

The Reflector.

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 1890.

(Continued from Last Week.)

DUNRAVEN RANCH

A Story of American Frontier Life.

By Capt. CHARLES KING, U. S. A., Author of "The Colonel's Daughter," "From the Banks," "The Deserter," Etc.

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"Several officers called three years ago, but he begged to be excused." "And what is the name?" "Mr. Maitland—is what he is called."

"All right. Possibly the time may come when Mr. Maitland will be as anxious to have the cavalry around him as he is now to keep it away. But if you ever feel like coming up to the fort, just ride in and ask me for."

"I feel like it a dozen times a week, you know; but a man mustn't quarrel with his bread and butter. I met one of your fellows once on a hunt after strays."

"A quick change came over the Englishman's face; a flush of surprise and anger shot up to his forehead, he wheeled about and gazed eagerly, lowering his back towards the far away buildings."

"How do you know there was—What fellow did you see?" he sharply asked. "Oh, I don't know who he was," answered Perry, coolly. "He avoided me just as pointedly as you did—galloped across the Monee and out on the prairie to dodge me; but he came out of that gate on the stream, looked it after him, and went on up to the fort, and his horse had cavalry shoes. Good day to you, my Britanick friend. Come and see us when you get tired of prison life."

"And, with a grin, Mr. Perry turned and rode rapidly away, leaving the other horse-man in a brown study. Once fairly across the Monee he ambled placidly along, thinking of the odd situation of affairs at this great prairie reservation, and almost regretting that he had paid the ranch the honor of a call. Reaching the point where the wagon tracks crossed the stream to the gateway in the boundary fence, he reined in Nolan and looked through a vista in the cottonwoods. There was the Englishman, dismounted, stooping over the ground and evidently examining the hoof prints at the gate. Perry chuckled at the sight, then whistling for Bruce, who had strayed off through the timber, he resumed his jaunty way to the post."

In the events of the morning there were several things to give him abundant cause for thought, if not for lively curiosity, but he had not yet reached the sum total of surprises in store for him. He was still two miles out from the fort, and riding slowly along the bottom, when he became aware of a trooper coming towards him on the trail. The sunbeams were glinting on the polished ornaments of his forage cap and on the bright yellow chevrons of his snugly fitting blouse. Tall and slender and erect was the coming horseman, a model of soldierly grace and carriage, and as he drew nearer and his hand went up to the cap visor in salute a gesture from his young superior brought an instant pressure on the rein, and horse and man became an animated statue. It was a wonderfully sudden yet easy check of a steed in rapid motion, and Mr. Perry, a capital rider himself, could not withhold his admiration. "Where did you learn that sudden halt, sergeant?" he asked. "I never saw anything so quick except the Mexican training; but that strains a horse and throws him on his haunches."

"It is not uncommon abroad, sir," was the quiet answer. "I saw it first in the English cavalry; and it is easy to teach the horse."

"I must get you to show me the knack some day. I've noticed it two or three times, and would like to learn it. What I stopped you for is this: You've been stable sergeant ever since we got here, have you not?"

"Yes, sir." "Then if anybody besides members of the troop had horses shod at our forge you would be pretty apt to know it?" "I know that no one has, sir." And a flush was rising to the young sergeant's face and a pained look hovering about his bright blue eyes. Yet his manner was self-restrained and full of respect.

"Don't think I'm intimating anything to the contrary, Sergt. Gwynne. No soldier in the regiment more entirely holds the confidence of his captain—all the officers—than you. I was not thinking of that. But somebody down there at that big ranch below us has had his horse shod by a cavalry farrier—it may have been done while the Eleventh were here—and, while I knew you would not allow it at our forge, I thought it possible that it might be done in your absence."

"It's the first time I've been out of sight of the stables since we came to the post, sir, and the captain gave me permission to ride down the valley this morning. May I ask the lieutenant why he thinks some ranchman is getting his shoeing done here at the post?"

"I've been down there this morning, and met a man coming up. He avoided me, and rode over to the south side, and so excited my curiosity; and as they keep that whole place enclosed in a wire fence, and he had evidently come out of the north gate, I was struck by the sight of the hoof prints; they were perfectly fresh there on the trail, and plain, you know. By the way, he rode up to the fort, and probably entered at your side of the garrison; did you see him?"

"No, sir, and, except for breakfast—just after reveille—I have been at stables all the morning. I was there when the lieutenant got his horse."

"Yes, I remember. Then no one rode in from the valley?" "No, sir—no ranchman, sir. The only horsemen I've seen were some Cheyenne scouts during the last two hours, and Dr. Quin—just before sick call."

