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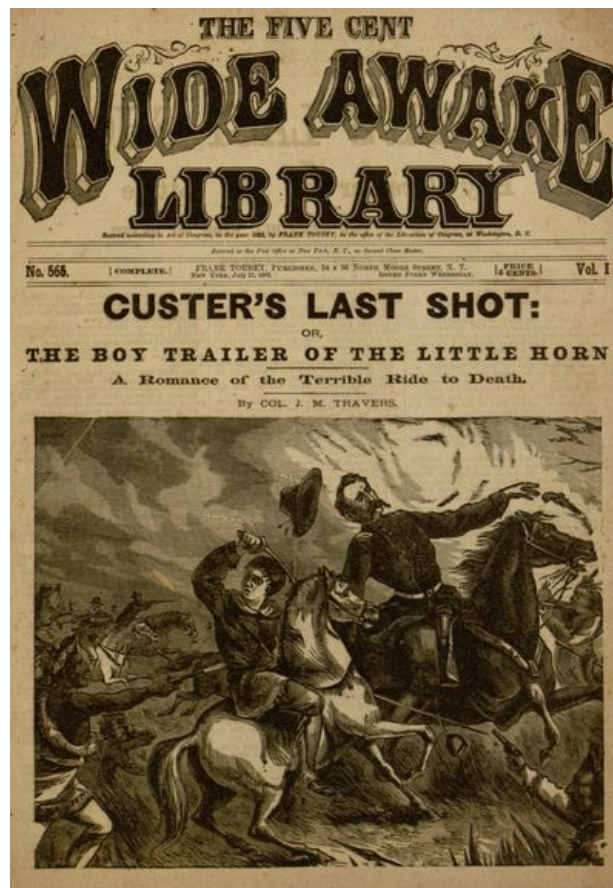
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USTER'S LAST SHOT:

OR,

THE BOY TRAILER OF THE LITTLE HORN

A Romance of the Terrible Ride to Death.

By COL. J. M. TRAVERS.



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CHAPTER I.

THE YELLOW-HAIRED CAVALRY CHIEF ON THE WAR TRAIL.

"Hold up yer hands thar, ye varmints. Ef his hair air gray I kin swar this chile's hand air as stedly and his eye as sure az they war twenty years ago. Bein' sich a heathen, I reckon ye don't know that wine improves wid age; ther older it air, ther better, an' I s'pose thar's a likeness between wine an' me, az ther feller sez. Keep them hands stedly, my red cock-o'-the-walk. Now, I'm goin' ter caterkize ye 'cordin' ter my own style. Fust and foremost, who air ye?"

The buckskin-clad hunter held his long rifle nicely poised, and the bead at the end was in a line with the object of his speech.

Under such peculiar circumstances the warrior (for his color proclaimed him an Indian) could do no less than remain quiet, although from his evident uneasiness it was plainly seen that he did so under protest.

Even in this sad predicament, the boasting qualities of his race seemed to be predominant.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, slapping his dusky chest vigorously, "me big chief. Hunter must hear of Yellow Hawk. Big chief, great brave. Take much scalps. Hab hunter's in little while. What name? ugh!"

The leather-clad ranger gave a laugh that was not all a laugh, insomuch that it appeared to be a loud chuckle coming up from his boots.

His thin face was a little wrinkled, and the tuft of hair upon his chin of the same iron-gray color as the scalp mentioned by the redskin; but no one would be apt to judge, taking into consideration the man's strength and stubborn endurance, that he was over seventy years of age.

Yet such was the actual fact; for some fifty years this ranger had roamed the wild West from the frozen region of the polar seas to the torrid climes of the Isthmus; and everywhere had his name been reckoned a tower of honesty, strength and power.

Though probably few men had had half of his experience among the redskins of the mountains and prairies, there was something so charmingly fresh in the remark of his red acquaintance that made the ranger more than smile.

"Purty good fur ye, Yaller Hawk. I won't furgit yer name, and by hokey I reckon I'll plug ye yet, ef things keep on ther way they seem set on going. Az ter my name, thet's another goose. I don't s'pose ye ever hearn tell o' such a cuss az Pand y Ellis, now did ye?"

Again that queer chuckle, for the Indian had slunk back, his black eyes fastened upon the ranger's face, with a sort of dazed expression.

It appeared as though Pand y was known to him by report, if not personally.

"Ugh! Sharp shot! Heavy knife! Big chief! Ugh!"

"I reckon," returned the old ranger dryly.

Half a moment passed, during which neither of them spoke.

Pand y's grim features had resumed their usual aspect, and there was actually a scowl upon his face as he gazed steadily at the redskin.

"Chief," said he at length, "fur I reckon I kin b'lieve ye that fur an' say ye air a chief, I'm going ter ax ye sum questions, an' I want square answers to every wun o' them. Fust o' all, what'd ye shoot at me fur?" and Pand y glanced at his shoulder, where a little tear told where the bullet had gone.

"Me see through bushes; tink was Blackfoot squaw. Ugh!"

"Yas, I reckon. Werry plausible, az ther feller sez, but two thin. Wal, we'll let that pass, seein' az no harm war done. I forgive ye, chief. Receive a benediction, my red brother. Let that lie pass ter yer credit. Now, my painted scorpion, look me full in the eye. *What hez Sitting Bull done wid my pard?*"

This was uttered in a slow, but emphatic tone.

The Indian either could not or would not understand; he shook his head.

Pand y took a step forward, and his rifle was again raised menacingly.

"Looky hyar, ye lump o' dough, I'm inquirin' respectin' Bolly Wherrit, the big rover o' thar plains. White Thunder, do ye understand?"

Whether it was the hunter's threatening attitude that scared the warrior, or that he suddenly

realized what was meant, can never be made manifest; certain it is he remembered just at this critical period.

"Ugh! mean White Thunder; him dead."

"Another lie. Now, redskin, how did he come ter die?" asked Pandy, who, although not believing this assertion, began to feel uneasy.

"Wagh! eat too much. Dine with Sitting Bull. No hab good tings afore; stuff full and burst. Run all ober. Ugh!" grunted this savage composedly.

"Thunder! thet air rich. How the ole man'll larf wen he hears it. Allers prided himself on bein' a light feeder; eat az much az a bird, him that I've seen git away wid a hull haunch o' venison while I war chawin' the tongue. Now, Yaller Hawk, allow me ter say I don't believe a word ye've sed; may be all is az true az Scripture, but I wouldn't like ter swar ye. I'll tell ye what I think. Bolly air a prisoner in yer camp. I tole him twar a fool's errand he started on, but a willing man must hev his way, az the feller sez, so he started widout me. I'm goin' into yer camp; tell Sitting Bull that I'll see him widin a week, and listen, Yaller Hawk. Does ther eagle car fur its mate? will thar she bar fight fur her cubs? Wal, I love Bolly Wherrit; he air my life, all I care about livin' fur. Mark my words, redskin; if any harm comes ter White Thunder, I swar Sitting Bull and his chiefs shall *go under*. Do yer hear? Then don't fail to report. That's all; ye can retire now, az ther cat sed when it had ther mouse by ther nape o' ther neck. Come, git, absquatulate, vamose the ranche."

An Indian's code is "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Yellow Hawk had attempted the ranger's life, and he expected the latter to take his in just retaliation.

Therefore, he was not a little surprised at the words of his enemy, nor did his amazement retard his progress.

A moment and he was beyond the range of vision, having vanished among the trees.

Pandy Ellis, the trapper chief, was alone. He did not stay in his exposed position long, however, knowing full well the treacherous character of the foes he had to deal with, but plunging among the undergrowth himself, in a direction almost opposite to the one taken by the Indian, he made his way along, aiming for a certain spot.

This proved to be a small creek, on the further bank of which his horse was tethered.

Crossing over, the ranger mounted and rode away. The animal he bestrode was no mustang, but a tall, broad-breasted horse, capable not only of carrying heavy burdens and making fast time, but also of keeping up his pace.

Many years ago Pandy owned a quaint steed called Old Nancy, and in memory of that faithful equine friend had this animal been named.

Reaching the prairie, the ranger dashed out upon the open space and cantered along toward the north.

The grass was already high, and dotted here and there with beautiful wild flowers, that seemed to make the scene one of enchantment.

His gray eyes swept both the horizon and the ground before him with customary caution.

All at once the ranger brought Nancy to an abrupt halt, threw himself from the saddle and bent down to examine tracks in the soft earth.

"Glory! kin I b'lieve my eyes? A hull army o' 'em, az I'm a sinner. Ther report I heerd must be true then. My yallar-haired chief air on the war-trail, and when Custer gits on ther rampage thar's blood on ther moon."

CHAPTER II.

SITTING BULL'S GANG OF RED MARAUDERS.

The slanting rays of the rising sun fell upon an immense Indian encampment that stretched for several miles along the left bank of the Little Horn, and could hardly have been less than a mile in width.

Doubtless such a gathering of redmen had not taken place for many years.

In addition to the several lodges composing the village proper, scores and even hundreds of temporary brush-wood shelters had been hastily constructed, which significant fact went to show that this immense assemblage of warriors, numbering very nearly three thousand, was a gathering from different tribes.

That mischief was intended by these warlike Sioux could be presumed from the fact of their being painted as for battle.

The sun had been shining for some time when two mounted Indians, coming from the plains away beyond the distant range of hills, appeared almost simultaneously on the high bluffs that lined the right bank of the river.

Dashing down the steep inclined plane they forded the Little Horn and rode directly into the

village.

One lodge, more conspicuous than its fellows, was situated near the center of the place, and even an inexperienced eye might have discovered in it the resting-place of a great chief, even though the only conviction came from seeing the many sub-chiefs that hovered near by.

These two hard riders reached the lodge at nearly the same time, and throwing themselves to the ground, left their sweltering horses to take care of themselves, while they entered with that boldness the bearers of exciting news generally possess.

Old Sitting Bull was busily engaged in an earnest confab with some half dozen chiefs, and although he spoke only once in a while, his words were listened to respectfully by the rest.

All eyes were turned upon the new-comers, and a hush fell upon the assembly, for something seemed to tell them that great news was on the tapis. Yellow Hawk, (for this discomfited chief was one of the hard riders) managed to get in the first word, and when it was known that the far-famed Pandey Ellis was in their immediate neighborhood, more than one of these dusky braves felt his heart beat faster, for there was a terrible meaning attached to the old ranger's honest name, for all evil-doers.

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When, however, the second courier spoke, a wild excitement seized upon the chiefs.

Custer the hard fighter, the yellow-haired devil, whom they had always feared, was charging along their trail and aiming for the village like a thunderbolt, with his cavalry regiment at his back.

Indians are not accustomed to speaking their thoughts during times of excitement, but the news loosened their tongues, and for several moments a hubbub arose in the head chief's lodge.

In the midst of this several white men, garbed as Indians, but with their faces painted, entered.

A moment only was needed to become acquainted with the state of affairs, and then one of them, a squat individual, who had long been a pest to the border, under the name of Black Sculley, spoke a few words in the ear of Sitting Bull.

Whatever he said does not concern my narrative, but it had its effect upon the chief, who immediately became calm, and made a motion toward one who stood at the entrance of the lodge as a sort of door-keeper.

This individual signaled the waiting chiefs outside, and in another moment fully forty well-known leading Sioux were clustered together.

Indian councils from the time of Red Jacket and Tecumseh back to time immemorial have been windy affairs, in which much eloquence and debate was needed to settle that which had already been decided before the argument commenced; for being natural born orators the red sons of the plains and forest liked to hear their own voices.

In contrast with these, this council was very brief, only lasting about five minutes.

This proved that their dealings with the whites had affected the redskins.

After the chiefs separated, there was a wild commotion in the immense village.

Horses neighed, dogs barked, men shouted, and the din was increased by the thunder of hoofs as squad after squad of mounted braves, led by their chiefs, dashed down to the river and forded it.

In a lodge not far removed from that of the great chief, a leather-clad ranger lay, bound hand and foot.

It was Bolly Wherrit, the old-time chum and friend of Pandey Ellis.

He had been taken prisoner, fighting against overwhelming numbers, and had lain here without food for over twenty-four hours.

What his fate would doubtless be the old ranger knew well enough, but he had faced death too often to flinch now.

Something seemed to trouble him, however, for he occasionally gave vent to a groan and rolled restlessly about.

"Cuss the thing," he muttered at length. "Bolly Wherrit, ye're growing inter yer second childhood; thar's eggscitin' times comin' off now, and hyar ye lie tied neck and heel. Didn't I hyar what them infernal renegades talked 'bout jest then. Custer, my pet, a-comin', tearin', whoopin' at this hyar town wid his cavalry. Lordy, won't the yaller-har'd rooster clean 'em out; don't I know him though. Wonder ef Major Burt air along. Why didn't I wait fur Pandey. T'ole man tole me I'd get inter trouble, but consarn the luck, in course a woman's at the head o' it. Cud I stand it wen that purty face, runnin' over wid tears, war raised ter mine, an' she a pleadin'? No, sir, fool or not, I'd run through fire fur a woman, 'cause I kain't never furget my mother. That gal is in this hyar village. 'Cause why? Sumfin tells me so, and I've hed that feeling afore. Beside, ain't ole Sittin' Bull hyar, and cudn't I swar I heerd the voice o' that white devil she tole me about, Pedro Sanchez she called him, right aside this lodge. Bolly Wherrit, thar's no good talking, ef ye don't get outen this place in an hour, ye'll never leave it alive, fur when Custer sails in he never backs out, and the reds hev a failing fur braining their prisoners, 'specially men folks. Now do ye set ter work, and show these red whalps that a border man air sumpin like a bolt o' lightning."

From the manner in which Bolly set to work, it would be supposed that he had been making efforts at freeing his arms for some time back, and had only stopped to rest while holding this one-sided conversation with himself.

Somehow or other he had found a piece of a broken bottle, and had been sawing away at the cord securing his hands with this, one end being thrust into the ground, and held upright in the proper position.

Although his wrists and hands were badly lacerated by this rough method, the ranger possessed the grit to persevere.

Ten minutes after his soliloquy his hands separated. Bolly gave a sigh of relief, held the bloody members up for inspection, and then, without an instant's delay, seized upon the sharp-edged glass.

It had taken him hours to free his arms, as he was unable to see, and his position, while working, exceedingly uncomfortable; the cord securing his feet he severed in a few minutes.

Something like a chuckle escaped his lips as he stood upright. There was a mighty stretching of those cramped and tired limbs, and then Bolly was ready for business.

An ardent desire had seized upon him to take part in the attack which brave Custer was sure to make.

Fastening the cords around his ankles in a way that looked very secure, but which was treacherous, the ranger lay down upon the ground.

With his hand he quietly raised one of the skins composing the lodge and peeped out.

The opening thus formed was not over a couple of inches in length, but his keen eyes could see everything that was passing.

A grim smile lit up the ranger's features, as he saw the wild excitement that reigned throughout the camp.

