, about six days: two days each way and perhaps two days in Mosby. It depends on whether [Pg 299] I can get the tools there that I want."

"I should think you could," said I, "unless it is the big rip-saw."

"I don't think there'll be any trouble about that," replied my partner. "Before the saw-mill came in, two or three of the mines used to cut their own big timbers by hand, and I've no doubt the old saws are lying around somewhere still. If they are, I'm pretty sure I can get one for next-to-nothing, for, of course, they are never used now."

"There's one thing, Dick," said I, after a thoughtful pause, "which makes me feel a little doubtful about your going alone, and that is lest Galvez should interfere with you. If he caught sight of you, either going or returning, he might make trouble."

"He might," replied Dick. "Though I don't much think he is likely to trouble you or me. Anyhow, when I leave to-morrow, you can take the glass and just keep watch on the village for an hour or so to see that he doesn't make any attempt to cut me off. If he should, you can raise a big smoke here to warn me and ride down to help."

"All right. I will. But how about when you come back?" [Pg 300]

"Why, I'll arrange to leave The Foolscap, as we did before, at four o'clock in the morning, which

would bring me about half way across the valley by sunrise. On the sixth morning, and every morning after till I turn up, you can take the field-glass and look out for me. From this elevation you would be able to see me long before Galvez could, and then you might ride down to meet me."

"That's a good idea. Yes; I'll do that."

Our camp was so placed that we could not only see the whole stretch of the valley between us and The Foolscap, but also the village and the country beyond it for many miles, and for about two hours after Dick's departure I sat there with the glass in my hand watching his retreating figure, and more especially watching the village. For, though in reality I had little fear that Galvez would attempt to play any tricks on him, particularly after Dick's exhibition of rifle-shooting, I was not going to take any avoidable chances.

At the end of that time, however, I rose up, put away the glass, and in company with Pedro went over to the other side of the cañon, where we first finished up the building of the pen, and then, [Pg 301] picking out a big, straight tree suitable for a stringer, I went to work upon it, trimming off the branches, while Pedro with the shovel began the task of digging out the saw-pit.

That evening, and each succeeding evening, just before the sun set, we stopped work and retreated across the bridge in order to avoid any trouble with the wolves, which, as a rule, did not come out in force until about that hour. Once only during the time that Pedro and I were at work there by ourselves did any of them venture on an attack. It was a pack of about a dozen which came down on us one evening just before quitting-time, but as we heard them coming, we retired into the pen, whence I shot one of them before they had found out where we were; whereupon the rest bolted.

I think the survivors of the fight in Wolf Arroyo—as we had named the ravine where we had had our battle—must have imparted to all the others the intelligence that we were dangerous creatures to deal with, for the wolves in general were certainly much less venturesome than they had been that first day. At night, though, they came out in droves, and continuous were the howlings, especially when the wind was south and they could smell us and our animals only a [Pg 302] hundred yards away on the other side of the cañon.

At sunrise on the sixth day, and again on the seventh, I searched the valley with the glass to see if Dick was within sight, but it was not until the morning of the eighth day that I saw him and old Fritz coming along, not more than five miles away. He must have made a very early start.

Jumping on my pony, I rode to meet him, while Pedro remained behind to watch the village.

I was very glad to see my partner safely back again, and especially pleased to hear the news he brought.

The professor, he told me, was delighted with the turn of events which bade fair to provide Dick with a settled occupation, and one so well suited to his tastes and training; while as to Uncle Tom, Dick had written to him an account of the present condition of the King Philip mine, and had given him a full description of the undertaking upon which we proposed to enter. In reply, my genial guardian had sent to me a characteristic telegram, delivered the very morning Dick left Mosby. It read thus:

"Go ahead. Money when wanted. How about book-learning now?" [Pg 303]

"How's that, Dick?" said I, handing it over to my companion to read.

Dick laughed. "You made a pretty good guess, didn't you?" he replied.

It was a matter of intense satisfaction to both of us to find our guardians so heartily in favor of the prosecution of our design, and it was with high spirits and a firm determination to "do or die" that we carried over the bridge the assortment of tools with which old Fritz was laden, and that very afternoon went systematically to work.

It was not until we really went about it in earnest that we fully realized the magnitude of the task we had set ourselves when we undertook to build that flume. We were determined that if we did it at all we would do it thoroughly well, and in consequence the timbers we selected for the stringers were of such size and weight that we should have been beaten at the word "go" if we had not had for an assistant a man like Pedro, who combined in his own person the strength of five ordinary men. It was a pleasure to see him when he put forth all his powers. Give him a lever, and let him take his own time, and the most obstinate log was made to travel sulkily down hill [Pg 304] when Pedro took it in hand.

After measuring with particular accuracy the space between the sockets on either side of the gorge, we sawed off one big timber to the right length, and getting it into position over the saw-pit we squared its two ends and then sawed it flat on one side, leaving the other sides untouched.

I had always understood that working in a saw-pit was a disagreeable job, but not till I had practical experience of it did I discover how correct my understanding had been. I discovered also why the expression, "top sawyer," was meant to indicate an enviable position.

It fell to Pedro to be top sawyer, for the harder part of the work is the continuous lifting of the saw; but for all that, the man below has the worst of it, for if he looks up he gets a stream of sawdust into his eyes, and if he looks down he gets it in the back of his neck. There is no escape,

as Dick and I found—for we took it in turns to go below and pull at the saw-handle.

However, we were not going to shirk the task just because it happened to be unpleasant, and being fairly in for it, we made the best of it.

Our first big timber being at length prepared, we got it down to the edge of the cañon, and then were ready for the next move—the most important move of all—getting it across the gorge. This could not be done by main strength, as had been the case with our bridge-timbers, for this stick, twenty-nine feet long and sixteen inches square, though pretty well seasoned, was an immense weight. [Pg 305]

But what could not be done by force might be accomplished by contrivance. The most bulky part of old Fritz's load had been composed of ropes and pulley-blocks, and it was with these that we intended to coax our big stick across the gap.

