

Triumph of John Kars

By RIDGEWELL CULLEN.

A Thrilling Tale of Love, Adventure, Gold and Indians, With Its Stirring Episodes Set in Alaskan Wildness.

(Continued From Saturday.)

CHAPTER VII—(Continued.)

The Out World.

The solemn eyes of the Indians were watching the white man's face with expressionless intensity. Kars gave no sign. His eyes were steadily regarding the wreck of humanity described as a "great chief." "White man burn the land because neche try to kill white man," he said after a moment's consideration. In level, unemotional tones. "White man come in peace. He want no fish. He want no hunt. He want only gold and peace. White man not go. White man stay. If Indian kill, white man kill, too. White man kill up all Indian if Indian kill white man. Louis Creal sit by his tepee. He say white man come Louis Creal not get gold. He say to Indian go kill up white man. White great friends with Indian. He good friend with Louis Creal, if Louis Creal lies low. Indian man very fierce. White man very fierce, too. If great chief Thunder Cloud not hold young men, then he soon find out. Louis Creal, too. Much war come. Much blood White man make most killing. So."

Hunder Cloud listened and gave no sign. Then he spoke again. "Great chief say him sorry for white man talk. Him come Him good friend to white man. Him old. Him very old. White man not go. Then him say him finish. Him mak' wise talk to young men. Young men listen. No good. Young men impatient. Young men say speak, white man. Speak plenty. Him not go? Then young men kill 'em all dead. So Thunder Cloud sorry. Hear sorry. Kars abruptly stood up. His great size brought him within inches of the low, flat roof. His jaw had suddenly hardened. His eyes were directed squarely into the eyes of the mean-looking interpreter. "See right here, you neche," he cried, his tones strong and full of restrained force. "You can hand this on to that darn old bunch of garbage you call a great chief. The play Louis Creal figgers on is played right out. He murdered Allan Mowbray to keep this gold to himself. Well, this gold ain't his, any more than it's mine. It's for those who got the grit to take it. If he's looking for fight he's going to get it plenty—maybe more than he's needing. You an' this darn old scallawag have got just five minutes to hit the trail clear of this camp. Clear quick—the whole darn outfit."

The interpreter conveyed the zeiftest gist of the white man's words, even as he hastily scrambled to his feet. Kars' tone and manner had impressed him as forcibly as his words. He was eager enough to get away. The old man, too, was on his feet far quicker than might have been expected and he was making for the door with ludicrous haste. The hut was cleared and the white men emerged into the open. They stood watching the precipitate retreat of their visitors.

"They'll be on us by nightfall," Kars said quietly. "We need to get busy."

That night the fighting men were at their posts on the flanking embankments. Reserves were gathered, smoking and talking in the lush of expectancy. Further afield an outpost held the entrance to the gorge to the north of the camp. Suddenly without warning a jet of rifle fire swept over the camp with reckless disregard of aim. Then came the sound of many voices, and the rush of feet, and the answering fire of the defenders. The battle of Bell river had begun.

The defenders—whites, "breeds" and Indians—were ready braced, at their posts, and their leaders were in their midst. The fierce yelling of advancing Indians was without effect. They met the onslaught at close quarters with a fire as coldly calculated as it was merciless. The rush of assault was doubtless calculated to brush all defense aside in the first attack. But as well might the Bell river leaders have hoped to spurn ferro concrete from their path. The method was old. The horde came like the surging tide of driven waters. It reeled before the flaming weapons like rollers on a breakerwater. There came the swirl and eddy. Then, in desperate defeat, it dropped back. The carnage of that first onslaught was horrible. But the defenders suffered only the usual casualties. Kars labored under no delusion. The attack would come again and again in the hope of creating a breach, and that possible breach was the thought in each leader's mind.

The tide of men surged once more. It came on under a rain of reckless fire. Kars shouted encouragement to his men. The response was all he could desire. The attacking Indians surged to the embankment only to beat vainly, and to fall back decimated. But again and again they rallied, their tempo growing to a pitch of fury that suggested the limit of human endurance. The numbers seemed endless, rising out of the black beyond only to take shape at the rifle muzzle. Each rifle was pressed tight into the shoulder, while the hot barrel hurled its billet of death deep into the dusky bodies.

Kars fought, with a disregard of self that left its mark upon all those who were nearby. He spared nothing and his "ammunition" drove terror as well as death into the hearts of those with whom he was confronted. Bill was no less stirred, and fought till the first casualties in the defense claimed mercy in exchange for the merciful, and he was forced regretfully to obey the demands of the doctor's mission.

It was midnight before the final convulsions of the great storming assaults showed a waning. The first signs were the lengthening intervals between the rushes. Then gradually the rushes lessened in determination and only occasionally did they come to close quarters. To Kars the signs were the signs he looked for. They were to him the sign of first victory. But no vigilance was relaxed. The stake was far too great. None knew better than he the danger of relaxing effort under the assurance of success. And so the straining eyes of the defense were kept wide. Minutes crept by, passed under a desultory fire from the distance. The bullets whistled widely overhead, doing no damage to life. The time lengthened into half an hour and no fresh assault came. Another hour passed and still there was no sign from the enemy. It almost seemed as if the victory had been more complete for the defense than had at first been thought. The men were refreshed, and the rest was more than welcome. Kars refused to leave his post. For all his faith in the defense he trusted the vigilance of no one.

