Title: At the Point of the Sword

Author: Herbert Hayens

Release date: September 14, 2007 [eBook #22595]
Most recently updated: January 2, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

[Frontispiece: "In a short time they had bound our arms tightly with strips of hide."]

[Transcriber's note: frontispiece missing from book.]

At the Point of the Sword

A Story for Boys

By
HERBERT HAYENS

Author of "Ye Mariners of England," "Under the Lone Star,"
"For the Colours," "A Captain of Irregulars,"
"In the Grip of the Spaniard,"
&c., &c.

THOMAS NELSON & SONS, LTD.
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK
1903

CONTENTS.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

AT THE POINT OF THE SWORD.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRTHDAY EVE.

In spite of my English name—Jack Crawford—and my English blood, I have never set foot on that famous little island in the North Sea, and now it is quite unlikely that I ever shall do so.

I was born in Peru, on the outskirts of beautiful Lima, where, until the year 1819, on the very eve of my fourteenth birthday, the days of my childhood were passed.

I expect you know that in ancient days Peru was called the "Land of the Sun," because the sun was worshipped by the natives. Their great city was Cuzco, built, it is said, in 1043 A.D., by Manco Capac, the first of the Incas, or Emperors of Peru.

The natives believed Manco to be a child of the sun; but I have heard an old story that his father was a shipwrecked Englishman, who married the daughter of a Peruvian chief. I do not think this tale correct, but it is full of interest.

Most of the Incas ruled very wisely, and the remains of palaces, temples, and aqueducts show that the people were highly civilized; but in 1534 the Spaniards, under Pizarro, invaded the country, and swept away the glorious empire of the Incas.

After that Peru became a part of Spanish America, and Pizarro founded the city of Lima, which he made the capital.

My father, who settled in the country when quite a young man, married a Peruvian lady of wealthy and influential family. The estate near Lima formed part of her marriage portion, and a beautiful place it was, with a fine park, and a lake which served me both for boating and bathing. I had several friends, chiefly Spaniards, but two English boys, whose fathers were merchants in Callao, often visited me, and many a pleasant game we had together.

At this time Peru was a Spanish colony, but some people, among whom was my father, wanted to make it an independent country, having its own ruler. Being still a boy, I did not hear much of these things, though, from certain talk, I understood that the country was in a most unsettled state, and that the Spanish governor had thrown many good men into prison for urging the people to free themselves.

One evening, in March 1819, I was busy in my workshop painting a small boat. My father had been absent for nearly a week, but he had promised to return for my birthday, and every moment I expected to see him crossing the courtyard.

Presently, hearing old Antonio unfasten the wicket-gate, I put down my brush, wiped my hands, and ran out joyously.

The happy welcome died on my lips. It was not my father who had entered, but Rosa Montilla, the young daughter of a famous Spanish officer. She was nearly a year younger than myself, and a frequent visitor at our house. Often we had gone together for a row on the lake, or for a gallop on our ponies round the park.

She was very pretty, with deep blue eyes and fair hair, quite unlike most Spanish girls, and generally full of fun and good spirits. Now, however, she was very pale and looked frightened. I noticed, too, that she had no covering on her head or shoulders, and that she had not changed the thin slippers worn in the house.

These things made me curious and uneasy. I feared some evil had befallen her father, and knew not how to act. On seeing me she made a little run forward, and, bursting into tears, cried, "O Juan, Juan!" using, as also did my mother, the Spanish form of my name.

Now, being only a boy, and being brought up for the most part among boys, I was but a clumsy comforter, though I would have done anything to lessen her grief.

"What is it, Rosa?" I asked; "what has happened?" But for answer she could only wring her hands and cry, "O Juan, Juan!"

"Do not cry, Rosa!" I said, and then doing what I should have done in the first place, led her toward the drawing-room, where my mother was. "Mother will comfort you. Tell her all about it," I said confidently, for it was to my mother I always turned when things went wrong.