Going over to the other side, we set up a framework of stout poles—a derrick, we called it—to the top of which we attached a big pulley. Threading a strong rope through this pulley, we carried it back and fastened it to a windlass which Dick built; he having seen dozens of them at work among the mines, having observed, fortunately, how they were made, and being himself a very handy fellow with tools. The windlass was securely anchored to two trees, when, the other end of the rope having been carried over and tied to our big log, we were ready to try the experiment of placing it athwart the chasm.

With this object, Dick and Pedro turned the windlass, while I, crossing the bridge once more, pried the log forward from behind. It was a slow and laborious operation, but inch by inch the great log went grating and grinding forward, until at length its end overlapped the further edge of the gorge. Soon, with a sullen thump, my end fell into its socket, when Dick lowered his end into the socket opposite, and our first big stringer was successfully laid. [Pg 306]

It was a good start and greatly heartened us up to tackle the rest of the work.

Our second big stringer we prepared and laid in the same manner—flat side up—and then came the most ticklish job of all—the placing of the two supports beneath each stringer. Without Pedro, with his steady nerves and his cat-like agility, we could not have done it.

Tying a rope to the stringer, Pedro descended the face of the cliff and set the butt-end of the supporting beam in its socket—the other end being temporarily tied in place—repeating the same process on the other side. These beams we had measured and prepared with great care, so that when their bases were set, the beveled smaller ends, by persistent pounding, could be tightly jammed into the notch previously cut for their reception in the under side of the big stringer. It was a good piece of work, and very thankful I was when it was safely accomplished; for though to one with a clear head it might not be very dangerous, it looked so, and I was, as I say, greatly relieved when it was done. [Pg 307]

It might seem that we made these stringers unnecessarily strong, and perhaps we did. But we intended to be on the safe side if we could. Our flume was designed to be eight feet wide and five feet deep, and though the pitch was considerable and the water in consequence would run fast, if it should by chance ever fill to the top there would be by our calculation thirty-three or thirty-four tons of water in it.

Having now our foundation laid, the rest of the work was plain, straightforward building, in which there was no special mechanical difficulty. One part of our task, however—the sawing of the lumber—we soon found to be so slow that we decided, if we could get them, to procure the assistance of two or three Mexicans from Hermanos, and with that object in view we sought an interview with our friend, José Santanna.

To do this we supposed we should have to go down to Hermanos, but on consulting Pedro, we found that there was another and a much easier way. [Pg 308]

I had often wondered if Pedro, during all the years he had lived on the mountain, had subsisted exclusively on meat, or whether he had some means of obtaining other supplies, and now I found out. I found that he had a regular system of exchange with the villagers, by which he traded deer-meat and bear-meat for other provisions, and that by an arranged code of signals, familiar to everybody in the village, with the single exception of Galvez himself, he was accustomed to let it be known when he desired to communicate with the inhabitants.

Accordingly, Pedro that day at noon went down to a certain spot on one of the spurs, and there built a fire, and piling on it a number of green boughs he soon had a column of smoke rising skyward. This was the signal, and that same evening he and we two boys, going down to the same spot, sat down there and waited, until about an hour after dark, we heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and presently a man rode into sight. It proved to be Santanna himself, much to our satisfaction.

He, as soon as he learned what we wanted, engaged to send us up three stout young Mexicans, an engagement he duly fulfilled—to the rage and bewilderment of Galvez, as we afterward heard, who could not for the life of him make out what had become of them. [Pg 309]

With this accession of strength we needed a second saw, and Dick went off to Mosby to get one. In a few days he returned with two saws instead of one, and with a load of dried apples, sugar and coffee with which to feed our hungry Mexicans. Flour—of a kind—we could get from the

village, and deer-meat, though poor and tough at that season of the year, we could always procure.

Dick also brought back with him that commodity so necessary in all business undertakings—some money. The professor had insisted on advancing him some, while Uncle Tom had enclosed fifty dollars in a registered letter to me.

Thus armed, we procured two more Mexicans, and setting Pedro and his five compatriots to work with the three saws, while Dick and I did the carpenter work, we very soon began to make a showing.

As it was obviously too dangerous to attempt to work on the bare stringers, we first laid a solid temporary floor of three-inch planks, and having then a good platform we could proceed in safety [Pg 310] to set our big cross-pieces—upon which the permanent floor was afterward laid—and to go ahead with the rest of the building.

There being no stint of timber, we could afford to make our flume immensely strong—and we did. The framework was composed mostly of ten-by-ten pieces, while the planks for the floor and sides were three inches thick. The wings at each end of the flume were extended up stream and down stream eight feet in either direction; and to prevent the water from getting around these ends we built rough stone walls on the edge of the gorge and filled in the spaces with well-tamped clay, of which we were fortunate enough to find a great supply close at hand.

I do not intend to go into all the many details of the work, or to relate our mistakes or the accidents—all of them slight, fortunately—which now and then befell us. There was one little item of construction, however, which seemed to me so ingenious and withal so simple and so effective that I think it is worth special mention.

When we came to lay our floor and build the sides, the question of leakage cropped up, when [Pg 311] Dick suggested a plan which he said he had heard of as being adopted by sheepmen on the plains in building dipping-troughs.

Each three-inch plank, before being spiked in place, was set up on edge, and along the middle of its whole length we hammered a dent about half an inch wide and half an inch deep. Then, taking the jack-plane, we planed off the projecting edges to the same level. The consequence was that when the plank became water-soaked, this dented line swelled up and completely closed any crack between itself and the plank above or beside it. It was an ingenious trick, and proved so successful that it was well worth the time and trouble it took.

In fact, by the expenditure of time and trouble, in addition to a very modest sum of money, we did at length put together a flume which, I think I may say, was a very creditable piece of work. It was strenuous and unceasing labor, and at first it was pretty hard on me, but as my muscles became used to the strain I enjoyed it more and more, especially as every evening showed a forward step—a small one, perhaps, but still a forward step—toward the accomplishment of our object.

