

The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

However, Lee began to breathe more freely when he had left the squalid little town behind him. He walked or trotted his horse till noon, gradually ascending toward the outskirts of the range through a fairly open country.

The snows might hold off for two or three weeks yet, and Lee felt confident that well-within that period he would be able to bring back Pelly, if the latter were in the region, unless he took alarm, in which event of course Lee would have to bring his horse back to Little Falls and prepare for a long winter's chase. The new dominion force carries on the tradition of the old North-West; it does not return without its man.

Stony lake was admirably adapted for the needs of the Free Traders. It was at the extreme northern limits of the range, a little beyond, and the head of a lake and river system by which communication could be had by water north to Fort Churchill or York Factory or west as far as Lake Athabasca.

The York boat, laden to the gunwale with supplies of liquor, could push anywhere along the thousands of lakes and streams, acting as mother boat in turn to the canoe, with one or more cases. And over all this vast, ill-defined district the hooch-runner had almost unlimited sway, proving a serious rival to the legitimate trading interests, since he carried his poison into the Indian's camping grounds and took his pick of the choicest furs.

His trade embraced a viceroy. All along the fringe of white settlement it was active. It had sprung up like a fungus overnight, during the disorganization of the police in consequence of the war and the readjustment. The gang were steadily embittering the relations between whites and reds, which had been amicable almost since the advent of the first pioneer.

Whichever district the girl was bound for, it was impossible to mistake the course that she would take initially. In front of Lee lay a long backbone of mountains, with only a single pass into the interior over a range of many miles.

Scanning the valley carefully, Lee saw, about a mile beyond the pass, a thin curl of smoke rising into the still air.

Satisfied that he had the girl in sight, Lee hesitated for a while, undecided whether to ride up to her, or to camp where he was, keeping a lookout for Pierre and Shorty. In the end he decided that the better course would be to make himself known, and accordingly he descended the slope and followed the trail along the bank of the river until he reached the camp.

The girl had already set up her tent, her horse was tethered near the stream, and she was cooking her dinner at a fire which she had made. She looked very trim and business like with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and her air of being completely at home in these surroundings.

As Lee jumped from his horse she started, then looked at him with an expression of calm which was an attempt to conceal a very obvious trepidation.

"Good evening," he called. "I'm travelling your way, and saw your camp fire, so took the liberty of joining you. If there's no objection."

She stared hard at him as if his advent were some long expected blow that had suddenly fallen. For a few moments she seemed under the influence of an all-consuming fear. Then, mastering it, she answered with the same affectation of indifference:

"You can camp where you like, of course. The range is free for all."

Lee, a little staggered at the unwillingness of this invitation, decided that it would be better for the present not to alarm her with any explanation, and proceeded to pitch his tent

near hers. While he was unloading his pack and watering his horse, the girl went on with her meal, without paying any attention to him.

Lee, feeling both uncomfortable and foolish, was beginning to wish he had waited, when a horse neighed close at hand, his horse and the girl's answered, and a minute later Pierre Cauchon and his companion Shorty rode into view through the gathering darkness.

Pierre's behavior at the sight of Lee was almost ludicrous. He pulled his horse up short with an oath, and set looking from Lee to the girl in almost comical surprise. Shorty, dismounting in a hurried manner, repeated his companion's gestures. For several moments the light of the camp fire illuminated the calm faces of the girl and Lee and the vindictive, scowling ones of the two men.

Then Pierre leaped to the ground. "By gar, it's de feller dat tell me 'dat'll be all,'" he shouted. "What you 'ink you're doing here, you d--n four-flusher!"

"Maybe the same as you," said Lee. "Ho, ho, dat's good!" roared the breed. "You 'ink we take you in as pardner, heya?"

"Wouldn't go with you. I've got my own hand to play," Lee answered. "You won't play it here, then?" belted Shorty.

Oaths poured from his lips. "Pack and vamoose!" yelled Pierre. The two advanced on Lee with belligerent gestures.

Lee held up his hand as the fists threatened him. "Didn't I tell you I don't fight?" he drawled deceptively. "You don't fight? By gar, you're goin' to fight dis time or git!" yelled Pierre. "You 'traid of gittin' whipped, eh?"

"That's about the size of it," laughed Lee. "That's why I shoot instead—quick and straight and sure, gentlemen!"

His right hand made a movement in his coat pocket, but his automatic was in the holster at the back of his hip, and there was nothing in the pocket more lethal than his pipe.

But Pierre, who was nearest, changed color. The man was a cur at heart, as Lee had suspected. He leaped back with a snarl. Shorty stepped back, too, though not quite so violently, and the two, withdrawing out of range, proceeded to hold a whispered colloquy, at the end of which, turning away without another word to Lee, they proceeded to set up their camp at a little distance.

