GEORGE EDWIN WARING

WHIP AND SPUR

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Содержание

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VIX

When the work on the Central Park had fairly commenced, in the spring of 1858, I found—or I fancied—that proper attention to my scattered duties made it necessary that I should have a saddle-horse.

How easily, by the way, the arguments that convince us of these pleasant necessities find their way to the understanding!

Yet, how to subsist a horse after buying one, and how to buy? The memory of a well-bred and keen-eyed gray, dating back to the earliest days of my boyhood, and forming the chief feature of my recollection of play-time for years; an idle propensity, not a whit dulled yet, to linger over Leech's long-necked hunters, and Herring's field scenes; an almost superstitious faith in the different analyses of the bones of the racer and of the cart-horse; a firm belief in Frank Forester's teachings of the value of "blood,"—all these conspired to narrow my range of selection, and, unfortunately, to confine it to a very expensive class of horses.

Unfortunately, again, the commissioners of the Park had extremely inconvenient ideas of economy, and evidently did not

consider, in fixing their schedule of salaries, how much more satisfactory our positions would have been with more generous emolument.

How a man with only a Park salary, and with a family to support, could set up a saddle-horse,—and not ride to the dogs,—was a question that exercised not a little of my engineering talent for weeks; and many an odd corner of plans and estimates was figured over with calculations of the cost of forage and shoeing.

Stable-room was plenty and free in the condemned buildings of the former occupants, and a little "over-time" of one of the men would suffice for the grooming.

I finally concluded that, by giving up cigars, and devoting my energies to the pipe in their stead, I could save enough to pay for my horse's keep; and so, the ways and means having been, in this somewhat vague manner, provided, the next step was to buy a horse. To tell of the days passed at auction sales in the hope (never there realized) of finding goodness and cheapness combined,—of the stationery wasted in answering advertisements based on every conceivable form of false pretence; to describe the numberless broken-kneed, broken-winded, and broken-down brutes that came under inspection,—would be tedious and disheartening.

Good horses there were, of course, though very few good saddle-horses (America is not productive in this direction),—and the possible animals were held at impossible prices.

Those who rode over the new Park lands usually rode anything

but good saddle-horses. Fast trotters, stout ponies, tolerable carriage-horses, capital cart-horses, there were in plenty. But the clean-cut, thin-crested, bright-eyed, fine-eared, steel-limbed saddle-horse, the saddle-horse *par excellence*,—may I say the only saddle-horse?—rarely came under observation; and when, by exception, such a one did appear, he was usually so ridden that his light was sadly dimmed. It was hard to recognize an elastic step under such an unelastic seat.

Finally, in the days of my despair, a kind saddler,—kept to his daily awl by a too keen eye for sport, and still, I believe, a victim to his propensity for laying his money on the horse that ought to win but don't,—hearing of my ambition (to him the most laudable of all ambitions), came to put me on the long-sought path.

He knew a mare, or he had known one, that would exactly suit me. She was in a bad way now, and a good deal run down, but he always thought she "had it in her," and that some gentleman ought to keep her for the saddle,—"which, in my mind, sir, she be the finest bit of 'orse-flesh that was hever imported, sir." That was enough. "Imported" decided my case, and I listened eagerly to the enthusiastic story,—a story to which this man's life was bound with threads of hard-earned silver, and not less by a real honest love for a fine animal. He had never been much given to saving, but he was a good workman, and the little he had saved had been blown away in the dust that clouded his favorite at the tail of the race.

Still, he attached himself to her person, and followed her in her disgrace. “She weren’t quite quick enough for the turf, sir, but she be a good ’un for a gentleman’s ’ack.”

He had watched her for years, and scraped acquaintance with her different owners as fast as she had changed them, and finally, when she was far gone with pneumonia, he had accepted her as a gift, and, by careful nursing, had cured her. Then, for a time, he rode her himself, and his eye brightened as he told of her leaps and her stride. Of course he rode her to the races, and—one luckless day—when he had lost everything, and his passion had got the better of his prudence, he staked the mare herself on a perfectly sure thing in two-mile-heats. Like most of the sure things of life, this venture went to the bad, and the mare was lost,—lost to a Bull’s Head dealer in single driving horses. “I see her in his stable ahfter that, sir; and, forbieten she were twelve year old, sir, and ’ad ’ad a ’ard life of it, she were the youngest and likeliest of the lot,—you’d swore she were a three-year-old, sir.”

If that dealer had had a soul above trotting-wagons, my story would never have been written; but all was fish that came to his net, and this thoroughbred racer, this beautiful creature who had never worn harness in her life, must be shown to a purchaser who was seeking something to drive. She was always quick to decide, and her actions followed close on the heels of her thought. She did not complicate matters by waiting for the gentleman to get into the wagon, but then and there—on the instant—kicked it to kindlings. This ended the story. She had been shown at a high

figure, and was subsequently sold for a song,—he could tell me no more. She had passed to the lower sphere of equine life and usefulness,—he *had* heard of a fish-wagon, but he knew nothing about it. What he did know was, that the dealer was a dreadful jockey, and that it would never do to ask him. Now, here was something to live for,—a sort of princess in disgrace, whom it would be an honor to rescue, and my horse-hunting acquired a new interest.

By easy stages, I cultivated the friendship of the youth who, in those days, did the morning's sweeping-out at the Bull's Head Hotel. He had grown up in the alluring shades of the horse-market, and his daily communion from childhood had been with that "noble animal." To him horses were the individuals of the world,—men their necessary attendants, and of only attendant importance. Of course he knew of this black she-devil; and he thought that "a hoss that could trot like she could on the halter" must be crazy not to go in harness.

However, he thought she had got her deserts now, for he had seen her, only a few weeks before, "a draggin' clams for a feller in the Tenth Avener." Here was a clew at last,—clams and the Tenth Avenue. For several days the scent grew cold. The people of the Licensed Vender part of this street seemed to have little interest in their neighbors' horses; but I found one man, an Irish grocer, who had been bred a stable-boy to the Marquis of Waterford, and who did know of a "poor old screw of a black mare" that had a good head, and might be the one I was looking for; but, if she

was, he thought I might as well give it up, for she was all broken down, and would never be good for anything again.