Week after week we kept at it, steadily and perseveringly pegging away, and at last, one day near [Pg 312] the end of July, summoning our six Mexicans to witness the ceremony, Dick and I, in alternate "licks" drove the last spike, and the flume was finished!

CHAPTER XIX [Pg 313]

Pedro's Bold Stroke

All this time the wolves had let us alone. Frequently, toward evening, we would detect them standing on the hillsides watching us, but they were afraid to come near: the hammering and sawing, the stir and bustle checked them and they kept aloof—by daylight.

Every night, though, they came down to the edge of the cañon to howl at us, and as the flume neared completion there was danger that they might summon courage to cross by it—the old bridge we had long ago tumbled into the stream. To prevent this, we at first set up every night a temporary gate across it, but later, we adopted a safer and better plan. We set two doors in our flume, one in the down-stream end, the other in the side, about the middle, so that by closing the former and opening the latter, all the water could be made to fall into the stream below. Our supply could thus be regulated at the flume instead of going all the way up to the old head-gate [Pg 314] for the purpose.

These gates being set, Pedro and another Mexican went up and opened connection between the lake and the low place where we had stirred up the deer the first day we were up there, and very soon there was a second little lake formed. Then, the flume being ready, we two and Pedro went up and raised the stone head-gate three inches. The rush with which the water came out was astonishing, and before the day was over it had come on down to the flume and was pouring through the side gate into the gorge—making a perfect defence against the wolves.

During the two months, or thereabouts, that we had been engaged in this work, Dick had made altogether three trips to Mosby, on which occasions he had written to Arthur, detailing our progress. Arthur, on his part, had written to us—or, rather, somewhat to our surprise, he had

written to the professor instead of directly to Dick—once from Santa Fé and once from the City of Mexico, whither he had been sent to institute a search of the records there. His last letter stated that up to that time no trace of the old patent had been found, but that, in spite of that drawback, [Pg 315] his father was vigorously stirring things up at his end of the line, and that we might expect to see "something doing" in the enemy's camp at any time. He stated also that he had hopes of rejoining us some time early in July.

In consequence, we had been constantly on the watch for him for nearly a month, but here was the end of July approaching and no Arthur had appeared.

As we were very anxious to know when to expect him, and as we were also in need of new supplies, the moment the flume was finished Dick set off once more for Mosby, while Pedro and I, transferring all our tools from the far side of the gorge, picked out a new working-ground on our side.

There was nothing further to be done on the "island," but though the flume was finished and ready for use, we still had need of a large amount of lumber in the construction of our ditch, for at the head of every draw it would be necessary to build a short flume, or, in some places, a culvert, to allow a passage for the rain-water which otherwise during the summer thunder-storm season would wash our ditch full of earth and rubbish.

As it would be too inconvenient, unfortunately, to cut lumber in the old place and carry it across [Pg 316] the flume, we moved all the tools, as I said, over to our side, and following along the line of the ditch for about half a mile, we selected a spot above it on the mountain and there set our Mexicans to work felling trees and digging new saw-pits.

From the place selected we could see out over the plain in all directions; a fact which had been one of our reasons for choosing that particular spot.

Indeed it had become a matter of great importance that we should be able to keep a watch on the valley, for we believed we had more than ever reason to fear some act of hostility on the part of the padron. Dick had no more than gone that day, when we were surprised by receiving a daylight visit from our friend, José Santanna, who informed us that Galvez of late had been showing unwonted signs of unrest; that he was growing more and more suspicious, irritable and evil-tempered. That the evening before a man had ridden into the village and had handed Galvez a paper—some legal notice, I guessed—upon receipt of which the padron had at first broken into a towering rage; had then gone about for half a day in a mood so morose and snappish that no [Pg 317] one dared go near him; and that finally he had ordered his horse and ridden away, saying that he was going to Taos.

"To Taos!" I exclaimed. "What has he gone to Taos for?"

José shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands, palms upward, as much as to say, "Who knows?"

"Have we scared him out after all, I wonder," said I. "Did he say anything about coming back, José?"

"He said he would return in four days," replied the Mexican.

"And is that all you know about it?"

"*Si, señor*, that is all. I know no more."

From this conversation it was plain to me that the law was beginning to work, and that Galvez was becoming uneasy. Knowing his character, I, too, became uneasy, for, should he be rendered desperate, there was no telling what tactics he might resort to. It was this consideration that made me so anxious for the safe return of my two partners.

From my vantage-point on the mountain I kept up a pretty constant watch for the next few days; [Pg 318] no one could come across the valley from any direction without my seeing them—during daylight, that is—and unless Galvez had slipped into Hermanos after dark I was sure he had not returned, when, about three o'clock on the afternoon of the fourth day I espied Dick, a long way off, coming back from Mosby. It was twelve hours earlier than I had expected him, and wondering if he had any special reason for making such a quick trip, I got my pony and hurried off to meet him.

I had a feeling that Dick was bringing news of some sort, and his first words after shaking hands proved the correctness of my impression.

"Well, old chap!" he exclaimed. "I've got news for you this time that will make you 'sit up and take notice':—Arthur may be here any day; and he has at last got track of that patent."

"Got a letter from him, then, did you?" I asked.

"Yes; written from Cadiz, in Spain, more than three weeks ago."

"From Cadiz!" I cried. "What's he doing there?"

"His father sent him over to go through a chest of old papers they have in their house there. Arthur says—I'll give you his letter to read as soon as we get to camp—he says that he spent a [Pg 319] fortnight reading all sorts of musty documents, without success, when at last he came upon an old note-book with the name of Arthur the First on its fly-leaf, and in that he found a single line

referring to the patent—the only mention that has turned up anywhere."

"And what does that say?"

"It says—— Here, wait a minute; hold my rifle. I'll show you what it says."

