Out on the Pampas

By G. A. HENTY

CHAPTER V.

Monday morning the boys were at work at two wheelbarrows, for which Mr. Hardy had brought out wheels and ironwork; and Mr. Hardy and the men went down to the stream, and began to strip off the turf, and to dig out a strip of land twenty-five feet wide along the line where the dam was to come. The earth was then wetted and puddled. In ten days a dam was raised eight feet high, three feet wide at the top and twenty-five feet wide at the bottom. In the middle a space of two feet wide was left, through which the little stream at present ran. Two posts, with grooves in them, were driven in, one upon either side of this; and thus the work was left for a few days, for the sun to bake its surface, while the men were cutting a trench for the water to run down to the ground to be irrigated.

A small sluice was put at the entrance to this and all was now in readiness to complete the final operation of closing up the dam. A quantity of earth was first collected and puddled and piled on the top of the dam and on the slopes by its side. A number of boards two feet long, and cut to fit the grooves, were slipped down into them, forming a solid wall, and then upon the upper side of these the puddled earth was thrown into the water, Terence standing below in the stream and pounding down the earth with a rammer. The success was complete; in a couple of hours' time the gap in the dam was filled up, and they had the satisfaction of seeing the little stream overflowing its banks and widening out above, while not a drop of water made its escape by the old channel.

While this work had been going on the boys had been engaged up at the house. The first thing was to make a churn, then to put some large closets and some more shelves. The girls tried their first experiment at butter, and the result was most satisfactory. The dinners, too, were pronounced to be an immense improvement upon the old state of things.

Mr. Hardy was rather surprised at Seth Harper, the Yankee, having remained so long in his service, as the man had plainly stated, when first engaged, that he thought it likely that he should not fix himself, as he expressed it, for many weeks. However, he stayed on, and had evidently taken a fancy to the boys. Of an evening, when work was over, they would go down to the bench he had erected outside his hut, and would ask him to tell them tales of his Indian experiences. Upon one of these occasions Charley said to him: "But of all the near escapes that you have had, which was the most hazardous you ever had? Which do you consider was the narrowest touch you ever had of being killed?"

Seth considered for some time in silence, and then said: "That's not altogether an easy question to answer. I've been so near wiped out such scores of times that it ain't no easy job to say which was the downright nearest. But I think that, at the time, I never so much felt that Seth Harper's time for going down had come as I did in an affair near San Louis."

"And how was that, Seth? Do tell us about it," Maud said.

"It's rather a long story, that is," the Yankee said.

"All the better, Seth," Charley said; "at least all the better as far as we are concerned, if you don't mind telling it."

"No, I don't mind, no how," Seth answered. "I'll just think it over, and see where to begin."

There was a silence for a few minutes, and the young Hardys composed themselves comfortably for a good long sitting, and then Seth Harper began his story.

"Better than five years back, in '47, I were fighting in Mexico. It wasn't much regular up and down fighting we had, though we had some toughish battles, too, but it were skirmishing here, skirmishing there, keeping one eye always open. Me and Rube Pearson worked mostly together. We had 'fit' the Indians out on the prairies for years side by side, and when Uncle Sam wanted men to lick the Mexicans we concluded to go in together. We 'listed as scouts to the 'Rangers,' that is, we agreed to fight as much as we were wanted to fight, and to go on in front as scouts, in which way we had many a little scrimmage on our own account; but we didn't wear any uniform, or do drill. Rube came from Missouri—most of them very big chaps do. I shouldn't wonder if Samson did, though I never heard for certain."

The young Hardys had great difficulty to prevent themselves from laughing aloud at Seth's idea on the subject of Samson. Charley, however, with a great effort, steadied himself to say, "Samson died a great many years ago, Seth. His history is in the Bible."

"Is it, though?" Seth said, much interested. "Well, now, what did he do?"

"He carried away the gates of Gaza on his back, Seth."

Seth remained thoughtful for some time. "It all depends on how big the gates were," he said at last. "That gate down there is a pretty heavyish one, but Rube Pearson could have carried away two sich as that, and me sitting on the top of them. What else did he do?"

"He was bound in new cords, and he broke them asunder, Seth."

Seth did not appear to attach much importance to this, and inquired: "Did he do anything else?"

"He killed three hundred men with the jawbone of an ass."

"He killed——" Seth began, and then paused in sheer astonishment. Then he looked sharply round "You're making fun of me, lad."

