

THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER V.

The sun rose; its beams played on the trembling yellow leaves of the trees, and tinged them with a thousand shades of gold and purple. The birds, cozily nestled in the bushes, struck up their matin carol; the awakening of nature was as splendid and imposing as it is in all mountainous countries.

The leader of the caravan left his tent and gave orders to strike the camp. The tent was at once folded up, the mules were loaded, and, so soon as the horses were saddled, the party started without waiting for the morning meal, for they generally breakfasted at the 11 o'clock halt.

The caravan advanced along the road from Santa Fe to the United States, at a speed unusual under such circumstances.

When he left the camp, the chief of the caravan spurred his horse and joined the Indian, who was marching alone in front, examining the bushes and apparently performing all the duties of an experienced guide. Curumilla, though he heard the hurried paces of the Mexican's horse, did not turn round, but continued trotting along on his sorry mule.

"Indian," said the caravan chief in Spanish, "I wish to speak with you on an important subject; be good enough to put off your usual silence for a while and answer like an honest man. You engaged with me at Santa Fe to lead me, for the sum of four ounces, safely to the frontiers of Upper Mexico. Since you have been in my service I must allow that I have only had reason to praise your prudence; but we are at this moment in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, that is to say, we have reached the most dangerous part of our journey. Two days ago you lifted the trail of Crow Indians, very formidable enemies of caravans, and I want to consult with you as to the means to employ to foil the snare in which these Indians will try to catch us."

The Indian felt in a bag of striped calico thrown over his shoulder, and produced a greeny paper, which he opened and offered the Mexican.

"What is this?" the latter asked. "Oh, yes, certainly; your engagement. Well, what has this to do with the question I asked you?"

Curumilla, still impassive, laid his fingers on the paper, at the last paragraph of the engagement.

"Well, what then?" the Mexican exclaimed ill-humoredly. "It is said there, it is true, that I must trust entirely to you, and leave you at liberty to act as you please for the common welfare. What proves to me that you are acting for our common welfare, and that you are not a traitor?"

At this word traitor, so distinctly uttered by the Mexican, Curumilla gave a tiger glance at the speaker, while his whole body was agitated by a convulsive tremor; he uttered two or three incoherent guttural exclamations, and ere the Mexican could suspect his intentions he was seized round the waist, lifted from the saddle, and hurled on the ground, where he lay stunned. Curumilla leaped from his mule, drew from his belt four gold ounces, hurled them at the Mexican, and then bounding over the precipice that bordered the road, disappeared.

The situation was becoming most critical for the chief of the caravan; he found himself abandoned without a guide, in unknown regions, doubtless watched by hidden foes, and exposed at any moment to an attack.

The march was continued; no suspicious sign was discovered; and the Mexicans were justified in believing that, with the exception of the time they would be compelled to lose, the flight of the Indian would entail no disagreeable consequences.

Singularly enough, Carnero seemed rather pleased than annoyed at the disappearance of the guide. Far from complaining or deploring the delay in the continuance of the journey he laughed at what had happened and made an infinitude of more or less witty jests about it, which considerably annoyed his master, whose joy was merely on the surface, and who, in his heart, cursed the mishap which kept them in the mountains and exposed them to the insults of the plunderers.

"Pray, what do you find so agreeable in what has happened that you are so affected to be so merry, No Carnero?" he at length asked.

"Forgive me, mi amo," the capataz answered; "but you know the proverb, 'What can't be cured must be endured.'"

"Hum!" said the master.

"And besides," the capataz added, as he stooped down, "however bad our position may be, is it not better to pretend to consider it good?"

A little before 11 a. m. the caravan reached the terrace, and it was with a feeling of joy, which they did not attempt to conceal, that the peons recognized the strength of the position.

"We shall stop here for the present," the Mexican said. "Unload the mules, and light the fires. Immediately after breakfast we will begin entrenching ourselves."

The peons obeyed with the speed of men who have made a long journey and are beginning to feel hungry; the fires were lighted in an instant, and a few moments later the peons vigorously attacked their maize tortillas, their tocina and their cecina—those indispensable ele-

ments of every Mexican meal. When the hunger of his men was appeased the chief rose.

"Now," he said, "to work."

CHAPTER VI.

The position which the leader of the caravan fancied he had been the first to discover, and where he had made up his mind to halt, was admirably selected to establish an intrenched camp. The immense voladero hovering at a prodigious height above the precipices, and guarded on the right and left by enormous masses of rock, offered such conditions of security that the peons regained all their merry carelessness, and regarded the mysterious flight of the guide as an accident of no real importance.

