

ON THE FRONTIER.



HERE was six of us. The sixth was Ginger. He was about 17 years old, black as a coal, with the biggest mouth I ever saw, and that mouth was full to overflowing with great shining white teeth. Ginger often declared his parents were almost white, but he had "taken back" into the black blood of his slave ancestors. This may have been true, but, as old Zeb Scatterman was wont to observe, he must have "taken back a darn long distance."

Out on Freshet Creek, in the Black Hills, we struck "gold." Freshet Creek, I think, has since been given another name.

To Mike Garrity belonged the honor of discovering that the southern bank of the creek showed "sign."

But it was Big Ben Harris who found the entire side of the ravine was full of "veins," containing gold enough to make us all rich, if it could be taken out.

Then we held a consultation. Just above the point where we had made these discoveries the puny stream dropped from a high fall.

"If we only had plenty of water there, we could work her by hydraulics," said Zeb.

"That set me to thinking. 'There must be plenty of water there in the wet season,' I observed. 'Remember this is called Freshet Creek.'"

"Begob, that's so," nodded Garrity. "Wild a bit av a dam up above we could get force to throw the warther clane to the top av this bank."

Ginger said nothing, but looked very wise.

We worked at the bank for awhile, but, although it was very rich, the work of getting it by the painful to the stream and washing out the "yaller" did not make it very profitable.

Big Ben thought we had better build a dam, and wait for the spring rains to give us all the water we needed.

I had an idea. "The spring rains would clean out our dam in a twinkling," I declared.

"Then what can we do?" "There is water enough here now, if we can hold back a good point above the fall."

They saw I was right. The next day Davis and Garrity were off for Custer to get hose pipes and nozzles.

The rest of us went to work building the dam.

We worked like beavers. We had it nearly completed when Davis and Garrity returned.

They brought the hose, likewise some ropes.

Sitting Bull and his braves were said to be in the hills.

It was reported that the chief had sent word that he would wipe out Custer City and level Deadwood.

A party of prospectors had been murdered and scalped in Potato Gulch.

Outside the larger camps there was a general state of alarm.

"Begob!" cried Garrity, "it's ourselves tho'til be losin' our hair av we don't look out."

"G'way, dar!" came contemptuously from Ginger's lips. "Who's skeered of a few Indians?"

His teeth were almost chattering with terror.

Old Zeb Scatterman looked serious. "Ef that's redskins in their hills we'd best keep our weather eye open all the time," he observed. "Ef anybody sees anything of 'em round these yore parts, we'll have ter skip out lively."

"Yah!" grinned Ginger. "Five big white mans runnin' from de Injun! Yah, yah, yah! Nobbet ketch dis nigger running while dar's yaller ter pay fer der washin'!"

Now we all knew that Ginger was about the biggest coward on the face of the earth, and so we did not pay much attention to his boasting.

This seemed to anger him, and he bristled worse than ever.

He began to tell how many Indians he had killed, and how he had escaped



HE SLUMPED AND FELL.

death at their hands time after time and he kept it up persistently for the next three days, till everybody was pretty sick of it.

"With his rifle he shot an eagle, from which he obtained plenty of feathers for his purpose."

Red clay served him as paint.

With considerable labor he made him self up like an Indian one day, and then he had us send Ginger down the ravine on an errand.

When the colored lad was at a considerable distance from the camp Big Ben came out upon him, uttering a fiendish whoop.

Ginger gave a choking yell of terror and started to run.

But his legs seemed to melt beneath him, and he fell in a helpless, blubbering heap.

Big Ben stood over him, flourishing a hatchet and knife, as he cried: "Heap nice fat black boy! Ugh! Goo curly scalp! Waugh! Big chief tak black boy's scalp!"

"Oh, good Mistah Injun, please don't take my scalp!" wailed Ginger, in the most abject terror.

With the others, I had followed, and we were concealed at a distance, where we could watch all that took place.

Ben flourished the knife, at the same time pretending to seek for a good grip in Ginger's hair.

"Big chief like black boy's scalp," he

declared. "Look heap nice in big chief's wigwam."

Ginger rose to his knees and clutched Ben about the legs, while he continued begging to be spared.

His manner was heartrending. "It's too bad!" I muttered to Zeb, who was near me. "Ben will scare the nig foolsh."

"Ef he'll cure him o' boasin' I don't keer a dern!" was the old fellow's retort.

I stood it just as long as I could. I really began to fear Ginger would die of abject terror.

Of a sudden I rushed out, firing into the air with both revolvers, and yelling loudly.

Big Ben took to his heels. Ginger flopped over and lay stiff on the ground.

When I reached him I found that he had fainted.

The others came out and we restored him to consciousness, but he was as weak as a kitten during the rest of the day, and he would start and shake at the slightest sound.

A thousand times he blessed me for saving his life.

The boasting was completely taken out of him.

Big Ben was going to tell him how the trick was played, but I objected.

I made them all promise they would keep still till Ginger got to boasting again.

He was not taken that way.

But his admiration and love for me seemed unbounded. Apparently he sincerely believed that I had saved his life, and he was so grateful that he could not do too much for me.

Really he hung about me so much that he began to be a nuisance.

We had completed the dam, and it gradually filled with water.

The pipes were properly laid, and one day we turned two heavy streams of water against the bank of the ravine.

It melted and came washing down before the force of the water.

We could not use the water very long, for the pond lowered rapidly, and it took time for it to fill again.

But we could wash down enough so it was an easy thing to carry the precious clay to the sluices we had constructed.

In this way we could handle six or eight times as much in the course of a day as we could before.

It paid, and we were jubilant.

At the end of a week we began to feel like millionaires.

Then something happened.

We had been using the water, but had stopped.

I was getting my load far in under the hollowed-out bank, where I thought it was liable to be the richest.

Suddenly there was a yell of warning. I looked up.

A big slice of watery clay came swooping and sliding down the slope toward me.

Above it I saw the overhanging bank slowly giving way, threatening to bury me beneath tons of earth.

Before I could make a leap the sliding clay came about me and caught me to the knees.

I tried to drag myself away. Too late!

I was held fast! Slowly but surely the great bank was settling for the fall.

Looking upward, I felt that my moments were few.

A numbness seized upon me, and I gasped like one fascinated as death came down upon me.

Then there was another hoarse shout. I felt somebody catch me about the body and fiercely struggle to draw me from the clutch of the clinging clay.

Given sudden hope, I did my best to get free.

Thus aided, I succeeded, and I was sent reeling through the thick clay, over the top of it, down the bank, catching a glimpse of the face of my rescuer as I went.

It was Ginger!

As I was suddenly freed, he slumped and fell, struggled up, fell again.

Reaching solid ground, I turned to see him in the clutches of the coiling clay.

I would have dashed back, but, at that very instant, the crumbling bank gave way and came down with a thundering roar, part of it reaching me and hurling me backward.

Ginger was buried from sight in a second.

I arose unharmed, but my brave rescuer was dead.

He had dared rush to my assistance when my other comrades stood spell-bound with fear.

But he had given his life for mine!

In time we excavated his body and gave him decent burial, with a large bowlder to mark his resting-place in Freshet Gulch.

On the bowlder I laboriously chiseled these words: "GINGER, A TRUE HERO."

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