

THE RED TRAIL

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER I.

Toward the end of June, 1854, a well mounted traveler, carefully wrapped up in the thick folds of a sarape, raised to his eyes, was following one of the most precipitous slopes of the Sierra of the Wind river, at no great distance from the source of the Green river, that great western Colorado which pours its waters into the Gulf of California.

It was about seven in the evening; the traveler rode along, shivering from the effects of an icy wind which whistled mournfully through the canyons. All around had assumed a saddening aspect in the vacillating moonbeams. He rode on without hearing the footfall of his horse, as it fell on the winding sheet of snow that covered the landscape; at times the capricious windings of the track he was following compelled him to pass through thickets, whose branches, bent by the weight of snow, stood out before him like gigantic skeletons, and struck each other after he had passed with a sullen snap.

The traveler continued his journey, looking anxiously on both sides of him. His horse, fatigued by a long ride, stumbled at every step, and in spite of the repeated encouragement of its rider seemed determined to stop short, when, after turning an angle in the track, it suddenly entered a large clearing, where the close-growing grass formed a circle about forty yards in diameter and the verdure formed a cheery contrast with the whiteness that surrounded it.

"Heaven be praised!" the traveler exclaimed in excellent French, "here is a spot where I can camp for to-night without any excessive inconvenience."

While thus speaking the traveler had stopped his horse and dismounted. His first attention was paid to his horse, from which he removed the saddle and bridle, and which he covered with his sarape, appearing to attach no importance to the cold, which was, however, extremely severe in these elevated regions. So soon as it was free the animal, in spite of its fatigue, began browsing heartily on the grass, and thus reassured about his companion, the traveler began thinking about making arrangements for the night.

It was no easy task to find dry firewood at a spot almost denuded of trees, and whose soil, covered with snow, except in the clearing, allowed nothing to be distinguished; but the traveler was patient, he would not be beaten, and within an hour he had collected sufficient wood to feed through the night two such fires as he proposed kindling.

"Ah! ah," said the traveler, "the fire will do, so now for supper."

Then fumbling in the double pockets, which travelers always carry fastened to the saddle, he took from them all the requisite elements of a frugal meal; that is to say, pemican and tassaio, or meat dried in the sun. At the moment when, after shutting up his alforzas, the traveler raised his head to lay his meat on the embers to broil, he stopped motionless, with widely opened mouth, and it was only through a mighty strength of will that he suppressed a cry of surprise and possibly of terror. Although no sound had reached his presence, a man, leaning on a long rifle, was standing motionless before him and gazing at him with profound attention.

At once mastering the emotion he felt, the traveler carefully laid the tassaio on the embers, and then without removing his eye from this strange visitor, he stretched out his arm to grasp his rifle, while saying in a tone of the most perfect indifference:

"Whether friend or foe, you are welcome, mate. 'Tis a bitter night, so if you are cold, warm yourself, and if you are hungry, eat. When your nerves have regained their elasticity and your body its usual strength we will have a frank explanation, such as men of honor ought to have."

The stranger remained silent for some seconds; then, after shaking his head several times, said in a low and melancholy voice, as if speaking to himself:

"Can any human being really exist in whose heart a feeling of pity still remains?"

"Make the trial, mate," the traveler answered, "by accepting without hesitation my hearty offer. Two men who meet in the desert must be friends, unless private reasons make them implacable enemies. Sit down and eat."

This dialogue had been held in Spanish, a language the stranger spoke with a facility that proved his Mexican origin. He seemed to reflect for a moment and then instantly made up his mind.

"I accept," he said, "for your voice is too sympathetic and your glance too frank to deceive."

"That is the way to speak," the traveler said gaily. "Sit down and eat without further delay."

The stranger smiled sadly. The two men then attacked with no ordinary vigor the provisions placed before them. The general appearance of the stranger was most wretched and his ragged clothes scarce covered his bony, fleshless body; while his pale and sickly features were rendered more sad and gloomy by a thick, disordered beard that fell on his chest. His eyes, inflamed by fever and surrounded by black circles, glistened with a sombre fire. His weapons were in as bad a condition as his clothes, yet there was in him something grand and sympathetic which aroused not only pity but also respect for torture so proudly hidden and so nobly endured. This man, in short, ere he fell so low, must have been great, either in virtue or in vice; but assuredly there was nothing common about him and a mighty heart beat in his bosom.

There was a rather long silence, during which the two men indulged in thought. The wind howled fiercely over their heads, the eddying snow was piling up around them and the echoes of the canyons seemed to utter notes of complaint. It was a horrible night. Beyond the circle of light produced by the flickering flame of the watch fire all was buried in dense gloom.

