HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

THE GOLDEN CANYON

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Содержание

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Publishers' Introduction

George Alfred Henty has been called "The Prince of Story-Tellers." To call him "The Boy's Own Historian" would perhaps be a more appropriate title, for time has proved that he is more than a story-teller; he is a preserver and propagator of history amongst boys.

How Mr. Henty has risen to be worthy of these enviable titles is a story which will doubtless possess some amount of interest for all his readers.

Henty may be said to have begun his preliminary training for his life-work when a boy attending school at Westminster. Even then the germ of his story-telling propensity seems to have evinced itself, for he was always awarded the highest marks in English composition.

From Westminster he went to Cambridge, where he was enrolled as a student at Caius College. It is a decided change of scenery and circumstances from Cambridge to the Crimea, but such was the change which took place in Mr. Henty's career at the age of twenty-one.

An appointment in connection with the commissariat

department of the British army, took him from the scenes of student life into the excitement of the Muscovite war.

Previous to this, however, he had written his first novel, which he has characterized as "Very bad, no doubt, and was, of course, never published, but the plot was certainly a good one."

Whilst engaged with his duties at the Crimea he sent home several descriptive letters of the places, people, and circumstances passing under his notice. His father, thinking some of those letters were of more than private interest, took a selection of them to the editor of the *Morning Advertiser*, who, after perusal of them, was so well pleased with their contents that he at once appointed young Henty as war correspondent to the paper in the Crimea.

The ability with which he discharged his duties in the commissariat department at that time soon found for him another sphere of similar work in connection with the hospital of the Italian forces. After a short time this was relinquished for engagement in mining work, which he first entered into at Wales, and then in Italy.

Ten years after his Crimean correspondence to the *Morning Advertiser* he again took to writing, and at this time obtained the position of special correspondent to the *Standard*. While holding this post, he contributed letters and articles on the wars in Italy and Abyssinia, and on the expedition to Khiva. Two novels came from his pen during this time, but his attention was mostly devoted to miscellaneous letters and articles.

It is a specially interesting incident in the career of Mr. Henty how he came to turn his attention to writing for boys. When at home, after dinner, it was his habit to spend an hour or so with his children in telling them stories, and generally amusing them. A story begun one day would be so framed as "to be continued in the next," and so the same story would run on for a few days, each day's portion forming a sort of chapter, until the whole was completed. Some of the stories continued for weeks. Mr. Henty, seeing the fascination and interest which these stories had for his own children, bethought himself that others might receive from them the same delight and interest if they were put into book form. He at once acted upon the suggestion and wrote out a chapter of his story for each day, and instead of telling it to his children in an extempore fashion, read what he had written. When the story was completed, the various chapters were placed together and dispatched to a publisher, who at once accepted and published it. It was in this way the long series of historical stories which has come from his powerful pen was inaugurated, and G.A. Henty was awarded the title of "The Prince of Story-Tellers."

There is in this incident a glimpse of the character of our author which endears him to us all. The story of his kindly interest in his own children surely creates a liking for him in the hearts of the children of others. The man who can spend an hour in telling stories to his little ones, and retain their attention and interest, has an evident sympathy with, and power over, the

youthful nature. Time has proved such is the case with G.A. Henty, for up to the present he has written close on fifty stories for boys, which have been received with unbounded joy and satisfaction by all.

As an indication of the reception which his books have met with, the following may be quoted from an English paper:

"G.A. Henty, the English writer of juveniles, is the most popular writer in England to-day in point of sales. Over 150,000 copies of his books are sold in a year, and in America he sells from 25,000 to 50,000 during a year."

"All the world" is the sphere from which Mr. Henty draws his pictures and characters for the pleasure of the young. Almost every country in the world has been studied to do service in this way, with the result that within the series of books which Mr. Henty has produced for the young we find such places dealt with as Carthage, Egypt, Jerusalem, Scotland, Spain, England, Afghanistan, Ashanti, Ireland, France, India, Gibraltar, Waterloo, Alexandria, Venice, Mexico, Canada, Virginia, and California. Doubtless what other countries remain untouched as yet are but so many fields to be attacked, and which every lad hopes to see conquered in the same masterly way in which the previous ones have been handled.

As a rule much of what boys learn at school is left behind them when classes are given up for the sterner work of the world. Unless there is a special demand for a certain subject, that subject is apt to become a thing of the past, both in theory and practice.

