

DUNRAVEN RANCH.

A Story of American Frontier Life.

By CAPT. CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANGES," "THE DESERTER," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.



It was nearly midnight, and still the gay party lingered on the veranda. There had been a fortnight of "getting settled" at the new post, preceded by a month of marching that had brought the battalion from...

well feigned amaze and with sudden glance towards the object of his inquiry. "How on earth should I know anything about it? Of course you do not seek expert testimony in asking me. He tries, I suppose, to adapt himself to circumstances. But why do you ask?"

Mrs. Belknap, however, seemed to enjoy the situation immensely. She was a pretty woman at most times, and even her rivals admitted. She was a beautiful woman at all times, was the verdict of the officers of the regiment when they happened to speak of the matter among themselves.

"You must remember that Mrs. Wells is a very strict Presbyterian, Mr. Perry said for that matter, non est in the world a dinner such as the colonel gave this evening for ever and ever so long. We are quite unused to the ways of civilization; whereas you have just come from the east—and long leave. Perhaps it is the fashion to be all devotion to one's next door neighbor at dinner."

In their own rooms the young officers soon found that unless they wished to be involved in an unpleasantness with Belknap it was best to be only very moderately devoted to his pretty wife, and those to whom an unpleasantness with the big captain might have had no terrors of consequence were deterred by the fact that Mrs. Belknap's devotee among the youngsters had invariably become an object of coldness and aversion to the other dames and damsels of the garrison.

"Absolutely none! There are some ranches down in the Washita country, but only one fine one near; and that might as well be on the other side of the Atlantic. No one from there ever comes here; and Dr. Quin is the only living soul in the garrison who ever got within the walls of that ranch. What he saw there he positively refuses to tell, despite all our entreaty."

"You don't tell me there's a ranch with a mystery here near Rossett?" exclaimed Mr. Perry, with sudden interest. "Why, I do, indeed! It is possible you have never heard of Dunraven Ranch?"

"That's what we all want to know—and cannot find out. Now, there is an exploit worthy your energy and best efforts, Mr. Perry. There is a big, wealthy, well stocked ranch, the finest homestead buildings, we are told, in all this part of Texas. They say it is beautifully furnished—that has a fine library, a grand piano, all manner of things indicative of culture and refinement among its occupants—but the owner only comes around once or twice a year, and is an iceberg of an Englishman. All the people about the ranch are English, too, and the most repellent, boorish, discourteous lot of men you ever saw. When the Eleventh were here they did everything they could to be civil to him, but he got so impatient they would they accept, not one would they extend; and so from that day to this none of the officers have had any intercourse with the people at the ranch, and the soldiers know very little more. Once or twice a year some very ordinary looking men arrive who are said to be very distinguished people—in England; but they remain only a little while, and go away as suddenly as they came."

"And you have never seen any of them?" "Never, except at a distance. Nor has any one of the officers, except Dr. Quin."

"And you have never heard anything about the inmates and why they keep up this policy of exclusiveness?" "We have heard all manner of things—some of them wildly romantic, some mysteriously tragic, and all of them, probably, absurd. At all events, Capt. Lawrence has told me that he did not wish me to repeat what I had heard, or to be concerned in any way with the stories afloat; so you must ask somebody else. Try the doctor. To change the subject, Mr. Perry, I see you have lost that mysterious little silver braid and tassel you wore on your cap button. I fancied there was some romance attached to it, and now it is gone."

"Mr. Graham," said she, "isn't your friend, Mr. Perry, something of a flirt?" "Who—Ned?" asked Mr. Graham, in sentiment whatever attached to it. I haven't the faintest idea whose it was, and only tied it there for the fun of the thing and to make Graham, here, ask questions."

"Well, no," laughed Perry. "I fancy Mrs. Belknap thinks as you thought—that it was a gag of amour. Hallo! look at that light away there across the prairie. What can that be?"

"What a beautiful, just cool enough to be exhilarating; his favorite horse, 'Brutus,' was trotting over the turf under the slopes, or ranging off through the cottonwoods along the stream, or the shallow, sandy arroyos, where the grass and weeds grew rank and luxuriant. Every now and then with sudden rush and a drove of prairie chickens would leap from their covert, and, after vigorous flapping of wings for a few rods, would go skimming resolutely in long easy curves and settle again a hundred yards away, as though suddenly reminded of the fact that this was mating time and no gentleman would be mean enough to shoot at such a season."

"Glad we get exercise enough at morning drill, one would think, and our horses too. Oh!"—And Mr. Parke stopped suddenly. It flashed across him that perhaps Perry was going riding with a lady friend and the hour was heretofore, in the opinion of the big American horse, across the prairie in mad races for his threatened life, putting a mile between him and the moon before he began to realize that the two quadrupeds ambling along the distant trail were obedient to the will of that single rider, who had no thought to spare for grazing so small. Some Indian ponies, grazing across his pathway, set back their stunted ears, and, cow like, refused to budge a single inch from the big American horse; whereas a little vagabond of a Cheyenne, not ten years old nor four feet high, set up a shrill chatter and screech and let drive a few well directed clouds of turf, and then swung his white teeth in a grin as Perry swung out a cheery "How! how!" and spurred on through the opening thoroughfare, heedless of spiteful pony looks or threatening heels.