A meal of sorts was sent down to him from the cook house, and he shared it with the stalwart ruffian, Abe. They had been talking and Abe suddenly broke off, his eyes searching the distance, his hearing straining. Kars, too, had turned, searching beyond the embankment. "It's coming," he said. "It is coming plenty."

In less than two minutes the battle was raging with all its original

desperation. The black night air was filled with the fury of yelling voices which vied with the rattle of firearms for domination. Bare, shadowy bodies hurled themselves with renewed impetus against the defenses, and went down like grain before the reaper. The embankments were held with even greater confidence. Earlier experience, the respite these things had made their contribution, a contribution which told heavily against the renewed assault. Kars wondered. He had said these men were like sheep. Now they were like sheep herded on to the slaughter house. The senselessness of it was growing on him with his increased confidence. It all seemed unworthy of the astute half white mind lying behind the purpose. These were the thoughts which flashed through his mind as he plied his weapons and encouraged the men of his command, and they grew in conviction with each passing moment. But there was more wit in it than he suspected.

Then came the diversion. It came by water. Out of the darkness grew the shadowy outlines of four laden canoes, and the beaching of the craft was the first inkling. Abe Dodds, who held the left defenses, had of the adventure. Action and thought were almost one with him. Claiming the men nearest him he hurled himself on the invaders with a ferocity which led for its inspiration a full understanding of the consequences of disaster in such a direction. Outflanking stared at him with all its ugly meaning, and as he went he shouted hoarsely back to Kars his ill-omened news. Kars needed no second warning. He passed the call on to Bill. He claimed the reinforcement which only desperate emergency had the right to demand. Then he flung himself to the task of making good the depleted defense where Abe had withdrawn his men.

The crisis was more deadly than could have seemed possible a moment before. The whole aspect of the scene had been changed. The breach, that dreaded breach with all its deadly meaning, was achieved in something that amounted only to seconds.

The neches swarmed on the embankments on the lower foreshore. The defenders who had been left were driven back before the fierce onslaught. They were already giving ground when Kars flung himself to their support. The whole situation looked like being turned.

It was no longer a battle of coldly calculated method. Here at least it had become a conflict where individual nerve and ability alone could win out. Already some dozen of the half-breed savages had forced their selves across the embankment, and more were pressing on behind. It was a moment when the whole edifice of the white man's purpose looked to be tottering, if not falling headlong. Kars understood. He had the measure of the threat to the last fraction, and he flung himself into the battle with a desperateness of energy and resolve that bore almost immediate fruit.

His coming checked the breaking of the defenders. But he knew it was like patching rotten material. His influence could not last without Bill and his reinforcements. He plied his guns with a discrimination which no heat or excitement could disturb, and the first invaders fell under his attack amidst a din of fierce-throated cries. His men rallied. But he knew they were fighting now with a shadow at the back of their minds. It was his purpose to remove that coming passed with the emptying of his pistols. He flung them aside without a moment's hesitation, and grabbed a rifle from a fallen neche. It was the act of a man who knew the value of every second gained. He knew, even more, the value of his own gigantic strength. The weapon in his hands became a far-reaching club. And, swinging it like a ferociously driven flail, he rushed into the crowd of savages, scattering them like chaff in a gale. The smashing blows fell on heads that split under their superlative force, and the ground about him became like a shambles. In a moment he discovered another figure in the shadowy darkness, fighting in a similar fashion, and he knew that Pelgan Charley had somehow come to his support. He was holding. Just holding the rush, and that was all. Without the reinforcements he had claimed he could not hope to drive his attack home.

His first call had reached the ears of the man for whom it was intended. Nor had they been indifferent. A call for help from Kars was an irresistible clamor of appeal to Bill Brudnell. He flung aside his drugs, his bandages. To collect reinforcements from the northern defenses was the work of a few minutes. Even the elderly breed cook at the cook house was claimed, though his only weapons were an ancient patterned revolver and a pick haft he had snatched up. Fifteen men in all he was able to collect and at the head of them, he rushed for the battleground. Nor was he a moment too soon. Kars' vigor was rapidly exhausting itself. Pelgan Charley was fighting with a demonic fury, but weakening. The handful of men who were still supporting were nearly defeated.

(Continued in The Morning Bee.)

Omahan, Pioneer of State, Dies on Pacific Coast

Wood River, Neb., Jan. 28.—(Special.)—Word was received here of the death Saturday of W. W. Mitchell at the home of his daughter, Mrs. E. M. Hollister, Los Angeles. The body will arrive Wednesday and funeral services probably will be conducted Saturday.

Mr. Mitchell located at Albia, Neb., in the early sixties. He owned a general store and bought grain until 1888, when he came to Wood River where he ran an elevator. He was organizer of the Citizens State bank at Wood River. He moved to Omaha 10 years ago.

Mr. Mitchell is survived by his widow, a son, Charles Mitchell of Albia, Neb.; four daughters, Mrs. Oscar Allen of Omaha and four in California; one sister and one brother.

Site for Museum and Park Meets With Approval

Nebraska City, Jan. 28.—(Special.)—The offer of the Morton estate to give Arbor Lodge, the home of the late J. Sterling Morton, to the state of Nebraska for museum and park purposes, favorably impressed 23 members of the legislature who looked over the place today. The mansion contains 52 rooms and is surrounded by spacious grounds on which the trees were planted by Mr. Morton, the father of Arbor Day. The estate offers the property to Nebraska if the state will agree to keep it up as a museum and park. It is valued at more than \$200,000.

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