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(CONTINUED.

And this last pound broke the back of Burleigh's obstinacy. It was nearly midnight anyway. The best thing to be done was to unhitch, unsaddle and bivouac until the gray light of dawn came peering over the eastward prairie, which in that high latitude and "long-day" month would soon be after three. Then the could push on to Reno.

Not until nearly eight o'clock in the morning, therefore, did they heave in sight of the low belt of dingy green that told of the presence of a stream still long miles away; and here, knowing himself to be out of danger, the major bade the weary escort march in at a walk while he hurried on. In 15 minutes the black-hooded wagon was twisting and turning over the powders road a good mile ahead, its dust rising nigh over the sage-covered desert, while the other two, with the dust-begrimed troopers, jogged sturdily on. Loring, the young engineer, had waved a cordial good-by to his old cadet acquaintance. "See you later, old man," he cried. Stone, the aid-de-camp, nodded and said: "Take care of yourself," and Burleigh said nothing at all. He was wondering what he could do to muzzle Loring in case that gifted young graduate were moved to tell what the quartermaster actually did when he heard the rush and firing out at the front on the road from Warrior Gap.

But when at last the black wagon bowled in at the stockaded quadrangle and discharged its occupants at the hut of the major commanding, there were tidings of such import to greet them that Burleigh turned yellow-white again at thought of the perils they had escaped.

"My God, man!" cried the post commander, as he came hurrying out to meet the party, "we've been in a blue funk about you fellows for two whole days. Did you see any Indians?"

"See any Indians!" said Burleigh, rallying to the occasion, as became a man who knew how to grasp an opportunity. "We stood off the whole Sioux nation over toward Crazy Woman's fork. There were enough to cover the country, red and black, for a dozen miles. We sighted them yesterday about four o'clock, and there were enough around us to eat us alive, but we just threw out skirmish lines and marched steadily ahead, so they thought best not to bother us. They're shy of our breech-loaders, damn 'em! That's all that kept them at respectful distance."

The major's face as he listened took on a puzzled, perturbed look. He did not wish to say anything that might reflect on the opinions of so influential a man as the depot quartermaster at Gate City, but it was plain that there was a train of thought rumbling through his mind that would collide with Burleigh's column of events unless he were spared the need of answering questions. "Let me tell you briefly what's happened," he said. "Red Cloud and his whole band are out on the warpath. They killed two couriers, half-breeds, I sent out to find Thornton's troop that was scouting the Dry Fork. The man we sent to find you and give you warning hasn't got back at all. We've had double sentries for three days and nights. The only souls to get in from the northwest since our fellows were run back last night are old Folsom and Baptiste. Folsom had a talk with Red Cloud and tried to induce him to turn back. He's beset with the idea that the old villain is plotting a general massacre along the Big Horn. He looks like a ghost. He says if we had 5,000 soldiers up there there'd hardly be enough. You know the Sioux have sworn by him for years, and he thought he could coax Red Cloud to keep away, but all the old villain would promise was to hold his young men back ten days or so until Folsom could get the general to order the Warrior Gap plan abandoned. If the troops are there Folsom says it's all up with them. Red Cloud can rally all the northern tribes, and it's only because of Folsom's influence, at least I fancy so—that—that they didn't attack you."

"Where is Folsom?" growled Burleigh, as he shook the powdery cloud from his linen duster and followed the major within his darkened door, while other officers hospitably led the aid and engineer into an adjoining hut.

"Gone right on to Frayne. The old fellow will wear himself out, I'm afraid. He says he must get in telegraphic communication with Omaha before he's four days older. My heaven, man, it was a narrow squeak you had! It's God's mercy Folsom saw Red Cloud before he saw you."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the quartermaster, turning over a little packet of letters awaiting him in the commanding officer's sanctum. "We could have given a good account of ourselves, I reckon. Brooks is down with fever, and young Dean got rattled, or something like it. He's new at the business and easily scared, you know; so I practically had to take command. They'll be along in an hour or so, and—a word in your ear: If Brooks has to remain on sick report you'd better put somebody in command of that troop that's had—er—er—experience."

