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(Continued.)

"But there are 20 warriors to every soldier," was the answer, "and all are fighting men."

They watched the pair until they disappeared far to the west. All day long the lookouts searched the horizon. All that night the sentries listened for hoofbeats on the Bozeman road, but only the weird chorings of the coyotes wake the echoes of the dark prairie. Dawn of the second day came, and, unable to bear suspense, the major sent a little party, mounted on their fleetest horses, to scour the prairie at least halfway to the foothills of the Big Horn, and just at nightfall they came back—three at least—galloping like mad, their mounts a mass of foam. Folsom's dread was well founded. Red Cloud, with heaven only knows how many warriors, had camped on Crazy Woman's Fork within the past three days, and gone on up stream. He might have met and fought the troops sent out three days before. He must have met the troops dispatched to Warrior Gap.

And this last, at least, he had done. For a few seconds after the fall of the buffalo bull, the watchers on the distant ridge lay still, except that Bryan, leaning slightly earlier to the order of the trumpeter, who had come trotting out after the troop commander, and was now halted and stood some 20 yards down the slope. "Go back, Bryan," he ordered. "Halt the ambulances. Notify Capt. Brooks that there are lots of Indians ahead, and have the sergeant deploy the men at once." Then he turned back and with his field glass studied the party along the ravine.

"They can't have seen us," can they, lieutenant?" muttered the trooper nearest him.

But Dean's young face was grave and clouded. Certainly the Indians acted as though they were totally unaware of the presence of troops, but the more he thought the more he knew that no big body of Sioux would be traveling across country at so critical a time (country, too, that was conquered as this was from their enemies, the Crows), without vigilant scouts afar out on front and flank. The more he thought the more he knew that even as early as three o'clock those keen-eyed fellows must have sighted his little column, conspicuous as it was because of its wagons. Beyond question, he told himself, the chief of the band or village so steadily approaching from the northeast had full information of their presence, and was coming confidently ahead. What had he to fear? Even though the blood of settlers and soldiers might still be red upon the hands of his braves, even though fresh scalps might be hanging at this moment from their shields, what mattered it? Did he not know that the safeguard of the Indian bureau spread like the wing of a protecting angel over him and his people, forbidding troops to molest or open fire unless they themselves were attacked? Did he not laugh in his ragged shirt sleeve at the policy of the white fool who would permit the red enemy to ride boldly up to his soldiers, count their numbers, inspect their array, satisfy himself as to their armament and readiness, then calculate the chances, and, if he thought the force too strong, ride on his way with only a significant gesture in parting insult? If, on the contrary, he found it weak, then he could turn loose his braves, surround, massacre and scalp, and, when the commissionaries sent out to investigate next morn that he and his people knew nothing about the matter—nothing, at least, that they could be induced to tell.

One moment more Dean watched and waited. Two of the Indians in the ravine were busily reloading their rifles. Two others were aiming over the bank, for, with the strange stupidity of their kind, the other buffalo, even when startled by the shot, had never sought safety in flight, but were now sniffing the odor of blood on the tainted air and slowly, wonderingly drawing near the stricken leader as though to ask what ailed him. Obedient and docile the Indian ponies stood with drooping heads, hidden under the shelter of the steep banks. Nearer and nearer came the big black animals, bulky, stupid, fatuous; the foremost lowered a huge head to sniff at the blood oozing from the shoulder of the dying bull, then two more shots puffed out from the ravine, the huge head tossed suddenly in air, and the ungainly brute started and staggered, whirled about and darted a few yards away, then plunged on its knees, and the next moment, startled at some sight the soldier watchers could not see, the black band was seized with sudden panic and darted like mad into the depths of the watercourse, disappeared one moment from sight, then, suddenly reappearing, came laboring up the hither side, straight for the crest on which they lay, a dozen black, bounding, panting beasts thundering over the ground, followed by half a dozen daring Indian ponies, each with the lion rider scurrying in pursuit.

"Out of the way, men! Don't fire!" shouted Dean. And, scrambling back toward their horses, the lieutenant and his men drew away from the front

of the charging herd, invisible as yet to the halted troop and to the occupants of the ambulance, whose eager heads could be seen poked out at the side doors of the leading vehicle, as though watching for the cause of the sudden halt.

And then a thing happened that at least one man saw and fortunately remembered later. Bryan, the trumpeter, with jabbing heels and flapping arms, was tearing back toward the troop at the moment at the top speed



Disdainfully turned their backs.

of his gray charger, already so near that he was shouting to the sergeant in the lead. By this time, too, that veteran trooper, with the quick sense of duty that seemed to inspire the wartime sergeant, had jumped his little column "front into line" to meet the unseen danger; so that now, with carbines advanced, some thirty bayonets were aligned in the loose fighting order of the prairies in front of the foremost wagon. The sight of the distant officer and men tumbling hurriedly to one side, out of the way presumably of some swiftly-coming peril, acted like magic on the line. Carbines were quickly brought to ready, the gun locks crackling in chorus as the horses pranced and snorted. But it had a varying effect on the occupants of the leading wagon. The shout of "Indians" from Bryan's lips, the sight of scurry on the ridge ahead brought the engineer and aid-de-camp springing out, rifle in hand, to take their manly part in the coming fray. It should have brought Maj. Burleigh too, but that appropriately named non-combatant never showed outside. An instant more and to the sound of rising thunder, before the astonished eyes of the cavalry line there burst into view, full rear for safety, the uncouth, yet marvelously swift-running leaders of the little herd. The whole dozen came flying across the sky line and down the gentle slope, heading well around to the left of the line of troopers, while sticking to their flanks like red nettles half a dozen warriors rode like the wind on their nimble ponies, cracking away with revolver or rifle in savage joy in the glorious sport. Too much for Burleigh's nerve was the combination of sounds, thunder of hoofs and sputter of shots, for when a cheer of sympathetic delight went up from the soldier line at the sight of the chase, and the young engineer sprang to the door of the ambulance to help the major out, he found him a limp and hasty leap, quivering with terror in the bottom of the wagon, looking for all the world as if he were trying to crawl under the seat.