"Ther askeered o' Custer; they know him mighty well, but by thunder they mean ter fight. It'll be the biggest Indian fight that this country ever saw, bust my buttons now ef 'twon't. Bolly Wherrit, ye must let t'other matter drop, and sail inter this, fur it'll be full o' glory and death."

Alas! how the words of the old ranger came true has been made manifest in a way that has caused the whole country to mourn.

Death was fated to ride triumphant in the ravine on the other shore; this valley would see such a red slaughter as the annals of Indian history have seldom presented.

Several hours passed on.

The warriors were too busy with other matters to even think of their prisoner just then, much less visit his secure quarters, and so Bolly was undisturbed.

Noon came and went.

The hot sun beat down upon the earth with great fury, but a gentle breeze in the valley did much toward cooling the air on this fatal twenty-fifth of June.

All at once the old trapper leaped wildly to his feet; this same light wind had carried to his ear the distant but approaching crash of firearms and the wild yells of opposing forces.

His frame quivered and seemed to swell with excitement.

"Yaller Har's at work. The best Indian fighter that ever lived hez struck ile. Bolly Wherrit, now's the time fur yer chance at glory. Whoop! hooray!"

With this shout the ranger burst out of the lodge like a thunderbolt, and not even giving himself an instant's time for reflection, hurled his body upon a guard who leaned idly against a post, listening to the sounds of battle.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECKLESS GALLOP IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

A column of mounted men wearing the national colors, and headed by a group of officers, were making their way in a westerly direction. In the advance rode a body of Crow Indians, and on either flank were the scouts of the regiment—over seven hundred in all, and some of the most gallant fighters on the plains.

Among that group of officers, every man of whom had honor attached to his name, rode one who seemed conspicuous both for his bearing and peculiar appearance. His form was rather slender, and indeed one might call it womanly, but the face above, with its prominent features, redeemed it from this characteristic. The features themselves might be styled classic in their strange light, having a Danish look. Surmounting this clearly cut face was the well-known yellow hair, worn long on the neck.

Such was the gallant Custer. He had always been a dashing cavalry leader, and with Crook and McKenzie rendered the Union efficient service under General Sheridan during the late unpleasantness.

The morning was half over when the command was ordered to halt for two reasons.

One of these was that his scouts had brought word that the large Indian village, whose presence

in the vicinity had been strongly suspected, was only a short distance ahead; the other that a single horseman was sighted coming along their back trail at a furious gallop.

Custer had suspected this latter might be a bearer of dispatches from his commander, General Terry, from whom he had separated at the mouth of the Rosebud, the commander going up the river on the supply steamer *Far West*, to ferry Gibbons' troops over the water.

When, however, the horseman came closer, it was discovered that he was no blue coat, but a greasy leather-clad ranger. The individual rode directly up to the officers, and his quick gray eye picking out Custer, he extended a horny palm.

"Can I believe my eyes?" exclaimed the general; "gentlemen, let me make you acquainted with my old friend, Pandy Ellis, the best Indian fighter that ever raised a rifle, and one whom I am proud to shake hands with."

"Come, come, general, don't butter it too thick. Yer sarvint, gentlemen. I'm on hand ter see ther fun, wich air all I keer 'bout. Don't mind me no more than ef I warn't in these hyar diggin's," protested Pandy, modestly.

"We shall do no such thing, old friend. Colonel Cooke, we will now move onward to the assault," and Custer touched his spurs to his steed.

A few notes from the trumpeters, and the regiment was again in motion.

Onward at a gallop went the troops.

The valley of the Little Horn was reached, and where the great trail entered it, another halt was made.

Now the immense village was in sight: large bands of warriors made their appearance on all sides, some of them mounted, others on foot.

That there was serious business before them every man in that regiment saw by intuition; bloody work that would ring from one end of the land to the other, and yet how few of them suspected in what a terrible way it would end.

Custer was reckless; every military man has agreed upon that.

He possessed a willful trait in his character that at times showed itself, and when the occasion presented, as it was fated to do before this day was over, merged into an indomitable stubborn nature. This one serious fault was generally hidden beneath his dashing spirit, and it would be a difficult thing to have met a more social companion than this hero of the last Indian war.

There was something wrong about him on this day when he committed his fatal error.

United in a solid body, the regiment might have cut its way through the Indian camp, and in the end come out victorious.

Custer either considered his force stronger than it really was, or else underestimated the fighting powers of the enemy.

He was too confident, and, in order that the Indians should not escape, ordered Major Reno, with three companies, to enter the valley where the trail struck it.

The yellow-haired cavalry leader took five companies himself, numbering over three hundred men, with the avowed intention of entering the village some three miles further down.

Major Reno could offer no remonstrance to his superior officer, although perhaps he may have felt that this plan was a most dangerous one.

His lips and those of his fellow officers were sealed by military discipline. Not so, however, with Pandy Ellis.

He had gazed upon the tremendous Indian village as it could be seen from their elevated position with something akin to amazement. Never before in all its vast experience had the veteran ranger witnessed such a gathering of redskins, and his usually smiling face clouded with apprehension.

None knew the reckless, dashing nature of Custer better than Pandy, and he heard the orders for a division of the regiment with dismay.

He even ventured to remonstrate with the general, but the latter turned upon him fiercely, and, although his sudden anger suddenly cooled down without a word being spoken, the look was enough to inform the ranger that he was meddling with affairs in which he had no part.

All the censure of the rash act must fall upon one pair of shoulders, where the glory also rests.

Pandy fell a little behind when the detachment struck off behind the crest of the high bluffs marking the right bank of the Little Big Horn. The old fellow had grown more cautious in his advancing years, and although at one time, in his career, this daring assault would have filled him with thoughts of glory, it now had an effect quite the reverse. He could only deplore the fact that Custer would take no warning, but persisted in riding directly into the jaws of death. Duty seemed to stand out before the ranger, and dashing alongside the general, he once more begged him to consider the situation. Something was certainly wrong with the usually gentlemanly general.

"Old friend," said he, "if you fear for your own safety, there is plenty of time to join Reno yonder. If for my welfare, I beg of you to let the subject drop."

"General, if 'twar any other man az sed that, he shud never live ter see another sunrise. Ye know Pandy Ellis better than that," said the old man, reproachfully. Custer moved uneasily in his saddle.

"Forgive me, Ellis; I meant nothing. Some devilish humor seems to possess me to-day, and I must let it out in fight. Besides, there is no danger." [Pg 4]

"No danger!" muttered Pandy, falling back again, "no danger. Cuss me ef thet don't sound odd. Three hundred agin three thousand! Taint like ther old days now; then reds war reds, but now az they've got rifles and kin use 'em better than our men, ther devils. Lord forgive me, but I must say that I never hearn o' sich a reckless thing. Pandy Ellis air a goin' ter see it through, though, ef he does go under. Time's 'bout nigh up anyhow, might az well larf an' grow fat, az ther feller sez. Don't think o' Bolly, but jist yell an' sail in. Hooray!" and the ranger gave a subdued shout as the wild excitement seized upon him.

Major Reno was left behind with his three companies. Further to the left, some two miles away, was Captain Belton with three more companies.

As Custer and his ill-fated three hundred rode gallantly away, vanishing behind the crown of the bluffs, some of those who remained may have entertained suspicions of the dreadful result that was soon to follow, but no time was granted to realize what these conjectures amounted to.

The Indians had gathered thickly on the opposite bank, and Major Reno at once gave the word to go forward.

Fording the river in the midst of a fire so deadly that several saddles were emptied, the soldiers reached the other shore. Once on *terra firma* they formed and then charged.

As the bugles rang out it was a glorious sight to see that compact body of men dash forward like an avalanche, clearing the way before them as if they were invincible.

Alas! that such a gallant charge should have been in vain.

Overwhelming numbers opposed the troops; the horses could not even move forward, and, brave to the core, the men threw themselves to the ground and fought on foot. It was a terrible struggle, but could not last long.

Finding that the number of the Indians was far more than had been even imagined, and realizing that to continue the struggle would mean the sacrifice of every man in the command, Major Reno reluctantly gave the order to remount, and the three companies crossed the river again under a harassing fire, sadly depleted in number.

Just then Captain Belton came up with his men, but seeing the madness of attempting to assail the infuriated horde of red demons, savage at their success and the sight of blood, he wisely retired, and joined Reno, who had taken up a position on one of the bluffs back of the river bank.

CHAPTER IV.

BRAVE CUSTER'S LAST SHOT.

"Cannon to the right of them,
Cannon to the left of them,
Cannon in the front of them,
Volleyed and thundered.
Onward through shot and shell,
Into the mouth of hell,
They who had fought so well,
Rode the six hundred."

—*Charge of the Light Brigade.*

The Crimean war may have presented its phases of reckless daring to the world, but I doubt if such a case as Custer's gallop to glory and death has been paralleled since the days of Leonidas and his deathless Spartans in the world-famed pass of Thermopylæ.

They literally rode to destruction, as may be seen when it is officially stated that not one regular soldier in the whole command lived through the battle.

After leaving the attack at the upper end of the village to Reno's case, Custer and his men struck along the route selected, at as rapid a pace as the nature of the ground permitted.

This line of travel was just beyond the crest of the high bluffs, and no doubt the leading principle that actuated the general into selecting it, was an idea that their movements might be concealed from the enemy.

In this, however, the project failed utterly, for great numbers of Indian scouts had posted themselves on the crags and their rifles kept up a continued musical refrain far from pleasant to the ears of the devoted band, more than one of whom threw up his arms and fell from his steed as the bitter lead cut home.

It was a dangerous ride, and yet in the face of this murderous fire these valiant men rode on, turning neither to the right nor the left, but keeping straight forward.

Now and then a trooper, exasperated beyond endurance by the fall of some dear comrade, would discharge his carbine at the Indians who showed themselves boldly on one side.

Owing to the rapid motion these shots were indifferently rewarded, only a few of the most expert hitting the objects of their aim.

On ordinary occasions old Pandy Ellis would have been one of the first to prove his marksmanship, but something seemed to keep his attention riveted in one direction, and amidst the storm of hissing bullets, growing momentarily louder and more threatening, the prairie ranger rode as calmly as if indeed there was no danger.

But if our old friend paid little attention to this deadly discharge from all quarters, others made up for his lack of interest, and growls of dissatisfaction arose on all sides; not at their leader, but because it was almost impossible to return the fire of the enemy.

With his usual disregard for danger, Custer rode in the advance, where his form was a prominent mark for all concealed sharpshooters; but the general, in spite of all, seemed to bear a charmed life.

He leaned forward in the saddle, and seemed to be scrutinizing some point of land, toward which his attention had been drawn by Bloody-Knife, one of his Crow scouts.

It was at this moment, after a gallop of nearly three miles after leaving Major Reno, that Custer gave a start and uttered an exclamation as a bullet grazed his flesh, making a slight but burning skin wound.

Aroused to action by this, his quick eye took in all the surroundings, and immediately the order was given to change the route.

Passing over the crown of the bluffs, the cavalry rushed down toward where the Little Big Horn ran noisily over its bed.

Indians seemed as thick as blackberries on a July day.

From every bush and rock they made their appearance, ugly-looking and determined on mischief.

All the way down to the level bank of the river men kept dropping, and with them horses, but in spite of it all the brave squad kept straight on.

Just at this moment a new form appeared among the blue coats.

Where he came from no one had the slightest idea, not even keen-eyed Pandy himself.

The first the ranger knew of it, he saw some one mounted on a white horse dash by him, and a boy dressed in the becoming suit of a hunter drew rein beside the yellow-haired chief.

Custer turned his head for the first time since changing the course of his troop, and his face expressed evident displeasure when he saw the boy.

"Mason, boy, you here?" the officer ejaculated.

The young fellow did not seem to pay any heed to the dismay that was plainly perceptible in the tones of the general.

"General," he almost shouted, putting out a hand to seize Custer's bridle, but which was impatiently put away by him, "to go forward is impossible. They are ten to your one."

"To retreat is also impossible, even if we wished it," said Custer, grimly.

It was indeed so; the command could never scale the bluffs again in the face of those defending them.

Again the boy appealed.

"General, the whole river bank is a mass of reds. It is a trap, an ambushade. Turn back, or halt, if you value your life," he exclaimed.

Several of the officers were waiting for a reply; but Custer, firm and brave to the last, did not hesitate in his course.

He realized that a terrible error had been committed in dividing his troop; but he possessed the spirit to persist in his former plan, hoping to come out all right in the end.

His fellow officers saw the lips pressed firmly together.

Then came the one word:

"Forward!"

The foot of the bluffs was reached, and then the truth of the boy's assertion became manifest.

Another moment, and the gallant command was completely surrounded by a struggling, yelling mass of Indians, many of whom were mounted.

Then commenced the deadliest fight that has ever been known to take place on the plains.

All the attendant noises of a great battle, cannon excepted, could be found here.

The Sioux seemed crazy with both anger and delight; and many a poor fellow, struggling hard in the midst of this sea of humanity, was actually pulled from his horse into the arms of death.

There was no halt made at all.

The command kept compactly together, using their weapons as best they could, but never

thinking of retreating.

On, on, was the cry; forward, the shout.

Being prevented from fording the river by the overwhelming force, Custer and his men rode along the shore.

Every second the number of opponents swelled, as those upon the heights came down upon the scene of action; and still the little band went on, trampling down and riding over those who would not get out of the way.

As a single man in a crowd is pushed hither and thither, like a feather floating on the water and at the mercy of the wind, so Custer and his command were drawn away from the river.

Everywhere was their trail marked by the dead, until it came to the slaughter-pen.

After leaving the water, the remnant of the gallant Seventh attempted to make a break out of this infuriated mass, but the tide had set in against them.

Five, ten minutes of this awful fighting, and then there came a time when retreat was utterly out of the question, much as they might have wished it. The Sioux had forced them into a ravine, and here was enacted the closing scene of the bloody drama.

Custer saw the inevitable finale; hope of a rescue there could be none, as Reno had received positive orders, and Terry and Crook were far away in different directions.

In this ravine they must die, then.

"My God!" exclaimed Custer, "we are trapped like foxes. To stay here means death. Forward, men, forward. Down with the hounds!"

Wounds counted as nothing at this dread moment; so long as a man could keep his seat, he was in good luck; it was the death bullet that told.

"My Heavens! the general's shot!" shouted a soldier close to Pandy Ellis.

Custer was reeling in his saddle; the film of death already showed itself in those clear eyes, but bracing himself, he discharged his revolver full in the face of Black Sculley, the renegade, who had given him his death-wound.

The scoundrel rolled over with a curse; Custer's last shot had done its work.

As the general fell from his saddle he was caught in the arms of the boy hunter, who had dismounted.

While the awful din raged around, and men were covering one another with blood, the soul of a gallant an officer as ever drew sword passed away to a better world.

Custer died at the head of his command.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE COMMAND PAID FOR IMMORTALITY.

