

Out on the Pampas

By G. A. HENRY

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued)

"No, papa," Hubert said eagerly; "don't you remember we left two loops in each room, when we built it, on purpose, only putting in pieces of wood and filling up the cracks with clay to keep out the wind?"

"Of course we did, Hubert. I remember all about it now. Run down and tell them to be ready to pull the wood out and to fire through when they hear the next rocket go off. I am going to send another light rocket over in the direction where I saw the horses; and directly I get the line I will send off cracker rocket after cracker rocket as quickly as I can at them. What with the fire from below among them, and the fright they will get when they see the horses attacked, they are sure to make a rush for it."

In a minute Hubert came back with the word that the men below were ready. In a moment a rocket soared far away to behind the house; and just as its light broke over the plains another one swept over in the direction of a dark mass of animals, seen plainly enough in the distance.

A cry of dismay burst from the Indians, rising in yet wilder alarm as three shots were fired from the wall of the house into their crowded mass. Again and again was the discharge repeated, and with a yell of dismay a wild rush was made for the fence. Then the boys with their carbines, and Mr. Hardy with the revolver, opened upon them, every shot telling in the dense mass who struggled to surmount the fatal railings.

Frenzied with the danger, dozens attempted to climb them, and, strong as were the wires and posts, there was a cracking sound, and the whole side fell. In another minute, of the struggling mass there remained only some twenty motionless forms. Three or four more rockets were sent off in the direction where the horses had been seen, and then another signal rocket, whose light enabled them to see that the black mass was broken up, and that the whole plain was covered with scattered figures of men and animals, all flying at the top of their speed.

"Thank God, it is all over, and we are safe!" Mr. Hardy said solemnly. "Never again will an Indian attack be made upon Mount Pleasant. It is all over now, my dear," he said to Mrs. Hardy as he went down the stairs; "they are off all over the country, and it will take them hours to get their horses together again. Two of us have got scratched with arrows, but no real harm is done. Charley's is only a flesh wound. Don't be frightened," he added quickly, as Mrs. Hardy turned pale and the girls gave a cry at the appearance of Charley's face, which was certainly alarming. "A little warm water and a bandage will put it all right."

"Do you think it will leave a scar?" Charley asked rather dolorously.

"Well, Charley, I should not be surprised if it does; but it won't spoil your beauty long, your whiskers will cover it; besides, a scar won't in honorable conflict is always admired by ladies, you know. Now let us go downstairs; my arm, too, wants bandaging, for it is beginning to smart amazingly; and I am sure we all must want something to eat."

The supper was eaten hurriedly, and then all but Terence, who, as a measure of precaution, was stationed as watchman on the tower, were glad to lie down for a few hours' sleep. At daybreak they were up and moving.

Mr. Hardy requested that neither his wife nor daughters should go outside the house until the dead Indians were removed and buried, as the sight could not but be a most shocking one. Two of the peons were ordered to put in the oxen and bring up two carts, and the rest of the men set about the unpleasant duty of examining and collecting the slain.

These were even more numerous than Mr. Hardy had anticipated, and showed how thickly they must have been clustered round the door and windows. The guns had been loaded with buckshot; two bullets he dropped down each barrel in addition; and the discharge of these had been most destructive, more especially those fired through the loopholes at the end of the house. There no less than sixteen bodies were found, while around the door and windows were thirteen others. All these were dead. The guns, having been discharged through loopholes breast high, had taken effect upon the head and body.

At the fence were fourteen. Of these twelve were dead, another still breathed, but was evidently dying, while one had only a broken leg. Unquestionably several others had been wounded, but had managed to make off. The bullets of revolvers, unless striking a mortal point, disable a wounded man much less than the balls of heavier-caliber. It was evidently useless to remove the Indian who was dying; all that could be done for him was to give him a little water, and to place a bundle of grass so as to raise his head. Half an hour later he was dead. The other wounded man was carried carefully down to one of the sheds, where a bed of hay was prepared for him. Two more wounded men were found down by the cattle inclosures, and these also Mr. Hardy considered likely to recover. They were taken up and laid by their comrades. Three dead bodies were found here. These were all taken in the bullock carts to a spot distant nearly half a mile from the house.