Taking the address, I went to a stable-yard, in what was then the very edge of the town, and here I found a knowing young man, who devoted his time to peddling clams and potatoes between New York and Sing Sing. Clams up, and potatoes down, —twice every week,—distance thirty miles; road hilly; and that was the wagon he did it with,—a heavy wagon with a heavy arched top, and room for a heavy load, and only shafts for a single horse. In reply to my question, he said he changed horses pretty often, because the work broke them down; but he had a mare now that had been at it for three months, and he thought she would last some time longer. "She's pretty thin, but you ought to see her trot with that wagon." With an air of idle curiosity, I asked to see her,—I had gone shabbily dressed, not to excite suspicion; for men of the class I had to treat with are usually sharp horse-traders,—and this fellow, clam-pedler though he was, showed an enthusiastic alacrity in taking me to her stall. She had won even his dull heart, and he spoke of her gently, as he made the most of her good points, and glossed over her wretched condition.

Poor Vixen (that had been her name in her better days, and it was to be her name again), she had found it hard kicking against the pricks! Clam-carts are stronger than trotting-wagons, and even her efforts had been vain. She had succumbed to dire necessity, and earned her ignoble oats with dogged fidelity. She had a little warm corner in her driver's affections,—as she always

had in the affections of all who came to know her well,—but her lot was a very hard one. Worn to a skeleton, with sore galls wherever the harness had pressed her, her pasterns bruised by clumsy shoes, her silky coat burned brown by the sun, and her neck curved upward, it would have needed more than my knowledge of anatomy to see anything good in her but for her wonderful head. This was the perfection of a horse's head,—small, bony, and of perfect shape, with keen, deer-like eyes, and thin, active ears; it told the whole story of her virtues, and showed no trace of her sufferings. Her royal blood shone out from her face, and kept it beautiful.

My mind was made up, and Vixen must be mine at any cost. Still, it was important to me to buy as cheaply as I could,—and desirable, above all, not to be jockeyed in a horse-trade; so it required some diplomacy (an account of which would not be edifying here) to bring the transaction to its successful close. The pendulum which swung between offer and demand finally rested at seventy-five dollars.

She was brought to me at the Park on a bright moonlight evening in June, and we were called out to see her. I think she knew that her harness days were over, and she danced off to her new quarters as gay as a colt in training. That night my wakefulness would have done credit to a boy of sixteen; and I was up with the dawn, and bound for a ride; but when I examined poor Vix again in her stable, it seemed almost cruel to think of using her at all for a month. She was so thin, so worn, so bruised, that

I determined to give her a long rest and good care,—only I must try her once, just to get a leg over her for five minutes, and then she should come back and be cared for until really well. It was a weak thing to do, and I confess it with all needful humiliation, but I mounted her at once; and, although I had been a rider all my days, this was the first time I had ever really ridden. For the first time in my life I felt as though I had four whalebone legs of my own, worked by steel muscles in accordance with my will, but without even a conscious effort of will.

That that anatomy of a horse should so easily, so playfully, handle my heavy weight was a mystery, and is a mystery still. She carried me in the same high, long-reaching, elastic trot that we sometimes see a young horse strike when first turned into a field. A low fence was near by, and I turned her toward it. She cleared it with a bound that sent all my blood thrilling through my veins, and trotted on again as though nothing had occurred. The five minutes' turn was taken with so much ease, with such evident delight, that I made it a virtue to indulge her with a longer course and a longer stride. We went to the far corners of the Park, and tried all our paces; all were marvellous for the power so easily exerted and the evident power in reserve.

Yes, Frank Forester was right, blood horses are made of finer stuff than others. My intention of giving the poor old mare a month's rest was never carried out, because each return to her old recreation—it was never work—made it more evident that the simple change in her life was all she needed; and, although in

constant use from the first, she soon put on the flesh and form of a sound horse. Her minor bruises were obliterated, and her more grievous ones grew into permanent scars,—blemishes, but only skin deep; for every fibre of every muscle, and every tendon and bone in her whole body, was as strong and supple as spring steel.

The Park afforded good leaping in those days. Some of the fences were still standing around the abandoned gardens, and new ditches and old brooks were plenty. Vixen gave me lessons in fencing which a few years later, in time of graver need, stood me in good stead. She weighed less than four times the weight that she carried; yet she cleared a four-foot fence with apparent ease, and once, in a moment of excitement, she carried me over a brook, with a clear leap of twenty-six feet, measured from the taking-off to the landing.

Her feats of endurance were equal to her feats of strength. I once rode her from Yorkville to Rye (twenty-one miles) in an hour and forty-five minutes, including a rest of twenty minutes at Pelham Bridge, and I frequently rode twenty-five miles out in the morning and back in the afternoon. When put to her work, her steady road gallop (mostly on the grassy sides) was fifteen miles an hour.

Of course these were extreme cases; but she never showed fatigue from them, and she did good service nearly every day, winter and summer, from her twelfth to her fifteenth year, keeping always in good condition, though thin as a racer, and looking like a colt at the end of the time. Horsemen never

guessed her age at more than half of what it actually was.

Beyond the average of even the most intelligent horses, she showed some almost human traits. Above all was she fond of children, and would quiet down from her wildest moods to allow a child to be carried on the pommel. When engaged in this serious duty, it was difficult to excite her, or to urge her out of a slow and measured pace, although usually ready for any extravagance. Not the least marked of her peculiarities was her inordinate vanity. On a country road, or among the workmen of the Park, she was as staid and business-like as a parson's cob; but let a carriage or a party of visitors come in sight, and she would give herself the prancing airs of a circus horse, seeming to watch as eagerly for some sign of approval, and to be made as happy by it, as though she only lived to be admired. Many a time have I heard the exclamation, "What a beautiful horse!" and Vix seemed to hear it too, and to appreciate it quite as keenly as I did. A trip down the Fifth Avenue in the afternoon was an immense excitement to her, and she was more fatigued by it than by a twenty-mile gallop. However slowly she travelled, it was always with the high springing action of a fast trot, or with that long-stepping, sidelong action that the French call *á deux pistes*; few people allowed her to pass without admiring notice.