Their valiant leader lying dead upon the ground, and men continually dropping on all sides, the remnant of the officers saw that the game was up. There was not one chance in a thousand for their escape, and the only thing that was left to them was to fight to the last gasp, to "pile the field with Moslem slain," and die as did Bowie and his friends at the Alamo, with the bodies of their enemies forming a breast-high bulwark around them.

"Down with the redfiends!"

It was brave Colonel Cook's last words, for hardly had he spoken before a lance knocked the red sword from his hand. Eager hands seemed to clutch at him on all sides, and in an instant he had disappeared, being pulled down among that surging crowd of savage devils.

Colonel Custer fought like a Hercules, but nothing could avail against such overwhelming numbers. In the confusion of the onslaught he had accidentally become separated a little from the rest, and although this may have hastened his death a trifle, in the end it made no difference. This gallant man was the next officer to fall. His horse was shot under him, and almost before he had reached the ground fate had overtaken him.

His comrade, Colonel Yates, uttered a heavy groan when Custer fell, and as if yet hoping against hope, turned his eyes towards the bluffs above. For once the brave man found himself wishing a fellow officer would commit a breach of discipline, and disobey orders. If Reno came up with the remaining seven companies they might be saved. Alas! the major never came, for about this time he was industriously engaged in defending himself against a horde of savage Sioux.

As moment after moment glided away, every spark of hope left the heart of Yates, and clenching his teeth, he turned his full attention upon the scene around him.

Indeed, it was enough to appall the stoutest heart to see that little band of brave men hemmed in on all sides by a surging mass of red demons, each one of whom seemed to feel the old desire for human blood so characteristic of the Indian race.

It would have been a sight fit for a painter, and yet what artist could do justice to the expression [Pg 5]

of mingled despair and courage that showed itself upon each face in that noble little band?

Ah, me! It was a terrible, terrible half-hour. Men in that gallant Seventh, who had been ordinary mortals before, now proved themselves heroes, and fought like tigers at bay.

There is something fearful in the look of a man who has given up every vestige of hope, and fights with that fierce courage born of despair; one can never expect to see it elsewhere.

"Boys, we've got to die here. Close up and let every man take half a dozen of these red fiends to eternity with him."

It was Captain Smith who yelled this out, and those who knew him best can believe it of the officer.

This was not his first Indian fight.

He had faced death before, but never would again.

Bronzed, bearded faces grew paler than usual, and perhaps some hands shook as the men thought of the loved ones at home.

God knows that they had cause to feel this weakness for a moment, when they realized that never again should their eyes behold those dear friends, and that this ravine in which they fought was doomed to be their field of death.

"Keep your faces towards the foe!" shouted Colonel Yates, bravely, and to himself he muttered the anxious prayer that could never be answered:

"Oh, heavens! that Crook was here, or Andy Burt and the Ninth."

But Crook and Gallant Major Burt were far away.

The Indians, incited by their chiefs, now prepared for a grand final rush.

Mr. Read, who had accompanied the expedition, was down; Colonel Keogh had vanished a long time before, and just at this critical juncture Captain Smith threw up his arms, and after reeling for an instant in his saddle, slipped to the ground.

Yates saw that the closing scene was at hand.

"Close up, men, close up! For God's sake, let every man keep his face towards them! The old Seventh will become famous!" he exclaimed.

Yes, indeed, famous at the dear cost of the utter extermination of almost half its number.

A yell, such as might have made the earth tremble, and the whole mass of warriors, mounted and on foot, came against the solid little phalanx like an avalanche.

Had the rush been from one quarter alone, the remnant of cavalry would have been swept out of existence like a flash, scattered here and there among their enemies; but as the press came from all sides at once, it only served to crush them closer together.

In union there is always strength.

Had the hundred cavalymen now left been divided into small groups, they would have been all killed before ten minutes had passed by, but in a solid body they could resist for over half an hour.

Pandy Ellis was in the thick of it.

His blood was thoroughly aroused, and I doubt if any man in that ill-fated command killed half as many red-skins as did this gray-haired ranger.

When his rifle and pistols were empty, he slung the former to his back very coolly, and then, drawing the huge bowie-knife that had given him the name of Heavy Knife, he sailed in to conquer or die. Experienced in these matters, he had foreseen such a catastrophe, although even his vivid imagination had failed to paint such a serious calamity.

Pandy had expected to be forced into a retreat, but such a thing as having the whole command utterly annihilated never entered his head, until they were pushed into the ravine trap.

Even when he was fighting in the midst of the red-skins, a thought of the strange boy who had so suddenly disappeared among them, entered his head.

Custer had called him Mason, and seemed to feel some affection for him.

Pandy's eyes soon fell upon him. He had the general's revolver in his hand, and was seated on his horse, engaged in emptying it with commendable precision, making every shot tell.

When the ranger looked again, a few moments later, the boy had disappeared.

"Poor feller, he's done fur; an' yet it'll likely be ther fate o' us all," muttered Pandy, as he drove his keen blade home in the broad breast of a brave.

At such a dread time as this the eye of a participant could not take in the entire scene.

All that Pandy was sure of after Cooke fell pierced by many wounds, was that every member of that heroic band fought as if the strength and endurance of a dozen men was in his body.

For every blue-coat who fell, at least two Indians bit the dust.

Although the fight had grown more silent, now that nearly all the firearms were discharged, it was none the less deadly on that account.

Sabers, red with human gore, were flashed in the sun's bright rays, and urged to their deadly work by arms that seemed iron in their endurance.

Lances, tomahawks and keen knives opposed them, and now and then a rifle added its weight to the side of the Indians.

On each occasion, some poor fellow would totter in his saddle, and finding himself going, show the spirit that imbued his nature by making a last sweeping blow at the enemy who held such a tight grip on them all.

It was horrible to see how that devoted little band continually diminished in numbers.

There were hardly forty left now, and in ten minutes these had become less than twenty. The end was near at hand.

Yates still lived, although the only commissioned officer.

His face was very white, and streaked with blood, so that old Pandey, still fighting like a hero, hardly recognized the man who touched his arm.

"Old friend, try to escape and carry the news to Crook and Reno. If you succeed, tell them to let my folks know how I died, and that my last were of them. The old seventh has made a record that ___"

It was never finished; the fatal bullet came, and as brave a man as ever presented his face to the foe succumbed to the inevitable.

Pandey seemed to hesitate an instant, then his powder-begrimed face lit up.

"I'll do it, bust my buttons. Might az wal die tryin' it az hyar. Good-bye, boys; I'm in fur death, or ter carry ther news ter Crook. Nancy, away wid ye," and the knife point sent the animal bounding among the Indians.

Ten minutes later and all was over. The ravine looked like a slaughter-pen in the daylight, and even when the Sioux, glutted with blood, searched among the heaps of slain for any who might live, the sun sank out of sight as if ashamed to look upon such a horrid scene, and a merciful darkness hurried to close over the ravine of death.

CHAPTER VI.

BOLLY WHERRIT'S BATTLE ON A SMALL SCALE.

When Bolly Wherrit threw himself upon the guard at his prison lodge, he was without a single weapon.

Besides this his hands and wrists were considerably lacerated by the cruel glass that had been the means of his gaining freedom, but he had no doubt regarding his ability to overcome the fellow, especially as he had the advantage of a surprise.

Finding himself so suddenly seized by the throat, the guard turned like a flash and attempted to use his arm, thinking to get the hunter in a bear's clasp, and then hold him till assistance came.

He counted without his host, however, as many folks are in the habit of doing.

Raised in the school of nature, very nearly the whole of his life being spent upon the plains in active warfare with the savage denizens thereof, it was not likely that Bolly would in his declining years lose the prompt discretion and agility that had marked his whole checkered career.

Perhaps that Indian thought a thunderbolt had seized hold of him, that is, if he took time to think at all, which is rather questionable, and in truth he would not have been far from the truth.

The way in which Bolly shook him by means of the hold upon his throat would have reminded one of a terrier and a rat.

So violent was the motion that the unlucky fellow's head was in danger of coming off, and when Bolly in the end dashed his clenched fist full in the red face, it ended the matter, for when he released his clasp the man dropped to the ground perfectly insensible.

To stoop over the fallen brave and transfer the fellow's weapon to his own person, was, for the ranger, but the work of a moment.

Quite a fine-looking rifle, of a modern pattern, a long, ugly-looking knife, a revolver and some ammunition were thus appropriated without compunction, for Bolly believed in the adage that "to the victor belong the spoils." Besides, had not this man or his friends made themselves owners of his articles of warfare without saying so much as "by your leave."

There were very few men left in the village; for one to remain idle when such deadly work was in progress at two separate points would have been a decided disgrace.

A dozen cavalymen dashing in at the northern and western end of the village could have carried everything before them.

Not forty yards away from the prison lodge, some ten or twelve warriors were clustered, being wounded braves unable to take part in the great battle.

So interested were these worthies in what was passing before their eyes (for, standing on a little

elevation, they could see the fight with Reno now drawing to an end, and the gallop to death of brave Custer and his men), that the little episode in their rear did not serve to attract their attention.

It was only when the ranger arose to his feet, after arming himself by means of the late guard's weapons, that one of the wounded braves happened to catch sight of him, and, giving the alarm to his companions, the whole of them started forward with a yell.

If they were to be deprived of a share in both of the fierce battles, why could they not get up a little affair of their own, a private entertainment, so to speak, whereby each individual participant on their side might share the excitement.

Unfortunately for them Bolly Wherrit proved too willing, and then again he wanted all the fun on his side of the house.

"Now fur sumpin rich. Calculate I kin wipe out them reds like a chalk mark. Old bruiser in front thar, take keer o' yerself."

The rifle proved to be a good one in the right hands, for as the report sounded, one of the approaching braves sprang wildly forward with a convulsive drawing up of the legs, and was met half way by death.

Then the revolver commenced its fearful work.

As man after man lay down never to rise again, Bolly burst out into a wild, reckless laugh.

When the chambers were empty, only four men stood erect, and they looked as if they wished themselves anywhere but in their present situation.

Nothing daunted by the force of numbers, Bolly sprang towards them, holding his empty rifle in one hand and the long knife in the other.

Some stern duty appeared to call these four brave fellows in as many different directions, just then; at any rate they did not wait for the arrival of White Thunder, but dashed wildly away, forgetful alike of their wounded dignity, and their late dignified wounds. A shout from the old hunter caused them to expedite matters, and Bolly laughed at the ludicrous figures they cut.

A shrill neigh close by caused him to start. It was a well-remembered sound, and the hunter quickly turned his face in the direction from whence it came.

A horse, saddled and bridled, was fastened to a stake driven into the ground in front of a tent, and Bolly saw that it was his own lost steed. The animal had recognized its master, and had given token of its love for him.

With a few bounds Bolly was at the side of Black Bess.

As his hand fell caressingly upon the noble mare's mane, the skin serving as a door to the lodge was swept suddenly aside, and the next instant Bolly found himself face to face with Blue Horse, a noted chief, and an old enemy of his.

What this individual was doing in his lodge while his comrades fought and bled will, perhaps, never be known, and does not really affect the course of my narrative.

All that I wish to be positive about is the fact that he was there, and that for almost fully sixty seconds the foes glared at each other.

"Ugh! White Thunder! Blue Horse no forget ears," grunted the chief, as he put his hand to his belt and drew a revolver.

"Remember that ole scrimmage, eh, chief? Wal, I reckon I cud give ye another leetle reminder o' this happy occasion, seein' that yer is so partic'lar 'bout it," and the ranger laughed in the Indian's face.

Blue Horse angrily raised his weapon, but considerately refrained from firing. The reason of this clemency on his part was obvious.

Bolly held his empty revolver in his hand, and this had been thrown with tremendous force against the chief's head, which, not being made of iron, gave way, and the Sioux nation had to mourn the loss of another leader.

Bolly secured the revolver of Blue Horse, and was thinking of searching the village from one end to the other in order to accomplish the strange mission that had brought him to this part of the country, when a chorus of angry yells attracted his attention.

Upon investigation these were found to proceed from a score of mounted red men who were dashing along towards him, having evidently been attracted by the cries of the four wounded warriors, who had fled after their little private amusement.

"Plague take the luck, I must git. Sich a good chance thrown away. Now, ye kin bet high on't, Bolly Wherrit's goin' ter have his own rifle back agin, an' resky that gal mighty soon. Whoa, Bess, whoa, old girl. Have they been treatin' ye bad? Away now, an' make the dust fly!"

Faithful Black Bess needed no second invitation, but darted away like an arrow shot from the bow, with Bolly swinging his rifle in the air, and shouting defiance to those who followed after.

His first thought was to make for the river and join the combatants on the other shore, but upon glancing across, such a mass of surging humanity met his gaze that Bolly was actually appalled. Besides, his pursuers were between himself and the water having come from that direction.

"Tarnal death! but it looks hot over thar. Reckon it must be Custer, for I swar no other man wud do sich a dare-devil thing. Ef they get out'er thet hole, then I'll guv the general credit fur a heap o' smartness. Oh! yer imps o' Satan. 'Spect ter ketch me, hey? Wal, now we'll see what the hoss has ter say 'bout thet," muttered Bolly.

Actions often speak louder than words; if Black Bess could not talk, she certainly showed what she thought of the case by making a streak that promised to carry the ranger out of sight very shortly.

The last the score of Sioux saw of him he was waving his old hat in an affectionate farewell, and the exuberant shouts he gave utterance to came faintly across the level ground.

Bolly made at once for the hills, which he reached in a short time. Here we will leave the brave old ranger for a time, hatching up daring plans to carry out his singular mission, and return once more to that ravine of death where Custer and the last of his command fell beneath the fury of the Sioux and their renegade friends.

CHAPTER VII.

ROBBERS OF THE DEAD.

Night had closed over the scene of the terrible battle, but the darkness was not intense, as the stars shone out with unusual brilliancy, and the silver crescent of a new moon in the western sky lent its feeble aid.

The cold stars looked down upon a fearful sight; such an one as has not been seen in this fair land for many a year.

Hundreds of men and horses lying dead in that fatal ravine, and a trail of bodies leading almost in a circle, down to the river and then up the bluffs.

Valiant men lay here: heroes whose names shall ever be mentioned with proud honor by their surviving comrades; and yet what a price they paid for that worthless commodity to the dead—immortality.

Across the Little Horn could be heard the noises of a great camp, and once in a while the breeze bore the distant crack of firearms.

These last came from several miles to the south, where Major Reno had intrenched his command on the bluffs, and from hastily-constructed rifle-pits fought the enemy, who had posted themselves on the neighboring heights, where they could control his position.

Shadowy figures glided hither and thither over the field of battle, for that it was a battle, though a very uneven one, I do affirm, in spite of the constant appellation of massacre indulged in by the newspaper men.

The very word massacre brings to mind the idea of a wholesale butchery of helpless people. Historians are prone to be partial in its use.

We always find the affair termed a massacre when the Indians are victorious; but when the tables are turned it is "a splendid campaign," "a hard-fought battle," and "a glorious victory for the troops."