On this her tears fell faster, but she came with me, and together we entered the room.

"Juan!" cried my mother.—"Rosa! what is the matter? Why are you crying? But come to me, darling;" and in another moment she was pressing the girl to her bosom.

At a sign from her I left the room, but did not go far away. Rosa's action was so odd that I waited with impatience to hear the reason. She must have left her home hurriedly and unobserved, since it was an unheard-of thing that the daughter of Don Felipe Montilla should be out on foot and unattended.

I was sure that should her father discover it he would be greatly annoyed. The whole affair was so mysterious that I could make nothing of it. The girl's sobs were more under control now, and she began to speak. As she might not wish me to hear her story, I walked away, meaning to chat with Antonio at the gate, and to await my father's return.

He might not come for hours yet, as it was still early evening, but I hoped he would, and the more so now on Rosa's account. She might need help which I was not old enough to give; while, as it chanced, Joseph Craig, my father's trusty English servant, had gone that afternoon into Callao. However, he also might be back at any moment now, and would not, in any case, be late.

Half an hour had perhaps passed, and I was turning from the gate, when two horsemen dashed up at full speed. One was Joseph Craig, or José as the Spaniards called him, and my feeling of uneasiness returned as I noticed that his face, too, wore a strange and startled look.

José, as I have said, was my father's servant; but we all regarded him more as a friend, and treated him as one of ourselves. He was a well-built man of medium height, with good features and keen gray eyes. He spoke English and Spanish fluently, and could make himself understood in several Indian dialects. He kept the accounts of the estate, and might easily have obtained a more lucrative situation in any counting-house in Callao. He excelled, too, in outdoor sports, and had taught me to fence, to shoot, and to ride straight.

The second man I did not know. He seemed to be an Indian of the mountains, and was of gigantic stature. His dress was altogether different from that of the Spaniards, and in his cap he wore a plume of feathers. His face was scarred by more than one sword-cut, his brows were lowering, and his massive jaw told of great animal strength. José's horse had galloped fast, but the one ridden by the stranger was flaked with foam.

Antonio would have opened the big gate without question: but I, thinking of Rosa, forbade him, saying to José in English, "Does he mean harm to the girl?"

You see, my head was full of the one idea, and I could think of nothing else. I imagined that Rosa had run away from some peril, and that this man with the savage face and cruel eyes had tracked her to our gate. So I put the question to José, who looked at me wonderingly.

"The girl?" he repeated slowly; "what girl?"

"Rosa Montilla," I answered.

We spoke in English; but at the mention of Rosa's name the mountaineer scowled savagely, and leaned forward as if to take part in the conversation.

"The man has come from the mountains with a message for your mother," said José; "I met him at the entrance to the park. But if Rosa Montilla is here, the news is known already."

His face was very pale, and he spoke haltingly, as if his words were burdensome, and there was a look in his eyes which I had never seen before.

I motioned to Antonio, and the two passed through. What message did they bring? What news could link dainty little Rosa with this wild outlaw of the hills?

José jumped to the ground and walked with me, laying a hand on my shoulder. Until then I had no thought of the truth, but the touch of his fingers sent a shiver of fear through me, and I looked at his face in alarm.

"What is it, José?" I asked; "what has happened? Why did Rosa steal here alone and sob in my mother's arms as if her heart would break?"

"The little maid has heard bad news," he answered quietly, "though how I do not know."

"And as she had no mother, she came to mine for comfort," I said. "It was a happy thought: mother will make her forget her trouble."

José stopped, and looked searchingly in my face.

"Poor boy!" he said. "You have no idea of the truth, and how can I tell you? The little maid did not weep for her own sorrow, but for yours and your mother's."

At that I understood without further words, though I was to learn more soon. The reason of it I guessed, though not the matter; but I knew that somewhere my dear father lay dead—killed by order of the Spanish viceroy.

José saw from my face that I knew, and there was sympathy in the very touch of his hand.