Her most satisfactory trait was her fondness for her master; she was as good company as a dog,—better, perhaps, because she seemed more really a part of one's self; and she was quick to respond to my changing moods. I have sometimes, when unable

to sleep, got up in the night and saddled for a ride, usually ending in a long walk home, with the bridle over my arm, and the old mare's kind face close beside my own, in something akin to human sympathy; she had a way of sighing, when things were especially sad, that made her very comforting to have about. So we went on for three years, always together, and always very much to each other. We had our little unhappy episodes, when she was pettish and I was harsh,—sometimes her feminine freaks were the cause, sometimes my masculine blundering,—but we always made it up, and were soon good friends again, and, on the whole, we were both better for the friendship. I am sure that I was, and some of my more grateful recollections are connected with this dumb companion.

The spring of 1861 opened a new life for both of us,—a sad and a short one for poor Vix.

I never knew just how much influence she had in getting my commission, but, judging by the manner of the other field officers of the regiment, she was evidently regarded as the better half of the new acquisition. The pomp and circumstance of glorious war suited her temper exactly, and it was ludicrous to see her satisfaction in first wearing her gorgeous red-bordered shabrack; for a time she carried her head on one side to see it. She conceived a new affection for me from the moment when she saw me bedecked with the dazzling bloom that preceded the serious fruitage of the early New York volunteer organizations.

At last the thrilling day came. Broadway was alive from end

to end with flags and white cambric and sad faces. Another thousand were going to the war. With Swiss bugle-march and chanted Marseillaise, we made our solemn way through the grave and anxious throng. To us it was naturally a day of sore trial; but with brilliant, happy Vixen it was far different; she was leaving no friends behind, was going to meet no unknown peril. She was showing her royal, stylish beauty to an admiring crowd, and she acted as though she took to her own especial behoof every cheer that rang from Union Square to Cortlandt Street. It was the glorious day of her life, and, as we dismounted at the Jersey ferry, she was trembling still with the delightful excitement.

At Washington we were encamped east of the Capitol, and for a month were busy in getting settled in the new harness. Mr. Lincoln used to drive out sometimes to our evening drill, and he always had a pleasant word—as he always had for every one, and as every one had for her—for my charming thoroughbred, who had made herself perfectly at home with the troops, and enjoyed every display of the marvellous raiment of the regiment.

On the 4th of July we crossed the Potomac and went below Alexandria, where we lay in idle preparation for the coming disaster. On the 16th we marched, in Blenker's brigade of Miles's division, and we passed the night in a hay-field, with a confusion of horses' feed and riders' bed, that brought Vix and me very closely together. On the 18th we reached the valley this side of Centreville, while the skirmish of Blackburn's Ford was going on,—a skirmish now, but a battle then. For three nights and two

days we lay in the bushes, waiting for rations and orders. On Sunday morning McDowell's army moved out;—we all know the rest. Miles's thirteen thousand fresh troops lay within sight and sound of the lost battle-field,—he drunk and unable, even if not unwilling, to take them to the rescue,—and all we did was, late in the evening, to turn back a few troopers of the Black Horse Cavalry, the moral effect of whose unseen terrors was driving our herds, panting, back to the Potomac. Late in the night we turned our backs on our idle field, and brought up the rear of the sad retreat. Our regiment was the last to move out, and Vix and I were with the rear-guard. Wet, cold, tired, hungry, unpursued, we crept slowly through the scattered *débris* of the broken-up camp equipage, and dismally crossed the Long Bridge in a pitiless rain, as Monday's evening was closing in. O, the dreadful days that followed, when a dozen resolute men might have taken Washington, and have driven the army across the Chesapeake, when everything was filled with gloom and rain and grave uncertainty!

Again the old mare came to my aid. My regiment was not a pleasant one to be with, for its excellent material did not redeem its very bad commander, and I longed for service with the cavalry. Frémont was going to St. Louis, and his chief of staff was looking for cavalry officers. He had long known Vixen, and was kind enough to tell me that he wanted *her* for the new organization, and (as I was her necessary appendage), he procured my transfer, and we set out for the West. It was not

especially flattering to me to be taken on these grounds; but it was flattering to Vixen, and that was quite as pleasant.

Arrived at St. Louis, we set about the organization of the enthusiastic thousands who rushed to serve under Frémont. Whatever there was of ostentatious display, Vixen and I took part in, but this was not much. Once we turned out in great state to receive Prince Plon-Plon, but that was in the night, and he didn't come after all. Once again there was a review of all the troops, and that *was* magnificent. This was all. There was no coach and four, nor anything else but downright hard work from early morning till late bedtime, from Sunday morning till Saturday night. For six weeks, while my regiment of German horsemen was fitting up and drilling at the Abbey Race-track, I rode a cart-horse, and kept the mare in training for the hard work ahead.

At last we were off, going up the Missouri, sticking in its mud, poling over its shoals, and being bored generally. At Jefferson City Vixen made her last appearance in ladies' society, as by the twilight fires of the General's camp she went through her graceful paces before Mrs. Frémont and her daughter. I pass over the eventful pursuit of Price's army, because the subject of my story played only a passive part in it. At Springfield I tried her nerve by jumping her over the dead horses on brave Zagonyi's bloody field; and, although distastefully, she did my bidding without flinching, when she found it must be done. The camp-life at Springfield was full of excitement and earnestness;

Price, with his army, was near at hand (or we believed that he was, which was essentially the same). Our work in the cavalry was very active, and Vix had hard service on insufficient food, —she seemed to be sustained by sheer nervous strength.