If the word massacre does not mean a one-sided butchery, then every world's battle has been such.

As to Custer's particular case, did he not move forward with the intention of attacking the village, and though every man fell, did they not slay at least their own number of redskins? Then this proves the affair a battle and not a massacre.

Having carried my point, I beg pardon for the digression.

These shadowy figures gliding over the scene of death were robbers of the slain, and having no compunctions of conscience, if a coveted ring refused to come off, the finger was at once severed in order to obtain the bauble.

Noble Custer and most of his officers lay close together, just as they had fallen.

Near by was a heap of slain, which included troopers, Sioux and horses.

One of the robbers of the dead approached this pile, and began pulling the bodies about in a promiscuous manner, his eyes busily engaged searching for plunder.

Under this pile a form lay, which, as the heavenly lights fell upon it, revealed the features of the boy who had been beside General Custer when he fell.

Something gleamed from the little finger of his left hand, and as this sparkled in the light of the moon, the prowler uttered a delighted exclamation that at once proved him to be a white man.

Seizing hold of the hand, he at once attempted to pull the diamond solitaire ring off, but this proving fruitless, he felt for his knife.

Just as this was drawn, his hand was tightly clutched by the one he held.

The truth of the matter was, that the boy had been rendered insensible by being struck with a

bullet, that glanced from his forehead without breaking the bone.

Others, killed later in the desperate struggle, had fallen upon him, and here for several hours he lay at the door of death.

When the heap that pressed upon him had been removed by the robber, the fresh air served to partially revive him, and the twisting of his finger by the desperado finished the business.

Mason, as I shall call my boy hero, for Custer had given him that name when addressing him, opened his eyes.

By the dim light of the stars and the new moon combined, he saw the figure of a man kneeling over him.

That it was a white man was evident from his clothes and hat, and also the bushy beard.

A pair of fine cavalry boots, stolen from some unfortunate officer, were slung across his shoulders, and he seemed burdened down with all sorts of plunder.

Mason waited to see no more.

The wrenching at his finger ceased, the man uttered a curse, and began to draw his knife.

Then the whole horrible truth burst upon the boy's mind.

Under the impulse of the moment he tightened his clasp, and actually pulled himself to his feet by means of the renegade, and after this had been accomplished, released his hold.

The matter did not rest here.

Amazed at having the dead come to life in such an unexpected manner, as it seemed, the renegade uttered a cry and started back.

Custer's revolver was still held in the boy's right hand, just as it had been when he had fallen to the earth.

Whether a single load remained or not he could not tell, but quickly pulling up the hammer he raised the weapon.

When the robber of the dead, base craven that he was, saw this movement, he flung out his hands in an involuntary appeal for mercy, but the boy, after passing through such a bitter, bloody experience, could feel no pity for such as he.

The hammer fell, the crack came, and the bullet did its mission of retributive justice.

"My God! I'm done for. Curses on the young hound," half howled the renegade, reeling wildly in the effort to keep his feet, and at length plunging to the ground, where he lay covered with plunder, waiting for some other robber to relieve him as he had despoiled others.

Mason sank to the ground immediately, and it was not until several moments had passed by that he ventured to raise his head and look around.

Not an object was stirring near him.

If the marauders of the dead had noticed the shot at all, they had taken it for granted that it was fired by one of their number at a wounded cavalryman, and the shout given by the victim of the bullet went far to corroborate this idea.

As he looked, Mason saw one of those shadowy forms skulking about and bending over the dead.

Fearful lest he should meet with one such and be murdered for want of weapons, he crawled over to where the renegade lay and secured his revolver.

Not content with this, he quietly proceeded to reload the empty chambers of the one he had taken from the holsters of Custer's saddle.

When this was done, he felt content, and arose to his feet.

Although he could see in the immediate vicinity, all appeared dark and gloomy a hundred yards away, and the bluffs could only be distinguished because they were outlined against the star-bedecked sky after the manner of a silhouette.

Which way to go was a puzzler.

Beyond the ravine he could hear the murmur of the river, and knew that on the other shore was the camp of the Sioux.

Once clear of this slaughter-pen and his ideas would flow more naturally, for it was impossible to think calmly while the mutilated bodies of friends lay around on every side.

To say a thing was to do it with Custer's boy friend.

He seemed to know that the general must be near by, and was led instinctively to his body.

A horse had fallen upon Custer's lower limbs, but the heavy weight had given him no pain, for he had been beyond that when the animal was shot.

I cannot positively say that the tears came from the boy's eyes, as some of my readers might deem that an unmanly proceeding, though God knows the poor fellow had cause enough to weep, with his best and only friend lying dead before him.

That he lifted the general's cold hand and kissed it repeatedly, while murmuring a farewell, I can and do affirm.

A moment more and he was stealthily making his way along the ravine, heading toward the river.

A vague notion that a horse was necessary to his future movements had intruded itself upon his brain, and although his plan of obtaining one was as yet illy defined, it constantly gained ground.

Once a dark form suddenly rose up in front of him, but the greasy Indian got no further than the drawing of his knife, when Mason's revolver sounded his death note, and without even a groan he sank beside the dead man whom he had been in the act of despoiling when disturbed by the boy's approach.

Avoiding all others whom he saw, Mason soon left the ravine behind him, and passing over the intervening ground, where a few bodies were scattered promiscuously about, he stood upon the river bank.

There was something soothing in the steady hum of the water which appeared to steady the boy's disturbed mind, and for almost half an hour he stood leaning against a tree that bent over the river, and engaged in dreamy fancies.

He had almost forgotten his notion of getting a remount in place of the one lost during the bloody skirmish.

Sad thoughts had crowded into his mind.

Of all that gallant band, was he the only survivor?

It seemed so, indeed; but Mason did not know of the supreme effort made by old Pandy Ellis, the prince of bordermen.

The boy's reverie was becoming almost unbearable, when it was disturbed by what appeared to be the flash of a paddle further up the stream.

CHAPTER VIII.

PANDY ELLIS' HOTTEST SCRIMMAGE.

Valliant old Pandy Ellis, the veteran ranger of the prairies, was not the man to give up hope easily. He had been in many a tight scrape before, and had kept a bright face when the best of men might have given up in despair.

But there was something so fearful in the horrible struggle, where human efforts however strong seemed puny as an infant's, that the ranger might well be pardoned for shutting his teeth grimly and resolving to die hard.

There were actually tears in his eyes as he gave one last glance back at that sadly depleted little band, where noble Yates still shouted out encouraging words, and wielded his bloody sword with an untiring arm.

It was the last ever seen of this detachment of the gallant Seventh alive; and although the old ranger were to live his whole life over again, he could never forget that scene.

His hands were fully occupied in defending his person against the many weapons raised against it.

During the next five minutes Pandy had the hottest little scrimmage that ever fell to his lot.

On every side nothing met his eye but a mass of red faces, bearing the most devilish looks he could imagine, and the owners of which were trying their best to stab or shoot the rider.

Boldly he plunged into the thick of them.

Nancy trampled many under her feet, and bore her inevitable wounds with the air of a martyr, than which she could not well do otherwise, belonging as she did to such a renowned hero.

Guns cracked about him, bullets whistled close to his head, and cut into his flesh; lances, knives and tomahawks were thrust up at him with vengeful intent, and yet this veteran urged his horse forward, armed only with a knife as a serviceable weapon, with which he seemed to keep himself surrounded by a wall of steel through which it was next to impossible to force a passage.

How many men he and his horse killed between them during that five minutes' fearful ride, Pandy could not even guess after it was over, for his mind was in a whirl, and he did mechanically the work that was needed, just as a set machine might have done; but it must certainly have been dozens.

Some men might have deemed it impossible to force a way on horseback through that mass of excited redskins. Colonel Yates had deemed it so, but to Pandy nothing was accepted as beyond the power to do, until an attempt had been made, and Yates' last words to him proved that the officer must have either placed more confidence in the ranger's dash than his own, or else had resolved to die with his brave boys at any risk.

It was over at last, this brief but exciting ride of the prairie man's, encompassed on all quarters by death.

As horse and rider burst out of that maddened throng as a strong swimmer buffets the billows of the mighty deep, Pandy drew a long breath.

Not that the danger was over by any means. Here were dozens of Sioux braves outside of the *melee*, and these seeing an enemy emerge from the mass of struggling combatants, made a rush at him. Pandy uttered a taunting laugh and dashed away like a bird, for although Nancy was breathing hard from her exertions, she was equal to what the occasion demanded.

The ranger after clearing about a third of a mile, turned to one side and rode up a pass that led to the other side of the bluffs.

Reaching the crest, he passed along until almost even with the ravine of death. Then he paused for a last glimpse. Alas! all was over.

Yates too had fallen, and not one of his men could be seen alive; all that was visible seemed to be a sea of red men rushing pell-mell over the battle-field.

Old Pandy was visibly affected.

"God help me! I never seen such a thing in my life. The hull crowd wiped out az clean az a whistle. What's goin' ter become o' us all at this hyar rate. Custer, Cooke, Yates, Keogh, all gone. Bust my buttons ef these reds ain't woke up wid sum o' ther old fire. My hate fur 'em war dyin' out, but it only needed this ter kindle it was nor ever. I'll have revenge for this day's work; Custer shall never lie in his grave without satisfaction; an' ef ther pesky Government won't take it in hand, dash me, Bolly Wherrit's ther chap ter stick by me. We'll go on ther war path, an' by ther heavens above, if Sitting Bull don't pay dear fur this, then it's because two ole trappers will hev gone under. Tarnal Snakes an' critters! but it makes me tearin' mad. I must let out my spleen or bust; jist a parting card afore I go, ter let 'em know what's comin' in ther future."

It took but a couple of moments to load his rifle and revolvers.

His presence was not even suspected until the gun sent its clear detonation echoing over the hills.

A commotion was visible among the crowd below, and cries of pain reached the ranger's ear that were sweet music to him just then.

Without wasting any more time, he emptied all the chambers of his revolver, and then turning his horse's head, gave a loud hurrah, and vanished from view, feeling a hundred per cent. better after making a start in what he was pleased to term his death roll.

Some thirty yards below the crest of the bluffs, the way was easily traveled, and what few difficulties presented themselves were speedily overcome by such an enterprising individual as the ranger.

In a short time Pandy came to Custer's back trail.

It was quite deserted now, save by the dead, for after the cavalry had passed, the Indians followed after in order to have a hand in the battle which they knew would take place when the troops attempted to storm the village.

The crags that had so lately echoed with the cracks of Indian rifles as their owners lay in ambush, were silent now, and as Pandy rode along he could not help thinking how different it would have all been, had headstrong Custer cast aside his willful mood, and listened to the advice of one who had his best interest at heart.

It was while in this contemplative mood that Pandy suddenly became aware of the fact that a body of Indians were dodging about and among the rocks in front of him.

To retreat was almost impossible, as he would doubtless receive a bullet in the back.

Making what might be termed the best of a bad bargain, Pandy took the bridle between his teeth, and holding a revolver in each hand, urged Nancy forward at a gallop.

There was something in the manner of this undaunted man's facing death again after his recent escape and great exertions, that would have enlisted the admiration of even an enemy.

As he advanced, the redskins vanished altogether, and Pandy was beginning to believe they had gone altogether, when he heard a singular but well-known whoop that made him draw rein with an exclamation of surprise.

At the same instant a tall Indian stepped into view from behind a boulder and advanced boldly toward the ranger.

The latter seemed to recognize him, for a smile illuminated his bronzed and blood-stained countenance.

It was Eagle Eye, the Crow chief, whose hand Pandy pressed so warmly.

The Crow scouts of the expedition were some of his braves, but the chief had missed seeing the ranger before.

They were old friends, having hunted and trapped together a whole season several years before.

"Brother been in the big fight; much hurt?" said the chief, looking with dismay at the ranger's many wounds, which he seemed to regard as so many scratches, although some of them were very serious.

"Yes, I war thar, chief, an' 'twar ther hottest time o' my life. Did ye see it?"

"We reached the hilltop too late to take part. Custer gone up and all his men? Ugh! it was a heap big fight. How brother get away?"

"Wal, ye see," said Pandey, tying a rag over one of his worst wounds, and sitting with one leg over the saddle, "we war jist about goin' under, an' I'd 'cluded not to survive the boys, when Yates asked me ter make an attempt ter git away ter carry the news ter Mary, az ther feller sez, so I done it. Kin tell ye more about it another time, chief. Just now I want ter git ye ter do sumpin important. Know where Terry air?"

The chief pointed in the direction whence lay the distant Yellowstone, as Pandey well knew, and the ranger beamed his satisfaction.

"I reckon ye're correct, chief. Now, what I want is that ye send a couple o' yer men ter tell the gineral this sad news, an' git him ter hurry on hyar, fur I heerd firing down below, an' ef Reno hain't met Custer's fate he's in a bad fix anyhow. I intend ter jine him wharever he may be an' stand ther consequences. Chief, I'm off. Remember I depend on ye," and waving his hand toward his red friend, Pandey Ellis disappeared in the growing shadow that told of the coming night.

CHAPTER IX.

RED GOLIATH, THE GIGANTIC HERCULES.

Mason, General Custer's boy friend, leaned forward still more, relying on the hold he had upon the tree bending over the water, when that unmistakable sound, the dip of a paddle, reached his ears.

Underneath him the water of the Little Horn gurgled and plashed among the stones jutting out from the bank; close by a melancholy owl tried to make night hideous with its solemn declarations of warning, and once in a while the barking of dogs in the great village could be heard; but to these usual noises the boy paid little heed, as he had heard them for some time past.

The silver crescent still held forth in the western sky, and its meager light, augmented by the united force of stars, proved sufficient to see the opposite shore of the river, which at this point was rather narrow.

Could the boy's mental faculties have given him warning that it was not a common foe he was about to see?

There have been many occasions when persons of fine perceptions and susceptibility have realized, seemingly by tuition alone, that those whom they bear no love for are in the vicinity.

With some people this delicate sense of knowing what even the eyes and ears fail to tell becomes an art.

Many a deaf and blind man can tell, even the instant he enters the room, whether it be occupied or not, no matter how quiet those within may render themselves.

I only state this to defend my position when saying that young Mason appeared to suspect that a foe of more than common caliber was approaching.

Of course one cannot be positive as to what he thought, but at any rate the boy leaned out further than ever, and was fully engrossed in the steady but light dip of the paddle.

Whoever this night traveler was, his movements proclaimed him to be a man habitually addicted to caution.

This the boy quickly discovered, for although the canoe was undoubtedly approaching him, yet the steady dips of the paddle seemed to grow fainter if possible, or at least no louder.

Soon, by judging from the sounds he was enabled to place the exact position of the descending canoe, and a few seconds later a moving object crossed his range of vision.

That this was a boat, and that this craft contained but one person, soon became manifest as it drew nearer the concealed watcher.

