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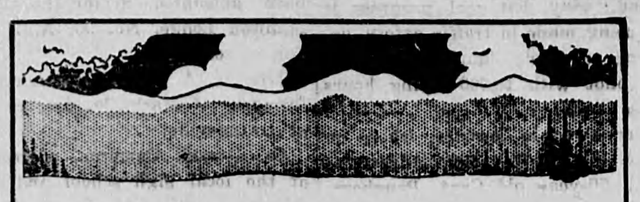

Valley OF REVENGE
BY
JACKSON·COLE

Synopsis

Chapter XXI: El Caballero Rojo rides to meet the settlers. He advised them to return home. Clark Weber—one of the three in the wagon—who has heard of the reward on Valdez' head, attempts to capture him.

Chapter XXII

If Michael Valdez noticed the sneer of Clark Weber's face, he gave no sign. Nor did his manner change when he noticed Weber's hand sliding beneath the seat blanket, his body inching forward as if he sought to look around the girl beside him, and yet see behind her.

Tense silence reigned for half a minute. Then Weber spoke derisively.

"Why do you try to frighten us? What does it mean to you whether we go or stay?"

"Frighten you?" Valdez's tone was mild. "If good advice scares you, then Madre de Dios help the three of you—when you're settled down there." He nodded toward the valley below, lit up by leaping scarlet flames.

* * *

"You'll never nail one of us to Don Attero's Cross!" Weber challenged sharply. "You'll never set any of our buildings afire! Because you've seen your own last sunrise!"

Few men could have snatched out and leveled a six-gun as fast as Clark Weber did while he pronounced that sentence of death. But even faster, Valdez's gaudily gloved hand flashed out from where it had dangled near his holster. Gun metal caught the moon's silvered rays. Flame leaped forth. Lead crunched into Clark Weber's gun. He cried out in pain as his weapon slid from limp fingers.

Valdez holstered his smoking Colt. His eyes above the neckerchief and his voice were still mild when he said:

"If you try that again, hombre, do it faster—and not when you are looking straight at me."

The girl recovered her power of speech, looking at El Caballero Rojo as she asked a question.

"You're sure that—"

"I've told you what I know," the strange apparition said.

Valdez backed El Cielo into the shadow of a rock and horse and rider disappeared. There was no sound, for he had gone as silently as he had come.

For long awed moments the trio on the wagon seat did not move.

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Then suddenly, with a harsh ejaculation, Clark Weber jumped to the ground and retrieved the gun that had been shot from his hand. The hand itself, he saw, had been no more than scratched, but the shock of the bullet had done what El Caballero Rojo had intend it to do.

"Curse him." Weber growled. "The next time—"

"He might not be as generous Maxon finished for him. "He was only trying to help us. Why did you draw that gun on him?"

"Because he's worth money — plenty of it — dead or alive," Weber growled surlily, angered even at the girl he professed to love. "I'd heard enough about him — and now that I know he is in these parts, I see how we're going to make it quick, paying the balance due Bartle on our land."

"With this man's body?" Chet Maxon demanded savagely. "You won't pay anything I owe — or Ellen owes — with blood money. You mean you'd really stoop that low, Clark — after he went out of his way to warn us to expect trouble?"

"Warned like fun!" flared Weber. "It wouldn't surprise me to know he crucified that man he said was on that cross, and set that fire we saw. Whether he did it or not, I'm paying more attention for a while to get that red-headed Mex outlaw than I am to farming."

Without a word Chet Maxon picked up the reins. The wagon creaked on. Even before it turned the bend and stopped near the ghastly cross, the silence of fear and disillusion dropped like a clammy blanket over the plodding settlers.

On Chet Maxon's side of the trail stood the ghastly cross. On his sister's side, far below, glowed the ember of the fire they had seen, but which now was dying down. It was as if some mocking son of Satan had prepared the welcoming signs.

Only an hour before, young Burr Aldman, nicknamed "Straw" because of his red-gold hair and freckled face, had been sitting across the table from his father, a hard-working tobacco farmer in Deep Water Valley. Burr, the son, was hard-working also, and he and his father had been figuring on their prospects. There was elation in both their hearts as they reached the conclusion that the contents of their crammed drying shed would sell for enough to take up the next note on the farm.