So saying, Dick took the letter out of his pocket, and finding the right place, handed it to me. The passage read: "It was an old memorandum-book in which my very great-grandfather used to note down all the particulars of the copper shipments and other matters dealing with the K. P. mine; but on the last fly-leaf was this entry, written in English: 'Mem. In case of accident to myself: The King's patent and the King's commission are in a hole in the wall above the door of the strong-room.' Where the strong-room may have been," Arthur went on, "I don't know, unless it is in the *Casa*. Ask Pedro."

"What do you think of that?" asked Dick.

"I think—— Well, I think we'll do as Arthur says: ask Pedro."

In the course of an hour we had reached camp, when Dick, as soon as he had greeted the faithful Mexican, at once propounded the important question. [Pg 320]

"Pedro," said he, without any preface, "did you ever hear of the 'strong-room'?"

"Surely," replied Pedro, with an air of surprise at being asked such a question. "Everybody knows the strong-room. It is a little room on the east side of the *Casa*; it has a door and no window; it is where one time the copper was stored, waiting for the pack-trains to come and take it away."

"It is, is it!" cried Dick. "Then, Frank, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if those deeds were in there now. How are we to find out?"

"Go and look!" I exclaimed, springing to my feet. "Now's our chance! Galvez is away—gone to Taos. Let us make a try for it at once. He's due to be back to-day, and then it will be too late. Come on! Let's get out! We haven't a minute to lose! Will you come with us, Pedro?"

To my surprise, and, I must confess, to my disappointment also, Pedro shook his head. I supposed he was afraid to leave his mountain, and for a moment my opinion of his courage suffered a relapse. But I was doing him an injustice, as I heartily owned to myself, when, pointing out over the valley, he said, quietly: [Pg 321]

"It is too late already, señor. Look there!"

Half a mile the other side of Hermanos, riding toward the village, were three horsemen, one of whom we recognized as Galvez. Who the others might be, and why the padron should be bringing them to Hermanos, we could not guess. We were destined, however, to learn all about them later in the day.

As a matter of course, the sole subject of our thoughts and our conversation was the King's patent, and whether or not it was still in its hiding-place above the door of the strong-room. The only way to find out was to get in there and search for it, but how to do that was the question. Many plans did we discuss and discard, and we were still discussing as we sat round the fire that night—our Mexican workmen being encamped some distance away—when Pedro suddenly jumped up, and signaling to us to keep quiet, stood for a moment with his head bent forward, listening intently. His sharp ears had detected some sound inaudible to our less practised hearing.

Making a quick backward motion with his hand, he whispered sharply: "Get away! Get away back from the light of the fire while I go see!" [Pg 322]

We speedily retreated up the hill a little way and hid ourselves among the trees, while Pedro, with the stealth of a wild animal, slipped silently off into the darkness. So quick and so noiseless were the movements of the clumsy-looking Mexican that I thought to myself I had rather be hunted by wolves than by that skilful woodsman, with his keen senses, his giant strength and his deadly, silent bow and arrow. I did not wonder any more that Galvez kept himself aloof.

For two or three minutes silence prevailed, when we saw Pedro step back into the circle of light, and with him another man. It was our friend, José Santanna, again.

"Well, José!" cried Dick. "What can we do for you?"

"Señor," replied the Mexican, "I came up to tell you something—to warn you. The padron is come back. He has been to Taos and he has brought back with him two men. They are bad—like himself. I go up to the *Casa* this evening while they are at supper and I hear them talking and laughing together through the door which is open. They say they like now to see three boys and a stupid peon"—he nodded toward Pedro—"get them out. They say if they catch Pedro they hang him, and if they catch 'that young Blake' they shoot him. They are dangerous, señor." [Pg 323]

"We shall have to keep our eyes wide open," said Dick. "Do you think they'll venture up here, José?"

"I think not," replied the Mexican. "One of the men say, 'Let us go up on the mountain and catch them,' but the padron, he say very quick, 'No, no. I do not go up on the mountain. While they are there they do no harm, but if they come down here, then——!'"

"I see," said Dick. "They mean to hold the fort against all comers. It is pretty evident, I think, that Galvez has been back to his old haunts, hunted out a couple of his old-time cronies, and brought them back to garrison the *Casa*, meaning to defy the law to get him out."

"That's it, I expect," said I. "And our chances of getting into the strong-room are a good deal slimmer than ever."

It certainly did look so; yet, as it happened, I never made a greater mistake.

Who would have guessed how soon we were to get that chance? And who would have guessed that the man who was to provide the opportunity—and that by a plan so bold that I am astonished at it yet—was the man whom I had that day mentally accused of cowardice? How I did apologize to him in my thoughts! [Pg 324]

"José," said Pedro, "does the padron still go to bed every night at ten o'clock, as he used to do?"

"*Si*," replied the cowman.

"Does he always come out to the well to get a drink of cold water just before he goes to bed, as he used to do?"

"*Si*," replied the cowman once more.

"Those two men, are they to sleep in that room next the padron's?"

"*Si*," replied the cowman for the third time.

"Good!" exclaimed Pedro. "What time is it, señor?" turning suddenly to Dick.

"Half past eight," replied my partner, looking at his watch.

"Good!" exclaimed Pedro once more.

For a minute he sat silent, his lower lip stuck out, frowning at the fire, while we sat watching him, wondering what he was thinking about, when, with an angry grunt he muttered to himself, "Stupid peon, eh! Humph! We'll see!" Then, jumping up, he said briskly: "Señores, get your horses. We will search the strong-room to-night." [Pg 325]

Still wondering what scheme he had in his head, we saddled up and followed him as he rode down the mountain and out upon the plain, too much engaged for the moment in picking our way to find an opportunity to ask questions.

It seemed to me that our guide must have something of the wild animal in him, for, though it was very dark, he never hesitated for a moment, but went jogging along, threading his way through the sage-brush without a pause or a stumble. Either he or his burro must have had the cat-like gift of being able to see in the dark.

