DUNRAVEN RANCH

A Story of American Frontier Life.

By Capt. CHARLES KING, U. S. A.,

Author of "The Colonel's Daughter," "From the Ranks," "The Deserter," Etc.

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CHAPTER XV.

WO days passed without event of any kind. Socially speaking, the garrison was enlivened by the advent of Mrs. Page, and everybody flocked to the Belknaps' quarters in order to do her proper homage. When Perry called he asked Parke to go with him, and when the latter seemed ready to leave the former, disregarding a very palpable hint from the lady of the house, picked up his forage cap and went likewise. For two days the one subject under constant discussion at the post was the event of Miss Maitland's sudden appearance, her perilous run and her daring and skillful rescue. Everybody maintained that Perry ought to be a very proud and happy fellow to have been the hero of such an occasion; but it was very plain that Perry was neither proud nor anything like happy. No one had ever known him so silent and cast down. The talk with Lawrence had helped matters very little.

In brief, this was about all the captain could tell him, and it was all hearsay evidence at best. The officers of the Eleventh and their ladies had, with a few exceptions, taken a dislike to Dr. Quin before Belknap and Lawrence with their companies of infantry had been ordered to Fort Rossiter. The feeling was in full blast when they arrived, and during the six or eight months they served there together the infantry people heard only one side of the story—that of the Eleventh—for the doctor never condescended to discuss the matter. After he was forbidden to leave the post by his commanding officer, and after the announcement of the "blockade" of Dunraven, it was observed that signals were sometimes made from the ranch at night: a strong light thrown from a reflector was flashed three times and then withdrawn. Next it was noted, by an enterprising member of the guard, that these signals were answered by a light in the doctor's windows, then that he mounted his horse and rode away down the valley of the Monee. He was always back at sick call; and, if any one told the commanding officer of his disobedience of orders, it was not done until so near the departure of the Eleventh that the doctor was not afterwards actually caught in the act. Things would undoubtedly have been brought to a crisis had the Eleventh been allowed to remain.

Now as to the story about Mrs. Quin and her going. It was observed during the winter that she was looking very badly, and the story went the rounds in the Eleventh that she was stung and suffering because of her husband's conduct. Unquestionably there was some fair enchantress at Dunraven who lured him from his own fireside. She had no intimates among the ladies. She was proud and silent. It did not seem to occur to them that she was resentful of their dislike of her husband. They were sure she was "pining" because of his neglect—or worse. When, therefore, without word of warning, she suddenly took her departure in the spring, there was a gasp of gossip loving cronies in the garrison; all doubts were at an end; she had left him and taken her children with her.

"The more I think of it," said Lawrence, "the more I believe the whole thing capable of explanation. The only thing that puzzles me now is that Quin hides anything from your colonel, who is one of the most courteous and considerate men I ever served with. Perhaps he has told him by this time; we don't know. Perhaps he thought he might be of the same stamp as his predecessor, and was waiting to find out before he made his confidences. As to Mrs. Quin's going away when she did, it may have been simply that her health was suffering, she needed change, and went with his full advice and by his wish, and he simply feels too much contempt for garrison gossip to explain. Very probably he knows nothing of the stories and theories in circulation; I'm sure I did not until a very few weeks ago. You know, Perry, there are some men in garrison who hear and know everything, and others who never hear a word of scandal."

But Perry was low in his mind. He could not forget Quin's sudden appearance; his calling her Gladys; and then he hated the thought that it was Quin who saw him having that confounded tender interview with Mrs. Belknap. Was there ever such a streak of ill luck as that? No doubt the fellow had told her about it! Perry left Lawrence's that night very little comforted, and only one gleam of hope did he receive in the two days that followed. Mrs. Sprague joyfully beckoned him on Wednesday afternoon to read him a little note that had just come from Miss Maitland. Her father had been very ill, she wrote; his condition was still critical; but she sent a world of thanks to her kind entertainers at Rossiter, and these words: "I was sorry not to be able to see Mr. Perry again. Do not let him think I have forgotten, or will be likely to forget, the service he—and Nolan—did me."

