

A TEXAN EPISODE.



WAS spending Christmas at Dos Hermanos' sheep ranch in northern Texas. It was a big and beautiful ranch in a beautiful country. Fine open valleys and draws, and cosy sheltered hollows, clothed with rich mesquite grass and the various little weeds that the dainty and fastidious sheep loves, were flanked and buttressed by low, conical, or humpy, flat-topped Egyptian looking hills. The plains, too, were only a couple of miles to the northward, and looking from them toward these pyramidal hills, with the everlasting silence about, and the sunlight lying softly over all the landscape's face, with its brooding loveliness, its majestic serenity and repose, seemed to wear a significance, a smile of inscrutable meaning, like that of Egypt, but lacking the awe, the dread that Egypt inspires.

The house—a large and comfortable one for this almost semi-tropical region of tents and two or three roomed box-houses—was full and running over, and a half dozen young fellows were camped in a little hollow close by; the weather was delightful, fairly meriting the adjective superb; one day followed another, warm, soft, brilliant, the air dry, crisp and bracing, like the brightest and best of October weather in the middle states.

The boys had worked hard all day long on the 23rd, when we arrived, rigging rings, making lances, and arranging seats for a grand tournament on Christmas eve; everybody was tired, and by mutual consent we went to bed early to be ready for the next day's festivities.

When the contestants all rode up and saluted, my eye was at once caught by two figures that came from a tent a little apart from the general camp in the draw.

One was a big, fair Saxon, six feet two or three inches in height, with his fair skin burned to a uniform dark red, from which a pair of fine, honest eyes looked out with startling blueness. His features were of a singularly large and regular mould, with a throat and chin so beautiful, a mouth so heavy yet correct, and a nose so high between the eyes that it gave him a slightly bucolic look, like ancient Apollo. His proportions were more fine and just than you would often see in so big a man; he carried his head and shoulders magnificently, and his bearing in the saddle was past criticism.

Beside him rode a boy of about twenty. He was of ordinary size, slightly but strongly built, had a pale, olive face, great black eyes and clustering, dark hair. It was a face that somehow appealed to you. Although so full now of life and spirit, it had a suggestion of keen sensitiveness, of hidden capacity for suffering. He was on an uncommonly fine and spirited black pony; his saddle was of superb and ornate Mexican workmanship, and a big white sombrero, glittering with silver, shaded the splendid eyes. While they paused in front of us I saw him look among the spectators as though seeking some one, then an electric smile passed over his face, he raised the big hat and touched a knot of red ribbon on the side of it. I looked up and saw Louie, the pretty seventeen-year-old daughter of the house, blushing and bowing, and I smiled to myself.

'Who are they?' I asked Mrs Flint, and she replied quite as if I had indicated them. 'O, David and——' 'Goliath,' I interrupted.

No, indeed, David and Jonathan. The tall one is Paul Melton, a young sheep man over on Live Oak, and the boy is his inseparable, a sort of protégé, and a partner, I believe in a small way.

'Mark used to drink and gamble, I think, and young Melton got hold of him, straightened him up, and has held on to him ever since. They are always together; you never see one without the other.'

Mark—I don't believe I ever knew his other name—carried off the most rings and rode up glowing with victory, to crown Louie queen of love and beauty.

As I looked away from the pretty picture, I saw the blonde giant standing near in a studiously unconcerned attitude, but with an expression of affectionate pride on his great frank face. After this we had a general display of horsemanship and a great deal of sky-larking.

There is no finer sight to my mind, than a troop of well-mounted men; there is nothing arouses my enthusiasm and admiration more than fine riding. This is true of a single horseman, and the enthusiasm and enjoyment increases in a geometrical progression with the number of horsemen engaged.

Here there were twelve or fifteen, among the best riders I have ever seen, all mounted on fine and well-trained horses. It is very easy to talk about picking up handkerchiefs and quarters from the ground, leaping on and off a horse, or hanging on one side of him and firing under his neck, all the while going at full gallop, but there are not so many, even among thorough-going cow men, who can perform these feats, as is supposed. However, there were several in the party that could perform all these and many more to admiration; there was no poor or even mediocre work. Young Melton's riding was something magnificent. He sat like a tower on his strong iron gray, and as he came sweeping down the track the impression of force and power was tremendous, overwhelming—he was like an embodied thunderbolt. He bore down upon two fellows who were racing, ran the gray between them, grasped right and left and went on with a man in each arm while the two horses prang away with empty saddles. Everybody applauded loudly: 'Melt's scooped the whole race. Hurrah for Melt!'

What'd ye leave the horses for, Melt?

But the boy's was a very form for the eyes of young love to linger on. The spare young outline, the lithe springing grace, the light alertness and vigour, and fearlessness! He seemed a glowing incarnation of youth and love and valour. Whether he bent forward or back, twisted sideways or sat erect, he seemed just poised in the saddle; every movement, every attitude charmed and satisfied the eye with its perfection of unstudied grace, like the something ineffable in the slant of a bird's wing, the turn of its glossy head, or the glance of its quick, bright eye.