"Dr. Quin—the post surgeon! Are you sure, sergeant?" "Certainly, sir. The doctor rode into the post just about an hour after the lieutenant left—coming up the valley too. He went right around to his own stable, over towards the hospital."

"A look of amazement and stupefaction was settling on Perry's face. Now for the first time he recalled Mrs. Lawrence's intimations with regard to the doctor and his connection with the signal lights. Now for the first time it occurred to him that the secret of those cavalry hoof prints at the gate was that no ranchman, but an officer of the garrison, had been the means of leaving them there. Now for the first time it flashed upon him that the Englishman's astonishment and concern on hearing of those hoof tracks indicated that the story of a mystery at Dunraven in which the doctor was connected amounted to something more than garrison rumor. Now for the first time an explanation occurred to him of the singular conduct of the horseman who had dodged him by crossing the Monee. Never in his young life had he known the hour when he was ashamed or afraid to look any man in the eye. It struck him to think that here at Rossiter, wearing the uniform of an honorable profession, enjoying the trust and confidence of all his fellows, was a man who had some secret enterprise of which he dared not speak and of whose discovery he stood in dread. There could be little doubt that the elusive stranger was Dr. Quin, and that there was grave reason for the rumors of which Mrs. Lawrence had vaguely told him."

For a moment he sat, dazed and irresolute, Nolan impatiently pawing the turf while, then, far across the prairie and down the valley there came floating quick and spirited, though faint with distance, the notes of the cavalry trumpet sounding "right, front into line." He looked up, startled. "They're out at battalion drill, sir," said the sergeant. "They marched out just as I left the stables."

"Just my infernal luck again!" gasped Perry, as he struck spur to Nolan and sent him tearing up the slope; "I might have known I'd miss it!"

CHAPTER V.



HAT evening a group of cavalry officers came sauntering back from stables, and as they reached the walk in front of officers' row a dark featured, black bearded, soldierly looking captain separated himself from the rest and entered the colonel's yard. The commanding officer happened to be seated on his veranda at the moment, and in close confabulation with Dr. Quin. Both gentlemen ceased their talk as the captain entered, and then rose from their seats as he stepped upon the veranda floor.

"Good evening, Stryker," said the colonel, cheerily. "Come in and have a seat. The doctor and I were just wondering if we could not get you to take a hand at whist to-night."

"I shall be glad to join you, sir, after parade. I have come in to ask permission to send a sergeant and a couple of men, mounted, down to the Monee. One of my best men is missing."

"Indeed! Who is that? Send the men, of course."

"Sergt. Gwynne, sir. The first time I ever knew him to miss a duty."

"Your stable sergeant, too? That is unusual. How long has he been gone?" "Since battalion drill this morning. He was on hand when the men were saddling, and asked permission to take his horse out for exercise and ride down the valley a few miles. I said yes, never supposing he would be gone after noon roll call; and we were astonished when he failed to appear at stables. Perry says he met him two miles out."

"The two culprits" said the colonel, laughing. "Poor Perry is down in the depths again. He rode up to me with such a woebegone look on his face at drill this morning that I could hardly keep from laughing in front of the whole line. Even the men were trying hard not to grin; they knew he had turned up just in the nick of time to save himself an 'absent.' What do you suppose can have happened to Gwynne?"

"I cannot imagine, sir, and am inclined to be worried. He would never willingly overstay a pass; and I fear some accident has happened."

"Is he a good rider?" asked the doctor. "None better in the regiment. He is a model horseman, in fact, and, though he never alludes to nor admits it, there is a general feeling among the men that he has been in the English cavalry service. Of course, there is no doubt of his nationality; he is English to the backbone, and, I fancy, has seen better days."

"What made them think he had been in the cavalry service abroad?" "Oh, his perfect knowledge of trooper duties and management of horses. It took him no time to learn the drill, and he was a sergeant before he had been with me two years. Then, if you ever noticed, colonel," said Capt. Stryker, appealing to his chief, "whenever Gwynne stands at attention he always has the fingers of both hands extended and pointing down along the thigh, close against it—so." And Stryker illustrated. "Now, you never see an American soldier do that; and I never saw it in any but English trained soldiers. He has quit it somewhat of late, because the men told him it showed where he was drilled—we have other English 'non-coms,' you know—but for a long time I noticed that in him. Then he was enlisted in New York city, some four years ago, and all his things were of English make—what he had."

"What manner of looking fellow is he?" asked the doctor. "I think I would have noted him had I seen him."