Of Dr. Quin he saw very little. With the full consent and knowledge of Col. Brainard, the doctor was spending a good deal of time at Dunraven now, attending to Mr. Maitland. Indeed, there seemed to be an excellent understanding between the commandant and his medical officer, and it was known that they had had a long talk together. Upper circles in the garrison were still agitated with chat and conjecture about Gladys Maitland and her strange father; Perry was still tortured with questions about his one visit to Dunraven whenever he was so incautious as to appear in public; but all through "the quarters," everywhere among the rank and file, there was a subject that engrossed all thoughts and tongues, and that was discussed with feeling that seemed to deepen with every day—the approaching court martial of Sergt. Leary and of Trooper Kelly.

As a result of his investigation, Capt. Stryker had preferred charges against these two men—the one for leading and the other for being accessory to the assault on his stable sergeant. Gwynne was still at the hospital, though rapidly recovering from his injuries. Not a word had he said that would implicate or acquise any man; but Stryker's knowledge of his soldiers, and his clear insight into human motive and character, were such that he had readily made up his mind as to the facts in the case. He felt sure that Leary and some of the Celtic members of his company had determined to go down to Dunraven and "have it out" with the hated Britons who had so affronted and abused them the night of Perry's visit. They knew they could not get their horses by fair means, for Gwynne was above suspicion. He was English, too, and striving to shield his countrymen from the threatened vengeance. They therefore determined, in collusion with Kelly, to lure him outside the stables, bind and gag him, get their horses, having once rifled Gwynne of the keys, ride down to the ranch, and, after having a Donnybrook fair on the premises, get back to Rossiter in plenty of time for reveille and stables. No sentries were posted in such a way as to interfere with them, and the plan was feasible enough but for one thing. Gwynne had made most gallant and spirited resistance, had fought the whole gang like a tiger, and they had been unable to overpower him before the noise had attracted the attention of the sergeant of the guard and some of the men in quarters. An effort, of course, was made to show that the assaulting party were from without, but it was futile, and Stryker's cross-questioning among the men had convinced them that he knew all about the matter. There was only one conclusion, therefore, that Gwynne must have "given them away," as the troopers expressed it.

Despite the fact that he had been assaulted and badly beaten, this was something that few could overlook, and the latent jealousy against the "cockney sergeant" blazed into a feeling of deep resentment. Garrison sympathy was with Leary and his fellows.

Thursday came, and Sergt. Gwynne returned to light duty, though his face was still bruised and discolored and he wore a patch over one eye. He resumed charge of the stables in the afternoon, after a brief conversation with his captain, and was superintending the issue of forage, when Perry entered to inspect the stalls of his platoon. Nolan was being led out by his groom at the moment, and pricked up his tapering ears at sight of his master and thrust his lean muzzle to receive the caress of the hand he knew so well. Perry stopped him and carefully and critically examined his knees, feeling down to the fetlocks with searching fingers for the faintest symptom of knot or swelling in the tendons that had played their part so thoroughly in the drama of Monday. Satisfied, apparently, he rose and bestowed a few hearty pats on the glossy neck and shoulder, and then was surprised to find the stable sergeant standing close beside him and regarding both him and horse with an expression that arrested Perry's attention at once.

"Feeling all right again, sergeant?" he asked, thinking to recall the non-commissioned officer to his senses.

"Almost, sir. I'm a trifle stiff yet. Anything wrong with Nolan, sir?"

"Nothing. I gave him rather a tough run the other day—had to risk the prairie dog holes—and, though I felt no jar then, I've watched carefully ever since to see that he was not wrenched. I wish you would keep an eye on him too, will you?"

There was no answer. Perry had been looking over Nolan's haunches as he spoke, and once more turned to the sergeant. To his astonishment, Gwynne's lips were twitching and quivering, his hands, ordinarily held in the rigid pose of the English service—extended along the thigh—were clinching and working nervously, and something suspiciously like a tear was creeping out from under the patch. Before Perry could recover from his surprise the sergeant suddenly regained his self control, hastily raised his hand in salute, saying something half articulate in reply, and turned sharply away, leaving his lieutenant razing after him in much perplexity.

That night, just after tattoo roll call when a little group of officers was gathered at the colonel's gate, they were suddenly joined by Dr Quin, who came from the direction of the stable where he kept his horse in rear of his own quarters. Col. Brainard greeted him warmly and inquired after his patient at Dunraven. Every one noted how grave and subdued was the tone in which the doctor answered.