"It is true," he whispered. "The Spaniards trapped him in the mountains, whither he had gone to meet the Indians. They wished to rise against the government; but he knew it was madness just now, and thought to keep them quiet till his own plans were ready."

"And the Spaniards slew him?"

"Yes," replied José simply. "Here," pointing to the mountaineer, "is our witness."

"But how did Rosa hear of it? she was not in the mountains. Ah, I forgot! Her father stands high in the viceroy's favour. And so my father is dead!"

The thought unnerved me, and I could have cried aloud in my sorrow.

"Hold up your head, boy!" exclaimed the harsh voice of the mountaineer. "Tears are for women and girls. Years ago my father's head was cut off, but I did not cry. I took my gun and went to the mountains," and he finished with a bitter laugh.

"But my mother!" I said. "The news will break her heart."

"The world will not know it," he answered, and he spoke truly.

"I am glad the little maid has told her," remarked José, giving his horse and that of the stranger to a serving-man. "Jack, do you go in and prepare her for our coming."

A single glance showed that Rosa had indeed told her story. She sat on a lounge, looking very miserable. My mother rose and came toward me. Taking my hands, she clasped them in her own. She was a very beautiful woman, famous for her beauty even among the ladies of Lima. She was tall and slightly built, with black hair and glorious dark eyes that shone like stars. I have heard that at one time she was called the "Lady of the Stars," and I am not surprised. They shone now, but all gentleness had gone from them, and was replaced by a hard, fierce glitter which half frightened me. Her cheeks were white, and her lips bloodless; but as far as could be seen, she had not shed a tear.

Still holding my hands, and looking into my face, she said, "You have heard the news, Juan? You know that your father lies dead on the mountains, slain while carrying a message of peace to the fierce men who live there?"

I bowed my head, but could utter no sound save the anguished cry of "Mother, mother!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed; "it is no time for tears now. I shall weep later in my own room, but not before the world, Juan. Our grief is our own, my son, not the country's. And there is little Rosa, brave little Rosa, who came to bring me the news; she must go back. Let Miguel bring round the carriage, and see that half a dozen of the men ride in attendance. Don Felipe's daughter must have an escort befitting her father's rank."

I began to speak of the strange visitor outside; but Rosa was her first care, and she would see no one until Rosa had been attended to. So I hurried Miguel, the coachman, and the men who were to ride on either side of the carriage, returning to the room only when all was ready.

Mother had wrapped Rosa up warmly, and now, kissing her, she said, "Good-bye, my child. You were very good to think of me, and I shall not forget. Tell your father the truth; he will not mind now."

Rosa kissed my mother in reply, and walked unsteadily to the coach. She was still sobbing, and the sight of her white face added to my misery.

"Don't cry, Rosa," said I, as I helped her into the carriage and wished her good-bye, neither of us having any idea of the strange events which would happen before we met again.

As soon as the carriage had gone, my mother directed that the stranger should be admitted, and he came in accompanied by José. I would have left the room, but my mother stopped me, saying,—

"No, Juan; your place is here. An hour ago you were but a thoughtless boy; now you must learn to be a man.—Señor, you have brought news? You have come to announce the death of my husband; is it not so?"

The mountaineer bowed almost to the ground.

"It is a sad story, señora, but it will not take long to tell. The Spaniards pretended he was stirring up our people to revolt; they waited for him in the passes, and shot him down like a dog."

"Did you see him fall?"

The fellow's eyes flashed with savage rage. "Had I been there," he cried, "not a soldier of them all would have returned to his quarters! But they shall yet pay for it, señora. My people are mad to rise. Only say the word, and send the son of the dead man to ride at their head, and Lima shall be in flames to-morrow."

My mother made a gesture of dissent.

"Don Eduardo liked not cruelty," she exclaimed; "and it would be but a poor revenge to slay the innocent. But Juan shall take his father's place, and work for his country's freedom. When the time comes to strike he shall be ready."