Lee turned to the girl, who had stood a silent spectator of the scene. "I ought to have explained, perhaps," he said. "You recognized that man who insulted you last night. A little later I happened to overhear the pair of them speaking of a plan they had formed for intercepting you tonight. I didn't want to alarm you, in case they failed to appear, but that is why I proposed to camp beside you. I think they are unscrupulous customers, and you've probably reached the same decision after the scene that has just taken place."

"Thank you, but I assure you that I am quite capable of protecting myself," answered the girl, and Lee saw her fingers stray toward a service-size revolver holster at her belt.

"Of course I don't want to intrude," said Lee. "But as long as these men are here, I think I ought to remain."

She took a step or two toward him, looking at him fixedly. "Who and what are you?" she demanded with quivering lips. "How am I to know that you are not those men's friend, that this is not all part of an arranged plan?"

"I am not a friend, or associate of those men," answered Lee indignantly. "I never saw either of them until one of them insulted you in the hotel yesterday evening. I know that they are planning to do you some harm."

"Well, and—you?" she asked, trying to keep her voice steady.

"You suspect me?"

"I don't know. I trust nobody. I ask you why you are here."

"My object in camping here beside you tonight is simply to protect you," Lee equivocated.

She answered, with an effort at irony. "And my answer to you is that I do not need protection, but that this country is free for all—for those men and for you."

She went back into her tent, leaving Lee stupefied. The pair were already seated in front of their fire, munching slabs of bread and raw bacon. They had been watching Lee and the girl furtively throughout the interview. Lee wondered whether the girl's demeanor had given them any inkling of its termination. He had never felt so foolish.

If they persuaded her that they were more to be trusted, the situation would be a serious one for her. Lee's position was certainly far more embarrassing than he had anticipated. It was almost as if the girl had decided to throw in her lot with the pair of Free Trader agents.

Not succeeding in convincing her that their motives were evil, perhaps because he had not ventured to voice his real suspicions of them to her. And he had not succeeded in arousing her hostility.

And, looking at the matter in a common-sense light, Lee realized that

he had acted wrongly. He should have warned her on his first arrival. He could not blame her for refusing to accept his word.

But what was at the bottom of her evident fear of him?

The only thing left for him to do was to try to protect her in spite of herself.

The friendly forest had suddenly grown hateful and alien. And then Lee knew what the trouble was. It was the submerged memories of Estelle. She meant nothing to him now, less than nothing, and yet—well, that had been years ago, and he had gone through all that. Still, the imprint was there.

Suddenly, as on the night before, he was startled by the low sound of voices. Peering across the grass, he could just distinguish the shadowy outlines of two figures against the men's fire.

Very deliberately Lee drew his automatic from his belt. He had no doubt that Pierre and Shorty were planning mischief; most probably they meant to attack him as a preliminary to overpowering the girl.

And he lay watching them and grinning waiting for their stealthy onset. He felt more than a match for the pair of them.

Minutes went by, however. The pair seemed an unconscionable time making their arrangements, and all the while the discussion, which was just audible without being intelligible, went on. Lee wondered how long he had been lying there. It was too dark to see his watch. He wondered why they had not waited till morning, when there would be a better chance of taking him unawares.

At last the black shadows separated. One of them was coming toward him with stealthy footsteps. Lee guessed that it was Shorty, the more outrageous of the two.

The figure came slowly on. He leaped the automatic, his finger steady on the trigger. "He would fire as soon as it made the first hostile movement, as soon as it raised its weapon to cover him."

And then, in amazement, he let the muzzle of his automatic drop. For the figure was not coming toward him, it was going toward the girl's tent.

And it was the girl herself!

Had she then some secret understanding with the two ruffians, and had the episode of the evening at the hotel been a performance staged for some particular purpose?

That might almost have appeared credible, but for the conversation that Lee had overheard beside the stove in the light of that, Lee had to dismiss the credibility of his surmise.

The only possible explanation at which he could arrive was that the girl had gone to the confederates with his own story. It is of record that Abraham Lincoln, in the darkest days of this Union, cured more than one crisis with some homely anecdote, some aptly barbed retort.

"In this series I have written, I have sought to choose those short stories which have made the greatest appeal to me. Some of them I heard years ago; others no longer ago than yesterday. I have tried to repeat them in the form in which they were uttered in my presence. I hope the reader may enjoy them as much as I have enjoyed the work of compiling the collection."

THIS PAPER WILL HAVE SERIES BY IRVIN COBB



The famous Irvin S. Cobb, in the opinion of many people the best story teller of our time, has compiled a remarkable series of short, humorous stories which he has heard. They will appear under Mr. Cobb's name with the title, "My Favorite Stories," and are soon to begin in this paper. Watch for them and read them, because you never encountered such a collection of funny stories in your life. Speaking of anecdotes, Mr. Cobb says: "Americans did not invent or discover the short humorous story. Indeed, some short stories still are making the rounds which were old when the Pyramids were young. Probably the piper who piped before Moses rounded out his act with one of the standard jokes of the period—a joke which, dressed in new clothes, is doing duty somewhere today. The mother-in-law joke could not have originated with Adam because Adam had no mother-in-law, but I have not the slightest doubt that Cain began using it after his marriage. And beyond peradventure Father Noah whiled away many a dragging half-hour in the Ark by telling them, Ham and Japhet the one which begins: 'It seems there were two Irishmen named Pat and Mike. And Pat said to Mike, 'Falth, as' be jabbers!'"