At last the order to advance was given, and we were to move out at daybreak; then came a countermanding order; and then, late in the evening, Frémont's farewell. He had been relieved. There was genuine and universal grief. Good or bad, competent or incompetent,—this is not the place to argue that,—he was the life and the soul of his army, and it was cruelly wronged in his removal. Spiritless and full of disappointment, we again turned back from our aim;—then would have been Price's opportunity.

It was the loveliest Indian-summer weather, and the wonderful opal atmosphere of the Ozark Mountains was redolent with the freshness of a second spring. As had always been my habit in dreamy or unhappy moods, I rode my poor tired mare for companionship's sake,—I ought not to have done it,—I would give much not to have done it, for I never rode her again. The march was long, and the noonday sun was oppressive. She who had never faltered before grew nervous and shaky now, and once, after fording the Pomme-de-Terre in deep water, she behaved wildly; but when I talked to her, called her a good girl, and combed her silken mane with my fingers, she came back to her old way, and went on nicely. Still she perspired unnaturally, and I felt uneasy about her when I dismounted and gave her rein to Rudolf, my orderly.

Late in the night, when the moon was in mid-heaven, he came to my tent, and told me that something was the matter with Vixen. My adjutant and I hastened out, and there we beheld her in the agony of a brain fever. She was the most painfully magnificent animal I ever saw. Crouched on the ground, with her forelegs stretched out and wide apart, she was swaying to and fro, with hard and stertorous breath,—every vein swollen and throbbing in the moonlight. De Grandèle, our quiet veterinary surgeon, had been called while it was yet time to apply the lancet. As the hot stream spurted from her neck she grew easier; her eye recovered its gentleness, and she laid her head against my breast with the old sigh, and seemed to know and to return all my love for her. I sat with her until the first gray of dawn, when she had grown quite calm, and then I left her with De Grandèle and Rudolf while I went to my duties. We must march at five o'clock, and poor Vixen could not be moved. The thought of leaving her was very bitter, but I feared it must be done, and I asked De Grandèle how he could best end her sufferings,—or was there still some hope? He shook his head mournfully, like a kind-hearted doctor as he was, and said that he feared not; but still, as I was so fond of her, if I would leave him six men, he would do his best to bring her on, and, if he could not, he would not leave her alive. I have had few harder duties than to march that morning. Four days after, De Grandèle sent a message to me at our station near Rolla, that he was coming on nicely, and hoped to be in at nightfall. "Vixen seems to be better and stronger." At

nightfall they came, the poor old creature stepping slowly and timidly over the rough road, all the old fire and force gone out of her, and with only a feeble whinny as she saw me walking to meet her. We built for her the best quarters we could under the mountain-side, and spread her a soft bed of leaves. There was now hope that she would recover sufficiently to be sent to St. Louis to be nursed.

That night, an infernal brute of a troop horse that had already killed Ludlow's charger, led by some fiendish spirit, broke into Vixen's enclosure, and with one kick laid open her hock joint.

In vain they told me that she was incurable. I could not let her die now, when she was just restored to me; and I forced from De Grandèle the confession that she *might* be slung up and so bound that the wound would heal, although the joint must be stiff. She could never carry me again, but she could be my pet; and I would send her home, and make her happy for many a long year yet. We moved camp two miles, to the edge of the town, and she followed, painfully and slowly, the injured limb dragging behind her; I could not give her up. She was picketed near my tent, and for some days grew no worse.

Finally, one lovely Sunday morning, I found her sitting on her haunches like a dog, patient and gentle, and wondering at her pain. She remained in this position all day, refusing food. I stroked her velvet crest, and coaxed her with sugar. She rubbed her nose against my arm, and was evidently thankful for my caresses, but she showed no disposition to rise. The adjutant led

me into my tent as he would have led me from the bedside of a dying friend. I turned to look back at poor Vixen, and she gave me a little neigh of farewell.

They told me then, and they told it very tenderly, that there was no possibility that she could get well in camp, and that they wanted me to give her over to them. The adjutant sat by me, and talked of the old days when I had had her at home, and when he had known her well. We brought back all of her pleasant ways, and agreed that her trouble ought to be ended.

As we talked, a single shot was fired, and all was over. The setting sun was shining through the bare November branches, and lay warm in my open tent-front. The band, which had been brought out for the only funeral ceremony, breathed softly Kreutzer's touching "Die Kapelle," and the sun went down on one of the very sad days of my life.

The next morning I carved deeply in the bark of a great oak-tree, at the side of the Pacific Railroad, beneath which they had buried my lovely mare, a simple VIX; and some day I shall go to scrape the moss from the inscription.

RUBY

I was a colonel commanding a regiment of German cavalrymen in South Missouri, and must have a horse; it was desirable to be conspicuously well mounted, and so it must be a showy horse; being a heavy weight and a rough rider, it must be a good horse. With less rank, I might have been compelled to take a very ordinary mount and be content: my vanity would not have availed me, and my rough riding must have ceased.

But I was chief ruler of the little world that lay encamped on the beautiful banks of the Roubie d'Eaux; and probably life was easier to all under me when I was satisfied and happy. I am not conscious of having been mean and crabbed, or of favoring those who favored me to the disadvantage of those who did not. I cannot recall an instance of taking a bribe, even in the form of a pleasant smile. It was probably easier, in the long run, to be fair than to be unfair, and therefore the laziest private ever ordered on extra duty could not lay his hand on his heart and say he thinks it was done because he was not diligent in foraging for turkeys and hens for my private mess. I had very early in life been impressed with the consciousness that the way of the transgressor is not easy; and as I wanted my way to be easy, I fell into the way of not transgressing.

This may not have been a very worthy motive to actuate the conduct of a military commander; but perhaps it was as good

as the average in our Department of the Southwest, where, if the truth must be told, virtue did not have it all its own way,—we were different from troops farther east; and although it made me sometimes wince to have my conduct ascribed to a noble uprightness of purpose, and showed that it would really have been more honest not to have been quite so good, yet one should perhaps be satisfied with having carried out one's intention of treating every man in the command, officer or soldier, as nearly as he should be treated as the interests of the public service, the good of the individual himself, and one's own personal convenience would allow.