"No, indeed, Seth," Charley said; "it is quite true."

"Oh, it was a miracle!" Seth said, thoughtfully. "I have no doubt that it is all true, and I wish I could read it for myself. I can just remember that my mother put a great store of her Bible, and called it the Good Book. I can't read it myself, and shouldn't have time to do it if I could; so it's all one as far as that goes. I am just a hunter and Indian fighter, and I don't know that for years I have ever stopped so long under a roof as I have here. My religion is the religion of most of us out on the prairies. Be honest and true to your word. Stick to a friend to death, and never kill a man except in fair fight. That's about all, and I hope it will do; at any rate, it's too late for me to try and learn a new one now. I listen on a Sunday to your father's reading, and I wish sometimes I had been taught; and yet it's better as it is. A man who acted like that wouldn't be much good for a rough life on the prairies, though I have no doubt it could be done in the settlements. Now I will go on with that yarn I was just beginning.

"One day our captain sent for Rube and me, and says, 'I've got a job for you two scouts. It's a dangerous one, but you won't like it any the worse for that, I know.'

"'Not a bit,' said Rube, with a laugh. He was the lightest-hearted fellow, was Rube; always gay and jolly, and wouldn't have hurt a squirrel, except in stand-up fight and as a matter of business.

"'What is it, Cap?' said I; 'you've only got to give us the word, and we're off.'

"'I've had a message,' he said, 'from Col. Cabra of their service, that he is ready to turn traitor, and hand us over some correspondence of Santa Anna, of which he has somehow got possession. Being a traitor, he won't trust any one, and the only plan we can hit upon is that he shall make a journey to San Miguel, thirty miles north of this, as if on business. I am to make an expedition in that direction, and am to make him prisoner. He will then hand over the papers. We shall bring him here, and, after keeping him for a time, let him go on parole. No suspicion will, therefore, at any future time, arise against him. Now, I want you to go on to-morrow to San Miguel. Go in there after dusk, and take up your quarters at this address. Get up as Mexicans; it only requires a big cloak and a sombrero. Stay all next day, and till daybreak on the morning afterward, and then ride back on this road. You will find out, in the first place, whether Cabra has arrived, and, in the next place, whether El Zeres is in the neighborhood. I shall only bring forty men, as I do not wish it to be supposed that I am going on more than a mere scouting expedition. You understand?'

"'All right, Cap; we'll do it,' I said, and we went off to our quarters.

"'We had better start early, Seth,' said Rube, 'say at daybreak.'

"'What for, Rube?' I said.

"Rube laughed. 'I don't want to get there before dusk. You remember Pepita? You know I did feel uncommon soft toward Pepita, and really thought of marrying and taking her back to Missouri.'

"'Only she wouldn't come, Rube?'

"'Just so, Seth,' said he, laughing. So we agreed we would be the best friends; and she asked me, if ever I went out to San Miguel, to go and see her. She lives in a small hacienda, a league this side of the town.'

"I saw that it was of no use to argue, but I didn't like it. The Mexican women hated us worse than the men did, and that warn't easy to do. But next morning off we started, and by ten o'clock we rode up to the door of the place which Rube said answered to the description Pepita had given him. It was a pretty place, with trees around it, and might have been the residence of a small proprietor such as Pepita had described her father to be. As we rode up to the door it opened, and I saw at once that Rube was right, for a dark-eyed Mexican girl came out and looked at us inquiringly.

"'What can I do for you, seniors?' she asked.

"'Don't you remember me, Donna Pepita?' Rube said, laughing, as he lifted the sombrero which had shaded his face.

"The girl started violently. 'Ah, Signor Americano, is it you? I might have known indeed,' she said, smiling, 'by your size, even wrapped up. This, of course, is Signor Seth—you are always together. But come in,' she said.

"'Who have you got inside, Donna Pepita?' Rube asked. 'I know that I can trust you, but I can't trust others, and I don't want it known I am here.'

"'The house is empty,' Pepita said. 'My father is out. There is only old Jacinta at home.'

"At this moment an old woman made her appearance at the door, and at a word from Pepita took our horses, while Pepita signed us to enter.

"'Excuse me, signora,' I said. 'We will go first and see our horses stabled. It is our custom; one never knows when he may want them.'

"I thought Pepita looked annoyed, but it was only for a moment, and then she said something in one of the country dialects to the old woman. She nodded her head and went off round to the back of the house, we leading our horses and following her. The stables, I observed, were singularly large and well kept for a house of its size, but, to my surprise, instead of going to the long range of buildings, the old woman led the way to a small shed.