"So it would not do for us to lay claim to the sole responsibility for the short humorous story. But I am quite certain that we, more than any other people, have made it a part of our daily life. Americans of whatsoever rank like to tell short stories and like to laugh at them. There are short stories which sum up the characteristics of white Americans or black Americans, Jews or Gentiles, city folk or country folk more completely than could ponderous essays or scholarly expositions. It is of record that Abraham Lincoln, in the darkest days of this Union, cured more than one crisis with some homely anecdote, some aptly barbed retort.

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CAUSE FOR GRIEF
A Hebrew attended the funeral of a multi-millionaire and all through the sad rites he cried as if his heart would break.
"Why are you crying, Abie?" asked a friend. "He wasn't a relative of yours."
"Dot's why I'm crying," Abie sobbed in a fresh outburst of tears.

POOR GIRL
There was a young girl from Savannah,
On the pavement slipped on a banana;
And since that sad day,
I am sorry to say,
She stands when she plays the pianoh.

MODEST MAN
He—I would gladly die for you, but for one thing.
She—And what is that?
He—I'm afraid you could never replace the loss.

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COPPER CARBONATE FOR WHEAT

Copper carbonate treatment for wheat smut while not generally used in this county, is considered far past the experimental stage in Oregon wheat growing centers.

This dry method of treating wheat for smut is of more than usual interest at present on account of the high price of seed wheat. Twenty per cent less wheat per acre can be used when seeding copper carbonate treated wheat as compared to the seed wheat required when using the liquid treatment. The saving of seed wheat where two bushels per acre would be 20 to 25 pounds. Twenty pounds at \$2.30 per bushel is worth seventy-six and two-thirds cents.

The copper carbonate for treating seed for one acre would cost between four and five cents per acre, thus leaving a net cost gain of about 70 cents per acre.

Wheat treated with copper carbonate does not have its germinating qualities injured. The treatment can be given any time and the treated seed can stand indefinitely without injury to germination.

Special treating equipment must be used to secure thorough covering of the grain with copper carbonate.

Breathing the copper carbonate dust is injurious to workers. A convenient machine for treating may be made from a large oil drum by extending an inch pipe through the barrel diagonally for an axis on which to rotate it. Half of one head is cut out and hinged to close tightly so that the grain may be put in and taken out. Mount on supports or posts that the barrel may be easily rotated. This machine will treat one sack at a time. Turn slowly for a moment or so. Avoid breathing the dust after opening the machine.

Don Gregg near Hillsboro has built such a machine, while Fred Beach of North Plains is using a concrete mixer.

An old churn, if of sufficient size, will answer the purpose nicely.

Commercial equipment may be secured through dealers.

APPLE SCAB CAN BE CONTROLLED

Apple scab, the most serious disease of the apple in Oregon, can be controlled, and even largely prevented by a few sanitary measures and a systematic use of lime-sulfur spray.

Scab is a fungus growth that attacks the fruit, leaves, and occasionally the twigs of the tree. It reproduces by means of spores, thousands of which are discharged from the perithecia, small dome-like pimples on the fallen leaves of the previous year. The spores mature about the time the apple blossoms are ready to open, and are carried up by the wind and thus cause infection, and a continuation of the spore production.

Plowing the dead leaves under in the early spring, before the winter buds burst, will remove the chief source of infection, but as the disease may be carried in from neighboring orchards as well as from leaves not turned under, the following spray schedule should be used: (1) Delayed dormant spray, 12 pounds of lime-sulfur to 100 gallons of water, applied soon after the winter buds open, when the leaves of the fruit spurs are one third to three-fourths inches long. (2) Pink spray, 3 1/2 lbs. lime-sulfur to 100 gallons of water, applied when the flower buds show a pink color, but are not yet open. (3) Calyx Spray, 2 1/2 pounds of lime-sulfur to 100 gal. of water, applied 10 days after the calyx spray. (5) Thirty-day spray, 2 pounds lime-sulfur to 100 gallons of water, applied 30 days after the calyx spray.

Pruning is also an important factor in preventing scab, for if the foliage is dense it remains wet longer after each rain, and gives the spores of the fungus a better chance to germinate and cause infection.

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HE SPEAKS UP

"Where've you been so late?"
"To a lecture."
"Huh?"
"And it was very poor. I don't care to listen to another one."

THE SIGN SAYS SO

She—What makes you think Jones is tired of his wife?
He—A sign in front of his house says "Honey For Sale."

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