"Before the time comes he will have disappeared," cried the mountaineer, with a harsh laugh. "Do you think Don Eduardo's son will be allowed to live? Accidents, señora, are common in Peru!"

"It is true," remarked José; "Juan will never be out of danger."

"But the country is not ready for revolt, and only harm can come from a rising now. Should the Indians leave their mountain homes, the trained soldiers will annihilate them."

"But Juan must be saved!"

"Yes," assented my mother; "we must save Juan to take his father's place."

After this there was silence for a time. Then José spoke, "There is one way," said he slowly. "He can find a refuge in Chili till San Martin is ready; but he must go at once."

A spasm of fresh pain shot across my mother's face, but it disappeared instantly; even with this added grief she would not let people know how she suffered. Only as her hand rested on mine I felt it tremble.

"Let it be so, José," she said simply. "I leave it to you."

Then she thanked the mountaineer who had ridden so far to break the terrible news to her, and the two men went away, leaving us two together.

"Mother," I said, "must I really leave you?"

For answer she clasped me in her arms and kissed my face passionately.

"But you will come back, my boy!" she cried; "you will come back. Now that your father is no more, you are my only hope, the only joy of my life. O Juan, Juan! it is hard to let you go; but José is right—there is no other way. I will be brave, dear, and wait patiently for your return. Follow in your father's footsteps. Do the right, and fear not whatever may happen; be brave and gentle, and filled with love for your country, even as he was. Keep his memory green in your heart, and you cannot stray from the path of honour."

"I will try, mother."

"And if—if we never meet again, my boy, I will try to be brave too."

She wiped away the tears which veiled like a mist the brilliance of her starry eyes, and we sat quietly in the darkening room, while outside José was making preparations for our immediate departure.

At last he knocked at the door, and without a tremor in her voice she bade him enter.

"The horses are saddled, señora."

"Yes; and your plan, what is it?" she asked.

"It is very simple, señora. Juan and I will ride straight to Mr. Warren at Callao. He may have a vessel bound for Valparaiso; if not, he will find us one for my master's sake. Once at sea, we shall be out of danger. General San Martin will give us welcome, and there are many Peruvians in his army."

Once my mother's wonderful nerve nearly failed her. "You will take care of him, José," she said brokenly.

"I will guard him with my life, señora!"

"I know it, I am sure of it; and some day yon will bring him back to me. God will reward you, José.—Good-bye, Juan, my boy. Oh how reluctant I am to let you go!"

I will not dwell on the sadness of that parting. The horses were waiting in the courtyard, and after the last fond embrace I mounted.

"Good-bye, mother!"

"Farewell, my boy. God keep you!" and as we moved away I saw her white handkerchief fluttering through the gloom.

At the gate the Indian waited for us, and he followed a few paces in the rear.

I thought this strange, and asked José about it.

"It may be well to have a friend to guard our backs," he replied.

So in the gathering darkness I stole away from my home, with my heart sore for my father's death and my mother's suffering. And it was the eve of my birthday—the eve of the day to which I had looked forward with such delight!

Being so young, I did not really understand the peril that surrounded me; but my faith in José was strong, and I felt confident that in taking me away he was acting for the best.

Our path through the park led us near the lake, and I glanced sorrowfully at its calm waters and fern-fringed border. I would have liked to linger a moment at its margin, dwelling on past joys; but José hurried me on, remarking there was no time to waste.

Only, as the great gates swung open, he let me stop, so that I might bid a silent adieu to the beautiful home where my happy days of childhood had been passed.

"Keep a brave heart," said he kindly; "we shall be back some day. And now for a word of advice. Ride carefully and keep your eyes open. I don't want to frighten you, but the sooner we're clear of Lima the better I shall be pleased."

With that he put spurs to his horse, and with the clanging of the gate in our ears we rode off on the road to Callao, while the gigantic Indian followed about twenty paces behind.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXCITING VOYAGE.