In about an hour we saw dimly the walls of the *Casa* looming up near us, and passing by it, we went on down to the creek where we dismounted and tied up our horses to the trees. Then, following down the creek for a short distance, we presently came opposite the front gate of the *Casa*, about a hundred yards distant. The village on the other side of the stream was dark and silent, but in one of the rooms in the *Casa*, facing the gateway, we could see a light burning.

"That is the padron's room," whispered José. "He has not gone to bed yet." [Pg 326]

Against the light of the open door we could see between us and the house the long, black arm of the well-sweep, and advancing toward it, we had come within about thirty steps of it when Pedro requested us to stop there and lie down, while he himself went on and crouched behind the curbing of the well. We could not see him; in fact we could see nothing but the lights in the window and doorway, the well-sweep, and, very dimly, the outline of the building.

There we lay in dead silence for a quarter of an hour, wondering what Pedro expected to do, when we heard voices, and the next moment the figures of two men showed themselves in the lighted doorway. One of them carried a candle, and the pair of them went into the next room—all the rooms opened into the courtyard—and shut the door. For five minutes the light showed through the little window and then went out. The padron's friends had gone to bed.

For another five minutes we waited, and then the padron himself appeared. We could hear the jingle of his spurs as he came leisurely down to the well to get his nightly drink of cold water. We lay still, hardly daring to breathe. [Pg 327]

Presently, we heard the squeak of the well-sweep and saw it come round, dip down and rise again. Then we heard the clink of a cup: Galvez was taking his drink. He never finished it!

At that moment Pedro's burly form rose up from behind the curbing; he took two steps forward, and with his great right hand he seized Galvez by the neck from behind, giving it such a squeeze that the unfortunate man could not utter a sound. We heard the cup fall to the ground with a clatter.

Then, grasping the helpless padron by the back of his trousers, the little giant swung him off his feet and hoisting him high above his head, stepped to the rim of the curbing. The next moment there was a muffled splash—Galvez had been dropped into the well!

He had been dropped in feet foremost, however, and as the well was only twelve feet deep with four feet of water in it, his life was not endangered.

At this point we all jumped up and ran forward, reaching the well just as Galvez recovered his feet, as we could tell by the coughing and spluttering noises which came up from below. As we approached, Pedro leaned over the coping and said in a low voice: [Pg 328]

"Good-evening, Padron. This is Pedro Sanchez. If you make any noise I drop the bucket of water on your head."

This gentle hint was not lost upon Galvez, who contented himself with muttered growlings of an uncomplimentary nature, when Pedro, turning to Dick, whispered sharply:

"Run quick now to the strong-room. I stay here to guard the padron."

In company with the barefooted José, we ran into the courtyard, where the Mexican pointed out to us the door of the strong-room, the first on the right, and while Dick and I pulled it open, taking great care to make no noise, José himself ran on to the padron's room, whence he quickly returned with a candle in his hand.

While Dick stood guard outside, in case the padron's two friends should come out, I slipped into the little room, where, finding an empty barrel, I placed it in front of the doorway, jumped upon it, and taking my sheath-knife, I stabbed at the adobe wall just above the lintel of the door. The second or third stroke produced a hollow sound and brought down a shower of dried mud, when, vigorously attacking the spot, I soon uncovered a little board which had been let into the wall and plastered over with adobe. [Pg 329]

In a few seconds I had pried this out, when I found that the space behind it was hollow, and thrusting in my hand I brought out a brass box shaped like a magnified cigar-case.

"Dick!" I whispered, eagerly. "I've found something! Come in here!"

My partner quickly joined me, when we pried open the box, finding that it contained a parcel wrapped up in a piece of cloth. Imagine our excitement when on tearing off the wrapping we found that the contents of the package consisted of two parchment documents, written in Spanish! We had no time to examine them thoroughly, but a hasty glance convincing us that we had indeed found what we sought, and there being nothing else in the hole, I crammed the parchments back into the box, shoved the box into my pocket, buttoned my coat, and away we went back to the well.

"Find it?" whispered Pedro.

I replied by patting my pocket.

Pedro nodded; and then, having first lowered the bucket into the well again, he leaned over the coping and said softly: [Pg 330]

"Padron, you may come out now as soon as you like."

With that, leaving Galvez to climb out if he could, or to remain where he was if he couldn't, we all turned and ran for it.

Having recovered our horses, José bolted for home, while we went off as fast as we dared in the darkness for camp.

There, by the light of the fire, we examined our capture. One of the parchments was the commission of old Arthur the First to the "Governorship" of the King Philip mine; the other was the original "Grant" of the Hermanos tract from Philip V, King of Spain, the Indies and a dozen other countries, to his trusty and well-beloved subject, Arturo Blake.

"This *is* great!" cried Dick. "This will settle the title without any chance of dispute. Galvez may as well pack up and go now. I wonder what he'll do?"

"I don't know what Galvez will do," said I; "but I can tell you what *we* must do, Dick. We must cut and run. This patent must be put away in a safe place—and it isn't safe here by any means. Galvez will be about crazy with rage at having been dropped into the well; and for another thing, he'll see that hole above the door, and he'll know that whatever it was we took out of the hole, it must be something of importance to have induced us to come raiding his premises like that." [Pg 331]

"That's true," said Dick, nodding his head.

"And I shouldn't be a bit surprised," I continued, "now that he has two other unscrupulous rascals to back him, if he were to come raiding us in return. What do you think, Pedro?"

"I think it is likely," replied the Mexican. "I think it is well that you go, and stop the Señor Blake from coming here. Those men are dangerous. For me, I have no fear: I can take care of myself."

"Then we'll skip," said Dick. "It's safest; and it's only for a time, anyhow, for, of course, Galvez's legal ejection is certain, sooner or later, now that we have the patent in our hands. So we'll get out, Frank, the very first thing to-morrow."

It was the night of July 28th that we came to this resolution; though, as a matter of fact, we were not aware of it at the time, for we had lost track of the days of the month. It was the astounding [Pg 332]

event of the day following that impressed the date so indelibly on our memories.