Therefore, I say, I am not conscious of having favored those who favored me, to the disadvantage of those who did not; neither do I think that (at this stage of our acquaintance) the Grafs and Barons and simple Mister Vons, of whom the command was so largely composed, entertained the hope of personal benefit when they laid their kindnesses at my accustomed feet, and tried to smooth my way of life.

The headquarters' mess was generally well supplied,—and no questions asked. My relations with most of the command were kindly, and it apparently came to be understood—for German cavalrymen are not without intelligence—that the happiness of the individual members of the regiment depended rather on the happiness of its colonel than on any direct bids for his favor. Be this as it may, I am not conscious of having received such direct appeals, and I am entirely conscious of the fullest measure of

happiness that my circumstances would allow; not an ecstasy of delight,—far from that,—but a comfortable sense of such well-fed, well-paid, well-encamped, and pleasantly occupied virtue as had left nothing undone that my subordinates could be made to do, and did nothing that my conditions rendered difficult. My own good-humor was equalled by that of the regiment at large, and the beetling sides of the Ozark valleys nowhere sheltered a happier campful of jolly good fellows than the Vierte Missouri Cavalry.

We lay on the marvellous Roubie d'Eaux, at its source; no such babbling brook as trickles from the hillside springs of New England, but a roaring torrent, breaking at once from a fathomless vent in the mountain. The processes of formation with these South Missouri rivers are all hidden from sight, but, far away in the topmost caves of the Ozark hills, the little streamlets trickle, and unite for a larger and ever larger flow, gorging at last the huge caverns of the limestone rock and bursting upon the world a full-grown river. Within our camp this wonderful spring broke forth, and close at hand was a large grist-mill that it drove. We were a self-sustaining community,—in this, that we foraged our own corn and ground our own meal. With similar industry we provided ourselves with fish, flesh, and fowl.

The trees were bare with the November frosts, but the Indian summer had come, and, day after day, it bathed every twig and spray with its amber breath, warming all nature to a second life, and floating the remoter hills far away into a hazy dreamland.

But personally, notwithstanding all this, I was not content: I was practically a dismounted cavalryman. Indeed, it would even have been a pity to see a colonel of infantry riding such brutes as fell to my lot, for good weight-carriers were rare in that section. I had paid a very high price for a young thoroughbred stallion (afterwards, happily, sold for a large advance), only to find him a year too young for his work, and the regiment had been scoured in vain for an available mount. I would have gone any reasonable length, even in injustice, to secure such an animal as was needed. It was not easy to make up one's mind to order a soldier to give up a horse he was fond of, and some soldier had an especial fondness for all but the worthless brutes. My reluctance to do this was perhaps not lessened by the fact that it was forbidden for officers to ride United States horses. It finally became evident that the chances were very small of ever finding a suitable animal, and I even went out, on one shooting excursion, mounted on a mule.

Up to this time the regiment had been all that could be asked, but now it seemed to contain a thousand ill-tempered, sore-headed men. The whole camp was awry. Some of the officers intimated that this was all the fault of the adjutant; that the orders from headquarters had lately been unusually harsh. This officer, when remonstrated with, insisted that he had only transmitted the exact orders given him, and I knew that my own action had always been reasonable,—on principle so. Sometimes one almost wished himself back in civil life, away from such constant annoyances.

We had in the regiment one Captain Graf von Gluckmansklegge, who was in many respects the most accomplished and skilful officer of us all. His life had been passed in the profession, and he had only left his position of major in a Bavarian Uhlan regiment to draw his sabre in defence of "die Freiheit," in America, as senior captain of the Fourth Missouri Cavalry. He was an officer of Asboth's selection, and had many of that veteran's qualities. Tall, thin, of elegant figure, as perfect a horseman as good natural advantages and good training could make, and near-sighted, as a German cavalry officer must be, he was as natty a fellow as ever wore an eye-glass and a blond mustache. He was, at the same time, a man of keen worldly shrewdness and of quick judgment,—qualities which, in his case, may have been sharpened by long practice at those games of chance with which it has not been unusual for European officers to preface their coming to draw their sabres in defence of "die Freiheit" in America.

With Gluckmansklegge I had always been on friendly terms. Among the many lessons of his life he had learned none more thoroughly than the best way to treat his commanding officer; and there was in his manner an air of friendly deference and of cordial submission to rank, accompanied by a degree of personal dignity, that elevated the colonel rather than lowered the captain,—a manner that probably makes its way with a newly fledged officer more surely than any other form of appeal to his vanity. One sometimes saw a brand-new second-lieutenant

made happier than a king by this same touch of skill from an old soldier in his company, whom he knew to be far his superior in all matters of service. To be quite frank, if I have an element of snobbishness in my own organization, it has been more nurtured into life by the military deference of better soldiers than myself under my command than by all other influences combined; thus modified do the best of us become in the presence of unmerited praise.

One evening Gluckmansklegge came to my tent door: "Escoose, Col-o-nel, may I come?" And then, flinging out his eye-glass with a toss of the head, he went on, with his imperfect English, to tell me he had just learned from his lieutenant that I could find no horse to suit me; that he had a good one strong enough for my weight, and, he thought, even good enough for my needs. He had bought him in St. Louis from the quartermaster, and would I oblige him by trying him? He was quite at my service, at the government price, for he, being lighter, could easily replace him. Did I remember his horse,—his "Fuchs"? "He is good, nice, strong horse, an he yoomp!—yei!!"

I did remember his horse, and I had seen him "yoomp." It had long been a subject of regret to think that such an animal should be in the regiment, yet not on my own picket-line. It was well known that great prices had been offered for him, only to make Gluckmansklegge fling his eye-glass loose, and grin in derision. "Fuchs is—how you call?—'heelty,' an gesund; wenn you like, your Ike will go to my company to bring him." I did like, and I

had no scruples against buying him for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Ike, a handsome contraband, went early the next morning with a halter for the Fuchs, and I was up bright and betimes to try him.