It may be that José's fears on my account had exaggerated the danger, as we reached Callao without interruption, and dismounted outside Mr. Warren's villa. Here the Indian took leave of us, but before going he unfastened a silver key from the chain round his neck, and pressed it into my hand.

"It may happen," said he, "that at some time or other you will need help. That key and the name of Raymon Sorillo will obtain it for you from every patriot in the mountains of Peru. For the present, farewell. When you return from Chili we shall meet again."

Without waiting for my thanks he bade adieu to José and then, spurring his horse into a gallop, he disappeared.

From the man who opened the gate in answer to our summons we learned that my father's friend was at home, and leaving our horses, we went immediately into the house. This English merchant had often been our guest, and it was soon abundantly evident that we had done right in trusting him. He was a short, round-faced man, with a florid complexion, twinkling eyes, and sandy hair. He was very restless and irritable, and had a queer habit of twiddling his thumbs backward and forward whenever his hands were unoccupied.

"How do, Joseph?" exclaimed he, jumping up. "Come to take that berth I offered you? No? Well, well, what a fool a man can be if he tries! Why, bless me, this is young Jack Crawford! Eight miles from home, and at this time of night too! Anything the matter? Get it out, Joseph, and don't waste time."

While Joseph was explaining the circumstances, the choleric little man danced about the room, exclaiming at intervals, "Ted Crawford gone? Dear, dear! Not a better fellow in South America! I'd shoot 'em all or string 'em up! The country's going to the dogs, and a man isn't safe in his own house! Eh? What? Hurt the boy? What's the boy to do with it? They can't punish him if his father had been fifty times a rebel!"

"That is so, sir," remarked José; "but he might meet with an unfortunate accident, or vanish mysteriously, or something of that kind. What's the use of making believe? Those who have got rid of the father won't spare the son, should he happen to stand in their way."

"Which he will," interrupted Mr. Warren. "My poor friend was hand in glove with the Indians, and they'll rally round the boy."

"There are other things, too, which need not be gone into now, however," said José; "but the long and the short of it is that Jack must be got out of the way at present."

"And his mother?"

"She has sent him to you."

"But he can't be hidden here. The rascally Dons will have him in the casemates before one can say 'Jack Robinson!'"

"We don't mean to stay here, sir," replied José. "Our idea is to go to Valparaiso, and we thought if you had a ship—"

"The very thing, Joseph," and the thumbs went backward and forward taster than ever. "Maxwell has a schooner leaving in the morning. You can go on board to-night if you choose, but you had better have some supper first."

As it happened, both José and I had been some time without food, so we were glad to have

something to eat; after which Mr. Warren took us to the quay, where the schooner *Aguila* lay moored.

"There she is," he remarked; "let us go aboard. Most likely we shall find Maxwell there.—Hi, you fellows, show a light!—Lazy dogs, aren't they? Mind your foot there, and don't tumble into the harbour; you won't get to Valparaiso that way.—That you, Maxwell? I have brought a couple of friends who are so charmed with your boat that they want to make a trip in her. Where do you keep your cabin? Let's go down there; we can't talk on deck."

Mr. Maxwell was another English merchant at Callao, and as soon as he heard what had happened, he readily agreed to give us a passage in the *Aguila*. We must be prepared to rough it, he said. The schooner had no accommodation for passengers, but she was a sound boat, and the Chilian skipper was a trustworthy sailor. Then he sent to his warehouse for some extra provisions, and afterwards introduced us to the captain, whose name was Montevo.

As the schooner was to sail at daylight, our friends remained with us, and, sitting in the dingy cabin, chatted with José about the state of the country. By listening to the talk I learned that General San Martin was a great soldier from Buenos Ayres, who, having overthrown the Spanish power in Chili, was collecting an army with which to drive the Spanish rulers from Peru. At the same time another leader, General Bolivar, was freeing the northern provinces, and it was thought that the two generals, joining their forces, would sweep Peru from north to south.

"And a good thing, too!" exclaimed Mr. Warren. "Perhaps we shall have a little peace then!"