Men plot and plan and calculate and contrive, thinking themselves very clever; but how feeble they are when Dame Nature steps in and takes a hand, and how easily she can upset all their calculations, we were to learn, once for all, that coming day.

CHAPTER XX [Pg 333]
The Memorable Twenty-Ninth

Though we had intended to get off about sunrise we failed to do so, for we found that Galvez was on the lookout for us. No sooner had we started than we saw the three men ride out from the *Casa* with the evident intention of cutting us off, so, not wishing to get into a fight if it could be avoided, we turned back again.

Thereupon, the enemy also turned back; but, watching their movements, we saw that soon after they had entered the house, the figure of one of them appeared again on the roof, and there remained—a sentinel. Plainly, they were not going to let us get away if they could help it.

At midday, however, we saw the sentinel go down, presumably to get his dinner, when we thought we would try again. Pedro therefore went off to get our horses for us, but he had hardly been gone a minute when we were startled to see him coming back with them, running as fast as [Pg 334] his short legs would permit.

"What's the matter, Pedro?" cried Dick. "What's wrong?"

"I see the Señor Arturo coming!" shouted the Mexican.

"What!" cried Dick, and, "Where?" cried I, both turning to look out over the plain.

That man, Pedro, must have had eyes like telescopes to pretend to distinguish any one at such a distance, but on examining the little black speck through the glass I made out that it was a horseman, and after watching him for a few seconds I concluded that it was indeed our friend, Arthur, returning.

"Frank!" cried my partner. "We must ride out to meet him at once! Pedro, you stay here and watch the *Casa*. If those three men come out, make a big smoke here so that we may know whether we have to hurry or not."

"It is good," replied the Mexican; and seeing that he might be relied upon to give us timely warning—for he at once began to collect materials for his fire—away we went.

Riding briskly, though without haste, we had left the mountain and were crossing a wide depression in the plain, when, on its further edge, there suddenly appeared the solitary [Pg 335] horseman, riding toward us at a hard gallop. Dick turned in his saddle and cast a glance behind him.

"The smoke!" he cried; and without another word we clapped our heels into our ponies' ribs and dashed forward.

As Arthur approached—for we could now clearly see that it was he—we observed that he kept looking back over his left shoulder, and just as we arrived within hailing distance three other horsemen came in sight over the southern rim of the depression, riding at a furious pace, their bodies bent forward over their horses' necks. Each of the three carried a rifle, we noticed, and one of the three was Galvez.

At sight of us, the pursuers, seemingly taken aback at finding themselves confronted by three of us, when they had expected to find only one, abruptly pulled up. This brief pause gave time to Arthur to join us, when Dick, slipping down from his horse, advanced a few steps toward the enemy, kneeled down, and ostentatiously cocked his rifle.

Whether the padron's quick ears caught the sound of the cocking of the rifle—which seemed hardly likely, though in that clear, still atmosphere the sharp *click-click* would carry a [Pg 336] surprisingly long distance—I do not know; but whatever the cause, the result was as unexpected as it was satisfactory. Galvez uttered a sharp exclamation, whirled his horse round, and away they all went again as fast as they had come.

"See that!" cried Arthur. "What did I tell you, Dick? We have to thank that locoed steer for that."

"I expect we have," replied Dick.

"Not a doubt of it," said I. "I was sure that Galvez was much impressed by the way that steer went over, and now I'm surer. Lucky he was, too, for those three fellows meant mischief, if I'm not mistaken."

"That's pretty certain, I think," responded Arthur. "And it was another piece of good fortune that you turned up just when you did. How did it happen?"

We explained the circumstances, but we had no more than done so, when Arthur exclaimed:

"Why, here comes old Pedro now! At a gallop, too! Everybody seems to be riding at a gallop this morning."

Looking toward the mountain, we saw the Mexican on his burro coming down at a great pace, but we had hardly caught sight of him when he suddenly stopped. He was on a little elevation, from which, evidently, he could see Galvez and his friends careering homeward, and observing that the affair was over and that his assistance was not needed, he forthwith halted, and, with a mercifulness not too common among Mexicans, jumped to the ground in order to ease his steed of his weight. [Pg 337]

There he stood, nearly two miles away, with his hand on the burro's shoulders, watching the retreating enemy, while we three rode toward him at a leisurely pace.

As will be readily imagined, there was great rejoicing among us over the safe return of our friend and partner, and a great shaking of hands all round, when, hardly giving him time to get his breath again, Dick and I plunged head-first into the relation of all we had done since we saw him last: the finding of the head-gate and the building of the flume; triumphantly concluding our story with the recovery of the patent the night before.

"Well, that was a great stroke, sure enough!" exclaimed Arthur. "That will settle the business. The 'stupid peon' got ahead of the padron that time, all right. But before we talk about anything else, Dick," he went on, "I have something I want to tell you about, something in my opinion—and the professor thinks so too—even more important—to you—than the title to the Hermanos Grant." [Pg 338]

"What's that?" cried my partner, alarmed by his serious manner. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"No, there's nothing wrong, I'm glad to say. Quite the contrary, in fact. I'm half afraid to mention it, old man, for fear I should be mistaken after all, and should stir you up all for nothing, but—why didn't you tell me, Dick, that your name was Stanley?"

"Why, I did!" cried Dick.

"No, you didn't, old fellow. If you remember, you were going to do so that first day we met, down there in the cañon by the opening of the King Philip mine, when Pedro interrupted you by remarking that the darkness would catch us if we stayed there any longer."

"I remember. Yes, that's so. Ah! I see. That was why you addressed your letters to the professor instead of to me."

"Yes, that was the reason. It didn't occur to me till I came to write to you that I didn't know your name."

"That was rather funny, wasn't it?" said Dick, laughing. "But I don't see that it made much difference in the end: I got your letters all right." [Pg 339]

My partner spoke rather lightly, but Arthur on the other hand looked so serious, not to say solemn, that Dick's levity died out.