"Now that the ice is broken between

down. The chief was the first to reach the bottom, and I fell upon his body, which deadened my fall. I cannot say how long I remained in this state, but I fancy my faint must have lasted two hours. When I opened my eyes again, I found myself in utter darkness. That did not trouble me greatly, as I had about me everything necessary to light a fire. Within a few moments I had a light, and was enabled to look about me. I was lying at the bottom of a species of tunnel, for the pit grew narrower in its descent. When I reached the floor of the cavern, I lay for more than half an hour on the sand, exhausted, panting, unable to make the slightest movement. Fortunately for me this terrible condition did not last long, for the refreshing air from without, reaching me through the passages of the cavern, recovered me. The ground around me was covered with dead bodies, and there had, doubtless, been a terrible struggle. I sought in vain for the corpses of Dona Anita and her father. I breathed again, and hope re-entered my heart. Those for whom I had given my life were saved. This thought restored my courage, and I felt quite a different man. I rose without any excessive difficulty, and supporting myself on my rifle, went toward the mouth of the cavern, after removing my stock of provision, and taking two powder horns from stores I had previously cached. No words can describe the emotion I felt when, after a painful walk through the grotto, I at length reached the river bank, and saw the sun once more.

"An hour later, mounted on my good horse, I bent my steps toward houses. My journey was a long one, and when I reached Sonora the news I heard almost drove me mad. Don Sylva de Torres had been killed in the fight with the Apaches, and was probably his daughter. For a month I hovered between life and death. When hardly convalescent, I dragged myself to the house of the only man competent of giving me precise information. This man refused to recognize me, although I had been intimate with him for many years. When I told him my name he laughed in my face, and when I insisted, he had me expelled by his peons, telling me that I was mad, that Don Martial was dead, and I an impostor. I went away with rage and despair in my heart. After this all my friends to whom I presented myself refused to recognize me, so thoroughly was the report of my death believed. All the efforts I attempted to dissipate this alarming mistake and prove the falsehood of the rumor were in vain, for too many persons were interested in it being true, on account of my large estates; and also, I suppose, through a fear of injuring the man to whom I first applied—the only living relation of the Torres family. What more need I tell you? Dismayed in every way, heartbroken with grief, and recognizing the inutilty of the efforts I had made, I left the town, and mounting my horse, returned to the desert, seeking the most unknown spots and the most desolate regions in which to hide myself.

"Brother," Valentine said, gently, "you have forgotten to tell me the name of that influential person who had you turned out of his house, and treated you as an impostor."

"That is true," Don Martial answered. "His name is Don Sebastian Guerrero, and he is military governor of the province of Sonora."

"Don Martial," cried the hunter, "you may thank heaven for decreeing that we should meet in the desert, in order that the punishment of this man should be complete."

(To be continued.)

Saved the Stamp.

Congressman J. Van Vechten Olcott tells a story of a member of the house from Missouri whose economical habits attracted some attention among his colleagues. The Missouriian is serving his first term, and as he was elected as a Republican from a strongly Democratic district some of his fellow members were anxious to know how much his campaign expenses were. He was swept into Congress on the Roosevelt tidal wave. When the question was put to him he satisfied the curious ones with the reply:

"Well, you can figure it out for yourself. The convention nominated another man first and he sent a letter of declination. That cost him a 2-cent postage stamp. They then nominated me, and I did not mail my acceptance."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Didn't Wish to Interrupt.

A husband was being arraigned in court in a suit brought by his wife for cruelty.

"I understand, sir," said the judge, addressing the husband, "that one of the indignities you have showered upon your wife is that you have not spoken to her for three years. Is that so?"

"It is, your honor," quickly answered the husband.

"Well, sir," thundered the judge, "why didn't you speak to her, may I ask?"

"Simply," replied the husband, "because I didn't want to interrupt her."

Old Adage Comes Up.

Creditor (angrily)—Say, when are you going to pay the \$50 you owe me?

Debtor (calmly)—That query reminds me of the old adage.

Creditor—What old adage?

Debtor—The one about a fool's ability to ask questions that a wise man is unable to answer.

Church in Use 1,500 Years.

The oldest building in England that has been uninterruptedly used for church purposes is St. Martin's Cathedral at Canterbury. The building was originally erected for a church and has been regularly used as a place for religious gatherings for more than 1,500 years.

A Mismonger.

A lady with a very inharmonious voice attempted to sing a piece called "The Tempest." A sea captain remarked: "Don't be alarmed; it is not a tempest, it's only a squall, and will soon be over."