"He is a very sick man, colonel, and it is hard to say what will be the result of this seizure."

"You may want to go down again, doctor, if that be the case—before sick call to-morrow, I mean; and you had better take one of my horses. I'll tell my man to have one in readiness."

"You are very kind, sir. I think old Brian will do all the work needed. But I would like to go down at reveille, as we have no men in hospital at all now. And, by the way, is Mr. Perry here?"

"I am here," answered Perry coldly. He was leaning against the railing, rather away from the group, listening intently, yet unwilling to meet or hold conversation with the man he conceived to be so inimical to his every hope and interest.

"Mr. Perry," said the doctor, pleasantly, and utterly ignoring the coldness of the young fellow's manner, "Mr. Maitland has asked to see you; and it would gratify him if you would ride down in the morning."

Even in the darkness Perry feared that all would see the flush that leaped to his face. Summoned to Dunraven Ranch by her father, with a possibility of seeing her! It was almost too sweet! too thrilling! He could give no reply for a moment, and an awkward silence fell on the group until he chokingly answered "I shall be glad to go. What time?"

"Better ride down early. Never mind breakfast. Miss Maitland will be glad to give you a cup of coffee, I fancy."

And Perry felt as though the fence had taken to waltzing. He made no answer, striving to regain his composure, and then the talk went on. It was Stryker who was talking now:

"Has the ring been found, doctor?"

"No! That is a most singular thing, and one that worries the old gentleman a great deal. It had a history; it belonged to Mrs. Maitland's father, who was from Ireland—indeed, Ireland was her country, as it was my father's—and that ring she had reset for her son Archie and gave it to him when he entered service with the Lancers. It was sent home with his watch and other property from South Africa—for he died there—and old Maitland always wore it afterwards. Archie was the last of three sons; and it broke his heart."

"And the ring was lost the night of Perry's adventure there?" asked the colonel.

"Yes. Mr. Perry remembers having seen it on his hand when the old gentleman first came down to receive him. It was missed afterwards, and could easily have slipped off at any time, for his fingers were withered with age and ill health. They have searched everywhere, and could find nothing of it. It could easily have rolled off the veranda on to the grass during his excitement at the time of the row, and somebody may have picked it up—either among the ranch men or among the troopers."

"I hate to think that any of our men would take it," said the colonel after a pause.

"I do not think any of them would, with the idea of selling it," said Stryker; "but here is a case where it was picked up, possibly, as one of the spoils of war. I have had inquiry made throughout the troop, but with no result so far. Do you go down again to-night, doctor?"

"Not if I can avoid it. I am going now to try and sleep, and will not ride down till daybreak unless signaled for. Good night, colonel; good night, all."

Unless signaled for! Instinctively Perry edged closer to Lawrence, who had stood a silent listener to the conversation, and Lawrence turned and saw him, and knew the thought that must be uppermost in his mind. There was a moment of perfect silence, and then Lawrence spoke:

"Does anybody know what the signal is?"

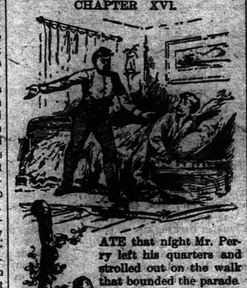
"Certainly," said Col. Brainard, promptly. "He has explained the whole thing to me. Those were signals for him that we saw the night you were all on my gallery. It was an arrangement devised by their old nurse—she who came up with the carriage for Miss Maitland the other day. She had a regular old fashioned headlight and reflector, and, when Mr. Maitland was so ill as to need a doctor, used to notify Quin in that way. He sometimes failed to see it, and I have given orders today that the guard should wake him when it is seen hereafter."

"Then that was what those mysterious night lights meant that we have heard so much about during the last three weeks?" asked Mr. Dana.

"Certainly," answered Brainard. "What on earth did anybody suppose they meant?"

To this there was no response for a moment. Then Lawrence burst out laughing.

CHAPTER XVI.



ATE that night Mr. Perry left his quarters and strolled out on the walk that bounded the parade. He could not sleep; he was feverishly impatient for the coming of another day, that he might start forth on his ride to Dunraven. A "spin" around the parade or out on the starlit prairie might soothe his nerves and enable him to sleep.