The man stood erect near the stern, and held lightly poised in one hand the long paddle he had just been using.

Even in the dim light one would think an ancient giant, or at least a modern pocket edition of the famous Goliath whom David, the shepherd boy, slew with a stone, had appeared.

The colossal proportions reared themselves at least seven feet high, and being bulky in proportion the man presented a formidable aspect, such as would at sight appall a common foe.

Mason uttered a low exclamation and gave a companion start of surprise when the figure loomed into view; but after this one indication of his feelings he remained as motionless as a form of bronze.

There was no mistaking that person whom he was now looking upon; even a casual glance would have been sufficient to impress the face and figure indelibly on any mind, and surely the eyes of hate are more susceptible of retaining an object they dislike than others.

Hate was a feeble word when used in connection with the feeling our boy friend entertained towards this giant in the canoe, and if there was a word that combined fierce detestation, aversion, and a bitter longing to hack a man to pieces, together with a trifle of respect for his

prowess, I should use it; but every one knows how weak the English language is in adjectives, compared with the scorching Italian.

The giant's back was toward the bank where Mason had concealed himself, and, judging from his appearance, he was closely scrutinizing the opposite shore as if intent on discovering something that required time to reveal.

At this point the river was rather swift, owing to its narrow bed, and his rapid motion seemed to interfere sadly with his study of the other bank, for he muttered several impatient words to himself in a voice that made Mason grit his teeth like a maniac when he heard it; for this verified what suspicions the sight of the form had raised.

Downward came the canoe with the current, and urged also by the impetus given by the last few dips of the paddle.

It was within a dozen feet of the spot where Mason hugged the tree-trunk, when the man threw up an arm bare to the shoulder and as knotty as the gnarled limb of an oak, and seized upon a branch that bent affectionately toward the cool water of the river. Instantly the canoe was halted in its downward course, as if a wall of stone had been suddenly reared in front of it, and remained swinging to and fro, with the water gurgling about the stern.

The giant now leaned down, and appeared to look up and down the stream as if searching for something.

This latter, which had been invisible to him while descending the stream, proved the opposite from his present post of observation, as the low ejaculation of surprise manifested.

"There it is as I expected; one, two, three a score of fires. The Indian village undoubtedly. Now, there's work before you if you expect to see that money, and such a sum ain't picked up every day these times. I've seen it when I'd risked my life for a tenth of the gold. It's as plain as daylight; after that battle and victory, old Sitting Bull and his men 'll keep a loose camp. All that I'm afraid of are those sharp devils, Santee and Crazy Horse, for they've got such a spite against me I'd have a nice time if taken.

"Then I believe that Cheyenne chief, Black Moccasin, is here, and he bears me a grudge for that affair on the Platte.

"But what's the odds; I'm used to running risks on a lone hand, and it's in me to win or lose all. I'll cross here, leave the boat, and bring back the gal, if I have to search every lodge in the place," saying which the man let go of his hold on the branches, and gave a sweep of his paddle that startled the canoe towards the opposite bank, which at this point was low and sweeping.

Mason gave a convulsive movement when he heard that word "gal" mentioned.

"It is Red Goliath, and he has come from *him* for *her*."

These muttered words were all that he spoke; after that his lips remained as close and immovable as the clasps of a vise.

A few more sweeps of the paddle, almost noiselessly given, served to bring the canoe to the opposite shore, which the prow struck with a slight grating sound.

Laying down the paddle, the giant leaped upon the shore, and grasping the canoe pulled it upon the pebbly bench so that it could not be carried away by the action of the water.

As he turned around after doing this thing, a dark shadowy form arose beside him, where it had up to this time crouched in the obscurity. [Pg 8]

Other ears than the boy's had heard the suspicious dip of the paddle, and eyes that were hostile to his cause had witnessed the crossing of the giant.

Mason from his position saw this form rise up, and he realized the danger of the late oarsman, but not by word or deed did he attempt to warn the giant who was his deadly foe.

There was no necessity for a warning, however, for Red Goliath saw the uprising of the tall form that seemed almost to rival his own.

This modern giant and Hercules possessed a fierce nature, similar to that of a wild beast, and on stated occasions his thirst for blood became almost a mania, that could only be quenched in the life fluid of some one.

Perhaps one of these moods was coming upon him even then.

A looker-on would have been inclined to think so upon hearing the growl of satisfaction he gave utterance to.

When foemen worthy of each other's steel come in contact, there is seldom much time lost in skirmishing.

The Red Goliath threw himself upon his Indian foe with an agility one would hardly expect him to possess.

His assault, overpowering as it seemed, was right valiantly met by his sturdy opponent, and as the two closed, Mason could no longer see the particulars of the combat.

There was a threshing of arms for half a moment, then came the dull, sodden sound of blows delivered with telling force, and which must proceed from the white man.

The crushing nature of these was soon made clear.

One of the gigantic forms raised the other high in the air with but feeble resistance, and dashed him upon the ground with tremendous power.

As if intent on making sure of his work, the Red Goliath stooped over his fallen foe.

Something gleamed in the faint light; the sound of a blow reached Mason's ears, and the blade did not shine when it was again raised.

A hoarse chuckle that would have curdled the blood in the veins of a sensitive person proceeded from the human vampire as he arose to his feet, and after giving the corpse a kick with his heavily booted foot, replaced his knife.

It was certainly a fair fight, and the giant had the same privilege of slaying his fallen enemy that was granted in the arena at the hippodrome of Rome during ancient times; but civilization has brought with it the noble act of forgiving foes, which, however, such men as this seldom practice.

After that half laugh of triumph, Red Goliath stalked noiselessly away, and the boy was left alone with his meditations and half-shaped plans.

CHAPTER X.

ADELE.

Only for a few moments did young Mason remain in this state. Then his active brain aroused him to the necessity of making each second count.

His plans were only partially matured; but it would not prove hard to fully arrange them as time wore on, and his first move was really characteristic of the boy.

Pulling out a piece of water-proof cloth, he quickly wrapped it around his revolver, and then stepped boldly down into the river.

A few seconds later he was swimming silently for the other shore, holding the revolver out of the water as much as possible by means of his teeth, in which it was clasped.

The current carried him a little distance down the stream, and he landed some ten or twelve yards below the spot where Red Goliath had left his boat.

Thanks to his buckskin garments, the water did not soak through, and after emerging from the river Mason found himself little the worse for his swim.

What to do now might have puzzled some old stagers; but the boy's action was prompt and to the point.

Stepping up to the boat, he felt along the side until his hand came in contact with a ring, and when this was found he gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

Leaving the water he struck off in the same direction the giant had taken but a few moments before, passing by the dead Indian without even halting to examine the body.

Red Goliath must have been moving very slowly and cautiously after his fight, for Mason, who had, either through good luck or excellent management, hit upon the exact line of travel pursued by the giant, caught up with him before the outskirts of the village were gained. A moving form, crouching low, and yet showing the immense bulk in spite of this proceeding, was seen not ten yards ahead of him.

This was what attracted Mason's eye and kept him on the watch.

When the first lodges were passed, the danger thickened around our boy friend.

He had two sources to guard against, the giant on the one hand and the inhabitants of the village he was in the midst of on the other.

It may be surmised from this that Mason was very careful of his movements.

In spite of his size, which one would naturally suppose conducive to clumsiness, Red Goliath managed to get over ground with almost the noiseless powers of a serpent.

He seemed to be somewhat acquainted with the arrangement of the village, for he passed by dozens of lodges without giving them the least attention, his aim being to all appearances a certain spot not far from the center of the encampment, which was of so great a length.

There were several things in favor of this spying expedition which counted in the favor of the giant, and also his unseen follower.

In the first place, the night might be called dark, for the crescent moon was at the horizon, and although one might distinguish a form at ten yards distance, it would be next to impossible to declare whether the man was white or red.

Then again there were but a few hundred braves in the village, and these scattered along its entire length did not serve to even partially fill the lodges.

Where some of the late inmates were the reader knows, for brave Custer and his men fought hard, and each dragoon slew at least one Indian before going under.

What the main portion of the Sioux were about at this time will soon be made manifest, but a

suspicion of the truth might be gleaned from the occasional shots that were borne by the wind from the north, where Reno had entrenched himself on one of the bluffs overlooking the river.

Red Goliath kept on his way as if he had been among the lodges before, and, to tell the truth, this was not his first visit to the village. Several nights before he had made one with the same purpose that he now had in view; but an unlucky tumble over a drunken brave had brought the Indians swarming around him like so many bees, and it took all the power the giant possessed to escape. He managed to do it, however, and by means of the canoe which we have seen him use, in coming to the point once more.

After moving forward some ten minutes, even Mason, some distance in his rear, could hear the boisterous sound of laughter and loud talking.

Where it came from would not prove hard to say, for a brilliant light, within a dwelling that seemed to be half cabin and half lodge, proclaimed its whereabouts.

There could be no doubt but what it came from white men, or at least men who were pale faces in looks but red devils by nature.

Goliath crept towards this lodge, and in another moment was beside it.

The boy moved around on the other side, and by dint of using the caution that seemed to be a part of his nature, managed to gain the dense shadow of the northern side without making an iota of noise.

Then the thought intruded itself, what if the giant should take a notion to make a circuit of the lodge?

He would certainly be found out, and Mason knew that discovery by this man meant death.

This action was promptly executed. The skins composing the lodge were loose at the bottom, and a pile of furs lay just within.

A glance at the two inmates showed that they were interested in the contents of a suspicious-looking keg, and paid no attention to anything else.

It took the boy but a moment to glide like an eel under the skin of the lodge, and hide among the furs.

From here he could watch the two men and hear all that was said without being in danger of discovery.

They were not a very nice-looking couple to gaze upon, not being overly well burdened with good looks, but the boy had seen one of them before, and it would be hard work to find any uglier man than Pedro Sanchez in this sphere of ours; so his companion might be said to possess some claims of beauty when compared with the noseless, one-eyed French creole, whose face bore the scars of some fearful combat.

Pedro was tall and slim, with the agility of a tiger combined with the ferocity of a grizzly bear.

He addressed his companion as Hoskins, and between the two they seemed to be effecting a compromise in regard to some bargain of which the nature was soon made manifest.

A faint long-drawn sigh, that told of unspoken misery close beside him, made the boy give a start, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he repressed the exclamation that arose to his lips when his eyes were turned in that direction.

From the pole of the lodge a long torch was stuck out, and the light of this served to illuminate the half where the men sat, but the cabin part was rather dim.

Guided by that sigh, however, the boy had little trouble in making out a small girlish form that crouched rather than sat upon a pile of furs, and seemed to be intently regarding the two men who laughed and grew merry over the whisky keg.

"Adele!" was the cry that arose to that brother's lips, but he bravely repressed it, and also the longing that had seized upon him to clasp that dear form to his breast and defy all enemies.

Although his ears were drinking in all that the two men said, yet his eyes were steadily glued upon the light form.

Hark! the Creole was speaking while he held up a tin cup that had lately belonged to one of Custer's men, and squinted with his one eye at its contents.

"*Carramba!* Hoskins, my price I think exceedingly reasonable. If you only knew the time and money I've spent in this matter, and what deadly enemies I've made by my exploit, you wouldn't begrudge me a picayune. *Begar!* I sent one of them to his long home in the fight to-day," and Pedro gave a hoarse laugh that grated on the nerves like a file, and would have set a sensitive person crazy.

The boy started, and unconsciously his hand sought his head where the bullet had glanced from it.

He knew now to whom he owed that debt, and gritted his teeth as he inwardly resolved to pay the amount with interest when the proper occasion presented itself.

Hoskins did not share in his companion's mirth, but appeared to be reflecting.

He soon looked up and took a sip at the liquor.

"Wal, mebbe the gal's worth it, squire. I've taken a mighty shine to her purty face, and, being in

want of a wife, I guess we kin come to a bargain. Two hundred shiners, you said, and the hoss I own. We'll consider the question settled then. Now let's take a look at my property."

Pedro jumped to his feet with alacrity, and led the girl forward, much against her will.

As the torchlight fell on that sunny head, with its masses of golden hair and tear-bedimmed face, Mason ground his teeth in mingled rage and pity, and at the same time drew out his revolver. It was fated differently, however.

Hoskins feasted his eyes upon Adele's delicate beauty, and the grin that came upon his face told Pedro that he was satisfied with the bargain.

"Old hoss, we're squar on that. Gal, look up. Ye're mine now, body and soul. D'ye hear me? I've bought ye with a price, and I'd jest like fur the man to show himself what's goin' to take ye from me," said Hoskins.

There was a queer ripping sound. Mason saw a shining blade cut the skins of the lodge as if they were paper, and through this opening leaped Red Goliath, with a revolver in one hand and a knife in the other, and the brief exclamation of "I'm the identical chap."

CHAPTER XI.

HOSKINS PAYS NATURE'S DEBT—ABOUT THE FIRST HE EVER DID.

Hoskins may have been astonished at this sudden intrusion and answer to the vain question he asked. I have no doubt but what he was, more especially when his eyes took in the huge form of the giant, but his surprise was as nothing when compared to the consternation exhibited by the creole.

Pedro Sanchez had appeared in the jolliest possible humor a few moments before; now, the smile that had illuminated his face at the time of the giant's entrance seemed frozen there.

Pedro Sanchez had good cause to remember Red Goliath.

The two had been comrades in crime, and together they had committed many of the deeds that made the city of New Orleans tremble to its center.

Between them they had carried off Adele, hoping to secure a heavy ransom from her mother.

At this time the treachery so natural to Sanchez exhibited itself.

A desire to obtain the whole reward, on which he could retire from business, possessed him, and he attempted to get rid of his comrade by pushing the giant over the edge of an abyss on the southern plains.

The creole really thought the other dead, but in some way Red Goliath escaped with severe injuries, that laid him up for months at a cabin.

There he became acquainted with a gentleman who had recently left New Orleans for his health, having slain his distinguished foeman in a duel, and who intended staying away until the affair blew over.

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In a conversation with this man, the giant became acquainted with several things that entirely changed the tenor of his ideas, and an understanding followed between them.

When Red Goliath started on the trail of vengeance, he had no intention of restoring Adele to her mother for a ransom, as a much larger sum had been offered him than he could ever expect from the lady, to carry her away to a point from whence she should never return, and the duelist had even hinted that he should not weep very much should news of her death reach him.

The truth of the matter was that Adele Pierrepont and her brother, Mason, stood between Luke Camden, the duelist and an immense fortune, and the idea of getting rid of the two had only entered his head when he heard through the giant that the girl had already been carried away.

Red Goliath proved a true traitor.

He had tracked his treacherous companion all the way from the plains of Texas to the pastures in the north, where the white man joined teams with Sitting Bull's gang of plunderers and thieves, where his merits in the peculiar line of business he dealt in were duly appreciated.

No wonder, then, that the creole shivered in dread when he saw the man whom he had attempted to murder standing before him with a deadly revolver in his hand, and cruel vengeance flashing from his eyes.

