THE FADING LIGHT OF DAY.

"Jenny, gather up the scraps, and Hetty, bring the broom;
Sally, push the settle back and tidy up the room;
Now's the time, 'twixt day and dark, to clear the work away;
For the morn make ready by the fading light of day.

"Come, my boys, bring in the wood and split the kindling nne,
Fetch some water from the spring and feed the waiting kine;
You'll not need the lantern, lads, the twilight's clear and gray,
Haste and you will finish by the fading light of day."

Thus the dear housemother spake, still busy all the while,
Helping girls and cheering boys with gentle word and smile,
Till the tasks were ended and the sons and daughters gay
Gathered round the fireplace by the fading light of day.

Scattered, scattered, far and wide, in distant lands, and dead;
Long the grass has waved above the gentle mother's head;
But at nightfall even yet I seem to hear her say,
"For the morn make ready by the fading light of day.'

Wiser now, methinks therein that hidden meanings lurk,
Teaching ere that night shall come "wherein no man can work"
Every soul be girded ready; God alone can say
If our eyes again behold the fading light of day.
—Boston Transcript.

THE STRESS OF THE TRAIL

AT midnight "Big Jeff" poked his head out from under the tarpaulin and peered through the murk. For half a minute, perhaps, he listened tentatively; then he brushed away the snowflakes that had accumulated on his tousled hair, and snuggled back into the comfortable warmth of the blankets. He thrust a big fist, none too gently, against the ribs of his partner.

"What's the matter with yuh?" growled the "Freak," sleepily. "I ain't no punchin' bag."

"We're goin' t' get them steers t' the post t'-morrow—I don't think!" Big Jeff murmured. "The angels is pickin' geese for their Christmas dinner. From the way the feathers is flyin' there'll be about two feet of 'em in the mornin'."

The Freak protruded his head, only to withdraw it hastily.

"Holy smoker!" he muttered, "she's sure comin' thick. Wonder if them cattle's all right."

"Yes; I heard 'em a-woofin' an' tramplin' round in the corral a minute ago," Jeff assured him. "You better go t' sleep, m' son; no use layin' awake worryin'."

This seemed to the Freak the proper course to pursue. He wriggled into a comfortable posture, and soon the minor key of his snore mingled with the deep bass Big Jeff emitted.

In the old round-up corral, beside which their bed was made, a bunch of steers stood huddled together with tails to the storm, great masses of snow piling on their broad backs; outside, tied securely to a post, two ponies alternately pawed the ground and shivered under the oiled slickers that were spread across their loins. Save for the canvas bed-cover that sheltered the two men, there was little comfort for beast or human that night; nothing but biting wind, that whistled keenly through the rails of the corral, and everywhere the silent, virgin snow, dropping swiftly earthward in huge, eddying flakes.

It was gray dawn when Big Jeff awoke again. He raised a corner of the tarpaulin, and a mass of snow fell on his face. The spluttering of him aroused the Freak. Profanely lamenting the necessity that drove them forth on such a trip, they groped about for their boots, drew them on, and emerged, in ugly temper, for there were two feet of snow on top of the bed.

To the top rail of the corral the Freak climbed and glanced quickly over the cattle to the illimitable reaches beyond. Inside the corral, the cattle still stood hump-backed; outside, the horses still shivered under the protecting slickers; but the wind had died to a faint breath, and the sun glared unwinkingly at them as it balanced on the lower edge of a cloud-free sky. It was a perfect morning, save for the diamond frost that glinted in the rarefied air, and the ugly menace of the silent, white pall of snow that lay, belly-deep to a long-horn, on every foot of the land.

"See the horses?" queried Jeff, looking up from his task of kicking away the snow that covered their coffee pot and frying pan.

"Naw!" the Freak snorted, disgustedly. "There's nothin' t' be seen but this everlastin' snow. The chances are them nags is hittin' the high places for the Circle Four about this time. Hobbles wouldn't stop 'em after they got started, an' a storm like this would start most anything that wasn't tied hard an' fast."

