

**Keel and saddle: a retrospect of forty years of military and naval service. By Joseph W. Revere.**

Revere, Joseph Warren, 1812-1880.

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## XXII.

FIVE rancheros, each with five to ten Indian *vaqueros*, assembled at the rendezvous at the appointed time with a *caballada* of some fifty excellent horses. The tame or Christian Indians enter into the spirit of these *razzias* with great zest, and take keen delight in entrapping their wild relatives. At the trysting-place Don Jose Armenteros was unanimously chosen leader of our party, whom we were to obey until the termination of the expedition. He was the major-domo of the rancho Rafael Garcia, and noted as the best rider, the most skilful *riatero* (thrower of the lasso), and the most accomplished in all the sports of the campo: he had also the advantage of experience in similar expeditions. At the rendezvous we began preparations for the expedition by a grand feast on the supplies brought or sent there by the provident wives of the rancheros, consuming all our stores in one night; and then, like Herman Cortes after he had burnt his ships, we were ready to push into the wild regions before us, unencumbered with whiskey or other groceries, and depending solely on the rifle or the *riata*, for our subsistence. We carried with us a few trinkets for trading.

At daylight we rose from the ground, and, taking a northerly route, set forth into the wilderness at full gallop, the *caballada* in advance, with all the *vaqueros*, headed by Armenteros. Encamping in the woods north of Bodega the first night, we resumed the march at early dawn, and rode all day through a

beautiful and fertile country, more like a gentleman's park than a primeval forest. The trees were superb, the *Palo Colorado* (red wood), a kind of cedar; *Wellingtonia gigantea*, coeval possibly with the Deluge; the *pinabete* (a pine of great size, hard and tough as oak); the *madron*, an orange-colored wood, laurels, and bays, mixed with live-oak, *alamos*, and *alamitos* (poplars); while the red berries of the *mansanito*, gleaming in the undergrowth, formed a picture of arboreal splendor nowhere else to be seen.

Now we ascended the spur of some mountain-range commanding a view of the sea on our left; then plunged into a dense forest; and anon crossed a broad and smiling savanna, enamelled with beautiful flowers of every hue and delightful perfume, *romero* (rosemary) being in great abundance. There shone the lily of the valley, poppies, and tulips of every tint, the aromatic anise-seed, the butterfly-flower, which is indigenous, dancing on its long stem, an almost perfect counterpart of the insect from which it takes its name; here the humble *canchalagua*, a febrifuge, and the *yerba del tos*, a specific for pulmonary and catarrhal complaints.

We killed a deer in the afternoon; and, while selecting a place for a bivouac, Armenteros lassoed a bear, on the savory paws of which, a *bonne bouche* with hunters, we supped heartily.

We were now in the Gentile country: so the next morning a place of security for our *caballada*, abounding in grass and water, was selected on a point of land projecting into the sea; and old Juan Briones, with two *vaqueros*, left to guard the neck which connected it with the mainland. The rest of our party continued their route.

Don Pepe, as Señor Armenteros was called, was now in his element, and recounted many anecdotes of former raids. He led our small but well-armed and mounted party in an easterly direction until about noon, when we halted in a dense wood;

and he set out with one man, my Antonio, whom he selected for his intelligence and courage, to seek an Indian village or rancheria. Meanwhile we picketed our horses, and beguiled the time with smoking and *monte* (Spanish game of cards).

At daylight Don Pepe and Antonio returned with an ally in the person of a naked Indian, with shaggy, unkempt hair, and a horrible squint. This worthy bore a wooden bow ingeniously strengthened on the back with deer-sinews; and under his arm, as the Devil in the song is said to have carried his tail, he carried a quiver made of the skin of a cub bear, filled with arrows tipped with obsidian, or volcanic glass, which abounds here.

Don Pepe introduced his new ally as an old acquaintance; and we returned with him to his rancheria, he being, according to our chief, *muy bravo*, and crafty as brave. We found the rancheria in a valley near the sea, which was not visible from our bivouac, but which we could distinctly smell, in a most ancient and fish-like odor. Not wishing to share the lodges of this untutored and unsavory race, we remained in a grove on the outskirts of the village; the Indians contributing to our frugal evening meal some excellent salmon, and melons from their *milpa* (garden).

Next morning we collected a few beads and light goods, and invited the men to visit our camp: ladies are not allowed that privilege among the Gentiles.