The big fellow rode as fluently as a man could ride, but there was something more than horsemanship in the boy's riding.

We danced that night to the peculiar and beautiful Mexican music. A harp, a viol and two violins, played by Mexicans who were musicians all the time and shears in the season, comprised our orchestra. We had the Colondrina, La Palonia and soft dreamy waltzes with their

singular intervals piercing, sweetness and unexpected and tender accompaniments.

I saw my boy waltzing with Louie. They came past me once and both young faces were flushed and bright with smiles. Presently they passed again—walking—and on Mark's face was the shadow that somehow I had felt a presence of from the first. The light was gone from his eyes, the colour and smile from his lips. Louie was chattering gayly and laughing up at him, but he looked past her, with a look of fierce pain in the great black eyes, at a young man, a new comer, on the other side of the room.

'Come and look at the tables,' whispered Mrs Flint. We went out, and in running about, helping, arranging and devising, I forgot the boy for a time.

Presently I slipped out on to a side verandah to cool my heated face a moment in the soft and chilly air. The full moon, the great white Texas moon, rode almost up to mid-heaven, pouring its flood of white radiance down through the silent and crystal air. It was like the sublimation, the apotheosis of daylight: the beauty, lustrous effulgence, without the harsh or unlovely details. Almost simultaneously with my opening the door two men rushed together just in front of me with knives in their hands, and the next instant the towering form of young Melton, dashed noiselessly on to the porch. He plucked them apart as though they had been two kittens, held the stranger in his right hand, fairly shaking the knife from his grasp, and pushed Mark gently, but hastily, toward me, against me, and through the open door.

'Don't Melt, don't,' said the boy, 'one of us has got—'

'Wait with him till I come back,' said young Melton, and away he went, carrying the other fellow, like a rat, by the back of the neck.

Mark turned on me a look of agonised desperation, a face drawn and blanched and blackened almost beyond recognition, all the beauty and softness struck out of it; the great lustrous eyes blazing, the fine sensitive features quivering fiercely.

I slipped my arm through his and we walked silently up and down the silent hallway. I could hear his heavy, gasping breath. I could feel his heart leap and his frame tremble and was still striving to think of some word to say that might soften the savage thrust it must have been that tore him so, when Melton came up, and with a grasp of his hand and a kindly look from his blue eyes, drew Mark away.

'Hello! Where's Jake Shackelford?' called someone, just as the pair went through the gate.

'O, I sent Linn home with him. He'd got too much and was noisy,' I heard Melton rejoim in a lower key.

After they had left the crowd behind I saw Melton's great arm thrown across the boy's shoulders, and was sure I heard a choking sob.

An hour later I saw them at supper, and I do not think the others found anything amiss; but to me there was visible a fleeting but frequent shadow on the boy's face, and a pathetic solicitude and concern in his big friend's manner.

The next day, which was Christmas, the men went bear-hunting up a very wild and rocky canyon, while such of us women folk as liked to ride and were fond of sport set off to find a certain wild cat that held forth in a low bluff some six or eight miles away across the plains. Mr Melton was our guide and protector, while Mark was dragged away by the bear hunters.

As we rode home in the late afternoon, full of scratches and glory, with a big cat skin and a tiny, snarling puff of a kitten as trophies, Mr Melton and I got far ahead of the others, and this is the story of Mark's troubles as he told it to me.

'His folks moved out to Esperanza, a couple of miles above my sheep camp, about four years ago. They were New England people. Everybody hated the old man on sight. He was a mean, close-fisted, cold-blooded, snaky sort of fellow. His wife was a warm-hearted woman, but she hadn't much sense. She ran the house, and him, too, though, when it came to the pinch.

'One day the old man, who was abusing Mark, was so outrageous and insulting, and called him such vile names, that the boy went and got down a gun to shoot him. His mother screamed, and threw her arms around him and held him. I reckon she was wild with terror, but she took Mark off and told him how she was not his mother. His own mother was a poor, pretty young servant girl she had had in the first years of her marriage, and whose ignorance and youth her husband had wronged. The girl had died and she had raised and loved Mark as her own.'

'Now, there was a nice thing for a sixteen-year-old boy to have to bear. He came down to my camp the next morning and told me about it. He sat about like some poor dumb creature that's been one half killed by a bad shot. It must be so, he said, for this fellow, Jake Shackelford, that came out with them and was afterward discharged by his father, had told some other people.'

'I was awfully roused with hearing, and before I knew it the boy was gone. He never was home again, but went up to Esperanza and got a place in a lumber yard.

'He made some awful bad plays, and no wonder. He got drunk and got to running with a gang of pretty rough men. But the old lady always loved him; she wrote to him, and finally went up to Esperanza, bought him an outfit and sent him over to east Texas to school. He was away two years. He hadn't been back a month, keeping books in Esperanza, when he saw Louie Flint, whom Jake Shackelford was crazy in love with. Anybody would love the boy; of course Louie preferred him, so Shackelford, like the low dog he is, went about telling his tale, and the next I heard of Mark he was all broke up and drinking again.'