All lights were out in the quadrangle, save those at the guard house. Even at Belknap's quarters, where the veranda had been thronged with officers and ladies only an hour before, all was now silence and darkness. Unwilling to attract attention by tramping up and down on the board walk, he crossed the road and went out on the broad level of the parade, but took care so to direct his steps as not to come within hailing distance of the guard house. It would be awkward work explaining the situation to the sergeant of the guard in case the sentry were to spee or hear and challenge him.

He edged well over to his left as he walked, and so it happened that he found himself, after a while, opposite the northeast entrance to the post, and close to the road on which stood the commissary and quartermaster storehouses. There was a sentry posted here, too, and it would not do to be challenged by him any more than by "Number One."

Stopping a moment to listen for the sentry's footfall, Perry's ear was attracted by the sound of a door slowly and cautiously opened. It was some little time before he could tell from which one of the neighboring buildings looming there in the darkness, the sound proceeded. Then he heard muffled footsteps and a whispered consultation not far away, and hurrying on tiptoe in the direction of the sound he presently caught sight of two or three shadowy forms moving noiselessly along the porch of the company quarters nearest him. Stryker's troop, that to which he belonged, was quartered down beyond the guard house on the lower side of the parade: these forms were issuing from the barracks of Capt. Wayne's troop, and before Perry could realize the fact that they were out either in moccasins or their stocking feet, and presumably therefore on some unlawful enterprise, they had disappeared around the corner of the building. He walked rapidly thither, turned the corner and they were nowhere in sight or hearing. Stopping to listen did not help matters at all. He could not hear a sound, and as for the shadows of which he was in pursuit, it was simply impossible to tell which direction they had taken. They had vanished from the face of the earth and were lost in the deeper gloom that hung about the scattered array of wooden buildings—store houses, fuel sheds and cook sheds—at the rear of the post.

Had it been his own troop he could have roused the first sergeant and ordered a "check" roll call as a means of determining at once who the night prowlers might be; but Capt. Wayne had his peculiarities, and one of them was an unalterable and deeply rooted objection to any interference on the part of other officers in the management of his men. Perry's first thought, too, was of the stables and Sergt. Gwynne. Were they meditating another foray, and had the feeling spread outside their own company? No time was to be lost. He turned his face eastward to where the dark outlines of the stables could be dimly traced against the sky, and hastened, stumbling at times over stray tin cans and other discarded rubbish, until he crossed the intervening swale and reached the low bluff along which the crude, unpainted structures were ranged. All was darkness here towards the northern end, and the one sentry who had external charge of the entire line was slowly pacing his post; Perry could see his form, dimly outlined, as he breasted the slope, and it determined him to keep on in the hollow until he got to a point opposite the stables of his own troop. If there was to be any devilment it might be well to see whether this soldier, too, would turn out to be in league with the conspirators. Listening intently as he hurried along, but hearing nothing, Perry soon found himself at the pathway leading to his own domain, and the next minute was gazing in surprise at a light burning dimly in the window of the little office occupied by Sergt. Gwynne. Stagry was not a glimmer elsewhere along the line.

Striding up to the window, he tapped lightly, and Gwynne's voice sternly challenged from within, "Who's there?"

"Lieut. Perry, sergeant. Come around and open the stable door for me."

"One moment, sir," was the answer, and he heard the sergeant bounding, apparently, off his bed. Then a hand drew aside the shade, and Gwynne's face appeared at the window, while a small lantern was held so as to throw its rays off the face without. "All right, sir," he continued. "I thought I could not be deceived in the voice."

Perry walked around to the front again, taking another survey of the sleeping garrison as he did so, and listening once more for footsteps; but all was still. Presently the little panel in the big door was unlocked from within, and the lieutenant bent low and entered, finding Gwynne, lantern in hand, standing in his uncompromising attitude of "attention" at the entrance.

"Everything been quiet here to-night?" he asked, as he straightened up.

"Perfectly so, sir."

"Come into your room a moment; I want to speak to you," said Perry, after a moment's reflection.