"This here's sure hard luck," Jeff mourned, as he fanned an incipient blaze with his hat. "We're out of grub if we don't hit the post to-night—an' we won't git there before the next chinook if we don't have them horses t' break trail. An' we promised t' eat Christmas dinner with Bob Stewart an' the girls, yuh know, Freak."

"I know it," he answered, shortly.

They brooded silently over their coffee and fried bacon, sitting uneasily on their boot-heels. Fifteen miles of unbroken snow lay between them and the agency; a day's drive when the going was good—now, five miles of wallowing through the drifts would leave their cattle exhausted. A sudden freshening of the wind meant a blizzard—and the White Death plays a winning game on the open prairie when there is neither food, nor fire, nor shelter.

"We better go back a piece—eh, Jeff?" advised the Freak, as they untied their horses. "There's a little coulee, yuh remember, back about four miles. Maybe them cayuses located in that. There's little cut-banks along it."

"Sure," the big man answered, hopefully. "We got t' have 'em t' break a road for these critters. Maybe we'll run onto a bunch o' broom-tails—though I guess the Injuns keep 'em pretty well chased out o' here."

They turned the cattle out of the corral to browse around as best they could; there was little danger of their straying far. Not voluntarily would they trample their way through the encompassing snow.

On top of a little eminence, half a mile from the coulee of which the Freak had spoken, they halted. Back at the corral they could see the bunch of cattle—a black blot on the dazzling white page of the prairie; before them spread away a vast expanse of monotonous level; for many miles the brown breast of the earth was clothed in the glittering robes of winter.

"Ugh!" Big Jeff shivered. "Not a blasted horse in sight! I guess we better go back an' try to shove them cattle through the best we can."

For answer, the Freak pointed down the coulee which they overlooked. "Ain't that a smoke down there?" he interrogated, anxiously.

It was smoke, Big Jeff averred. Toward it they headed their horses, plodding patiently. As they came nearer, the almost invisible exhalation developed into a half-dozen well-defined blue spirals, floating straight up through the tranquil atmosphere. They eyed them with disfavor; and, when rounding a bend of the coulee, they came upon a bunch of scrubby ponies, orange buckskins and gayly marked pintos predominating in number, the Freak pulled up in disgust.

"A bunch of skulkin' Gros Ventres!" he lamented. Lot o' good they'll do us."

"Maybe we could get 'm t' break trail for us," Jeff hazarded, hopefully. "It's worth quite a bit to the outfit, yuh know, t' get them cattle through; an' maybe some o' these buckos wouldn't mind makin' a few spondulicks."

"Won't do no hurt t' try, I reckon," admitted the Freak, "but these here Gros Ventres are lazier than a fat cow in July. I know 'em."

So they rode to the teepee that, by its size and ornamentation, they judged to be the abode of the chief. In many Indian dialects was the Freak versed, and so he was able to state their wants with dignity and much sonorous language.

But the chief grunted disapproval. His ponies were weary, he said, and the snow was deep. Also his young men were weary, and the smoke of the teepee fires was strong in their nostrils. Therefore the trail could not be broken for his white brothers, even though he offered much flat silver.

This the Freak communicated to Jeff as they rode away. Around the bend, past the Indian ponies, Jeff pulled up his horse. He curled one chap-encased leg around the saddle-horn, and eyed the Freak.

"How many ponies they got tied up in camp?" he asked, suddenly. "Did yuh notice, m' son"

"Two was all I seen. Why?"

"An' if them two was loose, they'd be afoot, wouldn't they? Big Jeff went on, ignoring the question.

"Why, yes, I guess they would. But what if they was?"

"I'll tell yuh." Jeff swung his horse closer to the Freak, and lowered his voice—though there was none within three hundred yards to hear. At intervals, the Freak nodded his head and ejaculated "Sure!" with much emphasis. Then Big Jeff resumed his normal position in the saddle, and they turned back to the Gros Ventre camp.

"The white brothers of the chief of the Gros Ventres," the Freak orated, "have little grub wherewith to face the deep snows, and their stomachs would be as the stomach of the gray wolf ere they reach the wooden teepees of the White Father at Snake Butte. Can the great chief spare a few pounds of flour and a leg of deer meat? His white brothers will give many pieces of flat silver."