This, however, is not likely to be the case with history, so long as G.A. Henty writes books for boys, and boys read them. History is his especial forte, and that he is able to invest the dry facts of history with life, and make them attractive to the modern schoolboy, says not a little for his power as a story-teller for boys. It is questionable if history has any better means of fixing itself in the minds of youthful readers than as it is read in the pages of G.A. Henty's works. There is about it an attraction which cannot be resisted; a most unusual circumstance in connection with such a subject. All this of course means for Mr. Henty a vast amount of research and study to substantiate his facts and make his situations, characters, places, and points of time authentic. To the reader it means a benefit which is incalculable, not only as a means of passing a pleasant hour, but in reviving or imparting a general knowledge of the history and geography, the manners and customs of our own and other lands.

There is a noticeable element of "Freedom" which runs through Mr. Henty's books, and in this may be said to lie their influence. From them lads get an elevating sense of independence, and a stimulus to patriotic and manly endeavor. His pages provide the purest form of intellectual excitement which it is possible to put into the hands of lads. They are always vigorous and healthy, and a power for the strengthening of the moral as well as the intellectual life.

In the present work, "The Golden Canyon," a tale of the gold mines, Mr. Henty has fully sustained his reputation, and we feel

certain all boys will read the book with keen interest.

The Golden Canyon

Chapter I.—A Run Ashore

In the month of August, 1856, the bark *Northampton* was lying in the harbor of San Diego. In spite of the awning spread over her deck the heat was almost unbearable. Not a breath of wind was stirring in the land-locked harbor, and the bare and arid country round the town afforded no relief to the eye. The town itself looked mean and poverty-stricken, for it was of comparatively modern growth, and contained but a few buildings of importance. Long low warehouses fringed the shore, for here came for shipping vast quantities of hides; as San Diego, which is situated within a few miles of the frontier between the United States and Mexico, is the sole sheltered port available for shipping between San Francisco and the mouth of the Gulf of California. Two or three other ships which were, like the *Northampton*, engaged in shipping hides, lay near her. A sickening odor rose from the half-cured skins as they were swung up from boats alongside and lowered into the hold, and in spite of the sharp orders of the mates, the crew worked slowly and listlessly.

"This is awful, Tom," a lad of about sixteen, in the uniform of a midshipman, said to another of about the same age as, after

the last boat had left the ship's sides, they leaned against the bulwarks; "what with the heat, and what with the stench, and what with the captain and the first mate, life is not worth living. However, only another two or three days and we shall be full up, and once off we shall get rid of a good deal of the heat and most of the smell."

"Yes, we shall be better off in those respects, Dick, but unfortunately we shan't leave the captain and mate behind."

"No, I don't know which I like worst of them. It is a contrast to our last sip, Tom. What a good time we had of it on board the *Zebra*! The captain was a brick, and the mates were all good fellows. In fact, we have always been fortunate since the day we first came on board together up to now. I can't think how the owners ever appointed Collet to the command; he is not one of their own officers. But when Halford was taken suddenly ill I suppose they had no others at home to put in his place, so had to go outside. My father said that Mr. Thompson had told him that they heard that he was a capital sailor, and I have no doubt he is. He certainly handled her splendidly in that big storm we had rounding the Cape. I suppose they did not inquire much farther, as we took no passengers out to San Francisco, and were coming out to pick up a cargo of hides here for the return journey; but he is a tyrant on board, and when I get back I will tell my father, and he will let Thompson know the sort of fellow Collet is. It doesn't do one any good making complaints of a captain, but my father is such friends with Thompson that I know he will tell the other

partners that he hears that Collet isn't the sort of man they care about having commanding their ships, without my name coming into it. If he does I can't help it. I know Thompson will see that I don't sail with Collet again, anyhow, and will get you with me, as he has often met you at my father's, and knows what chums we are. Collet brought Williams with him, and they were a nice pair. I believe the second and third are just as disgusted as we are, and as Allen is a nephew of one of the partners he will put a spoke in their wheel too, when he comes back."

"Well, we might be worse off in some respects, Dick. We have two good officers out of the four, and we have a very fair crew, and we have good grub; and the company always victual their ships well, and don't put the officers' messing into the hands of the captain, as they do in some ships."

Presently Mr. Allen, the second officer, came up with the two lads.

"I am going ashore in an hour, Preston," he said to Dick; "if you like, you can come with me."

"Thank you, sir; I should like it very much."

"I wish you were coming too, Tom," he went on when the officer moved away. "That is one of the nuisances, Collet never letting us go ashore together."