I had only seen the horse before under the saddle, perfectly equipped, perfectly bitted, and perfectly ridden, an almost ideal charger. There was a great firebrand scar on the flat of each shoulder, where he had been fired for a cough,—so said Gluckmansklegge;—others intimated that this effaced a U. S. brand; but, except this, not a sign of a blemish. In form, action, style, color (chestnut), and training he was unexceptionably good, and might well excite the envy of all good horsemen who saw him *under the saddle*. Knowing him so well, I went rather eagerly to the picket-line to refresh myself with the added sensation that the actual ownership of such a horse must give.

There stood the new purchase,—a picture of the most abject misery; his hind legs drawn under him; the immense muscles of his hips lying flabby, like a cart-horse's; his head hanging to the level of his knees, and his under-lip drooping; his eyes half shut, and his long ears falling out sidewise like a sleepy mule's. I had bought him for a safe price, and he would probably do to carry Ike and the saddle-bags; but I felt as far as ever from a mount for myself, and went back to my tent wiser and no happier than before.

Presently Ike appeared with the coffee, and asked how I liked the new horse.

"Not at all."

"Don't ye? well now, I reckon he's a consid'able of a hoss."

I sent him to look at him again, and he came back with a very thoughtful air,—evidently he had been impressed. At last he said, "Well now, Colonel, I don't reckon you bought that hoss to look at him on the picket-line, did ye?"

"No, Ike, or he should be sold out very cheap; but he is not the *kind* of horse I supposed he was; he ought to work in a mule-team."

"Well now, Colonel, mebbe he is; but you can't never tell nothin' about a hoss till you get him between ye; and I reckon he's a consid'able of a hoss, I reckon he is."

Ike was wise, in his way, and his way was a very horsy one,—so my hopes revived a little; and when Gluckmansklegge came up on a capital little beast he had been handling (secretly to replace the Fuchs), I had the new venture saddled and brought round. He came blundering along, head and ears and tail down, and stood like a leathern horse for me to mount, Gluckmansklegge dropping his eye-glass and grinning. It was as well to find out first as last whether he had anything in him or not, and I gathered up the curb-rein, which brought his head into superb position and settled him well back upon his haunches; but, as the movement had been made with dignity, I gave him both heels, firmly,—when we went sailing!—how high I don't know, probably not fifteen feet, but it seemed that, and covering a good stretch to the front. It was the most enormous lift I had ever had, and (after

an appreciable time in the air), when he landed square on all four feet, it was to strike a spanking, even trot, the bit playing loose in his mouth, his head swaying easily with his step, and his tail flying. I had never been more amazed in my life than by the wonderful grace and agility of this splendid brute. As he trotted along with his high, strong, and perfectly cadenced step, he showed in the swing of his head all the satisfaction of an athlete turning, conscious, lightly away from the footlights, after his especial *tour de force*.

As Gluckmansklegge rode up, he said, "Well, Col-o-nel, how you like? Nice pretty strong horse, what?"

And then, his English failing him, he fell, through an attempt at French, into German, in which his tongue was far more ready than my ear. Still it was easy to gather enough to understand some of the processes by which the animal's natural qualifications for his work had been developed into such unusual accomplishments; and then he glided into the complimentary assertion that no one but the colonel of his regiment could ever have hoped to buy him at any price,—and of course he did not consider it a sale. His original outlay, which he could not afford to lose, had been reimbursed; but the true value of the horse, his education, he was only too glad to give me. And then, the pleasure of seeing his colonel suitably mounted, and the satisfaction of seeing the horse properly ridden, really threw the obligation on his side. Then, with his inimitable *naïveté*, he not only expressed, but demonstrated, in every look and gesture,

more delight in watching our movements than he had felt in his own riding. “Praise a horseman for his horsemanship, and he will ride to the Devil.” Gluckmansklegge (I did not suspect him of a desire for promotion) pointed to a strong rail-fence near by, and suggested that the combination of man and horse for that sort of thing was unusual. Whether it was a banter or a compliment, it would have been impossible for any man who properly esteemed himself and his riding to stop to consider. Turned toward the fence, the Fuchs, checking his speed, seemed to creep toward it, as a cat would, making it very uncertain what he proposed; but as he came nearer to it, that willingness to leap that an accustomed rider will always recognize communicated itself to me, and, with perfect judgment, but with a force and spirit I had never hoped to meet in a horse of this world, he carried me over the enormous height, and landed like a deer, among the stumps and brush on the other side, and trotted gayly away, athlete-like again, happier and prouder than ever horse was before.

Sitting that evening at my tent door, opposite the spring, bragging, as the custom is, over the new purchase, it occurred to me that that stream of water and that bit of horse-flesh had some qualities alike; so I christened the latter “Roubie d’Eaux,” which was soon translated and shortened to “Ruby,”—a name henceforth familiar throughout the regiment.

To become my property was the only thing needed to make him perfect, for Ike was born in a racing stud in Kentucky, and had practised all the arts of the craft, up to the time when, being

both jockey and "the stakes" in a race he rode, he was lost to a Missouri gentleman of fortune, and became a body-servant. He was once confidential:—

"Well, now, Colonel, you see, this is how it was: I hadn't nothin' ag'in my master,—he was a right nice man; but then, you see, he drinked, and I didn't know what might become of me some time. Then, you see, I knowed this man was stiddy, an' he'd jess done bought a yallar gal I kinder had a notion for, an' so,—don't ye see why?—well, the hoss could have won the *race* fast enough, but then, you see, my master,—well, he was a drinkin' kind of a man, an' I thought I might as well fix it. I knowed I was up for stakes, an' that's how I come to Missouri; I ain't no Missouri man *born*, but that's how it was."