"Pooh! stuff!" said his friend; "things will be worse than ever! These people can't rule themselves. They're like disorderly schoolboys, and need a firm master who knows how to use the birch. I am all for a stern master."

"So am I," agreed José, "if he's just, which the Spaniards aren't."

"That is so," cried Mr. Warren. "What would our property be worth if it wasn't for the British frigate lying in the harbour? Tell me that, Maxwell; tell me that, sir! They'd confiscate the whole lot, and clap us into prison for being paupers," and the thumbs revolved like the sails of a windmill.

So the talk continued until daybreak, when the skipper, knocking at the cabin door, informed us that the schooner was ready to sail; so we all went on deck, where the kindly merchants bade us good-bye, and hoped we should have a pleasant voyage.

"Keep the youngster out of mischief, Joseph. There's plenty of food for powder without using him," were Mr. Warren's last words as he stepped ashore, followed by his friend.

It was the first time I had been on board a ship, and I knew absolutely nothing of what the sailors were doing; but presently the boat began to move, the merchants, waving their hands, shouted a last good-bye, and very quickly we passed to the outer harbour.

I have been in many dangers and suffered numerous hardships since then, some of which are narrated in this book, but I have never felt quite so wretched and miserable as on the morning of our departure from Callao.

Wishing to divert my thoughts, José pointed out the beauties of the bay and the shore; but my gaze went far inland—to the lonely home where my mother sat with her grief, to the mighty cordillera where my father lay dead. Time softened the pain, and brought back the pleasures of life, but just then it seemed as if I should never laugh or sing or be merry again.

The first day or two on the *Aguila* did not tend to make me more cheerful, though the skipper did what he could to make us comfortable. We slept in a dirty little box, which was really the mate's cabin, and had our meals, or at least José had, at the captain's table.

By degrees, however, my sickness wore off, and on the fourth morning I began to take an interest in things. By this time the land was out of sight; for miles and miles the blue water lay around us—an interminable stretch. There was not a sail to be seen, and the utter loneliness impressed me with a feeling of awe.

José was as ignorant of seafaring matters as myself; but the captain said we were making a good voyage, and with that we were content. A stiff breeze blew the schooner along merrily, the blue sky was flecked only by the softest white clouds, and the swish, swish of the water against the vessel's sides sounded pleasantly in our ears. I began to think there were worse ways of earning a living than by going to sea.

That same evening I turned in early, leaving José on deck, but I was still awake when he entered the cabin.

"There's an ugly storm brewing," said he, kicking off his boots, "and I don't think the skipper much likes the prospect of it. He has all hands at work taking in the sails and getting things ready generally. Rather a lucky thing for us that the *Aguila* is a stout boat. Listen! That's the first blast!" as the schooner staggered and reeled.

Above us we heard the captain shouting orders, the answering cries of the sailors, and the

groaning of the timbers, as if the ship were a living being stretched on a rack. Slipping out of my bunk and dressing quickly, I held on to a bar to steady myself.

"Let us go on deck before they batten down the hatches," said José, putting on his boots again. "I've no mind to stay in this hole. If the ship sinks, we shall be drowned like rats in a trap."

He climbed the steps, and I followed, shuddering at the picture his words had conjured up. The scene was grand, but wild and awful in the extreme. I hardly dared to watch the great waves thundering along as if seeking to devour our tiny craft. Now the schooner hung poised for a moment on the edge of a mountainous wave; the next instant it seemed to be dashing headlong into a fathomless, black abyss. The wind tore on with a fierce shriek, and we scudded before it under bare poles, flying for life.

Two men were at the wheel; the captain, lashed aft, was yelling out orders which no one could understand, or, understanding, obey. The night, as yet, was not particularly dark, and I shivered at sight of the white, scared faces of the crew. They could do nothing more; in the face of such a gale they were helpless as babies; those at the wheel kept the ship's head straight by great effort, but beyond that, everything was unavailing. Our fate was in the hands of God; He alone could determine whether it should be life or death.