Here, by the united labor of the peons, a large grave was dug, six feet wide, as much deep, and twelve yards long. In this they were laid side by side, two deep; the earth was filled in, and the turf replaced. At Hubert's suggestion, two

young palm trees were taken out of the garden and placed one at each end, and a wire fence was erected all around, to keep off the animals.

It was a sad task; and although they had been killed in an attack in which, had they been victorious, they would have shown no mercy, still Mr. Hardy and his sons were deeply grieved at having caused the destruction of so many lives.

CHAPTER XIII.

Another two years passed over, bringing increased prosperity to the Hardys. No renewal of the Indian attacks had occurred, and in consequence an increased flow of emigration had taken place in their neighborhood. Settlers were now established upon all the lots for many miles upon either side of Mount Pleasant; and even beyond the twelve miles which the estate stretched to the south the lots had been sold. Mr. Hardy considered that all danger of the floods and herds being driven off had now ceased, and had therefore added considerably to their number, and had determined to allow them to increase without further sales until they had attained to the extent of the supporting power of the immense estate.

Two hundred acres of irrigated land were under cultivation; the dairy contained the produce of a hundred cows; and altogether Mount Pleasant was considered one of the finest and most profitable estancias in the province. The house was now worthy of the estate; the inside fence had been removed fifty yards further off, and the vegetable garden to a greater distance, the enclosed space being laid out entirely as a pleasure garden. Beautiful tropical trees and shrubs, gorgeous patches of flowers, and green turf surrounded the front and sides; while behind was a luxuriant and most productive orchard.

The young Hardys had for some time given up doing any personal labor, and were incessantly occupied in the supervision of the estate. A year previously Mr. Hardy had, at one of his visits to Buenos Ayres, purchased a piano, saying nothing of what he had done upon his return; and the delight of the girls and their mother, when the instrument arrived in a bullock cart, was unbounded. From that time the girls practiced almost incessantly; indeed, as Charley remarked, it was as bad as living in the house with a whole boarding school of girls.

After this Mount Pleasant, which had always been considered as the most hospitable and pleasant estancia in the district, became more than ever popular, and many were the impromptu dances got up. Sometimes there were more formal affairs, and all the ladies within twenty miles would come in. These were more numerous than would have been expected. The Jamiesons were doing well, and in turn going for a visit to their native country, had brought out two bright young Scotchwomen as their wives.

Their neighbors at Canterbury were still their most intimate friends; they were shortly, however, to lose one of them. Mr. Cooper had heard six months before of the death of his two elder brothers in rapid succession, and he was now heir to his father's property, which was very extensive. It had been supposed that he would at once return to England, and he was continually talking of doing so; but he had under one excuse or other, put off his departure from time to time. He was very frequently over at Mount Pleasant, and was generally a companion of the boys upon their excursions.

"I think Cooper is almost as much here as he is at Canterbury," Charley said, laughing, one day.

Mrs. Hardy happened to glance at Maud and noticed a bright flash of color on her cheeks. She made no remark at the time, but spoke to Mr. Hardy about it at night.

"You see, my dear," she concluded, "we are still considering Maud as a child, but other people may look upon her as a woman."

"I am sorry for this," Mr. Hardy said after a pause. "We ought to have foreseen the possibility of such a thing. Now that it is mentioned, I wonder we did not do so before. Mr. Cooper has been here so much that the thing would have certainly struck us, had we not, as you say, looked upon Maud as a child. Against Mr. Cooper I have nothing to say. We both like him extremely. His principles are good, and he would, in point of money, be of course an excellent match for our little girl. At the same time, I cannot permit anything like an engagement. At the end of another two years, when Maud is 19, if Mr. Cooper renews the acquaintance in England, and both parties agree, I shall of course offer no objection, and indeed should rejoice much at a match which would promise well for her happiness."

Mrs. Hardy thoroughly agreed with her husband, and so the matter rested for a short time. It was well that Mr. Hardy had been warned by his wife, for a week after this Mr. Cooper met him alone when he was out riding, and after some introduction, expressed to him that he had long felt that he had loved his daughter, but had waited until she was seventeen before expressing his wishes. Mr. Hardy heard him quietly to the end.