They passed along the broad gangway between the rows of sleepy horses, some lying down in their stalls, others still afoot and munching at their hay. The stable guard stood at his post and faced them as they turned into the dark and narrow passage leading into Gwynne's little sanctuary. The lamps along the line of stalls burned low and dim, and, the ports being lowered, gave no gleam without the walls. Once more, however, a bright light shone from the window of the stable sergeant's room—brighter than before, could they only know it, for this time there was no intervening shade. After his brief inspection of the lieutenant's face, Gwynne had left it drawn.

The sergeant set his lantern on a wooden desk, and respectfully waited for his superior to speak. Perry looked him well over a moment, and then began:

"Did you tell Capt. Stryker the particulars of your rough treatment down there at the ranch?"

"The rough treatment—yes, sir."

"Would you mind telling me where you were taken?—where you saw Dr. Quin?"

The sergeant hesitated one moment, a troubled look on his face. His one available eye studied his lieutenant's features attentively. Something in the frank, kind blue eyes—possibly some sudden recollection, too—seemed to reassure him.

"It was to Mr. Cowan's little house, sir." He interposed to save me from a worse beating at the hands of three brutes who were employed there and had some grudge against this garrison of which I was ignorant. They attacked me without a word of warning. It was he, too, who called in Dr. Quin."

"Have you—did you see any of the people at Dunraven besides this young man?"

"I saw his mother, sir. She is a nurse there, and has been in the family for years, I am told."

Perry was silent a moment. Then he spoke again.

"Have you heard any further threats among the men here since the arrest of Sergt. Leary?"

Gwynne hesitated, coloring painfully.

"It is something I hate to speak of, sir. The talk has not alarmed me in the least."

"I know that, sergeant. All the same we want to prevent a recurrence of that performance, and it was that, mainly that brought me over here. I saw some men stealing out of M troop's quarters awhile ago, and lost them in the darkness. I thought they might be coming over here, and—got here first."

Gwynne's face lighted up. It touched him to know his officers were on the lookout for his safety.

"I have heard nothing, sir. The men would hardly be apt to speak to me on the subject, since the affair of the other night. What I fear is simply this—that there is an element here in the regiment that is determined to get down there to the ranch and have satisfaction for the assault that was made on you and your party. They need horses in order to get there and back between midnight and reveille, and are doubtless hatching some plan. They failed here; now they may try the stables of some other troop or the quartermaster's. Shall I warn the sentry that there are prowlers out tonight?"

"Not yet. They will hardly make the attempt while your light is burning here. What I'm concerned about just now is this: We all know that there is deep sympathy for Leary in the command, and it is not improbable that among the Irishmen there is corresponding feeling against you. I don't like your being here alone just now, for they know you are almost the only witness against him."

"Have thought of that, sir," answered Gwynne, gravely, "but I want nothing that looks like protection. The captain has spoken of the matter to me, and he agreed, sir, that it would do more harm than good. There is one thing I would ask—if I may trouble the lieutenant."

"What is it, sergeant?"

"Have a little packet, containing some papers and a trinket or two, that I would like very much to have kept safely, and, if anything should happen to me, to have you, sir, and Capt. Stryker open it, and—the letters there will explain everything that is to be done."

"Certainly. I will take care of it for you—if not too valuable."

"I would rather know it was with you, sir, than stow it in the quartermaster's safe," was Gwynne's answer, as he opened a little wooden chest at the foot of his bunk, and, after rummaging a moment, drew forth a parcel tied and sealed. This he handed to the lieutenant.

"Now I will go back and notify the officer of the guard of what I have seen," said Perry; "and I want Nolan saddled, over at my quarters right after morning stables. Will you see to it?"

"I will, sir, and thank you for your kindness."

All was darkness, all silence and peace as Perry retraced his steps and went back to the garrison, carrying the little packet in his hand. He went direct to the guard house, and found Mr. Graham sulky over being disturbed in his snooze by the sentry's challenge.

"What the devil are you owling around this time of night for?" was the not unnatural question. "I thought it was the officer of the day, and nearly broke my neck in hurrying out here."

But Perry's brief recital of the fact that he had seen some men stealing out of the quarters of M troop in their stocking feet or moccasins put an end to Graham's complaints. Hastily summoning the sergeant of the guard, he started out to make the rounds of his sentries, while Perry carried his packet home, locked it in his desk, and then returned to the veranda to await developments.