"What is it, old man?" he asked. "What difference does it make whether my name is Stanley or anything else?"

"It makes a great difference, Dick," replied Arthur. "I believe"—he paused, hesitating, and then went on, "I'm half afraid to tell you, for fear there might be some mistake after all, but—well—I believe, Dick, that I've found out who you are and where you came from!"

It was Dick's turn to look serious. His face turned a little pale under its sunburn.

"Go on," said he, briefly.

"You remember, perhaps," Arthur continued, "how I told you that one reason why I had to go back by way of Santa Fé was because I had some inquiries to make on behalf of my mother. Well, as it turned out, Santa Fé was the wrong place. The place for me to go to was Mosby, and the man for me to ask was—the professor!

"When I reached Mosby yesterday," he continued, "I rode straight on up to his house, when the kindly old gentleman, as soon as I had explained who I was, made me more than welcome. We were sitting last evening talking, when I happened to cast my eye on the professor's book shelf, and there I saw something which brought me out of my chair like a shot. It was a volume of Shakespeare, one of a set, volume two—that book which the professor found in the wagon-bed when he found you. I knew the book in a moment—for we have the rest of the set at home, Dick!" [Pg 340]

Dick stopped his horse and sat silent for a moment, staring at Arthur. Then, "Go on," said he once more.

"I pulled the book down from the shelf," Arthur went on, "and looked at the fly-leaf. There was an inscription there—I knew there would be—'Richard Livingstone Stanley, from Anna.'"

"Well," said Dick. His voice was husky and his face was pale enough now.

"Dick," replied Arthur, reaching out and grasping my partner's arm, "my mother's name was Anna Stanley, and she gave that set of Shakespeare to her brother, Richard, on his twenty-first birthday!"

For a time Dick sat there without a word, not at first comprehending, apparently, the significance of these facts—that he and Arthur must be first cousins—while the latter quickly related to us the rest of the story. [Pg 341]

Dick's mother having died, his father determined to leave Scotland and seek his fortune in the new territory of Colorado, whose fame was then making some stir in the world. In company, then, with a friend, David Scott—the "Uncle" David whom Dick faintly remembered—he set out, taking the boy with him.

From the little town of Pueblo, on the Arkansas, Richard Stanley had written that he intended going down to Santa Fé, and that was the last ever heard of him. At that time—the year '64—everything westward from the foot of the mountains was practically wilderness. Into this wilderness Richard Stanley had plunged, and there, it was supposed, he and his son and his friend had perished.

As for Dick, he seemed to be dazed—and no wonder. For a boy who had never had any relatives that he knew of to be told suddenly that the young fellow sitting there with his hand on his arm was his own cousin, was naturally a good deal of a shock.

If it needed a counter-shock to jolt his faculties back into place, he had it, and it was I who provided it. [Pg 342]

In order to give the pair an opportunity to get used to their new relationship, I was about to ride forward to join Pedro, when I saw the Mexican suddenly commence cutting up all sorts of queer antics, jumping about and waving his arms in a frantic manner.

"What's the matter with Pedro?" I called out. "Look there, you fellows! What's the matter with Pedro?"

"Something wrong!" cried Dick. "Get up!"

Away we went at a gallop, keeping a sharp lookout in all directions lest those three men should bob up again from somewhere, while the Mexican himself, jumping upon his burro, rode down to meet us.

"What's up, Pedro?" Dick shouted, as soon as we had come within hearing. "Anything the matter?"

"Señores," cried Pedro, speaking with eager rapidity, "those men come hunting us. I watch them ride back almost to the *Casa*, and then of a sudden they change their minds and turn up into the mountain. They think to catch us, but"—he stretched out his great hand and shut it tight, his black eyes gleaming with excitement—"if the señores will give me leave, we will catch them!" [Pg 343]

If his surmise was right, if those men were indeed coming after us as he believed, there was no question that if any of us could beat them at that game, Pedro was the one. Dick was a fine woodsman, but Pedro was a finer—my partner himself would have been the first to acknowledge it—and it was Dick in fact who promptly replied:

"Go ahead, Pedro! You're captain to-day! Take the lead; we'll follow!"

"*'Sta bueno!*" cried the Mexican, greatly pleased. "Come, then!"

Turning his burro, he rode quickly back to camp, and there, at his direction, having unsaddled and turned loose our horses, we followed him to the flume, taking with us nothing but our rifles.

There had been a little thunder-storm the day before, and the soil near the flume was muddy. Through this mud, by Pedro's direction, we tramped; crossed the flume on the gangway we had laid for the purpose, leaving muddy tracks as we went; jumped down at the other end and set off hot-foot up the gully to the little new-made lake and thence on up to the old lake; in several soft places purposely leaving footmarks which could not escape notice. [Pg 344]

"What's all this for, Pedro?" asked Dick. "What's your scheme?"

"The padron will see our tracks crossing the flume," replied Pedro. "He will think you take Señor Arturo up to show him all the work you have done, and he will follow. If he does so, we have him! When he is safe across, we slip back, and then I hide me among the rocks on the other side and guard the flume. Without my leave they cannot cross back again. Thus I hold them on the wrong side, while you ride away at your ease to Mosby. Now, come quick with me!"

So saying, Pedro turned at right angles to the line of the ditch, climbed a short distance up the hillside, and then, under cover of the trees, started back at a run, until presently he brought us to a point whence we could look down upon the flume, its approaches at both ends, and the line of the ditch up to the head of the little lake.

Hitherto it had been all bustle and activity, but now we were called upon to exercise a new virtue, one always difficult to fellows of our age—patience.

It must have been nearly an hour that we had lain there, sometimes talking together in whispers, but more often keeping silence, when Dick, pulling out his watch, said in a low voice: [Pg 345]

"If those fellows are coming, I wish they'd come. It's twenty minutes past two; and we're in for a thunder-storm, I'm afraid. Do you notice how dark it's getting?"

