THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

The capataz made a wry face.

"There will be probably plenty of blows to receive, and very little profit to derive from such an expedition."

"I believed that you were devoted to me," the general remarked bitterly.

"Your excellency is not mistaken; I am truly devoted to you, but I have also a fondness for my skin."

"I will give you twenty-five ounces for every slit it receives; is that enough?"

"Come, I see that your excellency wishes me to be cut into mince meat!" the capataz exclaimed joyously.

"Then that is agreed?"

"I should think so, excellency, at that price a man would be a fool to refuse."

"But about horses?"

"We have at least ten or a dozen in the corral.

"That is true; I did not think of that," the general exclaimed, striking his forehead, "have seven lassoed at once."

"Where must I take the senorita?"

"Bring her to this house, for she shall not set foot in the convent again."

"Very good, when shall I start, general?"

"At once, if it be possible."

"In twenty minutes I shall have left the house."

In the meanwhile the carriage dashed along; it passed at full gallop through the San Lazaro gate, then turned suddenly to the right and entered a somewhat narrow street. At about the middle of this street it stopped before a house of rather modest appearance, the gate of which at once opened, and a man came out holding the bridles of two prairie mustangs completely harnessed, and with a rifle at each saddle-bow. The Frenchman got out and invited his companion to follow his example.

"Resume your usual dress," he said, as he led him inside the house.

The Tigrero obeyed with an eager start of joy. While he doffed his gown his companion mounted, after saying to the young ladies:

"Whatever happens, not a word—not a cry; keep the shutters up; we will gallop at the door and remember your lives are in peril."

Don Martial at this moment came out of the house attired as a caballero.

"To horse and let us be off," said M. Rallier.

The Tigrero bounded on to the mustang held in readiness for him, and the carriage, in which the mules had been changed, started again at full speed. The house at which they had stopped was the one hired by Valentine to keep his stud at.

Half an hour thus passed and the carriage disappeared in the thick cloud of dust it raised as it dashed along. Don Martial felt new born; the excitement had restored his old ardor as if by enchantment, he longed to be face to face with his foe, and at length come to a settlement with him.

All at once the Indian uttered a cry. The two men looked back with alarm and saw a body of men coming up at full speed. At this moment the carriage was following a road bounded on one side by a rather thick chapparal, which extended for some distance; on the other by a deep ravine.

At a sign from the Frenchman the carriage was drawn across the road and the ladies got out and went, under Curumilla's protection, to seek shelter behind the trees. The two men, after seeing that their rifles to their shoulders and fingers on the triggers, stood firmly in the middle of the road, awaiting the onset of their adversaries, for, in all probability, the newcomers were enemies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Curumilla, after concealing, with that Indian skill he so thoroughly possessed, the young ladies at a spot where they were thoroughly protected from bullets, had placed himself, rifle in hand, not by the side of the two riders, but, with characteristic redskin prudence, he ambuscaded himself behind the carriage, probably reflecting that he represented the entire infantry force, and not caring, through a point of honor, very absurd in his opinion, to expose himself to a death not only certain but useless to those he wished to defend.

The horsemen, however, on coming within range of the persons they were pursuing, stopped, and by their gestures seemed to evince a hesitation the fugitives did not at all understand, after the fashion in which they had hitherto been pursued. The motive for this hesitation, which the Frenchman and his companions could not know, and which perplexed them so greatly, was very simple.

Carnero, for it was the general's capataz who was pursuing the carriage, with his peons, all at once perceived, with a secret pleasure, it is true, though he was careful not to let his companions notice it, that while they were pursuing the carriage other horsemen were pursuing them, and coming up at headlong speed. On seeing this, as we said, the party halted, much disappointed and greatly embarrassed as to what they had better do.

They were literally placed between two fires, and were the attacked instead of the assailants; the situation was critical, and deserved serious consideration. Carnero suggested a retreat, remarking with a certain amount of reason that the sides were no longer equal and that success was highly problematical. The peons, all utter ruffians, and expressly chosen by the general, but who entertained a profound respect for the integrity of their limbs, and were but very slightly inclined to have them injured in so disadvantageous a contest with people who would not recoil, were disposed to follow the advice of the capataz and retire before a retreat became impossible.