"It is a nuisance," the other said, heartily. "Of course, Allen is a very good fellow, but one can't have any larks as one could have if we were together."

"Well, there are not many larks to be had here, at any rate,

Tom. It is about the dullest place I ever landed at. It is a regular Mexican town, and except that they do have, I suppose, sometimes, dances and that sort of thing, there is really nothing to be done when one does go ashore, and the whole place stinks of hides. Even if one could get away for a day there is no temptation to ride about that desert-looking country, with the sun burning down on one; no one but a salamander could stand it. They are about the roughest-looking lot I ever saw in the town. Everyone has got something to do with hides one way or the other. They have either come in with them from the country, or they pack them in the warehouses, or they ship them. That and mining seem the only two things going on, and the miners, with their red shirts and pistols and knives, look even a rougher lot than the others. I took my pistol when last I went ashore; I will lend it you this evening."

"Oh, I don't want a pistol, Tom; there is no chance of my getting into a row."

"Oh, it is just as well to carry one, Dick, when you know that everyone else has got one about him somewhere, and a considerable number of them are drunk; it is just as well to take one. You know, it is small, and goes in my breast pocket."

"I will take my stick, the one I bought at San Francisco; it has got an ounce of lead in the knob. I would rather have that than a pistol any day."

However, as Dick was standing with the second officer at the top of the gangway, Tom Haldane, as he passed by, slipped the

pistol into his hand and then walked on. Dick thrust it into his pocket, and then descended the ladder. It was almost dark now.

"I have two or three places to go to, Preston, and do not know how long I shall be detained. It is just nine o'clock now. Suppose you meet me here at the boat at half-past ten. It will be pleasanter for you to stroll about by yourself than to be waiting about outside houses for me."

"Very well, sir. I don't think there is much to see in the town, but I will take a bit of a stroll outside. It is cool and pleasant after the heat of the day."

They walked together to the first house that Mr. Allen had to visit; then Dick strolled on by himself. The place abounded with wine-shops. Through the open doors the sound of the strumming of mandolins, snatches of Spanish song, and occasionally voices raised in dispute or anger, came out. Dick felt no inclination to enter any of them. Had his chum been with him he might have looked in for a few minutes for the fun of the thing, but alone he would be the object of remark, and might perhaps get involved in a quarrel. Besides the freshness of the air was so pleasant that he felt disposed for a walk, for the moon was shining brightly, the stars seemed to hang from the skies, and after having been pent up in the ship for the last four days it was pleasant to stretch the limbs in a brisk walk. In ten minutes he was outside the town, and followed the road for half an hour.

"It is a comfort," he said to himself, "to have got rid of the smell of hides. If ever cholera comes this way I should think it

would make a clean sweep of San Diego."

Turning, he walked leisurely back; he entered the town, and had gone but a hundred yards or two when he heard a shout, followed by a pistol shot, and then, in English, a cry for help.

He dashed down the street toward a group of people who, he could see in the moonlight, were engaged in a sharp struggle. One man was defending himself against four, and the oaths and exclamations of these showed that they were Mexicans. Just as he reached them the man they were attacking was struck down, and two of his assailants threw themselves upon him.

Dick rushed upon the men, and felled one with a sweeping blow of his stick. The other man who was standing up sprang at him, knife in hand, with a savage oath.

So quick was the action that he was upon Dick before he had time to strike a blow with his stick. He threw up his left arm to guard his head, but received a severe gash on the shoulders. At the same moment he struck out with his right, full into the face of the Mexican, who, as he staggered back, fell across the three men on the ground. Dick seized the opportunity to draw his pistol, dropping his stick as he did so, as his left arm was disabled. It was a double-barreled pistol and as the three natives rose and rushed at him, he shot the first. The other two sprang at him and he received a blow that almost paralyzed him. He staggered against the wall, but had strength to raise his arm and fire again, just as the man was about to repeat his blow; he fell forward on his face, and his other assailant took to his heels. A

moment later Dick himself sank to the ground.

Chapter II.—Dick's Escape

When Dick opened his eyes it was broad daylight. He was lying in a barely furnished room. A surgeon was leaning over him bandaging his wounds, while on the other side of the bed stood three red-shirted men, whose rough beards and belts with bowie knives and pistols showed them to be miners. One of them had his face strapped up and his arm in a sling. An exclamation of satisfaction burst from him as Dick's eyes opened.

"That is right, lad. You will do now. It has been touch and go with you all night. My life aint no pertik'lar value to nobody, but such as it is you have saved it. But I won't talk of that now. Which ship do you belong to? We will let them know at once."