The eyes of the strabismic unfortunate grew more fixed to the tip of his nose than ever at sight of our wonderful treasures; and I feared they would "shoot madly from their spheres," so distended were they in admiration of the many-colored beads, great needles, awls, mirrors, and knives displayed in our camp. Encouraged by the cupidity of our visitors, our spokesman began cautiously to approach the subject of our mission into their country; but he found the wary Gentiles better diplomatists than he imagined.

For two mortal hours the keen encounter of wits endured. Don Pepe endeavored to induce the Indians to send men from their rancheria to accompany us home, promising them good cheer in plenty and a generous reward. But all his eloquence was in vain: so we broke up the conference, and prepared to pass the day in quiet by ourselves, consulting about future movements, cleaning our arms, and recruiting our horses. In the afternoon we were called upon by our cross-eyed friend and another chief, and informed that we should have their assistance in getting all the help we wanted, if we would be guided by their advice, and grant their exorbitant demands. It was plain that a council had been held, and that our allies wanted to get rid of us, after obtaining certain articles they coveted, especially fish-hooks, at the sight of which in the forenoon they had greatly marvelled, never before having seen steel or iron hooks. They also feared that we should forcibly compel them to furnish the help we asked for: so, like skilful diplomatists, they resolved to divert our military prowess from themselves to their enemies. Accordingly an harangue was addressed to Don Pepe, who understood the Indian language, abounding in gestures and gutturals; which he was desired to expound to us in good Castilian.

The whole story was to the effect that our hosts (as they might have been termed) were a much-abused and long-suffering people, honest and above horse-stealing; while a neighboring community some ten leagues away were vile oppressors and bloody-minded villains, horse-thieves by profession, whom it would be both just and creditable to capture and enslave, in which laudable enterprise they would cheerfully aid us. While still deliberating, our conference was suddenly broken off by the appearance of Juan Briones and his *vaqueros*, who brought the astounding intelligence that our whole *caballada* had been stampeded and carried off by unknown Indians. Briones himself and a *vaquero* were wounded by arrows; and

the other boy dragged along at the end of his lasso an Indian of dogged and sullen aspect.

While we were listening to the story of Briones, one of our servants came up, and told us that every Indian in the rancheria hard by had vanished. As these Indians instantly kill and eat their stolen horses on reaching a place of security, our indignation was at once aroused; and we prepared to follow the trail, and rescue our *caballada* of over forty fine, well-trained steeds, amongst which were many especial pets of every individual of our party. Rafael Garcia particularly lamented a gallant *pinto* (spotted horse), threatening to cut his *pedazos* (morsels) out of the ugly maw of any Gentile who had eaten him; and all our party of rancheros imagined their noble steeds cut, slashed, and carbonadoed to make a banquet for thieving and graceless heathens.

Luckily Don Pepe had secured the persons of the two chiefs, at Briones' first intimation of our loss, before they could escape; and instant death was now denounced upon them if our horses were not recovered by the morning's light. Making a virtue of necessity, these worthies communicated with their subordinates, who had taken refuge in the inaccessible undergrowth hard by, and collected a party of twenty braves of their rancheria, armed with clubs, wooden spears, and bows and arrows. The big chief was lashed securely to a *vaquero* of our party as a hostage; and the whole party started for the hills.

We soon struck the trail of our horses; and it was so broad and plain, that we pursued it at full speed, our Indian allies stopping occasionally to verify it, while the moon shone in unclouded brilliancy after the short twilight had passed away. Don Pepe rode far ahead of the main body with his *vaqueros*, keeping a sharp lookout on the Indian runners, who out-travelled our horses, and seemed to enjoy the sport of tracking their fellow-men and brothers quite as well as we

did. I have often observed this peculiarity among savages when backed by whites.

About midnight we noticed that the hoof-tracks were quite fresh in the moist ground, and by other signs we knew we were not far in the rear of our *caballada* and their abductors. We now relaxed our speed, and proceeded cautiously, in order not to alarm the Indian camp, upon which we might come at any moment. At last it was reported near at hand; and we dismounted, leaving our horses under charge of our *vaqueros*, while we silently and stealthily approached the village on foot.

The little rancheria of lodges built of slender sticks, wattled with grass and mud, huddled around the usual *temascal* (sweat-house), indispensable in every place of the kind, lay in the gorge of a *cañon* (gully); while the hills rose steep around it on every side, save that by which we approached.

No sound broke the solemn stillness of the night, and the whole scene was brightly illuminated by the moon and twinkling stars.