He had become a good body-servant without forgetting his stable training, and his horses bore testimony to his skill and fidelity. After going through the routine of a well-regulated stable, he gave each horse a half-hour's stroking with the flat of his hands, brisk and invigorating; and the result was a more blooming condition and more vigorous health than is often seen in horses on a campaign. The best substitute that could be secured for a stable was a very heavy canvas blanket, covering the horse from his ears to his tail and down to his knees, water-proof and wind-proof. It was a standing entertainment with the less dignified members of the mess to invite attention to Ruby as he stood moping under this hideous housing. Certainly I never saw him thus without thinking that his time had at last come, and that

he surely would never again be able to carry me creditably. Yet, as Ike's devotion continued, he grew better and better, commanding daily more of the respect and admiration of all who knew him, and attaching himself to me more and more as we learned each other's ways.

One never loves but one horse entirely, and so Ruby never quite filled Vixen's place; but as a serviceable friend, he was all that could be desired. The unsupplied want of my life, that had made me restless and discontented, was now satisfied, and my duties became easy, and my pastimes (the principal times of South Missouri warfare) entirely agreeable.

It was no slight addition to these sources of contentment to feel that the command had at last awakened to a sense of its dereliction, and was fast reforming its ways. I had hardly owned Ruby for a fortnight before the old cheerfulness and alacrity returned to the regiment, and by the time we broke up our camp on the Roubie d'Eaux and went over to Lebanon for the shooting season, the entire organization was in a most satisfactory condition.

Our life in Lebanon was an episode of the war that we shall not soon forget. To the best of my knowledge and belief, after Price had retreated from Pea Ridge, the only organized forces of armed Rebels to be found north of the White River were local bands of jay-hawkers, whose rebellion was mainly directed against the laws of property, and the actuating motive of whose military movements was "nags." The stealing of horses, with

the consequent application of Lynch law, was all that the native male population had to keep them out of mischief, for weeks and weeks together. There was just enough of this sort of armed lawlessness to furnish us with a semblance of duty; not enough seriously to interrupt our more regular avocations.

Lebanon is on the high table-land of the Ozarks, in the heart of a country flowing with prairie-hens and wild turkeys, and bountifully productive of the more humdrum necessaries of life. Thanks to the fleeing of Rebel families, we found comfortable quarters without too severely oppressing those who had remained. What with moving the court-house away from the public square, leaving the space free for a parade, and substituting a garrison flag-staff for the town pump, we kept our men from rusting; and when, after a time, we had established a comfortable post-hospital and a commodious military prison, Lebanon was as complete and well-ordered a station as could be found in South Missouri. I had the questionable honor and the unquestionable comfort of holding its command from the end of January to the end of April,—three dreamy months, that seem now to have been passed in a shooting-lodge, under favorable auspices.

As a legacy of the "Hundred Days," when the "Fourth Missouri" was the "Frémont Hussars," we had an able-bodied and extremely well-selected regimental band, that soothed our over-tasked senses when we came in from our work in the fields, gathering where our enemies had sown, and (under the

suspended game-laws of the State) shooting grouse and quail in the early spring.

Naturally, most of my official duties were such as could be performed by an extremely well-regulated adjutant; and I usually passed his busy half-hour (in private) with Ruby. There had been an impetuosity about the horse at the outset which it was desirable to quell, and I rode him regularly in a nicely fenced kitchen-garden, where, after he learned that fences are not always intended for leaping-bars, he fell slowly into the routine of the training-school, and easily acquired a perfect self-command and *aplomb* that enabled him, under all circumstances, to await his rider's instructions.

I wish that less account had been made, in the writings of those whose horse-stories have preceded mine, of the specified feats of their animals. The *rôle* of a horse's performances is necessarily limited, and it is probably impossible for a well-constituted mind to recite the simple story of his deeds without seeming to draw largely on the imagination. Consequently, an unexaggerated account of what Ruby actually did (and I cannot bring my mind to an embellishment of the truth) would hardly interest a public whose fancy has been thus pampered and spoiled. But for this, these pages could be filled with instances of his strength and agility that would almost tax belief. Suffice it to say that while, like most good high leapers, he would cover but a moderate breadth of water, he would get over anything reasonable in the shape of a fence that could be found about the town.

I was a heavy weight,—riding nearly two hundred pounds,—and necessarily rode with judgment. If there was a low place in a fence, we never chose a high one; but, at the same time, if there were no low places, we took the best we could find. Ruby seemed to know that the two of us were solid enough to break through any ordinary pile of rails, and what we could not jump over we jumped *at*. More than once did he carry away the top rail of a snake fence with his knees, and land fair and square on the other side; but it was a very high leap that made this necessary.

He would jump on to the porch of the quartermaster's office (approached from the ground by four steps), and then jump over the hand-rail and land on the ground below again, almost wagging his tail with delight at the feat.

His ear was quicker than mine for the peeping of quail and for the drumming of grouse, and, in the absence of a good dog, there is no doubt that my pot (for which alone I have been said to hunt) was better filled by reason of his intelligence in the field, and because he would allow one to shoot from the saddle. The birds never mistook me for a sportsman until I was quite in among them, blazing away.

In coming home from the prairie, we generally rode round by the way of a certain sunken garden that stood a couple of feet below the level of the road. A five-foot picket-fence that stood at the roadside had fallen over toward the garden, so that its top was hardly four feet higher than the road. This made the most satisfactory leap we ever took,—the long, sailing descent, and the

safe landing on sandy loam, satisfied so completely one's prudent love of danger.

I think I missed this leap more than anything at Lebanon when, finally, we set out for Arkansas.

We made our first considerable halt early in May, at Batesville, on the White River,—a lovely, rose-grown village, carrying, in the neatly kept home of its New England secessionists, evidence that they remembered their native land, where, in their day, before the age of railroads, the "village" flourished in all its freshness and simplicity. It had now acquired the picturesque dilapidation, in the manner of fences and gates and defective window-panes, that marked the Southern domicile during the war. Ruby had strained himself quite seriously during the march, and had been left to come on slowly with the quartermaster's train. This left me quite free for the social life, such as it was, to which we—the only available men that had been seen there since Price gathered his forces at Springfield—were welcomed with a reserved cordiality. Our facilities for forming a correct opinion of society were not especially good, but I fancied I should have passed my time to as good advantage in the saddle.