Yes, the great chief could—for flat silver.

The transfer accomplished, the Freak reached the bundle up to Jeff, who sat on his horse, a silent spectator. As Jeff leaned to take it from him, his horse snorted and lashed out wickedly behind. A dun cayuse, meek of mien and small of stature, stood directly in his rear, tied to the wheel of a Red River cart; against his ribs the hoofs of Jeff's horse whacked loudly. Startled by the unexpected onslaught, the pony jerked violently against the tie-rope. It parted, and he scurried for the bunch like a frightened rabbit, Jeff giving chase.

"Let not the chief be alarmed," the Freak shouted. "His pony shall be brought back to his teepee."

He mounted hastily, did the Freak, not forgetting to keep tight hold of the sack. Calling assurances to the chief and to the bucks, who were swarming out of the lodges, he started after Jeff. But his horse was taken with a sudden madness, and bucked high and crookedly. At the next teepee a pinto was tied to an ancient sleigh. Between the sleigh and the pony's head the Freak's horse plunged, rearing, kicking, leaping high.

Presently the pinto also scurried up the coulee, with the Freak in hot pursuit; and save for their own indolent legs, the Gros Ventres were without means of locomotion.

"Crowd 'em, old boy!" the Freak yelled, as he turned the bend. "Next thing on the program is angry Injuns burnin' powder!"

"Say," he cried, breathlessly, to Jeff as he reached the bunch, "yuh ought to seen old 'Rock' do the Wild West act. He sure did things to that pinto when I throwed the hooks into him."

They fell upon the ponies with swishing ropes and tempestuous profanity. Through the drifts that barred their way they urged the herd to a floundering gallop. Enveloped in a cloud of snow-dust kicked up by the flying heels, they swept up out of the coulee, and almost gained the knoll from which they had spied the camp, ere the first bullet whinged futilely after them.

Big Jeff waved a gloved hand, and his deep laugh went bellowing across the white waste.

"Look at 'em, Freak!" he chortled. "The whole tribe is after us. Them dark-complected boys would sure do business with us if they was close enough."

"You bet!" the Freak responded. "And them brunette ladies would sure love to wind their fingers in our hair."

"Say," the Freak observed, as they topped the little ridge, "some o' them bucks is pretty good runners, I notice. Now I don't hanker t' have 'em catch up with us after we start with them cattle. I tell yuh, Jeff, you pike for the corral an' get the bed on one o' these cayuses. I'll stay on this pinnacle here an' snap a few caps at 'em. That'll hold 'em till you get ready t' start—an' then I'll come a-runnin'."

"I hate t' leave yuh, Freak," Jeff grumbled, "but I guess it's a good scheme."

"Don't yuh stay too long," he warned over his shoulder, as he crowded forward on the heels of the herd.

A score of young bucks were trotting swiftly along in the beaten track of the horses. At intervals a rifle would pop, like the breaking of a frosted willow, but the distance was too great for their guns to carry. Back on the bank of the coulee, the squaws and pappooses were massed, mutely witnessing. The yelping clamor of the mongrel dogs came indistinctly to the ears of the Freak.

He drew his rifle from the scabbard and pumped a cartridge into the chamber. Dropping on one knee in the powdery snow, he sent a steel-jacketed missile humming sinisterly along the back trail. The pursuing Indians dropped on their faces with a celerity that made the Freak smile. It was a close shot—very close, as he had meant it to be.

It was nearly an hour before the Freak swung stiffly upon his horse and loped away. Like bloodhounds the Indians struck the trail again, tramping doggedly, mile after mile. But Big Jeff and the Freak had a five-mile start, and they held their own. The long-horns, gaunt and hungry, traveled fast, stepping close up to the horses that, perforce, broke trail.

"This here's a swell way o' spending Christmas Eve," the Freak yelled across the backs of the plodding cattle to Jeff, who drove the horses ahead.

"Never yuh mind, Freak—there's good times comin'. Just cast your eye ahead."

He did, and the sight gladdened him. For behind them the sun was down and the wind was rising; but the brown mass of the agency upheaved its bulk before them. In half an hour they had swung down Wild Horse, under the shadow of Snake Butte, and Big Jeff was howling lustily at the agent's door.