Once, above the fury of the storm, the howling of the wind, the straining of the timber, there rose an awful shriek; and though the tragedy was hidden from my sight, I knew it to be the cry of an unhappy sailor in his death-agony. A huge wave, leaping like some ravenous animal to the deck, had caught him and was gone; while the spirit of the wind laughed in demoniacal glee as he was tossed from crest to crest, the sport of the cruel billows.

The captain had seen, but was powerless to help. The schooner was but the plaything of the waves, while to launch a boat—ah, how the storm-fiends would have laughed at the attempt! So leaving the hapless sailor to his fate, we drove on through a blinding wall of rain into the dark night, waiting for the end. No sky was visible, nor the light of any star, but the great cloud walls stood up thick on every side, and it seemed as if the boat were plunging through a dark and dreary tunnel.

Close to me, where a lantern not yet douted [Transcriber's note: doused?] cast its fitful light, a man lay grovelling on the deck. He was praying aloud in an agony of fear, but no sound could be heard from his moving lips. Suddenly there came a crash as of a falling body, the light went out, and I saw the man no more. How long the night lasted I cannot tell; to me it seemed an age, and no second of it was free from fear. Whether we were driving north, south, east, or west no one knew, while the fury of the storm would have drowned the thunder of waves on a surf-beaten shore. But the *Aguila* was an English boat, built by honest English workmen, and her planks held firmly together despite the raging storm.

For long hours, as I have said, we were swallowed up in darkness, feeling ourselves in the presence of death; but the light broke through at last, a cold gray light, and cheerless withal, which exactly suited our unhappy condition. The wind, too, as though satisfied with its night's work, sank to rest, while by degrees the tossing of the angry billows subsided into a peaceful ripple.

We looked at each other and at the schooner. One man had been washed overboard; another, struck by a falling spar, still lay insensible; the rest were weary and exhausted. Thanks to the skipper's foresight, the *Aguila* had suffered less than we had expected, and he exclaimed cheerfully that the damage could soon be repaired. But though our good ship remained sound, the storm had wrought a fearful calamity, which dazed the bravest, and blanched every face among us.

The skipper brought the news when he joined us at breakfast, and his lips could scarcely frame the words.

"The water-casks are stove in," he exclaimed, "and we have hardly a gallon of fresh water aboard!"

"Then we must run for the nearest port," said José, trying to speak cheerily.

The captain spread out his hands dramatically.

"There is no port," he replied, in something of a hopeless tone, "and there is no wind. The schooner lies like a log on the water."

We went on deck, forgetting past dangers in the more terrifying one before us. The captain had spoken truly: not a breath of air stirred, and the sea lay beneath us like a sheet of glass. The dark clouds had rolled away, and though the sun was not visible, the thin haze between us and the sky was tinged blood-red. It was such a sight as no man on board had seen, and the sailors gazed at it in awestruck silence.

Hour after hour through the livelong day the *Aguila* lay motionless, as if held by some invisible cable. No ripple broke the glassy surface, no breath of wind fanned the idle sails, and the air we breathed was hot and stifling, as if proceeding from a furnace.

The men lounged about listlessly, unable to forget their distress even in sleep. The captain scanned the horizon eagerly, looking in vain for the tiniest cloud that might promise a break-up of the hideous weather. José and I lay under an awning, though this was no protection from the stifling atmosphere.

Every one hoped that evening would bring relief, that a breeze might spring up, or that we might have a downpour of rain. Evening came, but the situation was unchanged, and a great fear entered our hearts. How long could we live like this—how long before death would release us from our misery? for misery it was now in downright, cruel earnest.

Once José rose and walked to the vessel's side, but, returning shortly, lay face downward on the deck.

"I must shut out the sight of the sea," he said, "or I shall go mad. What an awful thing to perish of thirst with water everywhere around us!"

This was our second night of horror, but very different in its nature from the first. Then, for long hours, we went in fear of the storm; now, we would have welcomed the most terrible tempest that ever blew, if only it brought us rain.