At first Pedro's hands failed to do their duty, and hung limp by his sides.

"Aha! it is thus we meet, my fine chicken," said the giant, who evidently had a tinge of the dramatic in his nature.

By the light of the torch it could now be seen that his hair and beard gave rise to the first half of his name, being of a fiery hue.

His eyes were small and deep-set, glittering like a snake's.

Pedro Sanchez was actually too frightened to say a word in answer to this implied question.

He could only stand and glare like a wild beast at bay and powerless to help itself.

The giant seemed rather talkative in his triumph.

"Pushed Red Goliath down a gulch, half a mile deep. Thought he'd die like a rat in its hole. Aha! my fine fellow, bushes are great inventions; thanks to them I am here now—here to claim my vengeance. Five thousand dollars tempted you, did it? Well, I want to tell you I'm offered double as much to keep the gal away forever: kill her if I like. Now, Brutus, your time has about come. Are you ready to meet your just doom?"

Pedro was shivering as only a man can who sees instant death before him, and his chattering teeth precluded the possibility of a reply.

The giant smiled derisively, and turned his eyes on Hoskins.

At this critical period the individual proved himself the possessor of more courage than the boasting creole.

Perhaps this arose from his ignorance of the giant's power, which Pedro was well acquainted with.

"Who the deuce are you that comes breaking into a man's house, and talking about doom and all that sort of thing? By George! I've a notion to—" began Hoskins in a blustering tone, but he came to an abrupt pause, for the giant seeing where it was most needed had swung the revolver around until it covered his form.

"You're mistaken. You haven't any notion at all, and it'll be better for your health if you don't have any. Asked me what I came here for; you invited me; declared you would like to see the man that was going to take the gal from you, so I showed myself. Now, my rooster, what's what with you?"

Hoskins seemed to have some spirit in him at any rate.

"Fool," said he, "one shot from your pistol would put you in a hornet's nest. If I choose to shout, a hundred braves will surround the lodge."

"As to the alarm, I care nothing for that; knew I couldn't do any work without raising it; but I swear you shan't shout again in this world, though you may in the one below us. Die, you dog."

The sudden startling crack of a revolver rang out.

Red Goliath had fired. There was an awful shudder on the part of Hoskins; a gurgling sound as if he was trying to curse his slayer, and then the stricken man fell to the ground shot through the heart. Turning on the creole, Red Goliath again raised his death-dealing revolver.

Pedro had slunk away and was crouching on the ground.

At this contemptible display of cowardice, the giant gave him a hearty kick of derision, in order to induce him to stand erect; but it only had the effect of flattening the miscreant out still more.

There was no time to waste, as the Indians must already be alarmed.

Firing two shots into the dark corner where Pedro had crouched, the giant hurriedly replaced his weapons.

Then like a flash he seized upon Adele, lifted her light form as easily as if she had been a feather, and dashed out.

An Indian met him just beyond the lodge.

One sweep of the giant's disengaged arm sent him to the ground like a ten-pin overwhelmed by a ball.

Although braves were appearing in every direction, Red Goliath sped onward like an antelope, the burden he carried appeared as nothing.

The village was soon left behind, and when the open ground was at length gained, two shadowy figures flitting close behind him proclaimed the fact that these were his only pursuers.

To get rid of them was an easy task to a man like the Hercules, who was well versed in every detail of fight and strategy, and armed into the bargain.

Again the revolver came into play.

Suddenly halting, and wheeling in his tracks, he presented the weapon.

With its first crack one of the pursuers described a parabola in the air, as if he had leaped from a spring-board, and upon touching the ground lay very, very quiet.

The second attempted to dodge, but soon found out that lead can travel mortally fast when driven by powder.

He made his way into camp half an hour later with a broken arm, and the bullet lodged in his side.

Having thus rid himself of both pursuers, the giant once more rushed along.

The river bank was gained, and also the canoe.

"Whoop! hurrah! won it, by George! run the gauntlet too," said the daring man to himself, as he placed Adele, too powerless with terror to resist, in the boat; and after pushing the craft off, sprang in himself.

Young Mason had been so taken aback by the giant's sudden shots and his rapid flight that even

had he so wished he could have done nothing to prevent him.

Before he actually realized what had occurred, Red Goliath had vanished from the lodge, carrying the boy's darling sister with him.

It seemed but half a minute had passed, and Mason was about to rise up from his place of concealment and follow on the giant's trail, when half a dozen Indians burst into the lodge to see what damage had been done here.

Hoskins would never steal another horse, he had gone to that bourne from whence no traveler e'er returns; in a word he was dead.

Pedro came crawling out of the dark corner with a hole in him large enough to let the life out of any common man, but which did not appear to inconvenience him at all.

For several moments they jabbered away in a tongue unknown to our hero, much to his disgust, for he was impatient.

When they at length left the lodge, Pedro securing the gold his late companion possessed before doing so, Mason gave a sigh of relief, and made haste to throw off the warm furs in which he had been wrapped.

Then he boldly stalked from the lodge, walking as if he had a perfect right in the village. Several times he came across braves, and on such occasions grasped hold of a revolver, ready for service, but his bearing must have deceived the red-skins, for he was not molested.

After gaining the outskirts of the village, Mason struck at once for the river.

He knew that it was too late to reach the place where the canoe had been left before the giant, and had resolved to wait for it at a point below.

The wisdom of his course was soon made apparent, for his sharp eyes caught sight of a dark object moving slowly down the river near the other bank.

It was Red Goliath's canoe.

CHAPTER XII.

WHITE THUNDER ON THE RAMPAGE.

When Bolly Wherrit left the great Indian camp behind him, and headed for the distant hills, he had no intention of leaving the vicinity.

An object had attracted him hither, which, though backed by a golden reward, had something else behind it as an invigorator that proved far more potent with the old ranger than the money involved.

His own words had proclaimed that the cause of his hastening north, leaving his chum Pandy Ellis in the thick of some business that concerned them both, was a beautiful woman's tears.

Bolly always was weak as regarded the other sex, and knowing this reverence of his, which can hardly be called a failing, it has been a continual wonder to me why the ranger never married, especially as he must have been a fine-looking fellow in his younger days, judging from the grand old face he possesses at the present writing.

I strongly suspect, however, that in his youth Bolly had loved and been deceived, and although he never ceased caring for the ladies, he regarded them with suspicion when he came to the point.

As he rode along Bolly was engaged in various conjectures, the main subject of which was the rescue of Adele, for the reader must know by this time that this was the object that had sent Bolly from New Orleans to this northern province in such haste.

The sun was sinking down in the western sky, and the shadows were growing very long, when Bolly reached the hills.

A stream of water, so cold that one could almost believe it an ice spring, murmured among the stone, and pursued its tortuous way through the neighboring ravine, heading for the Little Horn, where its waters were quickly engulfed by the larger stream.

At this Bolly came to a halt, and allowed Black Bess to drink all that she wished, dismounting first to quench his own thirst.

The ranger did not attempt to climb the hills, as it would have proven a difficult task, and one which there was no necessity for, as he intended doing some work before morning came on.

Longer grew the shadows, and more gloomy the ravines between the elevations, as the prairie ranger galloped slowly along the foot of the range.

Night at length closed around him; the peaks were dimly outlined against the sky in which the stars began to appear.

In the west the infant moon looked like a silver bond of promise to the good welfare of man, and smiled upon the earth as if in pity at its forlorn and unlighted condition.

All of these things Bolly noticed with the air of a man whose mind is preoccupied, and whose thoughts have no range beyond a certain point.

Now that quite a distance separated him from the huge Sioux village, the usual sounds that accompany a night upon the plains came to his ears, and it really seemed as though the wolves howled and the coyotes barked louder than ever on this particular occasion.

Perhaps with their more than human instinct, these beasts of carrion knew of the feast for their hungry maws, that the setting sun had shone upon, and which was not yet ready for them because of the many moving figures in that terrible ravine of death.

A whippoorwill sending forth his plaintive cry near by, and the shrill scream of a night hawk from a neighboring tree, aroused Bolly from the stupor as it might almost be called, into which he had unconsciously fallen.

For the first time he noticed that Black Bess had carried him into the midst of a forest that lay at the foot of the hills.

As he made this discovery, the distant murmur of running water came to his ears, which could not be made by a creek.

Undoubtedly it was the river that he was nearing, and as this was just what he desired, Bolly let his sable steed continue her own course.

Five minutes later he brought the animal to a halt.

Before him rolled the Little Horn with its shady banks, the starlight glinting from the tiny waves that the adverse wind gave rise to.

Long and earnestly Bolly looked at the water.

He had built his schemes upon the river, and being in a contemplative mood, he was wondering whether the morning would see him successful or the reverse.

From this serious state he was abruptly aroused by a sound that to ears of experience like his bespoke danger.

Only a twig snapped by some incautious foot, but it had a world of meaning to the ranger.

As if it affected him like electricity, Bolly slid from the back of Black Bess, and crouched on that side of the horse nearest to the seat of danger.

The rifle he held was laid gently upon the ground, and in its stead he quickly laid hold of the formidable knife taken from the Indian who had been placed over his prison as a guard.

Although these movements were accomplished with all the noiseless powers of a tiger, Bolly was not unobserved.

Two pair of gleaming eyes had noted his descent from the horse, and hardly had the ranger laid hold of his knife than he was called upon to use it. [Pg 10]

A form arose lightly in the air, and passing over the bushes like a bird, landed close beside him.

Following this came a second, and as this man landed he gave a fierce shout, the pent-up air of his jump forcing itself through his teeth with the shrill force of a steam-whistle.

There was no such thing as taking Bolly Wherrit unawares. A man who had earned the name of White Thunder and Never Sleep among the northern tribes might be surprised, as he was not possessed of a second sight to divine ambushes, but his enemies always found him ready.

The first man who leaped went to immediate death, for, as he braced himself to recover from the force of his jump, the ranger gave one spring and plunged his knife forward. It entered the broad red chest with a sickening thud, and when Bolly pulled it out again, a perfect deluge of blood followed.

Sickening as was the sight of this tottering man, actually turning pale from loss of blood, we soldiers have to witness far more terrible things, such as would make a civilian faint with horror.

The old ranger had seen worse in his day, when dear comrades were roasted before his eyes at the stake, and besides he had no time to waste in heroics.

His second foeman aimed a vicious blow at his head with a tomahawk that glittered like steel or silver as it flew by.

This intended death-blow Bolly avoided by a dip of the head, and in another instant the two were locked in a close embrace.

The Indian had managed to lay hold of his knife, so that the combatants were equally well armed.

Before a dozen seconds had passed Bolly discovered that he had no puny antagonist with whom to combat, for the fellow seemed to possess muscles of iron, and even by exerting all his strength, the ranger failed to raise him from the ground to dash him down, as he had done many a man before.

They were in such a situation that if either attempted to use his knife, the other would have the advantage for an instant, and even this short time might prove disastrous to all cherished hopes of victory.

An idea came into Bolly's head which told him that the advantage really lay in his favor, for while fully the Indian's equal in strength, he also possessed some knowledge of scientific wrestling, against which the brave could oppose nothing in the same line.

The chance soon presented itself, and was promptly seized upon.

By an adroit fling of his foot, and a corresponding whirl with his arms, the ranger completely demolished his sturdy but ignorant foe.

Falling underneath, the Indian knew that his chances of escape were slight, indeed, unless he managed to hold the ranger down, and dropping his knife, he attempted to accomplish this by claspng Bolly around the chest.

Unfortunately, however, for him, his hands failed to meet, and he could not put forth his full amount of strength.

Our old friend broke loose from the death clasp.

A cry of alarm burst from the doomed man's lips when he saw the red blade uplifted, but the outstretched arms were dashed aside, and the knife descended.

"That fur Tom Garny, blast yer hide," he muttered, and his foe was dead.

As the ranger was shaking himself to see that no material damage had befallen him through his recent struggle, the reports of several guns, followed by savage shouts, came from the bluffs across the river and further up. It proceeded from besieged Reno and his foes, but Bolly did not know this.

"Ah! sum o' ye over yonder I reckon. Wonder what became o' Custer, for it must hev been him, az no wun else'd rush inter danger like that. Sounds mighty bad; they hain't kerried the town, an' I'm afraid the yaller-haired chief hez either gone under or else had ter retreat, a thing I never knew him ter do, long az I've been acquainted—ha! what in blazes! Bolly Wherrit, down ye imp. Bess, silence now, old girl. Byes, do yer juty now, fur thar's sumpin' a comin' this way that needs lookin' arter."

The ranger sank out of sight as if he had been shot.

CHAPTER XIII.

RENO'S RIFLE-PITS ON THE RIVER BLUFFS.

The human mind differs so greatly with various individuals that what might be said of one person, proves exactly the opposite in another.

It has truly been remarked that one man's food is poison to another, and the same may be said of the capacity of their intellect.

Pandy Ellis, the veteran ranger of the wild West, whose days had been passed among scenes of danger from boyhood up to old age, was the possessor of an iron will and a stout heart.

He had witnessed, almost with composure, it might be said, scenes that would have made many a brave man turn pale and tremble; had passed through others, not unscratched either, when dear friends fell to rise no more, and yet had not been shocked.

The utter annihilation of Custer's devoted command had actually appalled him, and put him in the gloomiest state possible.

It was perhaps the fearful fact that not one in that gallant band came out to tell the tale, that worked so on his feelings.

Had some escaped, the affair would have lost some of that horrible fascination that proceeded from the fact that every one, officers and men alike, had been swept into eternity, just as surely as if an earthquake had swallowed them.

Eagle Eye, the Crow chief, had promised to send some of his men with the news to Terry; at least his silence had been the same as an acquiescence, and this finished his obligations toward the ill-fated Colonel Yates.

The sound of firing in the advance told Pandy that Major Reno was actively engaged on the bluffs, and aroused by the thought that there was hot work yet before him, he urged Nancy forward. As night closed about him, it could not but be conducive of gloomy thoughts, for the darkness appeared to communicate itself to the mind in some way or other, keeping brighter ideas at bay.

As he advanced, carefully now, as the way was rough and unfamiliar, the sounds in front grew clearer until the old ranger knew that he was drawing near the scene of action.

It would be impossible to join Reno on horseback, if the position of the troops was as bad as he suspected, and the next thing for him to do, would be to hide Nancy in some place where *he* could find her again, but no one else.

Such a spot he was not long in ferreting out, and after securing the horse by means of his lariat, Pandy moved forward once more.

Louder came the detonation from guns and shouts from dusky throats, threatening everything that was terrible to the remnant of the gallant Seventh; and yet their answering yells and shots proved the young fellows to be undaunted by the fate that seemed staring them in the face.

Pandy stood and listened, on the brow of an eminence, striving to pierce the gloom ahead with those eagle-like eyes.

Something like a cheer arose to his mouth at the unflinching bravery exhibited by these blue-coated heroes, as they gave back shout for shout.