A befurred receiving clerk counted the cattle into a corral and handed Big Jeff a receipt for their delivery.

"We can make it t' old Bob's tomorrow in time for dinner easy," Big Jeff exulted, as he removed the bed from the back of the dun pony and threw it into a shed beside the corral. "I'm sure thankful, Freak, that we ain't out on the bald prairie t'-night."

"Same here," the Freak responded, tersely. "But I reckon we better give these runty cayuses a good shoot along the back trail—I guess them Injuns 'd appreciate a ride back t' camp—an' then go up an' square ourselves with the agent before we get pinched for horse stealin'.—San Francisco Argonaut.

A DAY OF REST.

Old-Fashioned, Quiet Routine for Sunday Now Laid Aside.

Sunday, from being a day of rest for man and beast, has become the busiest day of the week. So many society people live in the suburbs that the English week-end parties have become an established custom in this country, and the guests must be amused. Dinners, at homes, and musicales, not only in town, but out of town, have become the regulation mode of entertainment for that day. Sunday, too, is the day now selected for repairing streets and altering car tracks in the business sections, which it is impossible to do during the rush and crowding of the week.

The old-fashioned Sunday has disappeared—that slow, easy-going day of rest and family reunion, when church and a good, solid dinner were the only distractions, and Sunday papers were of small import. Simple pleasures, and yet how restful!

The city's growth and the opening of new and convenient routes by the trolleys are in a great measure responsible for the change, and the truthful excuse is given that Sunday is the only day that one is free to visit. But have the majority this excuse, or is the feverish rush after excitement and novelty?

What would the Pilgrim fathers have to say if they saw the very vanities they had turned from in the old world becoming daily more established in the new? Think of the austerity of the Puritan Sunday—the long journey to church, the long, tedious service—and it cannot be wondered at that a reaction should ensue. Then came the Sundays of the last century—the Sundays when breakfast was deferred to an hour later than on week days. Oh, the luxury of that extra hour's sleep! The regulation Sunday breakfast of hot bread or griddle cakes, and the haste to be ready in time for church, for to church or meeting one must go, unless able to give some plausible excuse. The children all went to church, too, in those days, and if the sermon seemed endless and far beyond the comprehension of such youthful listeners there was always the compensation of dropping the bright penny on the collection plate, or watching poor old Mr. Plank nodding gently and waking with a start at regular intervals. Sacrilegious amusements without doubt but compensating in a measure for the penance of sitting still, which is so irksome to the young. How much the children enjoyed being allowed to keep on their best clothes in honor of the day! Light literature was tabooed, only to make it more enjoyable during the week and there was the solace of knowing that if story books were forbidden, lessons, too, were laid aside. Childish and simple this sounds now, yet how restful that Sunday routine in modern ears! —Washington Star.

A Worm's Skin.

The Annelid Podynce cirrata is a mean-looking worm about an inch and a half in length, of flattened shape, blunt at both ends, apparently covered by a smooth skin of a dull brown color. On being touched it throws itself into elegant serpentine curves, and then what appears to be the upper skin is seen to be composed of a great number of round, flat, membranous plates or shields, arranged in two rows, overlapping each other. These, though of larger size, are attached to the body only by a small point in the center of their sides, so that when the animal moves the edges of these shields are lifted and reveal their live structure, sliding upon each other in a singular manner.

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"Sheriff's, I guess," replied the owner, who had just looked over the steward's accounts.—Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune.

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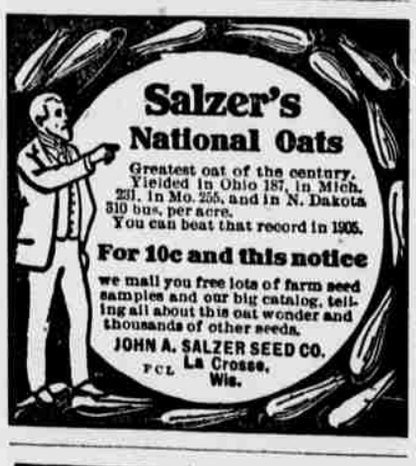

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