We soon left for an active expedition in the direction of Little Rock, of which it is only necessary to say, here, that it lasted about a month, and brought the writer acquainted with some very unsatisfactory horses,—a fact which heightened his pleasure, on striking the White River bottom again, at finding that Ruby had been brought over the ferry to meet him. Tired as I was, I took a

glorious brisk trot through the Canebrake Road, with a couple of leaps over fallen trees, that revived the old emotions and made a man of me again.

While we lay at Batesville we were unusually active in the matter of drill and reorganization; and this, with our engagements in the town, kept us too busy for much recreation; but Ludlow and I managed to work in a daily swim in the White River, with old saddles on our horses, and scant clothing on our persons. Talk of aquatic sports! there is no royal bath without a plucky horse to assist; and a swim across the swift current at Batesville, with a horse like Ruby snorting and straining at every stroke, belittled even the leaping at Lebanon.

From Batesville we commenced our memorable march to join the fleet that had just passed Memphis, following down the left bank of the river to Augusta, and then striking across the cotton country to Helena,—a march on which we enjoyed the rarest picturesqueness of plantation life, and suffered enough from heat and hunger and thirst, and stifling, golden dust to more than pay for it.

Helena was a pestiferous swamp, worth more than an active campaign to our enemies, filling our hospitals, and furrowing the levee bank with graves. It was too hot for much drilling, and we kept our better horses in order by daybreak races. With the local fever feeling its way into my veins, I was too listless to care much for any diversion; but Ike came to me one evening to say that he "reckoned" Ruby was as good a horse as anybody had in the

"camps," and he might as well take a hand in the games. I told him I had no objection to his being run, if he could find a suitable boy, but that both he and I were too heavy for race-riding.

"I don't weigh only about a hundred and a half," said the ambitious man.

"Well, suppose you don't, that is ten pounds too much."

"I reckon a man can ride ten pound lighter 'n he is if he knows how to ride; anyhow, if Rube can't skin anything around here, I don't know nothin' about horses."

"Ike, did you ever run that horse?"

"Well, Colonel, now you ask me, I did jest give Dwight's darkey a little brush once."

Conquering my indignation and my scruples, I went over, just for the honor of the establishment, and made up a race for the next day.

I have seen crack race-horses in my time, but I never saw more artistic riding nor more capital running than that summer morning on the River Road at Helena, just as the sun began to gild the muddy Mississippi. The satisfaction of this conquest, and the activity with which new engagements were offered by ambitious lieutenants, who little knew the stuff my man and horse were made of, kept off my fever for some weeks; but I steadily declined all opportunity of racing with horses outside of our command, for I had been reared in a school of Puritan severity, and had never quite overcome my convictions against the public turf. A corporal of an "Injeanny rege*ment*" took

occasion to crow lustily—so I heard—because "one of them French coveys" was afraid to run him a quarter for five dollars. It appeared that a cleanly European was always supposed by this gentry to be French; and in the army at large I was better known by the company I kept than by my New England characteristics.

Naturally, Ike thought that, while Ruby was engaged in this more legitimate occupation, he ought not to be ridden for mere pleasure; and it was only when a visitor was to be entertained, or when I went out on plea of duty, that I could steal an opportunity to leap him; but he took one fence that fairly did him credit. It was a snake fence measuring four feet and two inches, with a deep ditch on each side cut close to the projecting angles of the rails. Ruby carried me over the first ditch into the angle between the rails, then over the fence into the narrow space on the other side, and then over the second ditch into the field. It was the most perfect combination of skill, strength, and judgment that was possible to horse-flesh; and I think Gluckmansklegge, who was with me and had suggested the venture, despaired of ever getting his promotion by any fair means, when we rejoined him by the return leap and rode safely to camp.

Unhappily, even entire satisfaction with one's horse is powerless to ward off such malaria as that of the camp at Helena, and in due time I fell ill with the fever. The horse was turned over to the care of the quartermaster, and Ike and I came wearily home on sick-leave.

Late in the autumn we returned to St. Louis, where one of the

German officers told me that the regiment had joined Davidson's army at "Pilot K-nopp"; and after the Hun, our new adjutant, arrived from the East, we set out for headquarters, and took command of the cavalry brigade of Davidson's army.

From November until January we were tossed about from post to post, wearing out our horses, wearying our men, and accomplishing absolutely nothing of value beyond the destruction of an enormous amount of the rough forage, which would otherwise have been used to feed "nags,"—stolen or to be stolen,—and would have thus tended to foster the prevailing vice of the region.

At last we settled down in a pleasant camp at Thomasville,—a good twelve miles away from Davidson,—and were at rest; it was only those near him who suffered from his fitful caprices, and he was now encamped with the infantry.

Pleasant as we found it with our little duty and much sport, I can never look back to Thomasville without sorrow. To say that I had acquired a tenderness for Ruby would not be strictly just; but I felt for him all the respect and admiration and fondness that is possible short of love. Vix had been my heroine, and my only one; but Ruby was my hero, and I depended on him for my duty and my pleasure more than I knew. With his full measure of intelligence he had learned exactly his *rôle*, and he was always eager, whenever occasion offered, to show the world what a remarkably fine horse I had,—being himself conscious, not only of his unusual virtues, but, no less, of the praise they

elicited.

One sunny Southern day, toward the end of January, Davidson had ridden over, with his following, to dine with us; and as we were sitting before our mess-tent, mellow with after-dinner talk of our guns and our dogs and our horses, the General was good enough to remember that he had seen me riding a chestnut that he thought much too finely bred for field work: had I been able to keep him? Then Ruby was discussed, and all his successes were recalled, first by one friend and then by another, until Davidson needed ocular proof of our truthfulness.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.