"The *Northampton*," Dick said in a whisper.

"All right; don't you talk any more. We will get your friends here in no time."

But when Mr. Allen came ashore Dick was again unconscious. The mate fetched two more surgeons, who, after conferring with the first, were all of opinion that although he might possibly recover from his wounds, weeks would elapse before he would be convalescent. Before night fever had set in, and it was a fortnight before he was again conscious of what was passing round him. He looked feebly round the room. One of the red-shirted men was attending to a pot over a charcoal fire. Turning his head he saw, standing looking out of the window, his friend Tom Haldane.

"Halloa, Tom," he said, in a whisper, which, however, reached the midshipman's ears. He turned sharply round, and hurried to the bedside.

"Thank God, Dick, you are conscious again. Don't try to talk, old fellow; drink this lemonade, and then shut your eyes again."

Dick tried to raise his hand to take the glass, but, to his surprise, found he was unable to do so. Tom, however, put it to his lips and poured it down his throat. It was cool and pleasant, and with a sigh of relief he again closed his eyes, and went off into a quiet sleep.

When he awoke it was evening; the window was open, and the fresh air came in, making the lamp on the table flicker.

"How do you feel now, old man?" Tom asked.

"I feel all right," he said, "but I am wonderfully weak. I suppose I must have lost a lot of blood. Has the skipper given you leave to stop with me for the night?"

Tom nodded. "I will tell you all about it in the morning, Dick. There is some chicken broth Dave has been cooking for you. You must try and drink a bowl of it, and then by to-morrow morning you will be feeling like a giant."

Dick laughed feebly. "It will be some time before there is much of a giant about me. Tom; but I feel as if I could drink some broth."

The next morning Dick woke feeling decidedly stronger. "Raise me up and put some pillows behind me, Tom. It is horrid being fed from a spoon, lying on one's back."

The man called Dave, and Tom, lifted him up as he wished, and then the latter fed him with the broth, in which some bread had been crumbled.

"Now, then," Dick said, when he had finished; "let us hear what the old man said. I suppose he was in a tremendous rage?"

"That he was! a brute!"

"Why, there is my chest. What has he sent that ashore for? I should think I could be taken on board again to-day."

"You won't be taken on board the *Northampton,*" Tom said, "for by this time she is down somewhere near Cape Horn."

"Eh!" Dick exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, how long have I been here?"

"A fortnight to-day, Dick."

Dick was too surprised to make any remark for some time.

"But if the *Northampton* has gone, how is it that you are here, Tom?"

"Simply because she has gone without me, Dick. The old man was in a furious rage when he heard in the morning what had happened to you. Of course, we were in a great stew—I mean the third mate and myself—when Allen came off at twelve o'clock without you, after waiting an hour and a half at the wharf for you to turn up. We all felt sure that something must have happened, or you would never have been all that time late. There was a row between Allen and the skipper the first thing in the morning. Allen wanted to go ashore to make inquiries about you, and the old man would not let him, and said that no doubt you had

deserted, but that if you came on board again he would have you put in irons.

"Well, there was a regular row going on when a boat came off with a man in a red shirt, who I know now is one of Dave's partners, and said that you were desperately wounded, and that the Spanish doctor they had called in thought that you would die. So then the old man couldn't help Allen's going ashore. Of course, he could do nothing, as you were insensible, but he got two other surgeons. Their opinion was that you would not get over it, but that if you did it would be a long time first. When Allen got back there was another row. He wanted to have you brought on board. The captain said that as you had chosen to mix yourself up in a row on shore, you might die on shore for anything he cared. Then I asked for leave to stay with you when the vessel sailed, and got sworn at for my pains. In the afternoon I filled up your chest chockfull with as many of my things as I could get into it, and sent it ashore. By the next night we had got all the cargo on board, and were to sail by the next morning, and I lowered myself down and swam ashore.

"Allen had told me exactly where you were lying, so I came here at once and told Dave who I was, and why I had come ashore, and as soon as it was light he took me round to the room the other two had. The captain came ashore in the morning and stormed and raved at the Consul's, but he had better have kept on board. I told our friends here all about it, and as he went back to the boat again one of them pitched into him, and gave him such a

tremendous licking that I hear he had to be carried on board. As soon as he got on board the *Northampton* sailed, so you see here we both are. I have written off to your father and mine, giving them a full account of the whole affair, and saying what a brute Collet had been on the whole voyage. They will be sure to lay the letters before the firm, and as Allen and Smith will, when they are questioned, speak out pretty straight, you may be sure the old man and his friend, the first mate, will have to look for a berth somewhere else."