When he mounted and rode away from the stable Mr. Parke was outside at the picket rope, and busily occupied in his duties, supervising the fastening of the fresh, spirited horses at the line, for the troop commander was a man intolerant of disorder of any kind, and nothing more offended his eye than the sight of two or three of his charges loose and plunging and kicking up and down the stable yard. He was so busy, there was no one except that named to guide the younger animals keener delight—nothing that made the perpetrator a bigger hero in his own eyes or the object of greater envy among his fellows—and as a consequence every device of which equine ingenuity was master was called into play, regularly as the morning came around, to break loose either from the control of the groom or from the taut and straining picket rope. The first care of the officer in charge of the troop sergeants was, therefore, to see that all the horses were securely lashed and knotted. Not until he had examined every "halter shank" was Mr. Parke at leisure to look around, but when he did his comrade had disappeared from view.

And over this broad level, horizon bounded, not a moving object could be seen. Far away, in little groups of three or four, black dots of grazing cattle marked the horizon. In the distance, there were "bunches" of the Mesquite just beyond the fringing cottonwoods, two or three herds of Indian ponies were sleepily cropping their morning meal, watched by the little black imp of a boy whose dirty red blanket made the only patch of color against the southern landscape. Later in the day, when the sun mounted high in the heavens and the brisk westerly winds sent the clouds sailing swiftly to the west, the head of the prairie seemed in motion, for then huge shadows swept its face with measured speed, and distant cattle and neighboring pony herd appeared as though calmly and contentedly riding on a broad platform, Nature's own "observation car," taking a leisurely journey towards the far away Pacific.

But the sun was only just up as Mr. Parke came back from his inspection of the low valley. Far down to the southeast the rays seemed glinting on some bright objects clustered together within short range of the shadowy fringe, and the lieutenant shaded his eyes with his gauntlet and looked fixedly thitherward as he stood at the stable door.

"Some new thinging down at that English ranch they talk of, I suppose," his explanation of the phenomenon, and then "wonder why Perry hasn't ridden to cultivate the acquaintance of those people before this. He was always the first man in the— to find out who our neighbors were."

Pondering over this question, it occurred to Mr. Parke that Perry had said he was going down the Monee that morning; but nowhere was there a speck in sight that looked like loping horseman. To be sure, the trail here close to the low bluffs that bounded the valley on the north by the time one had ridden a mile or so out from the post. He was probably hidden by this shoulder of the prairie, and would continue to be until he reached the bend, five miles below. No use watching for him then. Besides, he might not yet have started. Mr. Parke recalled the fact that he had suspected a while ago that Ned was going to ride— at an early ante-breakfast ride—with a lady friend. Mrs. Belknap had her own horse, and was an accomplished equestrienne; Mrs. Lawrence rode fairly well, and was always glad to go, when somebody could give her a saddle and a reliable mount. There were others, too, among the ladies of the infantry garrison who were no novices a cheval. Mr. Parke had no intention whatever of prying into the matter. It was simply as something the officer in charge of stable duty was entitled to know that he turned suddenly and called:

"Sergeant, Gwynne!" He heard the name passed down the dark interior of the stable by the men sweeping out the stalls, and the prompt and cheery reply. The next instant a tall young trooper stepped forth into the blaze of early sunlight, his right hand raised in salute, and stood erect and motionless by the lieutenant's side.

"Did Mr. Perry take an extra horse, sergeant?" "No, sir." "I thought possibly he meant to take Roland. He's the best lady's horse in the troop, is he not?" "Yes, sir; but Roland is at the line now."

"Very well, then. That's all. I presume he has just ridden down to Dunraven." And Mr. Parke turned to look once more at the glinting objects down the distant valley. It was a moment or two before he was aware of the fact that the sergeant still stood there, instead of returning to his duties.

"I said that was all, sergeant; you can go back to your feeding." And then Mr. Parke turned in some surprise, for Sergeant Gwynne, by long odds the "smartest" and most soldierly of the non-commissioned officers of the cavalry battalion, for the first time in his history seemed to have forgotten himself. Though his attitude had not changed, his face had, and a strange look was in his bright blue eyes—a look of incredulity and wonderment and trouble all combined. The lieutenant was fairly startled when, as though gathering himself together, the sergeant falteringly asked:

"I beg pardon, sir—he had ridden—where?" "Down to the Ranch, sergeant—that one you can just see, away down the valley." "I know, sir;—the name?" "Dunraven Ranch."

For an instant the sergeant stood as though dazed, then, with sudden effort, saluted, faced about, and plunged into the dark recesses of the stable.