It was, hence, with well promising ardor that they rose on receiving their chief's command and prepared under his directions to dig the trench which was intended to protect them from a surprise. This trench was to be bordered by a line of tall stakes, running across the open space between the rocks, which gave the sole access to the terrace.

At the moment when the leader proceeded with several peons armed with picks and spades toward the entrance, with the probable intention of marking the exact spot where the trench was to be dug, the capataz approached, and said with a respectful bow:

"Mi amo, I have an important communication to make to you."

His master turned and looked at him with ill-concealed distrust.

"An important communication to make to me?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"What is it? Speak, but be brief."

"I have discovered a grotto."

"What?" his master exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, excellency."

"Where?"

"There," he said, stretching out his arm; "behind that mass of rocks."

A suspicious look flashed from behind his master's eyelashes.

"Well, we will enter it together. Fetch some torches of ocote wood, and show us the way. By the by, do not forget to bring weapons, for we know not what men or beasts we may find in caverns thus opening on a high road."

The Mexican selected six of his peons, on whose courage he thought he could rely, ordered them to take their muskets, and, bidding the others keep a good watch, but not begin anything until he returned, he made a signal to the capataz that he was ready to follow him. Carnero had followed the arrangements made by his master with an evil eye, but probably did not deem it prudent to risk any remark, for he silently bowed his head, and walked toward the pile of rocks that masked the entrance of the grotto.

These granite blocks, piled one on top of the other, did not appear, however to have been brought there by accident, but, on the contrary, they appeared to have belonged in some early and remote age to a clumsy but substantial edifice.

"It would not be prudent," said the chief, "to venture without precautions into this cavern. Prepare your arms, machachos, and keep your eyes open; at the slightest suspicious sound, or the smallest object that appears, fire. Capataz, light the torches."

The latter obeyed without a word; the leader of the caravan assured himself at a glance that his orders had been properly carried out; then taking his pistols from his belt, he cocked them, took one in each hand, and said to Carnero:

"Take the lead. It is only just that you should do the honors of this place which you so unexpectedly discovered. Forward, you others, and be on your guard."

The eight men went into the cavern at the heels of the capataz, who raised the torches above his head, doubtless in order to cast a greater light.

They thus reached a rather large hall, into which several passages opened. All at once the leader stopped and listened.

"Listen," he said to the capataz, "do you not hear something?"

The latter bent his body slightly forward and remained motionless for some seconds.

"I do," he said, drawing himself up, "it sounds like distant thunder."

"Is it not? or, perhaps, the rolling of subterranean waters?"

"I can swear that you are right. It would be a piece of luck for us to find water in the cave, for it would add greatly to our security, as we should not be obliged to lead our horses, perhaps, a long distance to drink."

"I will assure myself at once of the truth. The noise proceeds from that passage, so let us follow it. As for our men, they can wait here; we have nothing to fear now, for if the pirates or the Indians are ambushed to surprise us, they would not have waited so long before doing so, and hence the assistance of our peons is unnecessary."

The capataz shook his head doubtfully. "Hum," he said, "the Indians are very clever. I believe it would be more prudent to let the peons accompany us."

"Nonsense," said his master, "it is unnecessary; we are two resolute and well-armed men; we have nothing to fear, I tell you."

They then entered the passage. It was very narrow, and ran downward a steep incline. The further they proceeded the more distinct the sound of water became; it was evident that at a very short dis-

tance from the spot where they were, perhaps but a few steps, there ran one of those subterranean streams so frequently found in natural caverns.

All at once, without being warned by the slightest sound, the leader of the caravan felt himself seized round the waist, his torch snatched roughly from his hand, and extinguished against a rock, and himself thrown down and securely bound, before he was able to attempt the slightest resistance, so sudden and well calculated had the attack been. Carnero had been thrown down at the same time as his master, and bound.

"Cowards, demons!" the Mexican yelled, "show yourselves, at least, so that I may know with whom I have to deal."

"Silence! Gen. Don Sebastian Guerrero, resign yourself to your fate, for you have fallen into the power of men who will not liberate you."

Gen. Guerrero made a movement of impotent rage, but he was silent; he perceived that the originators of the snare of which he was a victim were implacable enemies.

When his conquerors had borne him to the hall, where his peons were disarmed and guarded, he saw, by the light of the torch that faintly illumined the hall, that among the men who surrounded him few wore the Mexican costume, it was true, and they had their faces hidden by a piece of black crape, forming a species of mask, and so well fastened round their necks, that it was entirely impossible to recognize them.