These Indians had no domestic animals whatever, not even dogs; which lack accounted for the silence, which remained unbroken, until, on a nearer approach, we heard the stamping of our captured horses from a rude corral near the sweat-house. Don Pepe instantly formed his plan. We withdrew again to our cover, each of us being assigned his place. The plan was explained to the Indians, the main body of whom, led by Don Pepe, making a *détour* round the village, climbed the hillside, and took up a position at the head of the *cañon* in order to cut off the retreat of men and horses to the hills. The rest of us were to attack in front on signal from our leader, and simultaneously with his party.

At two o'clock the moon had set, and the village was but faintly illuminated by the stars; when a group of Indians, asleep until then, aroused themselves under our very eyes from

their first nap, and gathered around a fire, whose embers they raked into activity, and began cooking, eating, and gambling, often wrangling with each other as they tossed the bones. We could even smell the savory horsemeat as it spluttered on the coals; and Rafael Garcia felt a bitter pang at the reflection that it might be a part of his inestimable *pinto*, for which he had refused five hundred dollars.

We waited in silence for an hour or more, until the first faint, gray streaks of dawn appeared in the east; when the Indians of the rancheria gradually ceased from gambling, and sank again in sleep.

The gray tints now became ashes-of-rose color, and the radiance of the stars was slightly dimmed, when from the head of the *cañon* came the cry of the *coyote* — the small wolf of the country — thrice repeated. This was the signal for mounting before the onset.

We all bestrode our horses, and a few minutes passed in breathless expectation: then, from the same quarter, came the old Spanish war-cry "Santiago" from the deep chest of Don Pepe Armenteros, followed by the shrill war-whoop of our Indian allies. This ancient war-cry is still used by the descendants of those heroes from whose lips it aroused the echoes of many a bloody field in bygone ages. It was the signal for the charge of mail-clad knights against Moor and Saracen, against Mexican and Peruvian, in later times; and now we heard repeated in these untrodden wilds the battle-cry of the Cid, of Ferdinand of Aragon, of Gonsalvo de Cordova, Don John of Austria, Pizarro, Cortes, and Almagro, — "Santiago y cierra España" ("Santiago and close Spain").

We instantly moved up, and, intervening between the fire and the corral, stood guard to prevent the horse-thieves from stampeding our imprisoned animals, to which they instinctively rushed when aroused from their sleep. The Indian horde, thus meeting our levelled fire-arms and lances, faced instantly in the



opposite direction, but were intercepted by our leader and his party, and turned again on us, using war-clubs, spears, and bows, while a crowd of squaws in their rear hurled stones and sticks at us over their heads.

The *mêlée* became general, and shot after shot was heard; while sabres, lances, and fire-arms met the ruder Indian weapons in a hand-to-hand conflict. Some of the Indians, diving under the bellies of our horses, succeeded in breaking down the corral; but our *vaqueros* secured the breach before the animals could escape, and the enterprise was not renewed. The contest ceased at last, the Indians sulkily retiring out of harm's way when convinced that they had no chance of success; and their head men sullenly informed us that they wanted peace.

It was granted as soon as asked for: our object was attained; and we recovered all the horses, save one that had been devoured, without the loss of a man, although most of our party were badly bruised by the shillelahs of the Indians, and several received arrow and spear wounds.

Fortunately these horse cannibals had selected for their feast an animal more fit for eating than for his other qualities.

We now prepared to inspect and adjudge the *spolia opima* of our vanquished foe; but there being but little *matériel*, and that little having been appropriated by our Indian allies in their way, we hesitated not to seize the *personnel* we had legitimately acquired, according to the notions prevalent at that time in California. The prisoners thus pressed into our service were divided equally among our party, submitting resignedly and even joyfully to their fate: they selected those of their squaws and children whom they wished to accompany them; and we all left for home, after rewarding our Indian allies. Arriving at our respective ranchos, our captives were soon domiciled, and supplied with full rations of beef; and, hav-

ing finished their task of making *adobes* (sun-dried bricks) for building-purposes, they were permitted to depart, laden with good shirts and blankets.

Two of the "bucks" remained with me, preferring good living and kind treatment to their precarious, half-starved condition in their native wilds; and, from savage and graceless "Gentiles," were converted into decent and respectable "Christians."

I remained at San Geronimo, attending to my duties both public and private; but, near the end of the year 1849, I resigned my commission as lieutenant in the United-States navy, hopeless of promotion after twenty years of service, yet reluctant to abandon my profession.