Unhappily, the Zaragate was among the peons. Believing from his conversation with the colonel that he knew better than any one the general's intentions, and attracted by the hope of a rich reward if he succeeded in delivering him of his enemy, that is to say, in killing Valentine; and moreover, probably impelled by the personal hatred he entertained for the hunter, he would not listen to any observation, and swore with horrible oaths that he would carry out the general's orders at all hazards, and that, since the persons they were ordered to stop were only a few paces before them, they ought not to retire until they had, at least, attempted to perform their duty, and that if his comrades were such cowards as to desert him, he would go on alone at his own risk, certain that the general would be satisfied with the way in which he had behaved.

After a declaration so distinct and peremptory, any hesitation became impossible, the more so as the horsemen were rapidly comnig up, and if the capataz hesitated much longer he would be attacked in the rear. Thus driven out of his last intrenchment, and compelled against his will to fight, Carnero gave the signal to push on ahead.

But the peons had scarce started ere three shots were fired, and three men rolled in the dust. The newcomers, in this way, warned their friends to hold their ground and that they were bringing help. The dismounted peons were not wounded, though greatly shaken by their fall, and unable to take part in the fight; their horses alone were hit, and that so cleverly that they at once fell.

"Eh, eh!" the capataz said, as he galloped on; "these picaros have a very sure hand. What do you think of it?"

"I say that there are still four of us; that is double the number of those waiting for us down there, and we are sufficient to master them."

"Don't be too sure, my good friend, Zaragate," the capataz said with a grin; "they are men made of iron, who must be killed twice over before they fall."

The Tigrero and his companions had heard shots and seen the peons bite the dust.

"There is Valentine," said the Frenchman.

"I believe so," Don Martial replied.

"Shall we charge?"

"Yes."

And digging in their spurs, they dashed at the peons.

Valentine and his two comrades, Belhumeur and Black Elk (for the Frenchman was not mistaken, it was really the hunter coming up, whom the Canadian had warned) fell on the peons simultaneously with Don Martial and his companion.

A terrible, silent and obstinate struggle went on for some minutes between these nine men; the foes had seized each other round the body, as they were too close to use firearms, and tried to stab each other. Nothing was heard but angry curses and panting, for what is the use of insulting when you can kill?

The Zaragate, so soon as he recognized the hunter, dashed at him. Valentine, although taken off his guard, offered a vigorous resistance; the two men were entwined like serpents, and, in their efforts to dismount each other, at last both fell, and rolled beneath the feet of the combatants who, without thinking of them, or perceiving their fall, continued to attack each other furiously.

The Zaragate, some years younger than Valentine, and possessed of his full bodily strength, while urged on by the love of a rich reward, made superhuman efforts to master his opponent and plunge his navaja into his heart.

Still Valentine felt that his strength was becoming exhausted, the unexpected resistance he met with from an enemy apparently so little worthy of him exasperated him and made him lose his coolness. Collecting all his remaining vigor to attempt a final and decisive effort, he succeeded in getting his enemy once again under him, and pinned him down; but, at the same moment, Valentine uttered a cry of pain and rolled on the ground—a horse's kick had broken his left arm.

The Zaragate sprang up with a tiger's bound, and bursting into a yell of delight, placed his knee on his enemy's chest, at the same time as he prepared to bury his navaja in his heart. Valentine felt that he was lost, and did not attempt to avoid the death that threatened him.

"Ah, ah!" the Zaragate said, with a ferocious grin. "I hold my vengeance at length, accursed Trail-hunter."

He did not complete the sentence; suddenly seized by his long hair, while a knee, thrust between his shoulders, forced him to bend back, he saw, as in a horrible dream, a ferocious face grinning above his head. With a fearful groan he rolled on the ground; a knife had been buried in his heart, while his scalp, which was suddenly removed, left his denuded skull to inundate with blood the ground around.

Curumilla raised in his arms the body of his friend, whose life he had just saved once again, and bore it to the side of the road. Valentine had fainted.

The chief, so soon as he saw his friends charge the peons, left his ambush, and while careful to remain behind them, followed to the battlefield. He had watched eagerly the long struggle between the hunter and the Zaragate; trying vainly to assist his friend, but never able to succeed. The two enemies were so entwined, their movements were so rapid, and they changed their positions so suddenly that the chief was afraid lest he might wound his friend in attempting to help him. Finally the Araucano bounded like a wild beast on the Mexican, and without hesitation scalped and stabbed him with the agility characteristic of the redskins, and which he himself possessed in so high a degree.