Sergt. Gwynne, meantime, having lighted his young officer to the stable door, stood there a few moments, looking over the silent garrison and listening to the retreating footsteps. The sentry came pacing along the front of the stables, and brought his carbine down from the shoulder as he dimly sighted the tall figure; but, recognizing the stable sergeant as he came nearer, the ready challenge died on his lips.

"I thought I heard somebody moving around down here, sergeant. It was you, then, was it?"

"I have been moving around—inside—but made no noise. Have you heard footsteps or voices?"

"Both, I thought; but it's as black as your hat on this beat to-night. I can't see my hand afore my face."

"Keep your ears open, then; there are men out from one of the quarters, at least, and no telling what they are up to. Who's in charge at the quartermaster's stables?"

"Sergt. Reilly, of the infantry; some of the fellows were over having a little game with him before tattoo, and I heard him tell 'em to come again when they had more money to lose. He and his helper there were laughing at the way they cleaned out the cavalry when they were looking up at taps. The boys retched over a bottle of whisky with 'em."

"Who were they?"

"Oh, there was Flanagan and Murphy, of M troop, and Corporal Donovan and one or two others. They hadn't been drinkin'."

"But Riley had—do you mean?"

"He was a little full: not much."

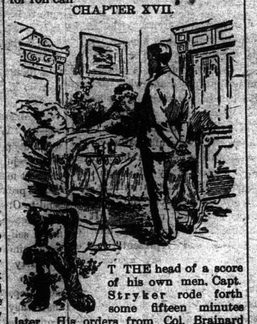
"Well, look alive now, Wicks. It's my advice to you that you watch that end of your post with all your eyes." And with this Sergt. Gwynne turned back into the stable, picked up his lantern and returned to the little room in which he slept. A current of cool night air, blowing in through the open casement, attracted his attention. Odd! He knew he had pulled aside the shade to scan the features of the lieutenant when he tapped at the pane, but he could not recall having opened the sash. It swung on a hinge, and was fastened by a loosely fitting bolt. Perhaps the rising wind had blown it in. He set his lamp down as before, closed the sash and then closed and locked the lid of his chest. That, too, was open. Wicks, the sentry, well up to the north end of his post and close to the entrance of the quartermaster's corral, was bawling: "Half past 12 o'clock, and a-all's well," when the light went out in Gwynne's little room, and all the line of stables was wrapped in darkness.

Perry fretted around the veranda until 1 o'clock, then sought his room. He was still too excited to sleep, and it seemed an interminable time before he dozed off. Then it seemed as though he could not have been in dreamland five minutes before a hand was laid upon his shoulder, shaking him vigorously, and a voice he well knew was exclaiming, in low but forcible tones:

"Wake, lieutenant, wake! Every horse is gone from the quartermaster's corral. There must be twenty men gone down the valley. I've Nolan here for you at the gate."

In ten minutes Lieut. Perry and Sergt. Gwynne were riding neck and neck out over the eastern prairie—out towards the paling orient stars and the faintly gleaming sky—before them, several miles away, the dark and threatened walls of Dunraven, behind them the stir and excitement and bustle consequent upon a night alarm. The colonel, roused by Perry with the news, had ordered the instant sounding of the assembly, and the garrison was tumbling out for roll call.

CHAPTER XVII.



T THE head of a score of his own men, Capt. Stryker rode forth some fifteen minutes later. His orders from Col. Brainard were to go to Dunraven, and, if he found the marauders there, to arrest the entire party and bring them back to the post. From all that could be learned from hurried questioning of the sentries and the dazed, half drunken sergeant of the corral, the troopers engaged in the raid must have selected a time when the sentry was walking towards the south end of his post, to lift one of their number over the wall of the inclosure in which were kept the wagons and ambulances. This man had unbarred from within the gate leading eastward to the trail down which the "stock" was driven daily to water in the Monee. Riley admitted that "the boys" had left a bottle with him which he and his assistant had emptied before turning in, and so it happened that unheard and unseen, the raiders had managed to slip out with a dozen horses that were kept there and had also taken six mules as "mounts" for those who could not find anything better.

