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feet of water, and progress was necessarily slow. Walter and I rode side by side, and he told me about the Indian, Rufino.

At that time Bolivia and Paraguay were openly at war over the disputed territory of the Gran Chaco, but for many years previously that territory had been the scene of covert hostilities between the rival factions. Banditry was rife, and the people who suffered most were the native Chaco Indians, for whom allegiance either to Bolivia or Paraguay meant nothing, and who wished only to be left alone to live their own lives in peace. One day an outlaw band swept down on a small Indian community, stole their horses, and carried off the lad Rufino to look after them. He was virtually their prisoner, and the harsh treatment meted out to him sharpened his desire both for escape and for revenge. Seizing his opportunity one night, he collected all the firearms and hid them in the thick undergrowth where they could never be found. Then he rode away into the night, taking with him all the other horses. That was a desperate venture, and probably resulted in the death of his captors, for, weaponless and on foot, their chances of succour were remote. His own life, too, was now forfeit should he ever be recognised, so instead of returning to his people he crossed the border into Brazil and came to Walter Hill's little township. By that time he had lost all his horses except the one he rode, and an unscrupulous peon claimed that one too, accusing Rufino of having stolen it. Naturally, he found it hard to defend himself, and without Hill's intervention would have lost his horse and received a whipping as well. But Walter, who knew as well as everybody else that the accused was lying, had the courage to say so and threatened that any whipping might have unexpected results.

This had all happened some six or eight years before, and since then Rufino had been Walter's own personal boy, and was always with him.

He was a treasure, Walter declared, his accomplishments ranging from bull-fighting to nursing the children. I did not have the opportunity of seeing him perform either of these feats, but I often saw him rope cattle at full gallop, or ride into fighting bulls when their tussles were holding up the whole herd; and on one occasion his quick wits saved Walter and myself from probable death.

THE weather was unkind to us, for heavy rain set in during the morning and continued throughout the day. The going was not easy, either, because once clear of the floods we struck timbered campo where the thick scrub and tall grasses hindered our progress. Even so, the ride was full of interest. In the swamp an alligator was a common sight, and commanded only a casual glance. More beautiful to look at were the birds and butterflies. Some of the birds were remarkably unafraid, though this seemed to vary in inverse ratio to their size. The large birds, storks, pelicans, and water fowl, flew away at our approach, but the small, brightly-coloured ones merely hopped on to another branch and watched us go by. One, in particular, I liked to see. He was a cheerful little fellow, about as big as a thrush, with a scarlet head and a white collar round

his neck; he looked just like a sprightly sergeant-major in full dress. The butterflies, of course, were amazing, for nowhere in the world are there more varieties than in Brazil.

Once the two Indians wheeled their horses and dashed off through the scrub. They were soon lost to sight, though we could hear them plunging about at no great distance. Presently they returned and Walter explained that they had spotted a wild pig, and given chase. In more open ground it would have been an easy kill, and we should have had pork for supper once again; but the dense undergrowth, while not hindering the pig in his blundering rush for safety, presented an impenetrable obstacle to the horsemen, and their quarry had escaped. The natives get these animals by chasing them on horseback and hitting them on the head with the steel ring of their lassoes.

Towards sundown the rain stopped and Walter decided to make camp. We had a stock of cold meat and some of this was warmed in the pot for supper, which on trips of this kind is the only prepared meal of the day. Together with hard biscuits and maté, it proved highly-acceptable fare.

\* \* \*

OUR first discovery in the morning was that the meat had turned bad, which meant that unless we could bag something we should be hungry by the time we reached our objective, an Indian settlement some seven hours' ride distant. This was rank bad luck, as things turned out, for we came to a stretch of marshy land, and there, plain as a pike-staff, were the fresh tracks of a tiger. Rufino eagerly declared that they were not more than two hours old and that we should get them for sure. But Walter deemed otherwise. The Indians, he knew, could trail the big cat unerringly, even through bush and timber, but it would be slow work and could easily take all day. We had no food and were faced with a stiff ride before we were certain of finding any; so, under the circumstances, his decision was probably a wise one, although it was a big disappointment at the time.

However, we soon forgot our lost tiger for, after another two or three miles, Rufino held up a warning hand and pointed away into the distance. We remained motionless, while the Indian and Walter conversed in low tones. Then Walter dismounted, and told me to follow him. For ten minutes we pushed our way as noiselessly as possible through the elephant grass which entirely hid us from view, and then, coming to the end of it, Walter stopped and whispered to me to look out for a shot.

"What at?" I said, which was a fair question, because no one had told me, and I was ready to have a bang at anything from a duck to a rhinoceros.

"Why, deer of course," he replied, "and it means the big feast if we can get one."

We straightened up to take a look, and about 400 yards away were a dozen deer, their heads up, looking suspiciously right towards us. But in that second it took to take aim and fire they were in instant flight, their white scuts bobbing through the bush waving goodbye to our empty stomachs.

(To be continued next week)

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