The post commander looked genuinely troubled. "Why, Burleigh, we've all taken quite a shine to Dean. I know the officers in his regiment think a heap of him; the seniors do, at least."

But Burleigh, with big eyes, was glaring at a letter he had selected, opened and was hurriedly reading. His face was yellowing again, under the blister of sun and alkali.

"What's amiss?" queried his friend. "Nothing wrong, I hope. Why, Burleigh, man! Here, let me help you!" he cried, in alarm, for the quartermaster was sinking into a chair.

"You can help me!" he gasped. "Get me fresh mules and escort. My God! I must start for Frayne at once. Some whisky, please." And the letter dropped from his trembling hands and lay there unnoticed on the floor.

CHAPTER V.

Mid June had come, and there was the very devil to pay — so said the scouts and soldiers up along the Big Horn. But scouts and soldiers were far removed from the states and cities where news was manufactured, and those were days in which our Indian outbreaks were described in the press long after, instead of before, their occurrence. Such couriers as had got through Frayne brought dispatches from the far-isolated posts along that beautiful range, insisting that the Sioux were swarming in every valley. Such dispatches, when wired to Washington and "referred" to the department of the interior and re-referred to the head of the Indian bureau, were scoffed at as sensational.

"Our agents report the Indians peaceably assembled at their reservations. None are missing at the weekly distribution of supplies except those who are properly accounted for as out on their annual hunt." The "officers," said the papers, "seem to take the real Indian in every bush," and unpleasant things were hinted at the officers in consequence.

Indians there certainly were in other sections, and they were unquestionably "raising the devil" along the Smoky Hill and the Southern plains, and there the interior department insisted that troops in strong force should be sent. So, too, along the line of the Union Pacific. Officials were still nervous. Troops of cavalry camped at intervals of forty miles along the line between Kearney and Julesburg, and even beyond. At Washington and the great cities of the east, therefore, there was no anxiety as to the possible fate of those little garrisons, with their helpless charge of women and children, away up in the heart of the Sioux country. But at Laramie and Frayne and Emory, the

"Got heap better," was his comment.

nearest frontier posts; at Cheyenne, Omaha and Gate City the anxiety was great. When John Folsom said the Indians meant a war of extermination people west of the Missouri said: "Withdraw those garrisons while there is yet time, or else send five thousand troops to help them." But people east of the Missouri said: "Who the devil is John Folsom? What does he know about it? Here's what the Indian agent says, and that's enough," and people east of the Missouri being vastly in the majority, neither were the garrisons relieved nor the reenforcements sent. What was worse, John Folsom's urgent advice that they discontinue at once all work at Warrior Gap and send the troops and laborers back to Reno was pooh-poohed.

"The contracts have been let and signed. The material is all on its way. We can't back out now," said the officials. "Send runners to Red Cloud and get him to talk. Promise him a lot of presents. Yes, if he must have them, tell him he shall have breech-loaders and copper cartridges—to shoot buffalo with, of course. Promise him pretty much anything to be good and keep his hands off a little longer till we get that fort and the new agency buildings finished, and then let him do what he likes."

Such were the instructions given the commissioners and interpreters hurried through Gate City and Frayne, and on up to Reno just within the limit fixed by Folsom. Red Cloud and his chiefs came in accordingly, arrayed in pomp, paint and finery, shook hands grimly with the representatives of the Great Father, critically scanned the proffered gifts, disdainfully rejected the muzzle-loading rifles and old dragoon horse-pistols heaped before him. "Got heap better," was his comment, and nothing but brand new breech-loaders would serve his purpose. Promise them and he'd see what could be done to restrain his young men. But they were "pretty mad," he said, and couldn't be relied upon to keep the peace unless sure of getting better arms and ammunition to help them break it next time. It was only temporizing. It was only encouraging the veteran war chief in his visions of power and control. The commissioners came back beaming. "Everything satisfactorily arranged. Red Cloud and his people are only out for a big hunt." But officers whose wives and children prayed fearfully at night within the puny wooden stockades, and listened trembling to the howls and tom-toms of the dancing Indians around the council fires in the neighboring valleys, wished to heaven they had left those dear ones in safety at their eastern homes—wished to heaven they could send them thither now, but well knew that it was too late. Only as single spies, riding by night, hiding by day, were couriers able to get through from the Big Horn to the Platte. Of scouts and soldiers sent at different times since the middle of May, seven were missing, and never, except through vague boastings of the Indians, were heard of again.