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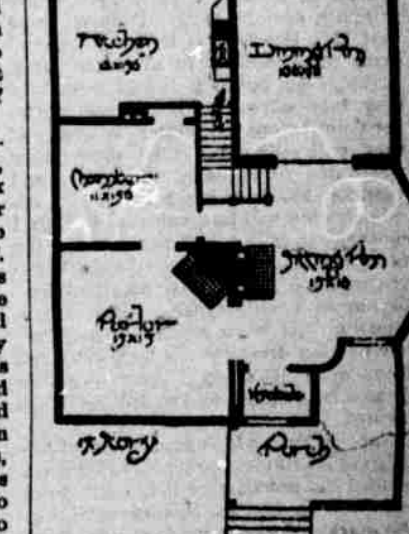
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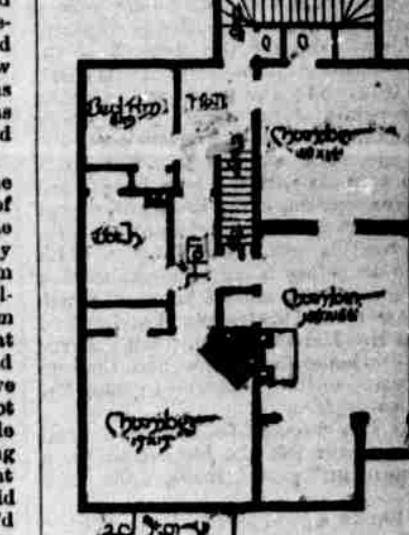
A SENSIBLE FARM HOUSE. Original Plans and Description by Architect L. M. Gibson.



In making a plan for a farm dwelling it is in the mind of many that it should be distinct in some respects from a town or suburban dwelling. The principal difference, however, is largely in the matter of construction. In the plan which is here submitted there is a front vestibule, in which may be placed wraps, etc., before going into the sitting room. There is a rear vestibule from which one may pass from the kitchen, dining room or rear porch to the second floor. In this vestibule is a low closet and a space for a hat rack.



On the second floor there is a parlor, with a grate in the front from which enters the same stair, but not the same fire as the one in the sitting room. There is a bedroom which may be approached either from the sitting room or parlor. The latter door is not necessary, and could be omitted and afford better bed space for that room. It is to be noticed that there is a closet in connection with this chamber. The stairway to the second floor goes to the sitting room. The approach is to a square landing and from thence to the second floor. From the kitchen one passes to the cellar under the front stairway. The usual kitchen conveniences, which have been common to the plans furnished by the writer, are herein included. The rear porch could be enclosed with lattice work for an advantage. On the second floor are four bedrooms, an alcove, a bathroom and a large number of ample closets. In one instance this house was built with sliding doors between the two side chambers, as indicated by this plan. Attention is called to the large store closet in the rear hall. There is an attic stairway to the second floor in the position indicated in second floor plan.



This house was built in Indiana as per following prices: SCHEDULE OF COSTS. Building, first floor finish oak, second floor, finish pine, 1000 sq. ft. \$1200.00. Privy vaults, 2, 1000 sq. ft. \$200.00. Chimneys and connections, 50 barrels \$100.00. Well, connections and pump, 200 ft. \$150.00. Walls of brick, 1000 sq. ft. \$100.00. Fences, light board 80, picket 100, 1000 ft. \$100.00. Plumbing, cedar sink, kitchen sink, bath tub, water closet, wash stand, street washer, cistern water, 100 ft. \$100.00. Four mantels and grates, average cost, \$20. \$800.00. Furnace, 1000 sq. ft. \$100.00. Total, \$2000.00. L. M. GIBSON.

The Toronto Wheel Tournament. A tournament will be held in Toronto on Oct. 21, 22, and 23, at which \$1000 will be given in prizes. A professional seventy-two hole race will occur, in which \$500 will be given—\$200 to the first, \$300 to the second, and \$100 to the third. The entrance fee will be \$25, and one-half must accompany the entrance; the other half to be paid before the start. The race will be started on the first day, and will continue up to 10 o'clock each day. If the record is broken, the entrance fee will be returned to the player, but it will be necessary to ride over 100 miles to obtain any of the money. There will also be a two, three, five and ten mile amateur race each day. There will be several ladies' races and a few children's races. The entrance fee for these will be \$1.00, and should be sent to F. W. Cousins, postoffice box 265, Toronto, Canada, before or on Oct. 4.

Canada Dogs. A glance at the Toronto and London bench show reports will show that Canada is well able to hold a good show irrespective of what may be sent from over the border, as most of the entries at both shows were local set from neighboring cities. The breeding of dogs in Canada has made rapid strides during the last few years. Setters, spaniels, Bedlington and black and tan terriers seem to be the strongest points, although many good breeds of different breeds have come down to our Yankee shores and taken away the money. It is surprising that mastiffs and St. Bernards do not enter more into popular favor than is the case. There is evidently an open field for some of the typical stock from the best kennels in the United States, and the couple shown by Wyoming kennels at Toronto may be productive of some good.