

THE SANTA FE TRAIL.

By MRS. J. K. HUDSON.

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He is glad that Janey is by his side.

At Fort Dodge the soldiers left the train. No halt was made there. The captain said he thought it better to push on, as so much time had been lost at Pawnee Rock.

At the fort the trail left the Arkansas and struck across the country in a more southwesterly direction toward the Cimarron river. Day after day the heavy train toiled on, slowly and creakingly in the hot sun.

It was an agreeable diversissement in those monotonous days—as it is in all phases and conditions of human life—to have a pair of lovers in the company, and the movements of the captain and Janey were watched with eager but unobtrusive scrutiny. Their little side excursions on horseback, their long talks in the twilight after the corral was formed and the tender glances that often passed swiftly between them were all noted; but these things did not solve the mystery surrounding King and this woman, and as yet no explanation had been offered by the captain further than what he said on the night he came to their aid at Pawnee Rock—that she was his promised wife.

The route of the trail from the point where it touched the Cimarron was up the stream for a considerable distance and then due southwest to the Catholic mission of San Miguel. It now lay through a more broken country. The foothills and low lying spurs of the mountains run out into the adjacent country for many miles, and diversify the plains and the shall fields with new and pleasing scenes. Mountain streams running down toward the valleys of the great rivers that feed the "Father of Waters," patches of verdure that have held their ground against the ugly, prickly cactus and the Spanish bayonet; real trees once more on the high elevations and along the water courses after the sandhills are passed, and then the dim outlines of the mountains in the distance—first the Raton range to the north, and then the Sierra Blanca, the great, perpetually snow covered divide appearing in the low distance like a silver line on a blue base.

Each day's travel increased the altitude, and the nights grew cold, but the days were glorious. New vigor filled the beasts as well as the men as they gained the higher atmosphere, and all pressed on. Up and down again, yet always ascending. Now following the highway of a mesa, now skirting the base of a round-top, now halting to slake their travel thirst from the sparkling arroyos, and again and again pointing out to the tenderfoot passengers the pinnacled cities of the mirage. Here and there a vista of the plains, widening between the foothills, showed this miracle of light half imbedded in and half floating over the sand. Or, a view from some high point that the caravan had almost unconsciously gained looked back over the flat, yellow desert and discovered the "false ponds" and spectral wind blown trees that they had seemingly passed by without knowing it. The curious configuration of the ground often made the mountain streams appear to be flowing up hill to meet the travelers, and then as the trail bent sharply around upon itself the lifelike water would slide away behind a rock and plunge down a precipice into a dark, green fringed basin or a tortuous crack of the canyon.

Hot springs boiled from one of the mountain sides and were walked around with the sediment of the overflow of ages, presenting grotesque shapes and blue-green tints suggestive of under-earth laboratories. To step over these long growing crusts and look for the first time into the bubbling waters; to feel their living motion with the hand; to wonder whence they had come through all the ages since the upheaval of the mountains; let loose their fountain heads, in whose dominions they took their rise; what fires warmed them; whence they gathered their salts and their sparkle, and what force brings them forever and forever upward—that was a rare sensation. The waters still effervesce, and their healing warmth has not diminished a degree, but the wilderness is gone.

When the Santa Fe train reached Las Vegas springs they found the lodge of several old and decrepit Indian families who had come, as their forefathers had for generations before them, to live their wounds and their worn out bodies in the waters. With them were three or four miserable Mexicans, who had crawled over the range from Santa Fe after some train, and who, behind their backs, were called lepers by their compatriots. All had faith that the waters of the mountain would cure their ills, and were happy. They greeted the train people as interlopers and demanded large tribute in anything they could get to eat and drink.

While the caravan was at this stopping place Captain King called the men together and said to them: "I want to be fair with you, partners, so I must tell you that at San Miguel we shall have to part company. We will be married there," nodding his head toward Janey, "by the father at the mission, and from there we will go to my claim up in the territory. You will be but fifty miles from Santa Fe then, and I think there can be little doubt of your safe arrival. It does not look quite the square thing to leave you on the way after you have honored me by making me your captain, but I hope you will forgive that. It may be, partners, that I have nearly as good a reason for resigning as old Jose had—I hope it will be all right."

An awkward silence for a moment held the tongues of the trainmen, but

prosefully one of them spoke up, saying: "All right, old man, why of course it will be all right, only we'll be sorry to lose you, and if you're a-goin' to get married that's excuse enough for any man." "Yes, certainly; certainly we'll let you off and wish you luck wherever you go," said another, and his good wishes were echoed generally around the camp. It was nearly sundown when the train reached the little frontier mission village of San Miguel. The old adobe house looked like a soft water color painting in the prismatic air. The "father" of the mission came forth to greet the weary band, and with upraised hand approached the bowed heads and gave them all his blessing.