Germany has 294,000 acres of land devoted to grape culture.

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CHAPTER III.

Don Martial gazed at the hunter in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he asked him. "I don't understand you."

"You will soon do so, my friend," said Valentine. "How long have you been roaming about?"

"Nearly two months."

"In that case you are well acquainted, I presume, with these mountains?"

"There is not a tree or a rock whose exact position I cannot tell, nor a wild beast trail which I have not followed."

"Good; are we far from a spot called the 'Fort of the Chichimeques'?"

"I know the place to which you refer, and have often camped there on stormy nights, because there is a deep cavern, excavated by human hands, and divided into several passages, every turning of which I know."

"I was not aware of the existence of this grotto," the hunter said, with a glad start, "and I thank you for having told me of it. Are we any great distance from this terrace?"

"In a straight line, not more than five or six miles, and, if it were day, I could show it to you, but as we must ride round to reach the caravan road, we have about three hours' ride before us."

"That is a trifle, for I was afraid I had lost my way in these mountains, which are strange to me."

While saying this, Valentine had risen to explore the clearing. The storm had ceased, the wind had swept away the clouds, the deep blue sky was studded with brilliant stars, and the moon profusely shed its rays.

"'Tis a magnificent night," the hunter said. "It is past midnight, and I feel no inclination to sleep. Are you fatigued?"

"I am never so," the Tigero answered with a smile.

"In that case, what do you think of a ride in this magnificent moonlight? Bravo! that is what I call speaking. We will go, if you have no objection, as far as the Fort of the Chichimeques."

"I was about to propose it; and, as we ride along, you will tell me in your turn what motive compelled you to come to these unknown regions."

"As for that," the hunter said, with a smile, "I cannot satisfy you; at any rate not for the present. But be easy, I will not put your patience to too long a trial."

"This happy meeting has already made a different man of me," the Tigero said, as he rose.

The hunter laid his hand on his shoulder. "One moment," he said to him; "before leaving this bivouac let us clearly agree as to our facts, so as to avoid any future misunderstanding."

"Be it so," Don Martial answered.

"Let us make a compact in the Indian fashion."

"Well said, my friend," Valentine remarked, as he drew his knife from his belt. "Here is my navaja, brother; may it serve you as it has done me to avenge your wrongs and mine."

"I receive it in the face of that heaven which I call as witness of the purity of my intentions. Take mine in exchange, and one-half my powder and bullets, brother."

"I accept it as a thing belonging to you, and here is half my ammunition for you; henceforth we cannot fire at one another, all is in common between us. My horse is yours."

"Mine belongs to you, and in a few moments I will place it at your service."

Then the two men, leaning shoulder to shoulder, with clasped hands, eyes fixed on heaven, and outstretched arm, uttered together the following words:

"I take heaven to witness that of my own free will, and without reservation, I take as my friend and brother the man whose hand is at this moment pressing mine. I will help him in everything he asks of me, without hope of reward, ready day and night to answer his first signal, without hesitation, and without reproach, even if he asked for my life."

There was something grand and solemn in this simple act, performed by these two powerful men beneath the pallid moonbeams, and in the heart of the desert, alone, far from all human society. After repeating the words of the oath they embraced and finally shook hands.

"Now let us be off, brother," Valentine said; "I confide in you as in myself; we shall succeed in triumphing over our enemies. By the bye, I must warn you, brother, that if you are not mistaken, and we are really following the road to the Fort of the Chichimeques, we shall probably meet several persons there; they are friends of mine, with whom I have an appointment and I will introduce them to you."

They set out again, still following the windings of the track, which gradually grew steeper; and, after a very zigzag course, reached the terrace half an hour later.

"This is certainly the place," the hunter exclaimed.

"But your friends—?" the Tigero asked.

The hunter without speaking discharged his gun, and at the sound three men appeared, though it was impossible to say whence they came. They were Belhumeur, Black Elk and Eagle-head.

CHAPTER IV.

About five or six leagues at the most from the spot where Valentine and the Tigero met, a caravan, composed of some ten persons, had halted on the same night and almost at the same moment as the hunter in a narrow valley.

The caravan was lodged on the bank of a running stream, the mules had been unloaded, a tent raised, fires lighted, and when the animals were hobbled, the travelers began to make preparations for their supper.

One of the travelers appeared to belong to the highest class. The rest were only servants or Indian peons. Still the dress of this person was most simple, but his stiff manner, his imposing demeanor and haughty air, evidenced the man long accustomed to give orders without admitting refusal. He had passed his fiftieth year;

a monkey, he commenced literally hopping from one tree to another, hanging by his arms, and clinging to the creepers, walking up, as he passed, the birds, which flew away in alarm.