CHAPTER IV.

Away to the left of the little command tore the quarry and the chase. Out on the rolling prairie, barely four hundred yards from where the ambulance and mules were backed into a tangle of traces and whiffetrees and fear-stricken creatures, another buffalo had dropped in a heap; a swartly rider had tumbled off his pony, cut a slash or two with ever-ready knife, and then, throwing a bead-benzed left leg over his eager little mount, had gone lashing away after his fellows, not without a jeering slap at the halted soldierly. Then, in almost less time than it takes to tell it, the pursued and pursuers had vanished from sight over a low ridge a mile to the north. "Only a hunting party," said one of the nervous recruits, with a gulp of relief. "Only a hunting party," gasped Burleigh, as presently he heaved himself up from the floor, "and I thought I'd never find that damned gun of mine. All this fuss for nothing!" he continued, his lips still blue and quivering. "That green youngster up there in front hasn't learned the first principles of plainscraft yet. Here, Brooks," he added, loudly, "it's high time you were looking after this sub of yours," and Brooks, despite his illness, was indeed working out of the back door of his yellow trundle bed at the moment, and looking anxiously about. But the engineer stood pale and quiet, coolly studying the flustered growler, and when Burleigh's shifting eyes sought that young scientist's face, what he read there—and Burleigh was no fool—told him he would be wise to change the tune. The aid had pushed him in front of the troop and was signaling to Dean, once more in saddle and scan-

ning through his glass the big band after down the valley.

"Take my horse, sir," said the sergeant, dismounting, and the officer thanked him and rode swiftly out to join the young commander at the front. Together they gazed and consulted and still no signal came to resume the advance. Then the troopers saw the staff officer make a broad sweep with his right arm to the south, and in a moment Dean's hat was up-lifted and waved well out in that direction. "Drop carbine," growled the sergeant. "By two again. Incline to the right. Damn the Sioux, I say! Have we got to circle five miles around their hunting ground for fear of hurting their feelings? Come on, Jimmy," he added to the driver of the leading wagon. Jimmy responded with vigorous language at the expense of his leading mules. The quartermaster and engineer silently scrambled in; the ambulance started with a jerk and away went the party off to the right of the trail, the wagons jolting a bit now over the uneven clumps of bunch grass.

But once well up at the summit of the low divide the command reined in for a look at the great Indian cavalcade swarming in the northern valley, and covering its grassy surface still a good mile away. Out from among the dingy mass came galloping half a dozen young braves, followed by as many squaws. The former soon spread out over the billowy surface, some following the direction of the chase, some bounding on southwestward as though confident of finding what they sought the moment they reached the nearest ridge; some riding straight to the point where lay the carcasses of the earliest victims of the hunt. Here in full view of the soldiery, but vouchsafing them no glance nor greeting whatever, two young warriors reined in their lively ponies and disdainfully turned their backs upon the spectators on the divide, while the squaws, with shrill laugh and chatter, rolled from their saddles and began the drudgery of their lot—skinning and cutting up the buffaloes slaughtered by their lords.

"Don't you see," sneered Burleigh, "it's nothing but a village out for a hunt—nothing in God's world to get stampeded about. We've had all this show of warlike preparations for nothing." But he turned away again as he caught the steady look in the engineer's blue eyes, and shouted to his more appreciative friend, the aid-de-camp: "Well, pardner, haven't we fooled away enough time here, or have we got to await the pleasure of people that never saw Indians before?"

Dean flushed crimson at the taunt. He well knew for whom it was meant. He was indignant enough by this time to speak for himself, but the aid-de-camp saved him the trouble.

"I requested Mr. Dean to halt a few moments, Burleigh. It is necessary, I should know what band this is, and how many are out."

"Well, be quick about it," snapped the quartermaster. "I want to get to Reno before midnight, and at this rate we won't make it in a week."

A sergeant who could speak a little Sioux came riding back to the camp, a grin on his sun-battered face. "Well, sergeant, what'd he say?" asked the staff officer.

"He said would I plaze go to hell, sor," was the prompt response. "Won't he tell you they are?"

"He won't, sorr. He says we know would ask 'em what they are, sor. They're Ogallallas to a man, berrin' the squaws and papposes, wid oud Red Cloud himself."

Brooks was badgered into telling Dean to let the ambulance take the lead. The driver shirked at once.

"There's no tellin' where we'll fetch up," said he. "Those mules can't see the trail if a man can't. Take their harness off and turn 'em loose, an' I suppose they can find their way to the post, but sure as you turn them loose when they've got somethin' on 'em, or behind 'em, and the doggone cussedness of the creatures will prompt them to smash things."

But the quartermaster said he'd tried it with those very mules, between Emory and Medicine Bow a dozen times, and he'd risk it. The driver could get off his seat if he wanted to, and run alongside, but he'd stay where he was.

"Let me out, please," said the engineer, and jumped to the ground, and then the cavalcade pushed on again. The driver, as ordered by an employer whom he dare not disobey, let the reins drop on the mules' backs, the troopers falling behind, the yellow ambulance and the big baggage wagon bringing up the rear.

(To Be Continued.)

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