"Yes," whispered Arthur. "And such a queer darkness. I'm afraid it's a forest fire and not a thunder-storm that is making it."

"I believe you're right," replied Dick. "It *is* a queer-colored light, isn't it?"

We could not see the sun on account of a high cliff at the foot of which we were lying, and if we had had any thought of getting up to look at it, we were stopped by Pedro, who at this moment whispered sharply to us to keep quiet. His quick eyes had detected a movement on the far side of the cañon.

Intently we watched, and presently the figure of a man stepped out from among the trees. Advancing cautiously to the end of the flume, he examined the tracks in the mud, climbed up to the gang-plank, inspected the tracks again, and turning, made a sign with his hand; whereupon two other men stepped out from among the trees. The three then crossed the flume, jumped down, and set off up the gully. [Pg 346]

We watched them as they followed the ditch up to the new lake, and thence to the draw which led up to the old lake. At the mouth of the draw they paused for some time, hesitating, doubtless, whether they should trust themselves in that deep, narrow crevice—a veritable trap, for all they knew.

Presumably, however, they made up their minds to risk it, for on they went, and a few minutes later were lost to sight.

By this time the darkness had so increased that the men were hardly distinguishable, though they, themselves, seemed to take no notice of it. The sun was behind them, and so intent were they in following our tracks and keeping watch ahead, that they never thought to cast a glance upward to see what was coming.

"Pedro," whispered Dick, as soon as the men had vanished, "let us get out of here. Either the woods are on fire or there'll be a tremendous storm down on us directly."

Pedro, however, requested us to wait another five minutes, when, jumping to his feet, he cried:

"Come, then! Let us get back! We have them safe now!"

Down we ran, but no sooner had we got clear of the trees than Pedro stopped short. In a frightened voice—the first and only time I ever knew him to show fear—he ejaculated: [Pg 347]

"Look there! Look there!"

Following his pointing finger, we looked up. The uncanny darkness was accounted for:—a great semi-circular piece seemed to have been bitten out of the sun!

"The eclipse!" cried Arthur. "I'd forgotten all about it. This is the twenty-ninth of July. The newspapers were full of it, but I'd forgotten all about it!"

"A total eclipse, isn't it?" asked Dick, quickly.

"Yes, total."

"Then it will be a great deal darker presently. We'd better get out of this, and cross the flume while we can see."

In fact, it was already so dark that the small birds, thinking it was night, were busily going to bed; the night-hawks had come out, the curious whir of their wings sounding above our heads; and then—a sound which made us all start—there came the long-drawn howl of a wolf!

"Run!" shouted Dick. "They'll be after us directly!"

Undoubtedly, the wolves, too, were deceived into the belief that night was approaching, for even as Dick spoke we heard in three or four different directions the hunting-cry of the packs. Wasting no time, as will be imagined, away we went, scrambled up on the gang-plank of the flume, and there stopped to listen. [Pg 348]

"I hope those men"—Dick began; when, from the direction of the draw above there arose a fearful clamor of howling. There was a shot! Another and another, in quick succession! And then, piercing through and rising above all other sounds, there went up a cry so dreadful that it turned us sick to hear it. What had happened?

The hour that followed was the worst I ever endured, as we crouched there in the darkness and the silence, not knowing what had occurred up above.

At length the shadow moved across the face of the sun, it was brilliant day once more, when, the moment we thought it safe to venture, down we jumped and set off up the line of the ditch. We had not gone a quarter-mile when we saw two men coming down, running frantically. In a few seconds they had reached the spot where we stood waiting for them, not knowing exactly what we were to expect of them.

Never have I seen such panic terror as these men exhibited; they were white and trembling and speechless. For two or three minutes we could get nothing out of them, but at length one of them recovered himself enough to tell us what had happened. [Pg 349]

The wolves had caught them in that narrow, precipitous arroyo, coming from both ends at once. The two men, themselves, had succeeded in scrambling up to a safe place, but Galvez, attempting to do the same, had lost his hold and fallen back. Before he could recover his feet the wolves were upon him, and then——!

Well—no wonder those men were sick and pale and trembling!

That the padron's designs against us had been evil there could be no doubt—in fact, his shivering henchmen admitted as much—but, quite unsuspicious of the coming of the midday darkness, and knowing nothing of the fierce nature of these "island" wolves, he had run himself into that fatal trap. It was truly a dreadful ending.

Does any one wonder now that the date of the eclipse of '78 should be so indelibly stamped on our memories?

There being now nothing to interfere with us, we went down to Hermanos and took possession of the *Casa*, and from that time forward the work on our irrigation system moved along without let or hindrance from anything but the seasons. [Pg 350]

But though it was now plain sailing, and though we eventually got together a force of twenty Mexicans to do the digging, the amount of work was so great that we had not nearly finished that part of the ditch which wound over the foothills when frost came and stopped us. We at once moved everything down to the village and began again at that end, keeping hard at it until frost stopped us once more, and finally for that year.

In fact, it was not until the spring of '80 that we at last turned in the water—a moderate amount at first—but since then the quantity has been increased year by year, until now we are supplying at an easy rental a great number of small farms, many of them cultivated by Mexicans, but the majority by Americans.

The largest of the farms is that run by the two cousins and myself, and its management, together with the supervision and maintenance of the water-supply keeps us all three on the jump.

As for old Pedro, he stuck to his mountain until just lately, when we persuaded him to come down and take up his residence on the ranch; though even now, every fall he goes off for a three-months' hunt and we see nothing of him till the first snow sends him down again. [Pg 351]

He is a privileged character, allowed to go and come as he pleases; for we do not forget his great services in turning this worthless desert into a flourishing community of busy wheat-farmers and fruit-growers; nor do we forget that it was really he who started the whole business.

As to that, though, we are not likely to forget it, for we have on hand a constant reminder.

Above the fireplace in our house there hangs, plain to be seen, a relic with which we would not part at any price—the "indicator" which pointed the way for us when we first set out on this enterprise—the original copper-headed arrow!

THE END

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