'I went up and got him to go down to my ranch with me. He's been with me ever since. I've got a bunch of cattle and he has charge of them. He never drinks, nor gambles, nor swears; he's got lots of courage, and he's all life and go; but there is something like a woman about him that makes him more to me than any brother could ever be.'

'Can't he ride the prettiest you ever saw? That saddle and sombrero of his are both premiums he won at rapping contests and tournaments. He—'

We were within half a mile of the house, with one or two rises and dips between it and ourselves. Suddenly a shot rang out on the still air, then another. My companion started, beckoned me, stuck spurs into his horse and launched forward like an avalanche. I followed as fast as I could, but I was fully five minutes behind him as I rode over the last rise.

There, in the hollow was a group of men, standing in the full glory of a prairie sunset, the golden splendour all about and upon them. In the midst knelt young Melton beside Mark's motionless form. Mark's head was upon his arm, I rode

up and dismounted. The big tears were running down his face as he tried to staunch the bleeding of a great wound in the boy's breast. 'O, Mark! O, Mark!' he said.

In a moment later the faithless eyes unclosed and gazed long and calmly into the west, then turned suddenly toward Melton with a look in their lambent depths, which I can never forget.

'Melt, I'm glad,' he said; 'then after a pause, "It's better." The look of yearning love and trust slowly faded from his eyes; then a mist clouded their splendour, he turned his cheek upon Melton and breathed no more.'

Four men rode up on steaming horses. 'Where is he?' said Melton, rising and struggling with his sobs.

'He turned and fired on us, and we shot him,' said Mr Flint. 'Bennett's bringing his body in.'

EMPEROR WILLIAM.

IN spite of the fact that the young German Emperor has a shrivelled arm, he is, among his intimates, a jolly, good fellow, fond of all the pleasures of life, and much given to practical joking and nonsense in general. His left arm, the shrivelled one, is not only considerably shorter than the other, but is almost absolutely without strength. The only use he can put it to is to remove his cigar or cigarette. However, the right arm is endowed with extraordinary strength and vigour, and this youthful monarch is not averse to putting it to a very noble use at times, to wit, encircling a taper waist. During the trip to Norway this summer he took great pleasure in ranging about incognito, and one day an officer of the imperial yacht had the misfortune to come face to face with the young Emperor when the latter had a very pretty girl by his side. What was to be done? It was too late to turn back. To halt, face front, and salute would to the youthful monarch in a bad fix. Under these circumstances, the officer turned his back and pretended to be gazing into a shop window. Suddenly he felt a sharp pinch on his arm and heard a voice whispering: 'You did that very nicely. Try to find as pretty a girl as I have. You have leave of absence until to-morrow.'

The young German Emperor is fond of a practical joke, and scarcely a day passes that some member of his personal household doesn't fall a victim to this penchant for harmless mischief. As a great lover of art, he never neglects to have some artist of acknowledged ability on board when out on a cruise. The business of this artist is to make sketches of places visited, and, above all, of fetes, reviews, triumphal entries, etc., in which the young Emperor figures as the bright particular star. One morning, while the imperial yacht was at anchor, the Emperor summoned his artist and expressed a desire for a sketch of the landscape. The artist pleaded indisposition for work. The Emperor, however, insisted on one half hour. But no sooner had the artist settled down to the task than William gave the signal to get under way. At first the artist was too intent upon his canvas to notice that his landscape was slipping away from him, but suddenly he realised the position he was in and, turning suddenly about, found his royal tormentor with a group of choice spirits, all convulsed with mirth. The painter made a motion as if to stop, but William called out: 'No, no, one-half hour was the time set.'

'But the landscape, your majesty?'

'Will be a panorama!' cried William, amid shouts of laughter.

EVERY YEAR.

Al! how sad to look before us
Every year;
While the cloud grows darker o'er us
Every year.

When the blossoms are all faded,
That to bloom we might have aided
And immortal garlands braided
Every year.

To the past go more dead faces
Every year;
Come no new ones in their places
Every year.

Everywhere the sad eyes meet us,
In the coming dusk they greet us,
And to come to them entreat us
Every year.

'You are growing old,' they tell us
Every year;
'You are more alone,' they tell us
Every year.
'You can win no new affection;
You have only recollection,
Deeper sorrows and dejection,
Every year.'

Yes, the shores of life are shifting
Every year;
And we are seaward drifting
Every year.
(Old places changing fret us,
The living moment forget us,
There are fewer to regret us
Every year.)

But the truer life draws nigher
Every year;
And its morning star climbs higher
Every year.
Earth's hold on us grows lighter,
And the heavy burden lighter,
And the dawn immortal brighter
Every year.

Thank God, no clouds are shifting
Every year
O'er the land to which we're drifting
Every year;
No losses there will grieve us,
Nor loving faces leave us,
Nor death of friends bereave us
Every year.

'OHE' CORRUGATED IRON is the best iron manufactured, it has no equal.—ADVT.