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"One thing we ain't figured, son," the old man told Straw ominously. "The fellers who are raising all the ructions in this here valley and burned Mike Chapman's drying shed. They killed Steve Ransom, too. We ain't taking no chances with them coming after us, so tomorrow morning we start baling and hauling that tobacco out of here."

But that had been an hour ago. Now young Burr Aldman was kneeling so close to the smoking ruins of the shed that he could feel the heat from the ashes. And stretched before him on the ground was his father — his life's blood draining from a stomach wound.

"I told you, son," old Aldman gasped. "It wasn't only Chapman and — and Ransom they wanted riddance of. Them beefmen ain't stopping at — at anything till they've run out — every tobacco man in the valley."

Straw Aldman was twenty-one. Or he had been up to minutes before. He was like a man of forty or more now, as bitter as gall, with but one purpose in life — to find the man who had tossed that torch into the drying shed; the man who had fired point-blank at his unarmed father who had tried to stop the arson.

* * *

"Yes, Dad," he wheezed out. "Beefmen. Curse 'em! I'll pay every one of them back, coin for coin, till either lead or rope stop me."

"No, son," the farmer's weak voice protested. "That's not the way. The thing for you to do is to get out of this hole of the devil. See — Russ Bartle. He'll help you find somebody to buy the farm. He's a good man, son. He'll help you. But get out of this Deep Water Valley. Start as soon as your brother Sam gets back home. You and Sam pull out of here tonight. Promise me that, Burr."

"All right, Dad," the young man said reluctantly. "I — I hate like all thunder to make a promise like that, but —"

He stopped short, staring at his father. For the next moment old Aldman died, stretched on the soil that nature had touched with such a prodigal hand.

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The red-headed young man staggered to his feet. His weary eyes to the smoldering ash-heap. Then shifted from the corpse of his father suddenly his teeth clicked together as he spun on his heels, snatching out the six-gun that was tucked beneath his belt. But as swiftly he remembered.

"That you, Sam?" he called hopefully.

When there was no answer and he still heard approaching footsteps, again his six-gun was flung upward. His finger danced on the trigger.

"Keep coming!" he commanded.

A slight figure in ragged overalls came to the dying glow of the ruins.

Straw Aldman glowered, then slightly relaxed. This was not the killer of his father, the men who had set fire to the drying shed. He had managed to get one glimpse of that man, a distant glimpse, as he had rushed from the house at the sound of shots. That fellow with the torch and gun had been taller than this ragged figure, had moved like one who was much older.

(To be Continued)

Record-Breaking Baby is 1,000th to be born this year in St. Joseph's Hospital, Chatham. The little girl shown here with her mother, Mrs. Frank Phelan of Stanley St., Blenheim, arrived Christmas Eve and was walked up and down the ward corridor by Santa Claus himself.

ANNE HIRST
Your Family Counselor

Sister's Children Invade Girl's Home

A YOUNG GIRL is about to declare war on her married sisters. They, with their children, invade her private life in such a way that she cannot enjoy her own home. I quote from her letter:

"Suppose you had an army of married sisters each of whom brings back home the trials, worries and cares attendant upon every marriage. Suppose their children, paraphernalia, et al, visit your home 365 days a year as surely as the sun rises? Suppose their code of thinking to be: 'Want to take a job? Step out any day? Why not? Palm the children off on Mother. She's always home, and you don't have to pay her!'"

"Suppose you could never ask your friends in because your living room is perpetually cluttered with diapers, rattles, blankets, booties and toys? Suppose you're tired of bumping into carriages, playpens, velocipedes? Suppose you hesitate to bring your young man home because it's too much like taking him into a day nursery, or projecting him into a young matrons' society with their one-track conversation?

"Suppose your parents were weary unto death of this, but believe it their duty to be helpful if it kills them?

"And worse, suppose your heart is broken to see your home's furnishings abused just because they are unpretentious? (My sisters have beautiful homes of their own.)