"It is awfully good of you to have come ashore to nurse me, Tom."

"Bosh! Why, I have got away from the *Northampton*. I found, too, that as far as nursing was concerned I might as well have stayed on board, for Dave here and his two mates have, one or other of them, been with you night and day, and they could not have taken more care of you if they had been women. Still I have been very glad to be here, though till three days ago there seemed very little hope of your pulling through it. Now you have talked enough, or rather, I have talked enough, Dick; and you had better turn over and get another sleep."

Chapter III.—The Gold-Seekers

Two days later the lad was able to sit up in bed and to enter upon a discussion as to the future with Tom and the miner. It was begun by the latter.

"I suppose you will be taking the first ship back as soon as you are strong enough?" he said.

"I don't know, Dave; now I am here I should certainly like a run ashore for a few weeks and to see something of the country. We have got twenty pounds between us; that will last for some time. I should think we could get a passage back without having to pay on this side for it, and if there was any difficulty about it, we could work our way back; but Tom agrees with me, we should like to see something of the country first.

"I suppose in another fortnight I shall be all right again; but there is the doctor to pay. I don't know what their charges are here, but I expect his bill will be a pretty long one. You had better tell him to-day that we have not got a great deal of cash between us, and that as I only want building up now, he need not come again."

"Don't you trouble yourself about that," Dave growled. "You don't suppose that when you have got yourself cut and sliced about in helping me you are going to have any trouble about doctors? We have got a tidy lot at present amongst us, and what is ours is yourn. We were going to set off among the hills a day

or two after the time we had that trouble; only, of course, that stopped it all."

"Please don't stop on my account," Dick said. "I shall get on very well now, and I was saying to Tom, as soon as I can get about we will go off somewhere among the hills; for one might just as well be lying in an oven as here. If you will tell us where you and your mates are working, we might find our way there, and get a job. We are both pretty strong, you know—that is to say, when we are well—and we have often said that we should like to try our luck gold-mining."

"We aint agoing till you are strong enough to get about," Dave said; "so it is no use saying any more about that. Then, if you want to do some mining, we will put you in the way of it; but we are going on a long expedition, which may last months, and from which, as like as not, we shall never come back again. However, we can easy enough take you with us for a bit and drop you at one of the mining camps, and stop there with you till you get accustomed to it, or work for a few months with you if you like. Time is not of much consequence to us."

"That is awfully good of you, Dave," Tom said, "but as you have lost more than a fortnight at present, and I suppose it will be another fortnight before Dick is strong enough to travel, it isn't fair on you; and perhaps you might be able to introduce us to some men going up to the hills—that is, if you think that we could not go with you on this expedition you talk of."

"That won't be a job for young hands," Dave said. "It will be

a mighty long journey over a terrible rough country, where one's life will be always in one's hands, where one's eyes will always be on the lookout for an enemy, and one will know that any moment, night or day, one may hear the war yell of the Indians. We are going into the heart of Arizona, to places where not half-a-dozen white men, even counting Mexicans as white men, have ever set foot; at least, where not half-a-dozen have ever come back alive from, though maybe there are hundreds who have tried."

"Then I suppose you are going to look for some very rich mine, Dave?"

"That is so; I will tell you how it came about, and queerly enough, it wur pretty well the same way as your friend and me came together. My mates and me were coming down from the hills when we heard a shot fired in a wood ahead of us. It wasn't none of our business, but we went on at a trot, thinking as how some white men had been attacked by greasers."

"What are greasers?" Tom asked.

Dave laughed.

"A greaser is just a Mexican. Why they call them so I don't know; but that has been their name always as long as I came in the country. Well, we ran down and came sudden upon two greasers who were kneeling by a man lying in the road, and seemed to be searching his pockets. We let fly with our Colts; one of them was knocked over, and the other bolted. Then we went to look at the man in the road; he wur a greaser too. He had been shot dead. 'I wonder what they shot him for?' says I. 'Maybe it is a private

quarrel; maybe he had struck it rich, and has got a lot of gold in his belt. We may as well look; it is no use leaving it for that skunk that bolted to come back for.' He had got about twenty ounces in his belt, and we shifted it into our bag, and were just going on when 'Zekel—that is one of my mates—said, 'I know this cuss, Dave; it's the chap that lived in that village close to where we were working six months ago; they said he had been fossicking all over Arizona, and that he was the only one who ever came back out of a party who went to locate a wonderful rich spot it was said he knew of.