"'Ain't these stables?' said I.

"She shook her head, and said in Spanish, 'They were once, but we have only two horses. Now they are used as a store for grains; the master has the key.'

"I could not contradict her, though I believed she was telling me a lie. However, we fastened our horses up in the shed, put the pistols from our holsters into our belts, and, taking our rifles in our hands, entered the house.

"Pepita received us very warmly, and busied herself assisting the old woman to get us something to eat; after which she and Rube began love-making, and it really seemed as if the girl meant to change her mind, and go back with Rube, after all. Still I was uneasy, and shortly made some excuse to leave the room and saunter round and about the house. I found nothing to excite the smallest suspicion, and was therefore content to return to the room and to throw myself lazily down and go off for a siesta, in the wakeful intervals of which I could hear that the delighted Rube was arranging with Pepita how she should escape and join him when the army retired; for of course neither had any idea that her father would consent to her marrying one of the hated enemies of his country.

CHAPTER VI.

"At 3 o'clock I roused myself and soon after the old woman came into the room with some lemonade. I observed that Pepita changed color, but she said nothing, and a moment after, making some excuse, she left the room. I was about to speak to Rube on the subject, when the window was darkened with men. Five or six shots were fired at us, and with a yell a crowd of Mexicans rushed into the room.

"As they appeared Rube sprang up with the exclamation: 'Trapped, by thunder!' and then fell flat on his back, shot, I believed, through the head.

"I rushed to my rifle, seized it, but before I could get it to my shoulder it was knocked from my hand. Half a dozen fellows threw themselves upon me, and I was a prisoner. There was such a hubbub and a shouting at first that I couldn't hear a word, but at last I picked up that they were a party of the band of El Zeres, who was in the neighborhood, and had been fetched by a boy that traitress Pepita had dispatched for them directly we arrived. I had my eyes fixed upon poor Rube, whom no one thought of noticing, when all of a sudden I gave quite a start, for I saw a move. I couldn't see his face, but I saw a hand stealing gradually out toward the leg of a man who stood near. Then there was a pause, and then the other hand began to move. It wasn't at all like the aimless way that the arms of a badly hit man would move, and I saw at once that Rube had been playing 'possum' all along."

"Doing what, Seth?" Ethel asked.

"Just pretending to be dead. I held my breath, for I saw he had come to the conclusion that he could not be overlooked much longer, and was going to make a move.

"In another minute there was a crash and a shout as the two men fell to the ground with their legs knocked clean from under them, catching hold of other men and dragging them down with them. From the midst of the confusion Rube leaped to his feet and made a rush for the window; one man he leveled with a blow of his fist; another he caught up as if he had been a baby, and hurling him against two others, brought them on the ground together, and then leaping over their bodies, dashed through the window before the Mexicans had recovered from their astonishment. I could have laughed out loud at the yell of rage and amazement with which they set off in pursuit; but two or three of them remained to guard me, and I might have got a knife in my ribs, so I kept quiet. I heard a shot or two, then there was a silence for a time, then a shout of triumph. I knew it was all over, and that Rube was taken again.

"He told me afterward that he had made a dash round to the stable, where he had found seven or eight Mexicans looking after the horses; that he had knocked down one or two who were in his way, had leaped upon the nearest animal, and had made off at the top of his speed, but that a dozen others were after him in an instant; and seeing that he would be lassoed and thrown from his horse, he had stopped and thrown up his arms in token of surrender. Rube's hands were bound tightly behind him, and he was led back into the room.

"The horses were then saddled, and we were soon off, Rube and I riding in the midst of the party with our hands tied before us, so that we could just hold the bridle. We had found out from the conversation that El Zeres with his band was about twenty-five miles distant.

"It was about nine o'clock when we rode into camp; and as we approached it we acknowledged that a better place against a sudden surprise could hardly have been chosen. The ground was flat for miles round; but the site of the camp rose in a slight mound, of nearly circular form and perhaps one hundred yards across; the central part was thirty feet or so above the general level. Round this the band of El Zeres was encamped. We were led up toward the central hut, which was evidently the abode of the chief. He was standing at the door, tapping his riding boot impatiently with a heavy whip; a man was holding his horse in readiness. One of the other leaders was standing talking to him. El Zares was a slight, wiry man, with a small, wicked-looking eye. He was the savagest and most bloodthirsty of all the Mexican partisans. The man with him was a tall, swarthy, ferocious looking villain.