Although the light at a distance was deceptive and uncertain, he could make out that Reno had planted his command on the top of the bluffs, to stand what might be called a siege.

In the haste of the movement, and worried by the Indians, the courageous major had, unfortunately for those under his command, selected a spot that was controlled by higher points on either side.

From one of these latter it would not have been a very difficult task to keep the enemy at bay, but now he had a double danger to contend against, as the Indians occupied the heights around him, and also attempted to storm his position.

It is doubtful whether the handful of the gallant Seventh who lived through this night and the succeeding day, will ever forget how the minutes dragged on, and yet I have no doubt but what in these dangerous hours some of them joked and laughed with that terrible *sang froid* men often assume when all hope is gone.

From his position the old prairie ranger could see that some kind of earthwork or rifle-pits had been constructed, and behind these rough shelters the tigers fought their fiendish foemen.

As yet Major Reno's men had had no suspicion of the awful calamity that had overtaken Custer and his three hundred men. So confident of success had the general been, that he divided what troops he had, so as to inclose the Indian village.

When they galloped away, it was the last that had been seen of them. True, some firing had been heard several miles away, long continued, as though an obstinate battle was in progress; but this had died away by evening.

Opinions differed, as they always will among many men. Some felt sure that Custer had defeated the Indians, marched on the village, and that any moment they might expect to see a huge bonfire in progress.

Others of a more reflective nature looked at the matter in a more serious light, thinking it not improbable that dashing Custer himself had been the sufferer, and that he would find it difficult to join them; but none ever suspected the horrible truth even for a moment.

That five companies of the bravest men in the old Seventh should have been completely swept out of existence was something almost preposterous.

When Pandy found himself gazing upon this scene, he began pinching himself, uncertain whether to believe his eyes or not.

"Lord help us, what's ther world comin' to, I'd like ter know? Wen these hyar reds gobble up ther bravest general az ever drew breath wid all his men, and then squat down round ther rest as if ther meal warn't complete, it's time ole Uncle Samuel war wakin' up. Blast my hide, ole Sitting Bull must be extarminated for this. I shall never hev any peace in life till it's done. But looky hyar now, ole man, bizness must be 'tended to. Ye'd like ter be wid Reno an' his men yonder, so az ter share in ther fun. Don't see any other way o' gittin' round it. Needs must wen ther devil drives, az ther feller sez. Now, jest show us wat ye kin do at this advanced period o' life in this line."

Communing with himself in his way the ranger began descending the elevation from which he had seen at the same time as much and as little. The valley below looked forbidding, but to a man of Pandy's nature, and who had so recently passed through such a horrible affair, a thing like this did not serve to daunt in the least. Soon he found himself gulfed in the darkness; the shots came from above him, and ten minutes after quitting his post of observation, an eagle's eyrie as it seemed, the trapper was cautiously making his way upward again.

There were manifold sources of danger on all sides against which he was compelled to guard himself. In every red warrior (and the hill actually swarmed with them) he had a deadly foe as a white man, and an inveterate one as the only Pandy Ellis. Besides there was a chance that the gallant boys above, deeming every moving object an enemy, would either fire upon him, or use their sabers as he attempted to mount the breastworks. It was a risky business, but one in which Pandy delighted.

Making use of each bush and rock, he slowly ascended the steep inclined plane. At times he was so close to some of the Indians, that he might have touched them with his arm had he so desired; but the reader may rest assured, Pandy did not take the trouble to test this. He was fated, however, to meet with one scrape before gaining his destination, and which came very near being fatal to him.

It was among a cluster of rocks, and the ranger had mounted a sort of cliff to expedite matters. Accidents are not confined alone to the careless, although they meet with more than the prudent, no doubt. Pandy's foot slipped and over he went.

It was certainly mortifying that after taking five minutes to get up this nice little cliff, he should descend it in a few seconds; it would have been even more so had he landed on the hard rocks below, for the fall was no petty one.

As luck would have it, however, an Indian brave happened to be below, and on this poor devil came the brunt of the tumble.

This being in the shape of a hundred and sixty pounds avoirdupois, proved to be too much for the equanimity of his mind and the balance of his body, as the poor fellow immediately collapsed.

He was only a little confused, however, and had sense enough to lay hold of the object that struck him, so that Pandy sought the ground almost as soon as did the other.

Perhaps the Indian had a vague notion that it was a comrade who had fallen upon him. If so, then he had no time to frame this idea into a thought, for the hill-top fell over upon him, at least the warrior thought so when he opened his eyes hours later in this world of pain.

Pandy had only given him a sound argument in the shape of a blow between the eyes.

Again the ranger pursued his upward way.

The small cliff was successfully scaled, and beyond this traveling seemed much easier so far as lifeless obstructions were concerned.

It would be impossible to follow Pandy's movements after this; they were inimical with those of a snake, crawling hither and thither, passing under the noses of red watchers, and close beside the fighting braves.

How he did it the trapper chief could not tell himself. With a thousand chances against him, he successfully gave the savage Sioux the slip, and, all unknown to them, passed from their outer line, and scaling the rudely thrown up earth-works, found himself among the rifle pits of the soldiers.

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 11]

THE BOY TRAILER AT WORK.

It needed no second look to convince Mason that it was the giant's canoe his eyes beheld, nor did he stop to examine the moving object more closely.

Having arranged his course of action long before, he now stepped quietly into the water, and when it reached as high as his neck, began swimming out.

So dexterous were the movements of the boy trailer, whose cause Custer had taken up so readily, and might have carried out but for his untimely death, that no sound resulted from his locomotion through the water, beyond that which even the most suspicious of mortals would take to be the swishing of the wind-driven wavelets.

When the canoe came even with the spot on which he had stood before entering the water, Mason was directly in front of it.

As only his head remained above the water and the giant's direction was directed further on, it was not strange that Red Goliath failed to discover anything suspicious just at the prow of his canoe.

The boat glided past, and Mason's hand sought the ring he had hunted up previously.

Luckily he found it, and in this way managed to keep alongside of the boat, just behind the giant.

Red Goliath stood up like a statue, and for such he might indeed have been taken but for the regular pendulum motion of his arms, as the paddle was shifted from side to side, in order that the momentum caused by the current might be materially aided by long silent sweeps.

Adele sat in the bow, motionless.

Young Mason's heart gave a great throb of sympathy when he heard what sounded suspiciously like a sob from the girl.

His sister had been stolen from her home in New Orleans by Hoskins and this giant, and like a sleuth-hound this boy had followed on the trail, tracking the fugitives from one border town to another on their northward course, and yet always coming too late.

He had met Custer years before, and had been a friend of the yellow-haired cavalry leader, so when he found the general in these regions, the latter at once took up his cause, and sent out scouts to discover where Hoskins and his fair girl captive were.

These men, experienced as they were, failed to accomplish their end.

It was Mason himself, by his indefatigable efforts, who first discovered Sitting Bull's village, and reported the fact to the general, who was already heading in that direction, aiming for the Little Big Horn.

The boy also declared that Hoskins was with the Indians, which fact Custer was prone to believe.

After this Mason vanished, nor did he make his appearance until the doomed command was riding down the bluffs into the ambushade.

How the latter proved fatal to the gallant troops is already known.

The wily Sioux allowed them to come on, pretending to give way, until the men were fairly in the trap, when they closed about them in a solid mass.

After this explanation, which I hold as due to the reader, I will resume the thread of my narrative where it was dropped.

The canoe passed down the stream for several miles in this way.

It may seem strange that Red Goliath, shrewd as he has shown himself to be, should risk so much in passing the Indian village after arousing the inhabitants by creating such an alarm, but the fact was, he proved to be one of those cunning fellows who believe that under the existing circumstances the safest place is that nearest the seat of action.

In spite of the danger that seemed to encompass him, the giant passed by without an alarm.

Soon the firing on the right shore could be heard, and this became louder as they drew nearer, until they were abreast of the scene of Reno's obstinate defense.

Passing by, the giant continued on its way down the river, until Mason began to wonder whether it would ever stop, his poor arm feeling the effects of the long pull.

Red Goliath had another object in view while taking this route, besides that already mentioned.

There was a cave in the hills below the village which he intended to occupy; for, although Adele was in his hands, only half of the mission which he had been intrusted with by the duelist was accomplished.

The boy yet remained, and although the words he had heard Hoskins boastfully utter had created a suspicion in his mind that Mason had fallen with Custer's command, he intended remaining in the vicinity until this could be proven by searching the battle-field.

Shortly after passing the bluffs where Reno was battling with overwhelming numbers of crafty foemen, the giant made a sudden sweep with the paddle, and turned the prow toward the shore.

As the boat struck, he sprang out and pulled it into a clump of bushes, which, with the reeds growing near the bank, proved an effectual hiding-place. Adele still sat motionless.

The giant addressed her, for the first time since starting on his water voyage, and Mason could see her tremble at the sound of his rough voice, as if it meant something of horror.

"Come, gal, we leave the creek here. There's a snug little hiding-place I intend taking you to, where there'll be no chance of discovery. Now that you're in my power again, I don't intend losing sight of you. You're in somebody's way, therefore you have to be removed. It depends on yourself how this is to be done. Two ways are open: one, by carrying you off to some foreign land; t'other, leaving you to the mercy of the forest beasts," and the unfeeling giant laughed to himself.

"And they would prove more merciful than such a monster as you," declared Adele, as she stepped from the unsteady boat and faced Red Goliath. How her eyes shone, as they flashed out the scorn born of her soul!

"Bravo! I see the little gal hain't lost her spirit yet. I acknowledge the corn without hesitation; hain't got such a thing as a heart; never had, either. Remember how I used to delight in pinching the wings of butterflies, and running pins through 'em when I was a little boy—which, considering my present size, was a long time ago. So you see, gal, I must be what they call a modern monstrosity, a man without a heart. However, I can say this hain't my doing. I only wanted to get a ransom from your mother; but this other fellow must step into the pie."

"Do you think I can't tell who you mean? It is a fit idea to originate with such a man as Luke Camden," said the girl, in scornful tones.

Red Goliath started, and when he spoke his voice was as gruff as ever.

"Remember, I mention no names. Now, gal, we'll be going. Give me your hand."

Adele drew back with a shudder of horror; willingly she would never touch it.

"I will walk beside you in plain view," she said.

"All right," growled the giant, who could not but notice the shudder and knew its import, and he looked at his hand as if half believing that he would see the red marks that had so often dyed it.

"All right, my gal; but remember no tricks, or as sure as there is life in the air we breathe, I shall shoot you down;" and as if to enforce this horrible threat, he whipped out a revolver.

Side by side, the man and his intended victim walked through the woods. When speaking of his method of traveling, stalked would be a better word, for he covered three or four feet with every step, so that Adele was compelled to almost run in order to keep up with him.

Neither of them saw the water-drenched form that flitted from tree to tree in their rear.

Half a mile, perhaps, was covered.

Mason, on several occasions, thought he heard a noise in his rear, as though the trailer himself was being trailed; but his attention being almost fully occupied in front, it soon passed from his mind.

The hills were reached at length, and the ascent commenced.

Before five minutes had passed Red Goliath came to a pause.

Before them a black orifice yawned in the rocks. The giant made Adele enter first, and himself followed after, as if afraid lest she should give him the slip after all.

Another moment and they stood in a cavern some twenty feet square, the dimensions of which could be seen by the star-light that found ingress through the large cracks above.

In spite of his protestations as to not harming her, there were dark thoughts in the mind of the giant.

Bloody deeds were every-day affairs with him; the girl stood in his way; therefore she must be removed.

Why he had not done the deed before I cannot say.

Perhaps, in the beginning his plan was different; and, once in the canoe, the outcry she would make might draw a cordon of enemies around him.

Red Goliath replaced his revolver and drew his knife, running his finger along the edge in a deliberate way.

His eyes gleamed like those of a snake, and appeared to fascinate the girl.

Not a word did the giant utter, but his actions needed no explanation.

He took a step towards Adele.

She sank on her knees terribly frightened at the savage monster's move.

The little hands were clasped and wrung despairingly, but they might just as well have appealed to a man of stone.

As the long blade was raised the light glittered along the steel.

"Be merciful, as you expect to receive mercy," moaned Adele.

The giant did not expect any mercy; at least his actions betokened as much, for, as if he had not heard her at all, he continued to advance.

Another step and he would be upon her.

She seemed to shrink even closer to the rocky floor, and seeing no hope in that ferocious countenance, covered her eyes with her hands to shut out the dread sight.

Unknown to himself, Red Goliath was sealing his own doom.

As the knife quivered in the air, and was just about to descend, Mason's voice rang out through the cavern.

CHAPTER XV.

A MAN WHO NEVER BROOKED AN INSULT.

Once within the rifle pits, Pandy Ellis drew his breath more easily, for the present danger was over.

The first person he met was garbed as an officer, and this man, although brave as a lion, proved to be an arrogant fellow in this time of danger.

"Whar kin I see Major Reno?" asked the ranger, laying his hand on the arm of the officer, a familiarity he seemed to resent, for he shook it off as he turned haughtily toward the other.

"What are you doing here, fellow, when all brave men are at work?"

Pandy smiled a little.

He entertained a curious feeling toward the army.

In one way he felt a contempt for them, and then again he almost revered everything pertaining to the great governmental system.

"Because I've jest come in; crawled among the reds. Been wid Custer, an' by ther Lord Harry, seen ther general an' every man wiped out," said Pandy.

"Look here, fellow; what canard is this?" demanded the officer.

The ranger overlooked the insulting speech; for he knew that what he said was astounding news.

His tone was dignified when he repeated it, however.

"I said Custer, Cooke, Gates, Keogh and every man of 'em had gone under."

"It is impossible, man alive; there is something behind this. Look here, fellow, do you know what we do with spies?" A vague notion had entered the officer's head that this might be a ruse of the enemy to force Reno to surrender.

Pandy's eyes flashed fire; here was something he could not stand.

"Do ye know what I would do wid such cusses as you? Wal, sir, I'd jist snap ye atween my fingers like a pipe-stem, bust me ef I wudn't," said Pandy, grimly.

"And this to me!" exclaimed the officer, in such a tragic voice, that had Pandy ever read Scott's works he would have been reminded of Marmion and the noble earl, Lord Douglas. "Who the devil are you, sir, may I inquire?"

It was evident that the man in authority had taken the ranger for one of the regular scouts belonging to the expedition, until his thoughts ranged on something worse.

"What am I? A free ranger; man who never took an insult in his life from red or white. Who am I? I reckon I'm a man, sir, which is more than kin be sed o' you. My name? I never was ashamed of

it. If ye'll go an' let Major Reno know what I told you, an' say ter him that Pandy Ellis sent ye, thar'll be no more sed about the matter."

The soldier leaned forward, and peered at the thin face of this leathern-clad warrior. Pandy stood like a rock, and their eyes met.

"It's him; curse me if I haven't put my foot into it;" and, wheeling about, the officer strode away, his sword jingling musically when it came in contact with the spur that adorned his heels. He never reported to Major Reno, as a ball laid him low not three minutes afterward.