"'He tried over and over again to get up another party, but no one would try after that first failure. We may just as well search him all over; it may be he has got a plan of the place somewhere about him, and it is like enough those fellows have killed him on the chance of finding it.'

"So we searched him pretty thorough, and at last we found a paper sewn up in the collar of his jacket. Sure enough it was a plan. We did not examine it then, for someone might have come along, and we might have been accused of the chap's murder; so I shoved it into the inside pocket of my shirt, and we went on. We looked at it that night; there was several marks on it and names, one of which we had heard of, though we had never been so far in the Indian country. Well, as you may guess, we had some big talks over it, and at last we reckoned we would have a try to find it.

"We had been lucky, and had struck it rich at the last place

we had been at, and we agreed, instead of spending our money in a spree or at the monte tables, we would fit out an expedition and try it. Now I believe that attack was made on me to try and get that piece of paper. The chap who bolted may like enough have hid himself and watched us, and may have seen us find it and me take charge of it. We thought more than once since we came down here that we were being dogged by a greaser, but we never thought about the paper. That evening I had been out by myself, which I did not often do, for we in general went about together, and was going back along that street, and was pretty nigh home, when someone said in Spanish, 'That is the fellow,' and then five men jumped out with knives in their hands. I had just time to whip out my six-shooter and fire once. One fellow went down, but at the same moment I got a clip across my wrist with a knife, and down went the pistol. Then I got a slice across the head, and another on the shoulder, and down I went. Two of them threw themselves on me, and I shammed dead, knowing that if I moved it was all over with me. One of them shoved his hand in my trousers pockets, and the other tore my shirt open. I heard a sudden row, a blow, and the fall of a body; then one of them came tumbling down on the top of us and knocked the two fellows over, then they jumped up, and I heard your pistol crack twice and two falls, and as I got up on to my feet to lend a hand I saw one of the fellows bolting down the street, running off in another direction. That was the one, I think, that came down on the top of us.

"I have been wondering since then how it was that that fellow fell, for you did not fire till they jumped up."

Dick explained that he had felled one with a blow from the stick, and not having time to strike with it again, had sent the second staggering over the group with a blow of his fist; "those are the two that got away, I expect," he said.

"I expect so; there were four bodies on the ground—yours, the two fellows you shot, and the one I wiped out to begin with."

"Has there been any row about it?" Dick asked.

"No; they take these things quietly. If it had been one of my mates and me who had killed three Mexicans, our story that we had been attacked might not have been believed, but as it was certain a young ship's officer would not have joined me in falling foul of three natives, they just took and buried them, and there was an end of it."

Chapter IV.—More Plans

"I suppose this is Dave's room?" Dick Said when he and his friend were alone.

"Yes, from what he said they lodged here together, but the other two went somewhere else the day after you were brought in, so that the place should be quiet, but they come in by turns to sit up with you at night. I wish they would take us with them on this expedition, Dick."

"I wish they would; it would be a splendid adventure, and we might come back with no end of gold. At any rate, after being four months under Collet, I think we have a right to a holiday. I expect they will let us go with them if you make a strong point of it, Dick."

"It shan't be for want of trying, Tom, anyhow."

The lads had their way. As soon as the three men saw that they were really bent upon accompanying them, they raised no further objections.

"We shall be glad enough to have you with us," Dave said, "and though the work will be toilsome and hard, there is nothing in it that two active young chaps like you need be afraid of. It is just the Injuns—they are the worst kind, and have always set themselves against gold-seekers. That is natural enough, for they know that if gold mines were once opened in their country, the whites would pour in, and they would soon be wiped out.

Anyhow, everyone who goes prospecting in that part of Arizona knows well enough that he takes his life in his hands.

"All along the country by the Gila River is the stronghold of the Apaches, the terror of Northern Mexico. Many parties of miners have set out, but very few have ever come back again; but those that have tell of gold richer by a hundred times than ever was seen in California, and have brought with them sacks of nuggets to prove it. These are men who have had the luck to get in and out without ever having been seen by the Injuns; the large parties have never succeeded. So you see, young fellows, the odds are strongly agin you. Still, if you like to go with us, you are welcome; but if the time comes when the redskins have got us shut up in some place we can never get out of alive, remember that you are there on your own choice, and that we had no hand in getting you into the scrape."