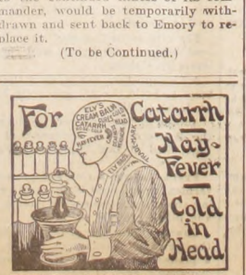
"It is a treacherous true, I tell you," said Folsom, with grave, anxious face, to the colonel commanding Fort Emory. "I have known Red Cloud 20 years. He's only waiting a few weeks to see if the government will be fool enough to send them breech-loaders. If it does, he'll be all the better able to fight a little later on. If it doesn't he will make it his casus belli."

It was nearly 300 miles by the winding mountain road from Gate City to Warrior Gap. Over hill and dale and mountain pass the road ran to Frayne, thence, fording the North Platte, the wagon trains, heavily guarded, had to drag over miles of dreary desert, over shadeless slopes and divides to the dry wash of the Powder, and by roads deep in alkali dust and sage brush to Cantonment Reno, where far to the west the grand range loomed up against the sky—another long day's march away to the nearest foothills, to the nearest drinkable water, and then, 40 miles further still, in the heart of the grand pine-covered heights, was the rock-bound gateway to a lovely park region within, called by the Sioux some wild combination of almost unpronounceable syllables, which, freely translated, gave us Warrior Gap, and there at last accounts, strengthened by detachments from Frayne and Reno, the little command of fort builders worked away, ax in hand, rifle at hand, subjected every hour to alarm from the vedettes and pickets posted thickly all about them, pickets who were sometimes found stone dead at their posts, transfixed with arrows, scalped and mutilated, and yet not once had Indians in any force been seen by officers or man about the spot since the day Red Cloud's whole array passed Brooks' troop on the Reno trail, peaceably hunting buffalo. "An' divil a sowl in the outfit," said old Sergt. Shaughnessy, "that hadn't his tongue in his cheek."

For three months that hard-worked troop had been afield, and the time had passed and gone when its young first lieutenant had hoped for a leave to go home to see the mother and Jess. His captain was still ailing and unfit for duty in saddle. He could not and would not ask for leave at such a time, and yet at the very moment when he was most earnestly and faithfully doing his whole duty at the front, slander was busy with his name long miles at the rear.

Something was amiss with Burleigh, said his cronies at Gate City. He had come hurrying back from the hills, had spent a day in his office and not a cent at the club, had taken the night express unbeknown to anybody but his chief clerk, and gone hurrying eastward. It was a time when his services were needed at the depot, too. Supplies, stores, all manner of material were being freighted from Gate City over the range to the Platte and beyond, yet he had wired for authority to hasten to Chicago on urgent personal affairs, got it and disappeared. A young regimental quartermaster was ordered in from Emory to take charge of shipments and sign invoices during Burleigh's temporary absence, and the only other officer whom Burleigh had seen and talked with before his start was the venerable post commander. One after another the few cavalry troops (companies) on duty at Emory had been sent afield until now only one was left, and three days after Burleigh started there came a dispatch from department headquarters directing the sending of that one to Frayne at once. Capt. Brooks' troop, owing to the continued illness of its commander, would be temporarily withdrawn and sent back to Emory to replace it.

(To be Continued.)



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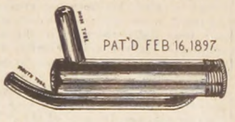

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