Janey was a good Catholic, and her wedding took place in the father's house, with nearly all of her companions on the overland journey and many of the natives of San Miguel as witnesses. John King could not subscribe to the faith that was inherited by Janey from her French forefathers (the only one known to the Spanish-Mexicans of the frontier, but he had been baptized in his youth in the good old realistic Baptist style, and the marriage was not done away from all the scenes and ties of her previous life a woman must feel the seriousness of new wifehood keenly, and it was truly a solemn hour for Janey when she promised to be unto John King a helpmeet for all time. Not that she hesitated an instant; her courage in the face of difficulty had proved her love and loyalty beyond a doubt, but the conventionalities and the sweet surroundings of home and friends are very dear to a woman's heart at such a time, and even plain little Janey thought with a sigh of the gown and the gifts, the music and the flowers, and the glory of the bridal day of her dreams. The same day saw the wedded pair start on their way alone northward—to just what point nobody knew.

From the village the Santa Fe Trail bent sharply to the northwest, the pass through the range at this point being a little to the south of Santa Fe. The Rio Pecos, a sparkling snow water stream, irrigates the fertile valley which is cultivated by the natives, and the everlasting mountains look down on the mud hats that have stood for two or three hundred years in this notch, the easternmost outpost of New Mexican Catholic strongholds.

Greeted by the swarthy rancheros and accompanied by the gayly dressed custom house agents who had come from Santa Fe to meet the traders, the train moved on through the broken range, and for several days toiled up and down the ridges and zigzagged around the mountains before the tired oxen made the last up hill haul onto the table land overlooking the corral.

Here a halt was made for the purpose of making preparations for the "grand entrance." Every man washed his face and the Mexicans combed their long, black hair; until it shone, while the American plainmen made a pretense of smoothing theirs and eclipsed everything by putting on a white shirt. The creaking wheels, now almost ready to fall apart they had become so dry, were greased anew and everything put in the most presentable condition. All were excited and impatient, and every man being now his own master, confusion and uproarious hilarity reigned. When the start to the city was finally made pandemonium broke loose, and the wagons rolled down the hill with the stiff kneeled oxen on a run.

The entire population was out to see the caravan arrive; the captain general, the customs officers, people of all degrees, and the black eyed senoras and senoritas peeped through the barred windows or waited outside, their faces half hidden by the winding rebozo or lace mantilla. Santa Fe was immediately transformed; the old town seemed to wake from a long sleep and become alive. On every side were heard the cries, "Los Americanos!" "La entrá, sa de la caravana!" "Los carros!" and there was hurrying to and fro by the mounted caballeros, all decked out in their brilliant and jangling trappings.

Through the main street the long line of wagons is soon strung out, the drivers shouting their loud and goading the jaded beasts to a last effort. The cracking of whips sounds like a fusillade, and in mere wantonness, or to show their dexterity, their wielders make the blood spurt from the sides of the oxen, or strike a leader in the face until he reels and plunges. Boys and dogs and beggars follow after until the round of the plaza is made, and then comes the general scramble for the custom house, the clamor of the interpreters and the swarming of the country traders, and the long journey of eleven weeks is done.

Not quite so our story. In the busy throng, yet somewhat apart, stands a Mexican who scans the faces of the newly arrived men. They are preoccupied and do not notice the furtive looks of the black browed fellow. Presently, with a gesture of impatience, he turns to one near him and asks in broken English:

"Where's Kingfisher? Wasn't there a driver or a wagon master in the train by the name of Kingfisher? Where is he?" "No, I don't know no such a man."

"A big man, not talk much, Americano, joined the train at Westport?" "No, I tell you, curse you. No such man among 'em. Captain King was the biggest man in the crowd. We lected him captain after old Jose was shot."

"Blue eyes and yaller hair and sorter soft spoken?" "Yes, I reckon that's about the size of him. What's it your business?"

"A volley of oaths and muttered curses was the answer to this question. A change of name, either partial or total, was so common a thing that the Mexican knew better than to trust a man's title as a means of identification. He no longer doubted that 'Captain King' was the man he wanted. Neither did he doubt that in the language of his time, he had 'missed his man,' hence his anger. But suddenly he ceased cursing his luck and drew his brows down in thought. Then turning again to the man at his side he demanded in a voice vibrant with suppressed rage:

"Where did this 'Captain King' as you call him, leave the train?" "At San Miguel."

"If you are lying to me I'll cut your heart out for it!" "What object have I in lying to you about Captain King? He left us at San Miguel, I tell you!"

"Which way did he go?" "South," the trainman said.

