

CASTLES IN SPAIN.

How fair they rise From hyacinthine meadow-ground that lies Within the shade. By snow-capped heights of wild sierras made!

THE GRAY STEER.

Twelve hundred feet high is the sun-dial of the Lazy J Ranch and nearly as broad—that cliff of divers hues which stands out from the wall of the canon of the Grand river.

With innumerable aspen gulches and brushy slopes draining down to the same canon.

Quicken their horses, they presently rode into the green gloom of the gulch, where the cooling aspens trembled above their heads.

They threaded the winding thicket on separate trails and met near its head without a sight of the gray steer.

He rode that morning a big-boned, Roman-nosed, blue-roan "outlaw"—a horse pronounced irremediable by the boys; he had tied a bucking roll across the shoulders of his saddle to supplement the grip of his knees, and on top of that lay the big, loose coil of his fifty-foot cable line, for he was still young enough to disdain a lariet of lesser length and caliber.

Below them the gulch enclosed the fastness of the deer, a space darkened to twilight by a growth of young spruce and aspen saplings.

Behind Holden Navajo Jim lifted a light left foot to the stirrup; then his spurred right tripped, clinking to the evasive dance of his young horse, and he slipped immitably into his saddle.

He had noticed a big block fallen from the rim-rock and lying tilted up on the slope. With mighty heaving he overturned it, and down the slope it crashed in smashing leaps through the brush and swaying timber to the very heart of the spruce thicket.

Foreman and follower struck out through the grasswood over ground without grass; the grazing range lay high on the mesa, fenced by the lofty wall of the canon. Its seemingly inaccessible height was scaled by the sure-footed, agile range cattle at a break in the porphyry ledge not far up the canon, and presently they took to the dizzy trail.

Snorts came up from below; Holden marked the course of startled, hurrying creatures by the lines of swaying tops fretting this still, green surface, and three grand bucks sprang out, their horns showing brown in the velvet as they topped the lower brush; but a bearer of mightier horns was breaking through the pliant young trees, and a glimpse of a grizzly hide was exultantly caught by the young foreman.

"Ah, he show up now!" shouted Navajo Jim, erect in the stirrups, as the great steer came out below.

Bred from the finest of the Lazy J stock, he would have weighed near 2000 pounds; but such speed and bottom was his "rustling" on that rough range that the big body rose over the brush with the wild grace of a buck, and with deer-like ease his frontlet, black and threatening, was thrown back over his grizzly shoulder as he stopped and eyed his hunters for an instant. One defiant shake of his perfect horns, then he raced onward, and only bending brush marked his path.

"Yes, I know," Holden returned, impatiently. "The boys started twenty head down yesterday and had them pointed for the corral, when that bland gray steer scattered the bunch, and they broke back for the hills."

Holden was already galloping after him, smashing the undergrowth in a straight course down the slope to intercept him below, shouting as he ran. Jim, with Indian circumspection, ran his horse in an easier descent along the slope, keeping his eyes on the swaying brush beneath and waiting for an opportunity of closing in more open ground.

"That gray steer like bull elk. Better corral him with six-shooter," said Jim. "One steer not worth worth."

Now Holden's horse, the blue outlaw, showed once more his spirit and brought Holden close behind the game. Navajo Jim emerged from the thicket to see the young foreman full career, swinging his big rope, while the haltered head of the horse and the huge-horned frontlet of the steer reached out in an even race across the little open space beyond.

on the obedient Indian spurred after the wild steer and the flying saddle. The great steer seemed scarcely to feel the 50-pound drag of the bumping saddle. Yet it tightened the rope about loin and flanks, and by making it harder for him to breathe so lessened his speed that Jim easily kept him in sight.

Each bawling bunch in turn was distanced. The brushy slopes broke away. As the mesa, sprinkled with pines, began to offer to Jim smooth spaces for handling his horse, he unbuckled the strap that held the coil of his rope, but still, as every leap of the steer took him the nearer to the corral, the wise Indian only held the rawhide ringed ready in his hand.

Down the rapidly narrowing tongue of the mesa—the mesa which tipped precipitously out into the river-gorge and was bounded on either side by an abyss—the trapped steer sped. He must soon be at a standstill or attempt to return on his tracks.

The Indian's eyes had already kindled with anticipation of triumph, when at the last of the pines the bumping, rattling saddle caught rest between projecting roots. It scarcely checked the steer! Holden's cable tore loose from the saddle-horn, and its slackened loop was speedily kicked from the steer's high-plunging haunches. Once more the great gray brute was free.

"Ah, he on the push now!" said Jim and looked to his loop as the steer reversed his big body, gave a high, writhing leap over the spurred rope, confronted the herder with the threatening crescent of his sharp horns and plunged forward to the combat.

The Navajo lifted his horse aside with the spruce, swung the loop open in his right hand and rose, half turned in the stirrups, in a quick underthrow for the front hoofs of the steer as he lunged by.

Jim's eyes saw, for an instant, lowered horns and uplifted hoofs mingled together, and his throw was true. But so quick was the play of the ponderous feet that the loop caught one foreleg only and passed over the face and hung across the horns.

The loop, drawn tight by the ropers' instantaneous jerk and kept from slackening by his nimble horse, bound horn and hoof together. Now the steer was in sad plight. With head drawn sidewise, with tongue lolling from open jaws, bellowing, he surged on three legs, but his spirit was unbroken.

The ropers slowed his horse to the strain. From horn to caudle the saddle creaked as, tramping and tugging in a wild, wide waltz, straining horse and hauling steer made the mad circuit of the precipices.

Holden, pounding down bareback on the blue roan, had stopped to gather up his rope, but now Jim heard his encouraging shout. The quickened tramp of his rushing horse, the whirling of his big rope as he swung it aloft, sounded close at hand, and the sweating ropers relaxed his strain.

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