Almost at the same moment the horsemen also finished their fight. The peons had offered a vigorous resistance, but being badly supported by the capataz, who was disabled at the beginning of the skirmish by Don Martial, and seeing the Zaragate dead and three of their friends dismounted and incapable of coming to their assistance, they gave in.

The capataz had been wounded at his own request by Don Martial, in order to save appearances with the general; he had a wide gash on his right arm, very severe at the first glance, but insignificant in reality. A peon had been almost smashed by Belhumeur, so that the field of battle remained in the hands of the hunters.

When their victory was assured, they assembled anxiously round Valentine, for they were alarmed at his condition, and most anxious to be reassured. Valentine, whose arm Curumilla had at once set, with the skill and coolness of an old practitioner, soon reopened his eyes, reassured his friends by a smile, and offered the Indian chief his right hand, which the latter laid on his heart with an expression of indescribable happiness, as he uttered his favorite exclamation of "Ugh!" the only word he permitted himself to use in joy or in sorrow, when he felt himself choking with internal emotion.

"Senores," the hunter said, "it is only an arm broken; thanks to the chief, I have had an easy escape. Let us resume our journey before other enemies come up."

"And we, senor?" the capataz cried humbly.

Valentine rose with the chief's assistance, and took a furious glance at the peons. "As for you, miserable assassins," he said with a terrible accent, "return to your master and tell him in what way you were received. But it is not sufficient to have chastised your perfidy, I must revenge for the odious snare into which my friends and I all but fell. I will learn whether in open day, and some half a dozen miles from Mexico, bandits can thus attack peaceable travelers with impunity. Begone!"

So soon as the peons, in obedience to the hunter's orders, had left the battle field, he, on his part, gave his companions the signal to start. Don Martial had hurried to reassure the ladies, who were standing more dead than alive at the spot where the chief had concealed them. He made them get into the carriage again, without telling them anything except that the danger was past, and that there was not the slightest doubt but what the rest of the journey would be performed in safety.

Valentine's friends tried in vain to induce him to get into the carriage with the ladies. He would not consent, but insisted on mounting his horse, assuring them, in the far from probable event of their being attacked again, that he could be still of some service to his companions in spite of his broken arm. The latter were too well acquainted with his inflexible will to argue or press the point with him further, so Curumilla remounted the coach box and they started.

The rest of the journey was performed without any incident, and they reached the quinta twenty minutes later.

The skirmish had taken place scarce two miles from the country house. On reaching the gates, Valentine took leave of his friend without dismounting.

"What!" the latter said to him, "are you going, Valentine, without resting for a moment?"

"I must, my dear Rallier," he answered; "you know what imperious reasons claim my presence in Mexico."

"But you are wounded."

"Have I not Curumilla to attend to my hurt? Do not be anxious about me; besides, I intend to see you again soon. This quinta appears to me strong enough to resist a surprise. Have you a garrison?"

"I have a dozen servants and my two brothers."

"In that case I am easy in my mind; besides, there is only one night to pass, and I believe that after the lesson his people have received, the general will not venture on a second attack, for some days at least. Besides, he reckons on the success of his pronunciamento. You will come to me to-morrow at daybreak, will you not?"

"I shall not fail."

"In that case I will be off."

"Will you not say good-by to the ladies?"

"They are not aware of my presence and it will be better for them not to see me; so good-by till to-morrow."

(To be continued.)

"MOMENTUM IN VARIATION."

Explanation of Growth of "Useless Animal Organs."

In many animals there are certain organs which, useful in their earlier stages, have apparently been so greatly developed as to become rather hindrances. The horns of certain deer, for example, useful as weapons of defense when smaller, have become so large as rather to handicap the animals in the struggle for life. The huge overgrown teeth, or tusks, of certain of the boar family may be cited as further examples. These are sometimes explained as organs which have been more useful in their present state under former different conditions, and which have persisted through heredity. In the American Naturalist, however, F. B. Loomis brings forward another explanation. He thinks the growth of such organs is due to what he calls "momentum in variation." As a variation proceeds in a certain direction it acquires, like a body moving under the action of gravity, a momentum which may carry it past the stage of greatest utility. This factor in evolution, Mr. Loomis thinks, has not been assigned the importance it deserves.

Other evolutionists, however, have suggested that when an animal or plant has once started to vary in a given direction, it acquires a tendency to go on varying in that direction. And this, although the word momentum is not used, agrees with the above theory.