"Suppose they never consider knocking when they drop in any hour of the day or night, or whether it is convenient for you to receive them? (We, however, must observe all proprieties when visiting them.) Suppose they all, including the small fry, feel that they have a real share in this home, without owing it a particle of respect?

"And suppose your point-blank request that they stay away occasionally meets with visits of redoubled length and clamor?

"Talking is not going to change them. We can't pull up stakes and leave. I suppose we must wait till the children grow up before we can have peace. And by then I'll be middle-aged and these children will be bringing home the next generation to plow roughshod through our home!

"I don't dislike children. If I could, I'd marry and have my own. All I ask is the chance to be free to enjoy my own home. Only God can help us through this, I know; but a few ideas from an outsider might save my sanity—I might use this to write a tragi-comedy or something! Please answer soon."

"TO GRIN AND BEAR IT:" Does your mother know how bitterly you feel about this monopoly of your home? This is for her to handle. she should not oblige your sisters on nights when you have a date at home. Also, they should not leave the children's toys, etc., overnight.

Your mother feels a natural pride that her daughters can count on her. But until you marry, the home is your home, too, and your privacy in it should be protected. Stop worrying, though, about how your dates regard this disorder. They're not so squeamish as you are.

Hurry up and pick your own young man and have your own home! Then you can park your babies with your mother, too.

Every girl needs some privacy in her own home, and every mother should try to arrange that she gets it. Anne Hirst can help mother and daughter. Write her at Box A, Room 421, 73 Adelaide St., West. Toronto.

Sunday School Lesson

By Rev. R. Barclay Warren

What We Know About God
Isaiah 40: 28-31; John 14: 8-14.

Golden Text—But without faith it is impossible to please him. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—Hebrews 11:16.

A youth leader said, "If you want to keep young, stay around young people; if you want to get old, try and keep up with them." How truly he spoke! But Isaiah summons us to a source of strength greater than the springs of youth. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Not only is the Eternal God, the Creator of the earth, a Being of unlimited strength but He is able to give of His strength to those who call upon Him. There are times when we need to soar as with eagles' wings above the confusion and din of a sin-torn weary world. But it is equally important to be able to walk and not faint. The mother of the little children often feels the need of moral strength and courage to carry on the humdrum duties of everyday life. She doesn't ask for eagles' wings to get above them but for strength to walk and not faint.

Isaiah also says of God "There is no searching of His understanding." He who can trust the infinite wisdom of God in the hour of stark tragedy has a strong consolation.

* * *

Many who think well of Jesus Christ regard God the Father as a stern, austere Being who is not nearly as sympathetic with humanity as His Son. This is a false notion Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." His words and works are of the Father who dwelleth in Him. Would you know what God the Father is like? Then read the life of Jesus and become acquainted with Him as your personal Saviour and you will know the Father.

The lesson closes with a challenge. There is a great work for us to do. It is to tell the world about Him. Jesus regards this as in a sense greater than the miracles which He, up to that time, had wrought. There is also the challenge to pray. Dare we accept it? "If ye shall ask anything in my Name, I will do it." God lives and rewards those who in faith, diligently seek Him.

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New Old Joke

Question: "Who was the lady I saw you with the other night in that sidewalk cafe?"

Answer: "That was no sidewalk cafe—that was our furniture—we're living there."

★

How Can I?
By Anne Ashley

Q. How can I clean windows and glass easily, and also give the glass a nice polish?

A. By using a lintless cloth dipped in a solution of two tablespoonfuls of household ammonia to two quarts of water.

Q. How can I give an added gloss to the linen?

A. A gloss can be produced by making the hot starch with soapy water. This also prevents the iron from sticking to the goods.

Q. How can I improve the flavor and the texture of fudge?

A. Both the flavor and texture will be improved if a small spoonful of cornstarch is added.

Q. How can I distinguish fresh fish from spoiled fish?

A. By looking at the gills and the eyes. The gills of fresh fish are red and the eyes are clear.

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VALUABLE BOOKLET FEATURE
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