"What do these men want with me?" he muttered, as he let his head fall on his chest sadly.

"Patience!" said the man who had already spoken, "you will soon know."

CHAPTER VII.

There was a short delay, during which the conquerors appeared to be consulting together in a low voice; while doing so, an Indian chief, who was no other than the Jester, entered the hall. The general and the capataz were then again picked up by the redskins, and at a sign from one of the masked men, transported on to the voladero.

One hundred and fifty to two hundred Indians, mostly armed with guns, and ranged in good order round the terrace, the center of which remained free, faced the cavern, having among them the disarmed Mexicans, the baggage, horses and mules.

The tent still stood in the middle of what was to have been the encampment; but the curtain was raised, and a horseman was standing in front of it, as if to defend the entrance.

At the moment when the party emerged from the cave and appeared on the terrace, the horsemen drawn up at the entrance of the defile opened out to the right and left, leaving a passage for a small troop of men dressed in hunter's garb, and whom it was easy to recognize as white men; two ladies, mounted on ambulating mules, were in the midst of them.

This troop of strangers was composed of eight persons altogether, leading with them two baggage mules. As the men were disarmed, and walked on foot amid some fifty Indian horsemen, they had, in all probability, been surprised by a party of redskins.

The two ladies, one of whom was of a certain age, while the other appeared scarce 18, and who might be supposed closely related, through the resemblance of their features, were treated with an exquisite politeness they were far from expecting by the Indians, and conducted to the tent. The curtain was then lowered, to conceal them from the glances of the Indians.

The newcomers, at a signal from their conductors, ranged themselves with the other prisoners; they were powerful men whom the Indians had probably not given a chance to defend; otherwise they looked as if they would sooner be killed than yield.

Two masked men took their seats on the granite blocks, and the Indians who carried the general laid him on the ground in front of this species of tribunal. The person who seemed to be the president of this sinister assembly gave a sign, the prisoner's bonds at once fell off, and he found himself once more able to move his limbs.

The general drew himself up, crossed his hands on his chest, threw his body back haughtily, raised his head and looked at his judges with a glance of withering contempt.

"What do you want with me, bandits?" he said; "enough of this; these insolent maneuvers will not alarm me."

"Silence!" the president said, coldly; "it is not your place to speak thus."

Then he remarked to the Jester, who was standing a few paces from him:

"Bring up the other prisoners, old and new; everybody must hear what is going to be said."

The Jester gave a signal to the warriors: some of them dismounted, approached the prisoners and, after loosening the cord that bound the capataz, they led him, as well as the peons and prisoners of the second caravan, in front of the tribunal. Then, at a signal from the Jester, the horsemen closed up round the white men.

(To be continued.)

Hardest of All Metals.

Tantalum has been hammered into sheets, which are extremely hard. Sir William Crookes, F. R. S., states that "a hole had to be bored through a plate of this metal and a diamond drill was used, revolving at the rate of 5,000 revolutions per minute. This whirling force was continued ceaselessly for three days and nights, when it was found that only a small depression 25 mm. deep had been drilled, and it was a moot point which had suffered the more damage—the diamond or the tantalum."

It is only a waste of time to look at the ashes after you have burned the money.

Mineral Wealth of the South.

About one-seventh of the mineral production of the entire country comes from the Southern States. Of bituminous coal, the most valuable mineral, the South produces one-fourth, and of iron about one-ninth. Its total coal resources amount to nearly 600,000,000 tons, or more than one-fourth of our estimated coal reserve.

Of mineral chemical materials the South supplies more than one-half, chiefly phosphate rock, all of which is produced in Florida, Tennessee and South Carolina, and nearly one-third of the mineral pigments. Of precious stones the whole country produces only \$325,000 worth, with the South furnishing its fair share.

The showing in iron ore reserves is quite as good; a safe minimum is 3,000,000,000 tons, or nearly one-third of the nation's total. Of workable iron ore the South contains one and one-half times as much as the famous Lake Superior district, and this does not include the deep lying southern ores.

On a basis of value of product the South furnishes more than two-sevenths of our oil and more than one-sixth of our gas.—New York Sun.

It Wasn't New York.

A gentleman who had occasion to go to an inland New England village ten miles from a railroad was met at the station by an old fellow who looked as if he might have just awakened after a Rip Van Winkle sleep. His horse and buggy were in keeping with their owner's ancient appearance.

"Here we air at last," said the driver, when they finally came to three houses and a blacksmith's shop.

"This isn't much of a place, is it?" said the depressed stranger, looking around.