Eighteen men, apparently, were in the party, and the sentry on Number Three heard hoof beats down towards the valley about half past 3 o'clock, but thought it was only some of the ponies belonging to the Cheyenne scouts. There was one comfort—the men had taken no firearms with them: for a hurried inspection of the company quarters showed that the carbines were all in their racks and the revolvers in their cases. Some of the men might have small caliber pistols of their own, but the government arms had not been disturbed. Half the party, at least, must have ridden bareback and with only watering bridles for their steeds. They were indeed "spoiling for a fight," and the result of the roll call showed that the missing troopers were all Irishmen and some of the best and most popular men in the command. Whatever their plan, thought Stryker as he trotted down to the Monee, it was probably carried out by this time, it was now within a minute of 4 o'clock.

Only a mile out he was overtaken by Dr. Quin, who reined up an instant to ask if any one had been sent ahead. "Thank God for that!" he exclaimed when told that Perry and Sergt. Gwynne had gone at the first alarm, then, striking spurs to his horse, pushed on at rapid gallop, while the troopers maintained their steady trot. A mile from Dunraven, in the dim light of early morning, the captain's keen eyes caught sight of shadowy forms of mounted men on the opposite shore, and, despite their efforts to escape on their wearied steeds, three of them were speedily run down and captured. One of them was Corp. Donovan, and Donovan's face was white and his manner agitated. Bidding him ride alongside as they pushed ahead towards the ranch, Stryker questioned him as to what had taken place, and the corporal never sought to equivocate.

"We've been trying for several nights, sir, to get horses and go down and have it out with those blackguards at the ranch. We took no arms, sir, even these of us who had pistols of our own. All we asked was a fair fight, man against man. They wouldn't come out of their hole—they dasn't do it, sir—and then they fired on us. We'd have burned the roof over their heads, but that Lieut. Perry galloped in and stopped us. I came away then, sir, and so did most of us. We knew 'twas all up when we saw the lieutenant; but there was more firing after I left. This way, captain. Out across the prairie here. We cut down the fence on this side." And so saying, Donovan led the little troop to a broad gap in the wide barrier, and thence straight across the fields to where lights were seen flitting about in the dark shadows of the buildings of the ranch. Another moment, and Stryker had dismounted and was kneeling beside the prostrate and unconscious form of his lieutenant. Some misguided ranchman, mistaking for a new assailant the tall young soldier who galloped into the midst of the swarm of taunting Irishmen, had fired the cruel shot. There lay Nolan dead upon the sward, and here, close at hand, his grief stricken master had finally swooned from loss of blood, the bullet having pierced his leg below the knee. Beside him knelt the doctor: he had cut away the natty riding boot, and was rapidly binding up the wound. Close at hand stood Gwynne, a world of anxiety and trouble in his bruised and still discolored face.

Grouped around were some of the assailing party, crestfallen and dismayed at the unlocked for result of their foray, but ashamed to attempt to ride away, now that their favorite young officer was sore stricken as a result of their mad folly. Mr. Ewen, too, had come out, and was bustling about, giving directions to the one or two of his hands who had ventured forth from the office building. The big frame house under whose walls the group was gathered was evidently used as a dormitory for a number of men, and this had been the objective point of the attack, but not a soul had issued from its portals: the occupants were the men who made the assault on Perry the night of his first visit, and now they deemed it best to keep within. Everything indicated that Perry had got to the scene just in time to prevent a bloody and desperate fracas, for the few ranch people who appeared were still quivering with excitement and dread. Ewen was almost too much agitated to speak:

"Go to Mr. Maitland as soon as you can, doctor; this has given him a fearful shaking up. Mrs. Cowan is having a room made ready for Mr. Perry. Ah! here's young Cowan now. Ready?" he asked.

"All ready. Mother says carry the gentleman right in. She wants you to come too," he added, in a lower tone, to Sergt. Gwynne, but the latter made no reply.

(To be Continued.)

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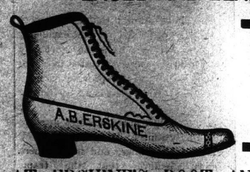

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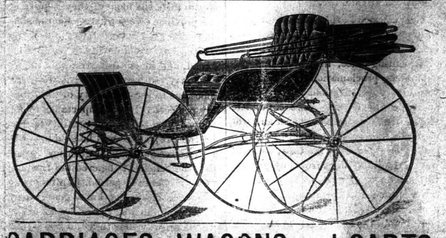

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