Pandy Ellis was a curious fellow, taciturn, one might call him. Although he fought through the night side by side with the cavalrymen, he never once mentioned a word of what he had seen, supposing the officer had reported to Reno, and that the major did not communicate the news to his men for fear of disheartening them. His duty had been done in this respect, and he was satisfied, although, of course, the ranger could not help wondering why he was not called upon to give a full report of the awful battle. [Pg 12]

The night passed in those rifle pits, with death hovering close by, and seizing upon a comrade every little while, will never be forgotten by those who have survived the dread ordeal.

Again and again did the Indians attempt to force their position, only to fall back in confusion from the defense offered by those valorous sons of the republic who fought on with the black shadow hovering above them and the bullets, commanding their position, rattling about their ears.

It was a moment to be remembered until time shall be no more.

Morning broke at last, but did not materially change their prospects; for what was a benefit to them proved the same to their foes; each side could now make their bullets tell.

Brave men fell during the day—men whose records in the memory of their fellow-soldiers will doubtless be their only monuments.

Pandy fought through it all like a hero.

It was familiar business to the veteran ranger; and it might be noticed that every time he fired (which was frequently) he cut a fresh little notch on the handle of his tomahawk.

Pandy Ellis was the first man to avenge the death of Custer and his men.

As the day wore on, even the most cheerful began to grow discouraged.

Surrounded by tireless enemies thirsting for their blood; without water to quench the fierce longing that commenced to prey upon them; and no signs of aid from either Custer or Terry, their case was indeed becoming desperate.

It was late in the afternoon of the 26th of June, that keen-eyed Pandy Ellis discovered that the Indians' village had vanished, so far as lodges and people were concerned.

This gave him grounds for hope, which feeling was soon communicated to the rest of the devoted band.

It was evident that Terry or else Gibbon, perhaps, had arrived, and that the Indians were ready for retreat, although they intended holding Reno under their thumbs as long as possible.

Word must be sent, or by some oversight the remnant of the gallant Seventh might be left to perish on the field, and those rifle pits become their graves.

Pandy Ellis at once volunteered to accomplish this duty.

How he ever managed to dash through the redskins and live, will probably ever remain a mystery, but he did it.

A bullet touched his arm, three more cut his clothing, and, at the last instant, the cavalry horse he rode was shot from under him; but in spite of all this, the brave ranger carried the news to General Terry.

As the soldiers advanced the Indians retired, and the remnant of the Seventh Cavalry was saved.

Sleep seemed very sweet to those tired heroes that night; that much I can vouch for.

"Hold!" Mason shouted this word as if he possessed the fire of a Forest or an Edwin Booth.

Involuntarily the giant became motionless. It was only for a few seconds, however, and the deadly knife would have descended after all.

A pistol crack rang out with startling distinctness, awakening the echoes of this subterranean place. The boy trailer had fired; his prey had been tracked down, and the closing scene of the tragedy drew near.

Red Goliath dropped his blade with a howl, and clapped his hand up to his left shoulder, where the lodging-place of the bullet could be seen by the blood that wet his flannel shirt.

Two inches from his heart; not a bad shot, considering the excitement consequent upon the termination of the chase, and the dim light afforded by the cracks above, and yet it came very near costing the boy his life.

After shooting, in his eagerness to prevent the monster from doing Adele any harm in his dying

moments (thinking his shot fatal), Mason sprang forward and presented his revolver.

It was a bad move on his part. Although agile beyond all calculation, his excitement made him less cautious than was his custom.

Red Goliath gave a singular cry when the boy appeared, for he recognized him at once, even though the young gentleman he had seen in New Orleans was now clad in the fanciful garb of a hunter.

In spite of his astonishment, the man did not lose his presence of mind an iota.

He saw the leveled revolver, and gave it a knock that sent the weapon spinning to the other end of the cavern, and the next instant the boy was clasped by the giant's one useful arm.

Once in that grasp, Mason's struggles were those of an infant, and he was soon thrown upon his back. A heavy knee upon his chest held him down, and he was compelled to see the giant reach over and, with his left arm, pick up the long knife.

Then eye glared at eye.

Mason's did not flinch at the blood-shot orbs that were fastened upon him.

He saw that blade ascend, but beyond a slight shudder it did not seem to affect him.

Red Goliath now realized what a climax affairs had reached, and he could not forego the temptation to tantalize the boy before dispatching him.

"There you lie, my little man, and there you're going to lie forever. Thought to get the best of me, did you? Aha! Red Goliath has passed through the jaws of death too often to give in to a mere stripling. The fates work in my favor. Hoskins found out what it meant to meddle with such a dangerous customer; now I'm going to give you a taste. Say your prayers, young man, for your seconds are numbered on this earth."

Higher rose the blade, as the giant gathered strength for a mighty stroke.

Yet the boy's eyes did not quiver, but remained fastened on those of his enemy. A minute would seem an eternity at such a time.

Red Goliath was purposely delaying his blow, to make the death agony more potent; but he hesitated too long.

A hand that could grip like a vise caught the upraised arm, and the giant looked up to find himself face to face with Chevalier Bolly Wherrit.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT FATE HAS ORDAINED.

Adele had for ancestors, on her father's side of the house, valiant Frenchmen, and she inherited some of their courage.

Red Goliath had paid no attention to her after Mason so suddenly appeared upon the scene of action, and in this disregard he proved his complete ignorance of the young girl's bravery.

When she saw the one she loved so well in the power of this rough assassin, all fear fled for the time being from her heart, and she was brave.

While she alone had been threatened Adele could not help being terror-stricken, but now the case was quite altered.

The revolver that had been knocked from Mason's hand (General Custer's revolver) lay near the young girl. Her eyes had followed its course through the air mechanically, and as she realized what power lay in the little weapon, her eyes flashed. She sprang forward and picked it up.

Just at this instant a man clad in a buckskin, and whose face bore the impress of nature's nobleman, stepped into view. He held up a hand toward Adele, as if telling her to remain a passive spectator, and she, willing to trust her cause in such hands, suffered the revolver that had been raised with so determined a purpose to fall to her side.

One bound, like that of a panther, served to bring Bolly Wherrit in a position where he could enter into the game. As his iron hand came down upon the brawny arm of the giant Hercules, the latter looked up with a startled look. It was his last word upon earth, the curse he uttered; for the ranger buried his knife in that broad chest, with the force of an avenger, and threw the dying monster upon the rocky floor. Mason sprang up and took Adele away to the other end of the cavern, in order that she might not witness what a terrible thing death was.

I shall not dwell upon the convulsive movements of the stricken giant.

Twice he essayed to pull out a revolver, but each time Bolly kicked his arm; and thus foiled of his devilish purpose, the savage man died, foaming at the mouth.

Bolly stood contemplating the body with folded arms.

There was something fascinating, and at the same time repulsive, in the bulky form lying so quiet in the arms of death, and the gray-haired ranger shook his head as he turned away.

"It run agin the grain, that blow did, but 'twar either his life or yers, and I took the choice. He was a fine man in shape, but a devil in mind. Wal, it's the fate o' us all; and the only wonder air how ye've 'scaped so long. Young feller, I reckon az how yer name must be Mason Pierrepont?" said the ranger.

"It is, sir, and to whom are we indebted for this great service," said the boy, clasping an arm tighter around Adele than the circumstances seemed to warrant, seeing that she was only an adopted daughter of his mother.

His words contained a dignity that compelled Bolly to respect him.

"Bolly Wherrit air my name, tho' that ain't o' much consequence. Yer mother engaged me to come arter the leetle gal yonder. Unfortunately I war taken prisoner, but escaped during the fight yesterday. Kin ye tell me anything about it?"

Mason graphically, but concisely, gave an account of Custer's annihilation, at which the old ranger stood aghast, and it was several moments before he recovered.

"Heavens! but that war orful. Arter that I'm death on the reds. And ye say my chum Pandey Ellis war in it? If they've rubbed out—but no; sech a thing air impossible; Pandey couldn't die so easy. Custer kilt Black Sculley wid his last shot, did he? Then thar's another boarder jest gone. But poor Custer, an' Cooke, handsome Cooke, and Yates, wid whom I've bunked many's the time. Poor boys, it's a bad piece o' bizness, but ef they've kilt my Pandey Ellis, then the world won't be big enuff ter hide ole Sitting Bull an' his chiefs from Bolly Wherrit's rifle;" and the set teeth proclaimed every word meant as it was uttered.

By comparing notes, Mason and the ranger came to a good understanding, and realized the situation of affairs across the river pretty accurately.

It was while they were debating as to their future course, that an alarm occurred in the shape of the sudden appearance of an Indian, who had stumbled upon the cave by accident, as his surprise would seem to indicate.

The prairie ranger proved too quick for the red American, however, and hurling himself upon the Indian, he brought him to the ground.

Here he was speedily secured, with Mason's assistance, and rolled into a corner for safe-keeping.

Fearing lest more of these unwelcome guests should make their appearance, Bolly took his station in the passage leading to the cavern, and there remained all night, while Mason and Adele slept within, or at least made a pretense of sleeping.

But the darkness passed away without any alarm, and daylight found them in the same order, only that all signs of the dead giant had strangely vanished from the cavern, in which mystery Bolly was a participant.

Leaving the others, the ranger went out on a scout, and came back in an hour or so with the news that the remainder of the cavalry were intrenched among the hills on the other side of the river, and battling with the Sioux.

Bolly also brought with him the choice portion of a deer he had shot.

It took but a short time to gather fuel, and soon the olfactories of our friends were greeted by the delicious aroma of roasting venison.

Breakfast dispatched, the situation was discussed again, and at the end of the council it was decided best to remain where they were, and await the movement of the troops.

Mason being acquainted with Custer's intended plans of operation, knew that Terry might be expected, and it might be safer for them to leave in the care of the soldiers, for the vicinity seemed swarming with Indians.

Thus the day passed.

In the evening Bolly took another scout, and witnessed the arrival of General Terry's men.

He was soon with the heroes who had fought so long under Major Reno, and almost the first person he ran across was his chum.

It would have done a philosopher good to have witnessed the meeting between these great-hearted men, each of whom feared the other was dead.

A pressure of the hand that spoke volumes was followed by the expressive glance.

Words fail on such an occasion to convey the idea that other things can tell.

Bolly did not wait to see any of the officers, although many of them were known to him, but rushed his chum to the other side of the river, where he made him acquainted with Mason and Adele.

That night the quartette of friends spent in the cave, enjoying themselves with yarns and good cheer.

In the morning, Bolly proposed a start, urged by the young girl's desire to see home, and the agony of that lady mother in the Southern city, whose tears had accomplished what money alone could never have done.

After reaching Laramie, rapid transit was obtained, and, before many days passed by, the city of New Orleans was reached.

Madame Pierrepont fulfilled all her promises to Bolly, and still thinks that everything she owns would be inadequate to recompense him for saving her dear son and adopted daughter.

I have grave suspicions (aroused by some of young Mason's warm *brotherly* actions) that the time is not far distant when his wealthy mother will receive pretty Adele as her own daughter, but perhaps they are too young as yet for more than surmises on my part.

[Pg 13]

Pandy Ellis and his partner started for the field of action again, and by the time this reaches the reader's eye, they will doubtless be at the side of impetuous Major Burt or some other of Cooke's gallant officers.

On their way we lose sight of these princes of the prairies, but let us hope it will not be forever.

Alas! poor Custer!

His memory will ever be green in the memory of his fellow-soldiers.

The whole country mourns his loss, and well they may, for a more dashing, chivalrous, valiant cavalry chief never led his men to battle, and though willful at times, his other qualities completely hid this fault.

Who among us can stand forth, and pointing to himself, say, "Look at me, and take a lesson. I am faultless?" Not one, I am sure.

And with Custer fell the flower of the army; noble men whose names shall ever be cherished by all lovers of the good and brave.

That Pandy Ellis was their first real avenger the reader already knows.

Whether retribution shall overtake Sitting Bull and his warriors, or not, time alone will tell.

As to the movements of the troops under Terry, also those under Cooke, the reader can glean fresher news from the daily papers than I can give.

At present it seems that the Northwest will be the scene of a bloody Indian war which can only terminate with the extermination of the warriors engaged.

As to Pedro Sanchez, he has recovered from the wounds received at the hands of his former companion, Red Goliath, but trembles whenever left alone, for he has in some way heard of the terrible oath sworn by Pandy Ellis to have his life; and if there is one man in the world whom the French Spaniard fears it is the veteran trapper chief.

From the limited papers at my command I have drawn this tale out of the terrible death-ride still so fresh in the public mind, and now that Custer has gone to join his brave fellow-officers in the spirit world, I hope all his faults, such as they were, may be overlooked, and due reverence shown for the name of our missing hero.

[THE END.]

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

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Retained inconsistent spellings in dialect (e.g. "yallar-haired" vs. "yaller-haired").

Retained some inconsistent hyphenation (e.g. "red-skin" vs. "redskin").

Page 2, changed period to question mark after "fight fur her cubs?"

Page 3, added missing apostrophe to "thar's" in "thar's eggscitin' times comin'." Corrected "Indion" to "Indian" in "through the Indian camp." Changed "Scully" to "Sculley" for consistency with later appearances.

Page 4, corrected "entertained suspicious" to "entertained suspicions;" "on the drags" to "on the crags;" and "had accidentally became" to "had accidentally become." Corrected "Bowie" to "Bowie."

Page 5, changed "cry of a participant" to "eye of a participant." Changed "powder-begrimmed" to "powder-begrimed." Corrected "Wherritt" to "Wheritt" ("Bolly Wheritt proved too willing").

Page 6, removed duplicate "a" from "battle and not a massacre." Changed comma to period after "all sorts of plunder." Added missing "r" to "I can and do affirm."

Page 7, added missing period after "sumpin important." Corrected "detestion" to "detestation." Changed "world" to "word" in "that word 'gal.'"

Page 8, corrected "cautiousty" to "cautiously" ("slowly and cautiously"). Corrected "firs" to "furs" ("pile of furs lay just within").

Page 9, corrected "disinguished" to "distinguished" ("slain his distinguished foeman"). Added missing apostrophe to "Pedro's hands failed to do their duty." Corrected "miscreat" to "miscreant" ("flattening the miscreant").

Page 10, corrected "puled" to "pulled" ("Bolly pulled it out again").

Page 11, changed "know" to "known" ("is already known"). Added missing apostrophe to "think I can't tell." Corrected "semed" to "seemed" ("familiarity he seemed to resent"). Corrected "uuder"

to "under" ("every man of 'em had gone under").

Page 12, changed "gripe" to "grip" in "grip like a vise." Corrected period to question mark in "Kin ye tell me anything about it?" Corrected "situaion" to "situation" ("situation was discussed again").

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CUSTER'S LAST SHOT; OR, THE BOY TRAILER OF THE LITTLE HORN ***

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