"Oh, you don't see all o' it from here," was the reply. "Thar's two more houses over behind that hill thar, an' a cooper's shop jest around that bend in the road thar. Come to bunch 'em all together an' it's consid'able o' a place—but o' course it ain't New York."—Woman's Home Companion.

A Failure.

Not long ago a man appeared at the capitol and had his card taken in to Senator Bailey. The Senator did not recognize the name, but, in accordance with his usual courtesy, came out to where the stranger was waiting.

It took only a few minutes' conversation to develop the fact that the individual simply desired to make a "touch." It was the regulation "Been unfortunate, sah, and desire to get back to my own country, sah."

"What is your business, colonel?" the Senator inquired. The rusty frock coat and black hat seemed to warrant the title.

"Why, I am a gentleman, Senator," the stranger replied, pompously.

"Oh, I see," the Senator said, pleasantly. "Have you instituted bankruptcy proceedings yet?"—Philadelphia Record.

The Prize Cow.

Take for yourself a well bred cow, get her on full feed, cram and feed and stuff and cram her for, say, a year. Go to the trouble of washing and currying and scrubbing and combing her twice a day, get down on your hunkers, my friend, sandpaper her hoofs, groom her legs, polish her horns and brush her tail, and by the time show season comes around you should have a very creditable looking show cow.—Sheridan (Mo.) Advance.

So Many!

They went in to dinner together. He was very bashful, and she tried in vain to draw him out. Finally she began to talk books, and he became responsive. "And Hugo?" she asked. "Do you like his style?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I find him intensely interesting. I've read a number of his books."

Then she asked, "Have you read 'Ninety-three'?"

"No, I've—er—only read three. I didn't know he had written so many."

—Lippincott's.

Witty Journalism.

Jacob A. Riis, the author and journalist, was talking about witty newspaper headlines.

"As witty a headline as I know," said he, "was written by a youth of 18 in a San Francisco newspaper office. There was a bill up to prohibit the sale of alcoholic drinks within four miles of the University of California, and this bill the youth headed:

"An Act to Promote Pedestrianism Among Our Students."

—Lippincott's.

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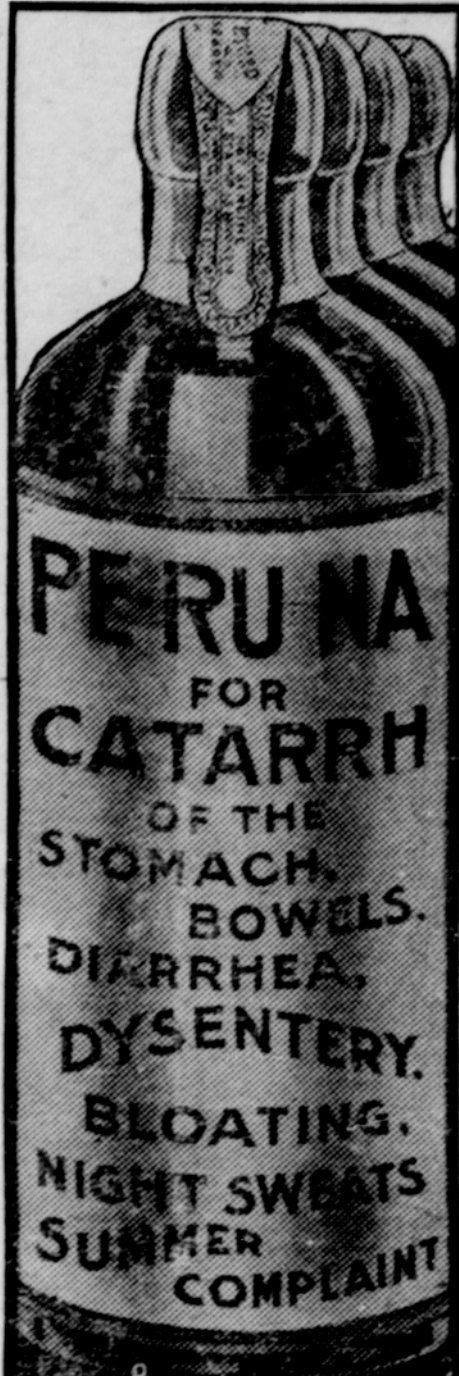
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HEALTH NOTES FOR AUGUST.



August is the month of internal catarrh. The mucous membranes, especially of the bowels, are very liable to congestion, causing summer complaint, and catarrh of the bowels and other internal organs. Peru-na is an excellent remedy for all these conditions.

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