"El Zares looked at us for some time without a word. Then he said, 'I've got you at last; I've been on the lookout for you for a long time past.'

(To be continued.)

It Would Seem So.

Rubberton—May I inquire what your business is, stranger?

Stranger (haughtily)—Sir, I'm a gentleman.

Rubberton—Well, I reckon that's a good business, stranger, but you're not the only man that's failed at it.—Chicago News.

HOUSEHOLD DEPARTMENT

Ice Cream Cake.

Cream one cup of sugar with one-half cup of butter. Add one-half cup of milk, one and three-fourths cups of flour sifted with two level teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Beat well and fold in the beaten whites of three eggs and add one-half teaspoonful of vanilla. Bake in two round tins or one biscuit tin from twenty to thirty minutes. Frost with the yolks of two eggs, thickened with confectioner's sugar and flavored with vanilla. This same cake recipe, flavored with almond extract and frosted with a boiled icing containing one-half cup of chopped blanched almonds, makes a delicious almond cake.—Good Housekeeping.

Angel Food.

Sift a half-cup of flour six times with a teaspoonful of cream of tartar. Beat the whites of six eggs until they stand alone and beat into them gradually a half-cup of sifted powdered sugar; add the flour in the same way, beating steadily, then a teaspoonful of vanilla and turn the mixture into a clean, ungreased pan with a funnel in the middle. Bake carefully in a steady oven. At the end of twenty-five minutes test the loaf with a broomstraw. When baked remove the cake from the oven and let it stand in the tin for ten minutes before loosening it gently from the sides and turning it out upon a clean cloth. Cover with a white icing.

Hard Soap.

On six pounds of washing soda and three pounds of unslaked lime pour four gallons of boiling water. Set aside until clear, then drain off and add six pounds of pure fat. Boil, stirring often, until it begins to harden. This will take several hours. Thin occasionally with two gallons of cold water which was poured on the mixture after the water was drawn off after standing. When so thick that a little poured on a plate cools, add a handful of salt, stir and turn into a tub wet with cold water. When cold it may be cut into the sized cakes desired.

Baked Stuffed Peppers.

Cut green peppers in two lengthwise. Remove the seeds and let the peppers soak in cold water for half an hour. Dry them and fill with a stuffing made of breadcrumbs, chopped meat and seasoning—pepper, salt, sage and onion juice to taste. Place them in a pan and bake until brown on top. Add a little soup stock or melted butter and hot water before placing in the oven. Serve hot with fish or meat.

Canned Cherries.

Prick each cherry. To three quarts of cherries make a sirup of a quarter of a pound of sugar and a half-cup of water. Put the sugar and water over the fire until the sugar is dissolved, then turn the cherries carefully into the sirup and bring very slowly to the boil. Boil gently for five minutes, pack the cherries in jars and fill these to overflowing with the boiling sirup. Seal immediately.

To Polish Linoleum.

First clean off all dirty marks with paraffin, applied with a piece of clean rag, either cotton or woolen. Rub till a good polish is obtained with clean cloths. If the smell of paraffin is not liked, use beeswax and turpentine. Linoleum should never be washed with hot water.

Chocolate Tablets.

Put into a double boiler an equal quantity of unsweetened chocolate and melted fondant. When both are soft stir until smooth, flavor with vanilla, then drop by the small spoonful upon oiled paper to harden.

For a Light Short Crust.

Take three ounces of butter, clarified dripping, or lard, rub into six ounces of pastry flour. Add a pinch of salt and a teaspoonful of baking powder and make the whole into a stiff paste with three tablespoonfuls of cold water. Roll out the paste thinly and bake in a very hot oven.

Stewed Potatoes.

Put into a frying pan a small piece of butter, a little chopped parsley, salt, pepper, and a gill of milk, thickened with flour. Let this come to the boil, add cold boiled potatoes cut into slices, and let cook gently for ten minutes. Add a little bit more butter and serve.

To Renovate Leather.

Wipe the surface slightly with a damped cloth to cleanse it and rub dry. Beat the white of an egg to a stiff froth, and apply it quickly to the leather with a soft rag.

For Burns and Scalds.

Apply glycerine and flour, the latter heaped on the affected part to keep off the air. On this put a good pad of cotton wool and bandage.

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A Sad Case.

"Is she really so homely?"

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