"We will never blame you, whatever comes of it, Dave. If the risk is not too great for you and your comrades, it is not too great for us. There is nothing in the world we should like so much as such an adventure."

"Well, that is settled then, and no more words about it. We shall be glad to have two more with us, and we intended to go alone only because it is not everyone that can be trusted."

"What do we take with us?"

"We shall each take a horse, and a Mexican pony to carry our food and traps. If everything goes right and we find a bonanza, we can load them up on the way back. Twenty dollars will buy a pony

here. Then you will want a critter each to ride. We are not going to get first-rate ones, for if the Indians come on us it is fighting that we shall have to do, not riding. Among those mountains no shod horse of the plains has a chance with those Indian ponies, which can climb like goats and go at a gallop along places where a horse from the plains wouldn't dare move. Then you will want rifles and six-shooters. That is about all; I am afraid our stock of money will hardly run to it, and I think we had better work for a while in one of the diggings to make up what we shall want."

"We have twenty pounds between us," Dick said, "and we can draw on our fathers for twenty-five pounds each. The Consul here has, of course, heard of my being wounded and left behind, and I expect he won't mind cashing our draft."

"There will be more than we want," the miner said. "Still, it is as well to be on the right side. If we don't find any gold up there, we shall want a little when we get back to keep us going until something turns up."

Three days later Dick was strong enough to go with his friend to the Consul's; they found that Mr. Allen had spoken about Dick, and told him that should he recover from his wounds, he could cash a draft for him without any fear. Therefore in half an hour the lads returned to their lodgings with three hundred and fifty dollars, having changed their English gold into the currency of the country.

"You have not got your horses yet, I suppose, Dave?"

"No, we shall go up the river about a hundred and twenty

miles. There we shall buy horses cheaper than we can get them here. We have got rifles and colts; they are things one can't very well do without in knocking about among the hills. I will go round the town, and I have no doubt I shall be able to pick you up what you want cheap. There are so many men get rubbed out one way or the other that such things are pretty often for sale."

The other two miners, who during Dick's illness had nothing to do but to stroll about the town, both knew of men who had rifles or revolvers to dispose of, and in a couple of hours the purchases were completed and a considerable stock of ammunition was also bought.

"I should recommend yer," the miner called 'Zekel said, as the party were talking matters over that evening, "to rig yourselves out miner fashion. Them uniforms looks very nice on board ship, but they aint much good for knocking about in the mountains; and yer can leave them here, and take to them again when yer gets back."

The lads thought the advice was good, and next day rigged themselves out in red shirts and high boots, in which were tucked the bottom of the thick moleskin trousers. They also bought jackets of the same material as the troupers.

"You will be glad of them at night," Dave said; "it gets pretty cold up in the mountains when the sun is down, and we shan't be lighting any fires, you bet."

They also bought a couple of rough blankets each, a spare shirt, and two or three pairs of stockings, a couple of long bowie

knives, and two broad-brimmed felt hats.

Chapter V.—The Search For The Canyon

Ten days later the party took passage in a large boat going up the river to Santa Fe. It had come down freighted with hides, and the odor still hung about it. However, by this time they had become accustomed to the smell, and scarcely noticed it. The boat was manned by six Mexicans, who sometimes poled it along, sometimes, when the stream was rapid, got ashore and towed from the bank.

It took them six days to arrive at Santa Fe. Although just inside the United States frontier, the population was almost entirely Mexican. There were, however, a few American stores, containing European goods of all kinds, for the use of the natives, and such articles as miners or prospectors going up among the hills would require. Here they had no difficulty in purchasing horses. Five rough, serviceable ponies for the carriage of the baggage were picked up at twenty dollars a piece, and five well-made and wiry horses for their own riding. Mexican saddles, with very high pommels and cantles, heavy and cumbersome to look at, but very comfortable for long distances, were also obtained without difficulty. At the stores were bought two sacks of flour and two sides of bacon, a frying pan, saucepan, baking pot, and a good supply of tea and sugar; four large water-skins, five small ones, completed their purchases, with the exception of shovels, picks, and pails for washing the gravel.

"Going up among the hills again, Dave?" remarked the storekeeper, with whom the miners had often dealt before.

"Yes, we are going to try a new direction this time, and don't want to have to come back directly we have struck anything. We have got enough grub here for three or four months, reckoning as we shall occasionally get hold of bear or deer meat."