"Yes, you Englishmen are apt to look to one another," said the colonel in reply. "And Gwynne is a particularly fine specimen. He has your eyes and hair, doctor, but hasn't had time to grow grizzled and bulky yet, as you and I have. One might say that you and the sergeant were from the same shire."

"That would help me very little, since I was only three years old when the governor emigrated," answered the doctor, with a quiet smile. "We keep some traces of the old sod, I suppose, but I've been a Yankee for forty years, and have never once set eyes on Merrie England in all that time. Did the sergeant say where he wanted to go?" And the questioner looked up sharply.

"Nowhere in particular—down the valley was all I remember. I might, but the fact is, he seemed much exercised over the name of that ranch down the Monee—I've forgotten what they call it. Have you heard it, colonel?" "Seems to me I have, but I've forgotten. You have, doctor, have you not?" "Heard what, colonel?"

"The name of that ranch down the Monee—an English ranch, they tell me—about seven miles away."

"Oh, yes—that one! They call it Dunraven Ranch. Did the sergeant take any of the hounds with him, captain? It occurs to me he might have been running a coyote or a rabbit, and his horse may have strayed and fallen with him. There is no end of prairie dog holes down that way."

"No, the dogs are all in. I wouldn't be surprised if he had gone to the ranch. That's an English name, and they are all Englishmen down there, I hear. Very possibly that is the solution. They may have tempted him to stay with English hospitality; though it would astonish me if he yielded. I'll tell the men to inquire there first, colonel, and will go and send them now." And, bowing to his commander, Capt. Stryker turned and left the porch.

The doctor rose, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, paced slowly to the south-east corner of the veranda, and gazed down the distant, wooded valley, an anxious cloud settling on his brow. The colonel resumed once more the newspaper he had dropped upon the floor. After a moment Dr. Quin came slowly back, stood in front of the entrance a few seconds looking irresolutely at the soldier sprawled at full length in his reclining chair, stepped towards him with a preparatory clearing of his throat as though about to speak, and then, suddenly and helplessly abandoning the idea, he plunged down the short flight of steps, hurried out the gate and disappeared around the fence corner in the direction of the hospital. Immersed in his paper, the colonel never seemed to note that he had gone neither did he note the fact that two ladies were coming down the walk.

The soft swish of trailing skirt being insufficient to attract his attention as they arrived nearly opposite the shaded veranda, a silvery peal of laughter broke the stillness of the early evening. Mrs. Belknap's laugh was delicious—soft, melodious, rippling as a canary song, and just as spontaneous. Neither lady had said anything at the moment that was incentive of merriment; but if Mrs. Lawrence had given utterance to the quaint, oddest, most whimsical conceit imaginable, Mrs. Belknap's laugh could not have been more ready, and her great dark eyes shot a sidelong glance to note the effect. Down went the paper, and up, with considerable prepping from his muscular arms, came the burly form of the post commander. Two sweet, smiling faces beamed upon him through an aperture in the leafy screen, and Mrs. Belknap's silvery voice hailed him in laughing salutation.

"Did we spoil your siesta, colonel? How can I make amends? You see, you were so hidden by the vines that no one would dream of your being there in ambush."

"Oh, indeed, I assure you I wasn't asleep," answered the colonel, hastily. "Won't you come in, ladies, and sit here in the shade awhile?" "We thought we would stroll around until parade," said Mrs. Lawrence, hesitatingly, "and then sit down and watch it somewhere."

"No place better than this," promptly answered the colonel. "You can sit behind the vines on that side and see, or, what we would infinitely prefer, sit here at the entrance and be seen. Meantime, I've been unpacking some photograph albums this afternoon, and you can amuse yourselves with those while I put on my harness. Come!"

The colonel's collection of photographs was something the ladies had already heard a great deal of. One of the most genial and popular officers of the army, he had gathered together several large albums full of pictures of prominent men and attractive and distinguished women—not only those with whom he had been associated in his long years of service, but men eminent in national and state affairs, and women leaders in society in many a gay metropolis.

Both the ladies had hoped to see this famous collection the evening before, but the colonel had not then unpacked the albums, and they were disappointed. Now, however, the prospect was indeed alluring, and neither could resist. The first call sounded for parade a few moments after, and the commanding officer was getting himself into his full dress uniform, the two pretty heads were close together, and two pairs of very lovely eyes—one dark and deep and dangerous, the other a clear and honest gray—were dilating over page after page of photographed beauty. There was no need to puzzle over the identity of the originals; under each picture the thoughtful colonel had carefully written the name and address. 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