"I can hardly say that I am unprepared for what you say, Mr. Cooper, although I had never thought of such a thing until two days since. To yourself, personally, I can entertain no objection. Still, when I remember that you are only twenty-six, and that for the last four years you have seen no one with whom

you could possibly fall in love, with the exception of my daughter, I can hardly think that you have had sufficient opportunity to know your own mind. Next month she proceeds to England with her mother, and for the next two years she will be engaged upon finishing her education. At the end of that time I shall myself return to England, and we shall then enter into society. If at that time you are still of the same way of thinking, and choose to renew our acquaintance, I shall be very happy."

Mr. Cooper endeavored in vain to alter Mr. Hardy's determination, and was at last obliged to give the required promise. Two or three days after this he rode up and said that he had come to say good-by, that he had received letters urging him to return at once, and had therefore made up his mind to start by the next mail from Buenos Ayres.

For a few days Maud was unusually quiet and subdued, but her natural spirits speedily recovered themselves, and she was soon as lively and gay as ever.

About a fortnight after the departure of Mr. Cooper an event took place which for a while threatened to upset all the plans which they had formed for the future.

One or other of the girls was in the habit of frequently going over to stay for a day or two with a Mrs. Mercer. One evening Hubert rode over with Ethel, and Mrs. Mercer persuaded the latter to stay for the night; Hubert declining to do so, as he had arranged with Charley to go over early to Canterbury to assist at the branding of the cattle at that station.

In the morning they had taken their coffee, and were preparing for a start, when, just as they were mounting their horses, one of the men drew their attention to a man running at full speed toward the house from the direction of Mr. Mercer's.

"What can be the matter?" Charley said. "What a strange thing that a messenger should come over on foot instead of on horseback!"

"Let's ride and meet him, Charley," Hubert said; and putting spurs to their horses, they galloped toward the approaching figure.

As they came close to him he stumbled and fell, and lay upon the ground, exhausted and unable to rise. The boys sprang from their horses with a feeling of vague uneasiness and alarm.

"What's the matter?" they asked.

The peon was too exhausted to reply for a moment or two; then he gasped out, "Los Indios! the Indians!"

The boys gave a simultaneous cry of dread.

"What has happened? Tell us quick, man; are they attacking the estancia?" The man shook his head.

"Estancia burnt. All killed but me," he said.

The news was too sudden and terrible for the boys to speak. They stood white and motionless with horror.

"All killed! Oh, Ethel, Ethel!" Charley groaned.

Hubert burst into tears. "What will mamma do?"

"Come, Hubert," Charley said, dashing away the tears from his eyes, "do not let us waste a moment. All hope may not be over. The Indians seldom kill women, but carry them away, and she may be alive yet. If she is, we will rescue her, if we go right across America. Come, man, jump up behind me on my horse."

The peon obeyed the order, and in five minutes they reached the gate. Here they dismounted.

"Let us walk up to the house, Hubert, so as not to excite suspicion. We must call papa out and tell him first, so that he may break it to mamma. If she learns it suddenly, it may kill her."

Mr. Hardy had just taken his coffee, and was standing at the door, looking with a pleased eye upon the signs of comfort and prosperity around him. There was no need, therefore, for them to approach nearer. As Mr. Hardy looked round upon hearing the gate shut, Charley beckoned to him to come down to them. Mr. Hardy, feeling that something strange was happening, ran down the steps and hurried toward them.

By the time he reached them, he had no need to ask questions. Hubert was leaning upon the gate, crying as if his heart would break; Charley stood with his hand on his lips, as if to check the sobs from breaking out, while the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Ethel?" Mr. Hardy asked.

Charley nodded and then said, with a great effort; "The Indians have burned the estancia; one of the men has escaped and brought the news. We know nothing more. Perhaps she is carried off, not killed."

Mr. Hardy staggered under the sudden blow. "Carried off!" he murmured to himself. "It is worse than death."

"Yes, papa," Charley said, anxious to give his father's thoughts a new turn. "But we will rescue her, if she is alive, wherever they may take her."
(To be continued.)

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