Listening for Bombs.

"What makes Bilkins jump so at every little noise?"

"He's been over in Russia a year and it's got to be a habit with him."—Detroit Free Press.

The Sahara has over one-half the area of the United States. Its population is very small for its area. The Libyan and Nubian deserts are only a continuation of it to the Red Sea.

There are over 7,000 women in charge of American postoffices.

GUILTY OF REBATING

Santa Fe Railroad Liable to Very Heavy Fine.

JURY FINDS SIXTY-SIX COUNTS

Concessions for Loss in Transportation Not Allowed—May Have to Pay Million and a Quarter.

Los Angeles, Cal., Oct. 12.—After being out 20 minutes the jury in the case of the government against the Santa Fe Railroad company, on trial for rebating in the Federal court here yesterday afternoon, brought in a verdict of guilty against the railroad on all of the 66 counts of the indictment. Judge Wellborn will announce his decision next Monday.

An estimate of the maximum penalty which may be imposed is $1,250,000. The charge against the Santa Fe was that it had granted rebates from its regular tariff on shipments of lime by the Grand Canon Lime & Cement company, of Arizona. The defense of the railroad company was that the rebates were "concessions" made for alleged losses in the shipment during transit. The trial began on September 30.

In his decision on the law points which arose during the trial, Judge Wellborn today laid down a point of law which is held to be one of the most important which had been enunciated since the Interstate Commerce commission was instituted. He said:

"I hold that the acceptance by the defendant of a less sum of money than that named in its tariff for the transportation of the property described in the indictment, if there has been such acceptance, was a departure from the legal rates and that it is no justification for such departure, nor is it any defense in a prosecution thereof that the acts of the carrier were done in compromise of claims for loss of property in transit."

HARRIMAN LINES INDICTED.

Three More Charges of Rebating on Matting From Japan.

San Francisco, Oct. 12.—The Federal grand jury yesterday reported to United States District Judge DeHaven three indictments against the Southern Pacific company and two against the Pacific Mail Steamship company for carrying freight for less than the legal rate between Kobe, Japan, and various cities in the United States. The cargo consisted of matting, which was brought from Kobe to San Francisco in the Pacific Mail steamship Mongolia and thence to the East by the Southern Pacific and its connections. The indictments are supplementary to those of a similar nature filed last week.

Flour Prices Boosted.

Los Angeles, Oct. 12.—Flour went up 20 cents a barrel in Los Angeles yesterday, a rise that has been expected for some time, owing to the rapid advance of wheat. The San Francisco flour market went up four weeks ago, but owing to the large supply on hand the Los Angeles prices remained stationary. With a big shortage in the wheat crop of the United States, there is a tremendous increase in the demand for export meals and cereals, and feeds will advance shortly, according to dealers.

Sugar Advances in South.

Los Angeles, Oct. 12.—Sugar has just been advanced 20 cents a barrel. Both the cane and beet varieties are affected. Wholesale dealers say the rise in price is due to an increased demand and to the fact that the output of Europe and South America is not more than the average. Nathan Cole, vice president of the Pacific Sugar company, says that this is the first of a series of advances. The next one will occur within a week, he thinks, and will probably be as great.

Same Reduced Rates in 1908.

Omaha, Neb., Oct. 12.—The Union Pacific and Southern Pacific lines in connection with the Chicago & Northwestern, Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul and other transcontinental lines have given notice to the Transcontinental association that they will continue colonist rates during the months of March and April, 1908, and on the same basis as the rates which were in effect during March, April, September and October, 1907.

Schmitz Will Appeal.

San Francisco, Oct. 12.—The attorneys for ex-Mayor Eugene Schmitz, who has been convicted of extortion and sentenced to five years' imprisonment, will this afternoon file their appeal in the Appellate court. It was not believed that the matter would come up for hearing until late in November or early in December.

Advancing on Casa Blanca.

Paris, Oct. 12.—A telegram has been received from General Drude, commander of the French expeditionary forces in Morocco, saying that one of Mulai Hafig's armies has arrived within 20 miles of Casa Blanca. The Moors have with them four pieces of artillery.

Biggest Warship in World.

Yokohama, Oct. 12.—Japan is to have the largest battleship in the world, according to advices received here today. Instructions have also been given to construct a vessel similar to the new style of British destroyer, but much higher.

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