This strange journey lasted about three-quarters of an hour. At length the guide stopped, looked attentively around him, and gliding down the trunk, reached the ground. The spot where he now found himself was a rather spacious clearing, in the center of which blazed an enormous fire, serving to warm forty or fifty redskins, completely armed and equipped for war.

This detachment of redskins was certainly on the war trail, or at any rate on a serious expedition, for they had with them neither dogs nor squaws. In spite of the slight care with which the Indians were wont to guard themselves at night, the free and deliberate manner in which the guide entered their encampment proved that he was expected by these warriors, who evinced no surprise at seeing him, but, on the contrary, invited him with hospitable gestures to take a seat at their fire. The guide sat down silently, the chief standing by his side. This chief was still a young man, his marked features displaying the utmost craft and boldness. After a rather lengthened interval, doubtless expressly granted the visitor to let him draw breath and warm himself, the young chief bowed to him and addressed him deferentially:

"My father is welcome among his sons; they were impatiently awaiting his arrival."

The guide responded to this compliment with a grimace.

"Our scouts," the chief continued, "have carefully examined the encampment of the Yoris, and the warriors of the Jester are ready. Is my father Curumilla satisfied?"

Curumilla laid his right hand on his chest and uttered with a guttural accent, "Ugh!" which was with him a mark of the greatest joy.

The Jester and his warriors had been too long acquainted with Curumilla for his silence to seem strange; hence they yielded to his mania, and giving up the hope of getting a syllable out of his closed lips, began a conversation in signs.

The redskins have two languages, the written and the sign language. The latter which has attained high perfection, and which all understand, is usually employed when hunting, or on expeditions, when a word pronounced even in a low voice may reveal the presence of an ambulance to the enemy, whether men or beasts.

It would have been interesting for any stranger who had been present at this interview to see with what rapidity the gestures and signs were exchanged between these men, so strangely lit up by the ruddy glow of the fire, and who resembled with their strange movements, their stern faces and singular attitudes a council of demons. At times the Jester with his body bent forward and emphatic gestures, held a dumb speech, which his comrades followed with the most sustained attention, and which they answered with a rapidity that words themselves could not have surpassed.

At length this silent council terminated. Curumilla raised his hand to heaven, and pointed to the stars, which were beginning to grow dim, and then left the circle. The redskins respectfully followed him to the foot of the tree by the aid of which he had entered their camp. When he reached it he turned round.

"May the Wacandah protect my father!" the Jester then said. "His sons have thoroughly understood his intentions, and will follow them literally. The great pale hunter will have joined his friends by this hour and he is doubtless awaiting us."

"It is good," Curumilla answered, and saluting for the last time the warriors, who bowed respectfully before him, the chief seized the creeping plants, and raising himself by the strength of his wrists, in a second he reached the branches and disappeared.

The journey the Indian had made was very important and needed to be so for him to run such great risks in order to have an interview at this hour of the night with the redskins.

The chief recommenced his aerial trip with the same lightness and the same good fortune. After a lapse of time comparatively much shorter than that which he had previously employed, he reached the camp of the white men. The same silence prevailed in its interior; the sentinels were still motionless at their post and the watch fires were beginning to expire.

The chief assured himself that no eye was fixed on him—that no spy was on the watch; and, feeling certain of not being perceived, he slid silently down the tree and resumed the place beneath the buffalo robe which he was supposed not to have left during the night.

At the moment when, after taking a final glance around, the Indian chief disappeared beneath his robe, the capataz, who was lying athwart the entrance of the hut, gently raised his head and looked with strange fixity of glance at the place occupied by the redskin.

(To be continued.)

Unbelievable Part.

He—Do you believe in fortune telling?

She—Only in part. I had my fortune told one day last week and the woman said I'd be married shortly. I believe that.

He—What did she tell you that you do not believe?

She—She said I'd be married to a poor man.

Expensive Lines.

The persistent poet had been hauled up for reciting his effusions on the highway and obstructing traffic.

"Who can say poetry doesn't pay?" whispered the judge, as he raked in the fine. "Why, here is where it pays \$10 toward better roads."

Persistent Query.

She—There wasn't a dry eye in the room when I finished my pathetic recitation last evening.

He—Indeed! Did everybody leave before you got through?

The Purchasing Agent.

"Dad," asked Bobby, "what is biology?"

"Go ask your mother," replied dad curtly. "She spends the most money."

—Harper's Weekly.

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