"Well, you had better keep clear of the Indian country, Dave. They made a raid down South, I hear, last month, and burnt half a dozen Mexican villages, and they would make short work with you if they came across you anywhere near their country. However, I suppose you aint going to be fool enough to go that way, especially as I see you have got two green hands with you."

"They are old enough to be useful," Dave said. "We can put them to cook and look after the horses, if they can't do anything else. They are Britishers, and one of them stood by me pluckily in a mess I got into in San Diego; so as they had left their ship and were out of a berth, I thought I would bring them with me, as they had a fancy for seeing a little of mining life, before they shipped back again."

Two days after their arrival at Santa Fe they started.

"We will strike due south as if intending to enter Mexico; one never knows who is watching one," Dave said the evening before. "There are always some pretty hard men about these border towns—miners who are down on their luck; men who have had to run from the northern diggings, and such like. We may say what we like, but they will make a guess that we have

located something rich, and are going back to work it quietly and keep it to ourselves, and like enough some of them will take it in their heads to follow us. Anyhow, we will travel south for a day or two, and then turn off sharp to the west. It aint as I should grudge anyone else a share in the mine, but the more there are the more chance of the Injuns finding us. Besides, some of these chaps are so reckless that like as not they would light a big fire if they wanted to cook a loaf of bread. We three have been up that way before, although not so far as we are going now, and we know what we have got to expect, and that, if we are going to bring our scalps out again, we have got to sleep with our eyes open."

Another fortnight's traveling and they had passed the last settlements, had left Fort Mason behind them, and had entered the country that the Apaches and kindred tribes claimed as their own.

The two lads had enjoyed the journey immensely. They had traveled about fifteen miles a day, their pace being regulated by that of the pack animals. During the heat of the day they had all halted in the shade of some clump of tree or bush. Here the horses had picked up their sustenance, grass and leaves, while the men slept. At night they had camped, when they could find such a spot, on the banks of a stream. Then a big fire would be lighted, a dough of flour, water, and soda would be mixed, and placed in the baking pot. This was put among the red embers, which were drawn over the lid so as to bake it from above as well as below. Then, if they had no other meat, rashers of bacon would

be grilled over the fire, and eaten with the hot bread. Generally, however, they had been able to purchase a kid or some fowls at one or other of the little villages through which they passed.

They always carried with them two of the large skins filled with water, in case none should be met with at their halting places; this sufficed for tea and for a good drink at night, and before starting in the morning for the horses. The villages, however, had become fewer and fewer, and at the last through which they had passed they had bought one of the little bullocks of the country, cut the flesh into strips, and hung it in the sun to dry, halting three days for the purpose.

Chapter VI.—The Map Again

"Now," Dave said, as they finished their meal on the evening after leaving Fort Mason, "we have got to consider which course we had better take. First we will have another look at the map."

This was taken out from a wash-leather case, in which it had been sewn, Dave carrying it under his shirt by a string that went round his neck. It was the first time that the boys had seen it. As Dave opened it they examined it with much curiosity. It was divided in two; the upper one appeared to be a general map of the country, the lower one a plan of the immediate locality of the spot.

"It looks very confusing," Dick said, as he examined it.

"You see the chap as made it did not do it for other people, but so that he could find his way back by it. This line that runs along the bottom of the other map I take to be the Gila, which is a big river which runs right through the Indian country, and falls into the Rio Grande. I have gone up it from that side two or three hundred miles. We were a strong party, but we had to fight our way back again, and lost pretty near half our number. You see by the map it lies on the north side of the Gila. But as the Gila is eight or nine hundred miles long, that don't help us a great deal, and the map wouldn't be any good to us if it was not for this mark here up near the top. You see all these things are meant for mountains, but as one mountain on a map is just like

another, we should be downright done if it was not for this mark. Do you see there are three little jags here close together? Now I take it those three jags are meant for a mountain the Indians call the Three Sisters, which is a mountain with three peaks close together. I never saw it myself, but I have spoken with miners who have seen it from the north. Now, here you see, to the south of the Three Sisters, is a cross, and I take it that's the mine. You see there is a black line waving about among the mountains that stops at that point. I guess that is the line they traveled by."

"But there is nothing to tell us what scale the map is on, Dave," Tom said; "it may mean five hundred miles from end to end, it may mean fifty. If it is five hundred it must be seventy or eighty miles from those peaks to the cross, if it is fifty it is only seven or eight."

"That is so," Dave agreed.

"Have you any idea how far it is from the three peaks to the river?"

"Yes, I have heard it is about fifty miles north of the Gila."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.