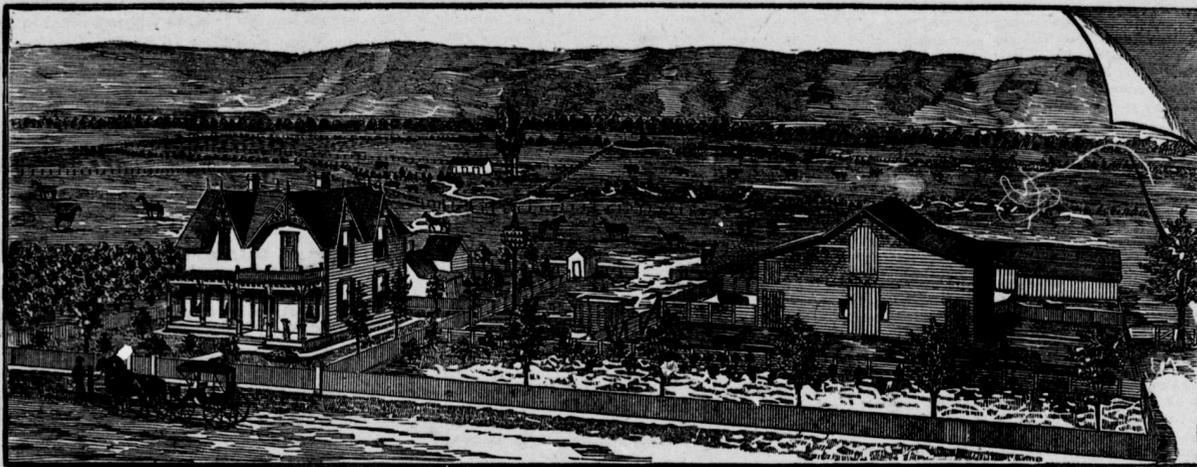
"To Mexico city?" growled the "greaser" between his closed teeth. "I know it! he thinks he will get there" and with a stream of oaths, half English and half Spanish, flowing behind him, he hurried out of the adobe build-

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ing, sprang upon his saddled broncho and galloped clattering up the street toward the hill, the dogs barking at his heels and the stupid gazers half guessing that some desperate deed would be done if Hernando Marino rode like that with hate glaring from his eyes.

"Who is that—Mexican?" questioned the trainman of those who were attracted by the noise in the street and turned to look out. "He is trying to find a man by the name of Kingfisher—thought he was with the train."

"Hugh!" grunted a grizzly half breed who was turning over packages, "he's missed him again! Kingfisher is too smart for him. He's the man that caught Marino stealing cotton down in Mexico and had him jailed for it. Marino always said it was because Kingfisher wanted to marry the Senorita Avellaneda. As soon as he was free Marino swore vengeance, and has been trying to get on the track of Kingfisher since the coast train, they say, but ever since. He went back to the States, rino says he'll come again to the watch. Maybe he will," the garrulous old man continued, "but if he does, I reckon he'll give Santa Fe the go by. He knowed that Marino come back up here, and there's more'n one way 'round to Mexico. Besides, Marino is jealous of his sweetheart, and"

"Hurry up there, old man; what are you chattering about? Handle them things lively now!" interrupted a commanding voice.

None but the trainman whom Marino had questioned had given much heed to the half breed's talk, and nobody else noticed when he left off. The tale was intensely interesting to this one listener, but it had not solved the riddle of Captain King's disappearance from Westport Landing, it had only whetted this man's curiosity, and he waited about impatient for the time when the old man would be released from work and he could loosen his tongue again with a drink of pulque.

He was not hard to start. But in the meantime it had become current rumor that "Captain King" and "Kingfisher" were identical, and that Hernando Marino, his bitter enemy, was on his track. No man in the train had known Kingfisher in Mexico; that is, no man that lived to reach Santa Fe, but more than one of the natives recalled the fact that the trader who was shot by the Indians at Pawnee Rock knew him well. They had heard him speak of the enmity between Marino and Kingfisher. He had come up on the boat from St. Louis, and John King first learned of his presence when he saw him standing on the bow waiting for a landing.

"I'll tell you just how it is," said the half breed after he had drained his glass. "Kingfisher was there to meet the woman he had promised to go back and marry years ago—fact is the States men near about all come out here leavin that kind of a promise behind 'em, or else they come because they've been jilted—and when he seen that trader aboard the boat from St. Louis he had to choose between givin up his woman for good and all, or keepin out of sight till he see what she would do. He knowed that if he was not a dead man afore he reached Santa Fe he would be betrayed into the hands of Marino as soon as he did get here. Womanlike, after the gal had started out to find him she kept right on. Plucky, wasn't she? But it was the hardest course for him—he had to follow. Well, the boys say they went north from San Miguel. That means he's gone up to the Lost Pleiad mine; he's a partner in it—the States men is

givin a hold here, I tell you—and Kingfisher'll be a rich man if Marino don't lay him out."

"One thing is sure," said the trainman, "Captain King, or Kingfisher, is not a coward or he would not have undertaken the journey overland from Westport to Santa Fe without the protection of the train, and he would not have rejoined the train at Pawnee Rock when he learned of our perilous situation, believing as he did that the friend of Hernando Marino, his deadly enemy, was alive in the corral. Captain King is a brave man, I stake my life on that, and the man that meets him wants to have courage. Let this Marino beware."

As the night wanes, Hernando Marino, the vengeful, descends a jagged peak and bears more and more toward the south, cursing the blind rage that has made him lose the trail of the man he seeks.

Toward the north John King and the bride who waited long for his coming went their way in peace. She has never heard of the Senorita Avellaneda, and he—if he has not forgotten her—is glad that Janey is by his side.

The mountain fastnesses are familiar paths to him, and she cares not whether they lead since he is her guide.

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