THE EVENING NEWS.

Thursday, - - - April, 13, 1871.

HOW I RODE FROM ST. JOE TO SWAMP CITY.

[CONTINUED.]

I must say that I felt rather nervous, for if I had a dread of anything it was of Indians; so, as I galloped along, I kept continually looking over one shoulder or the other. Suddenly my pony shied at something and then stood stock still, trembling like a leaf. I was not long in discovering the cause of its alarm, for the skeleton of a horse and its rider lay right in our track. I knew by the ghastly grinning teeth of the latter that he had been a white man, for many of them were decayed, and an Indian's teeth never decay. I knew, too, by the skeleton of his steed, that it must have been a pony of about the size of mine, while a round hole in the dead man's skull, which the birds or beasts of prey, or probably both, had cleared of every vestige of flesh and hair, indicated that he had met a violent death. Neither arms nor fragments of apparel lay about him, as might be expected; but there were plenty of pieces of cut leather scattered about the grass, some having blotches of sealing wax on them; so that I pretty well guessed them to be fragments of a mailbag, such as I myself was the bearer.

"What was your fate yesterday may be mine to-morrow, old fellow; and so good bye," I muttered, half addressing the bleached corpse, half in mental soliloquy as I forced my pony past.

Again I pursued my course with a gallop, but I was destined to meet with strange adventures on this particular day, and presently, upon glancing behind me, I saw about a dozen horses about two miles in my rear, coming over the level prairie, right on my trail.

Now, had I been a greenhorn, I should have imagined these horses to have been riderless. I certainly could perceive no one on their backs, but I could instantly tell, both by the way they galloped and the steadiness with which they held on their course, neither diverging to the right nor to left that they were guided by invisible and yet firm hands. Their riders were lying prostrated along their backs to escape observation, and they were all in pursuit of one scalp, and that scalp was my own.

I knew that no men could ride thus but Indians, and no Indians except Assiniboines, the boldest and most brilliant horsemen in the world. If I fell into their hands the chances were that I should be butchered without pity. But I wasn't in their hands yet, that was one comfort; and though their long-bodied, long-limbed mustangs were fleeter of foot than my own little steed, yet they had not the strength and endurance in them that the Norway cross gave to the poney I bestrode; and as a stern chase is, proverbially a long chase, whether on sea or land, except perhaps when a locomotive under a high pressure of steam is in pursuit of a black beetle, I didn't give up all hope of escaping from their knives.

"Do it the pace, old girl! there's Injuns after us," I cried, patting my poney on the shoulder. As if she understood my words, she bowled away right merrily over the soft springy turf, and after a lapse of ten minutes or so I came to the conclusion that if my foes were gaining on me—a fact I almost doubted—it was, at all events, very slowly indeed.

The Indians were not long in observing my increase in pace, and knowing therefrom that I had not been deceived by their ruse, they quickly assumed an upright position in the saddle, and treated me to terrible a war-whoop, that my blood ran cold and every hair fairly rose on my head, as though in anticipation of coming off, which they undoubtedly would do within the next hour unless my usual good fortune attended me.

In the midst of all my danger I could not help admiring the firm centur-like and yet graceful riding of the pursuing Assiniboines, whose naked bodies shone in the sunshine like statues of bronze. Broad-chested and powerful fellows they were, looking war-like and picturesque enough, with their head-dresses of gorgeous feathers, and their brightly colored mangas or cloaks floating behind them on the wind. Over the right shoulder of each appeared the barrel of a rifle, for the Assiniboines are the best-armed Indians on the American Continent, and have discarded the bow for nearly half a century.

Thus we swept on, pursuers and pursued, for more than one hour, and then the prairie was nearly crossed, and as the sun sank below the vast plain I saw the wooded country just in my front, a seven miles' gallop through which would bring me to Swamp City. My foes had, however, by this time gained upon me very considerably, and I knew they would not be shaken off until the town was fairly in sight. Luckily my pony showed no signs of distress. I therefore had still a hope left of saving my scalp, though it grew fainter and fainter every minute. At last I was fairly among the trees, but the track was perfectly plain, and so had not to draw rein for a moment.

Little did I think that I had foes in my front as well as in my rear, yet of the fact I was somewhat abruptly convinced by several men springing out of the bushes on each side, and forming across the road. I saw at a glance that they were armed to the teeth, and that four or five revolvers covered me, yet I felt delighted to see these men, rascals though they were.

"We don't want your life, stranger—we want the mail-bags; but if you don't give them up quietly, why, we'll preciously soon take both," shouted a fellow, who seemed to be their leader.

"Don't ask for the bag, or talk of taking my life," I answered, "for in a few minutes time you'll have enough to do to save your own. I am flying from the Indians, who are close behind; so let me pass."

"Injuns!" said they; "that's a likely yarn Injuns don't come within five miles of Swamp City, so none of your tricks upon travelers. If you don't drop that mail-bag before I count three, I'll shoot you as dead as a clam; there now! One,"

These fellows had appeared so suddenly upon the scene, and now covered me so completely with their weapons—their leader especially—that I saw that before I could handle my own rifle or pistols I should be riddled by a dozen balls at the least. Luckily, however, at this critical moment the Indians war-whoop rang shrilly out close in my rear, and that wild and terrible cry produced a magical effect upon the white banditti.

"Now will you let me pass?" I cried.

"Pass?" said they. "Yes, why of course but surely you won't leave us to the mercy of those infernal red-skins? We've no horses to escape on, and your rifle might turn the day in our favor."

To be continued.

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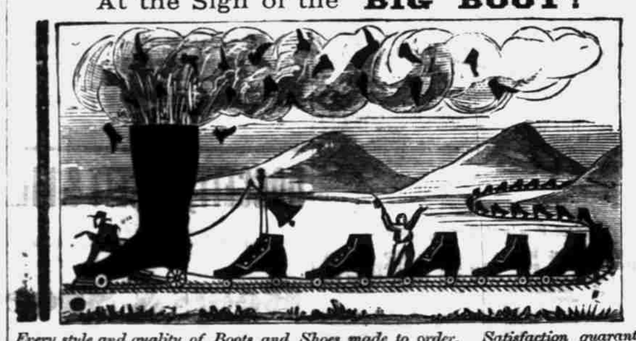

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