Very slowly the night crept by, and again we were confronted by the gray haze, with its curious blood-red tint. We could not escape from the vessel, as our boats had been smashed in the hurricane; we could only wait for what might happen in this sea of the dead.

"Rain or death, it is one or the other!" remarked José, as, rising to our feet, we staggered across to the skipper.

Rain or death! Which would come first, I wondered.

The captain could do nothing, though I must say he played his part like a man—encouraging the crew, foretelling a storm which should rise later in the day, and asserting that we were right in the track of ships. We had only to hold on patiently, he said, and all would come right.

José also spoke to the me cheerfully, trying to keep alive a glimmer of hope; but as the morning hours dragged wearily along, they were fain to give way to utter despair. No ships could reach us, they said, while the calm lasted, and not the slightest sign of change could be seen. Our throats were parched, our lips cracked, our eyes bloodshot and staring. One of the crew, a plump, chubby, round-faced man, began talking aloud in a rambling manner, and presently, with a scream of excitement, he sprang into the rigging.

"Sail ho!" he cried, "sail ho!" and forgetting our weakness, we all jumped up to peer eagerly through the gauzy mist.

"Where away?" exclaimed the captain.

The sailor laughed in glee. "Oho! Here she comes!" cried he; "here she comes!" and, tearing off his shirt, waved it frantically.

The action was so natural, the man seemed so much in earnest, that we hung over the schooner's side, anxiously scanning the horizon for our rescuer. Again the fellow shouted, "Here she comes!" and then, with a frenzied laugh, flung himself into the glassy sea.

A groan of despair burst from the crew, and for several seconds no one moved. Then José, crying, "Throw me a rope!" jumped overboard, and swam to the spot where the man had gone down.

"Come back!" cried the skipper hoarsely; "you will be drowned! The poor fellow has lost his senses." But José, unheeding the warning, clutched the man as he came to the surface a second time.

We heard the demented laugh of the drowning sailor, and then the two disappeared—down, down into the depths together.

"He has thrown his life away for a madman!" said the captain, and his words brought me to my senses.

With a prayer in my heart I leaped into the sea, hoping that I might yet save the brave fellow.

A cry from the schooner told me that he had reappeared, and soon I saw him alone, and well-nigh exhausted. A dozen strokes took me to his side, and then, half supporting him, I turned toward the vessel. The men flung us a rope, and willing hands hauled first José and then me aboard.

"A brave act," said the skipper gruffly, "but foolhardy!"

José smiled, and, still leaning on me, went below to the cabin, where, removing our wet things, we had a good rub down.

"Thanks, my boy!" said José, "but for your help I doubt if I could have got back. The poor beggar nearly throttled me, down under!" and I noticed on his throat the marks of fingers that must have pressed him like a vice.

"Do you feel it now?" I asked.

"Only here," touching his throat; "but for that, I should be all the better for the dip. Let us go on deck again; I am stifling here. And keep up your spirits, Jack. Don't give way the least bit, or it will be

all over with you. We are in a fearful plight, but help may yet come." And I promised him solemnly that I would do my best.

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF THE "AGUILA."

The drowning of the crazy sailor had a bad effect on the rest of the crew, and it became evident that they had abandoned all hope. They hung about so listlessly that even the captain could not rouse them, and indeed there was nothing they could do.

This utter inability to help ourselves was the worst evil of the case. Even I, though only a boy, wanted to do something, no matter what, if it would help in the struggle for life; but I, like the rest, could only wait—wait with throat like a furnace, peeling lips, smarting eyes, and aching head, till death or rain put an end to the misery.

I tried not to think of it, tried to shut out the horrible end so close at hand; but in vain. José sat beside me, endeavouring to rouse me. It must rain, he said, or the wind would spring up, and we should meet with a ship; but in his heart I think he had no hope.

The day crawled on, afternoon came, and I fell into a troubled sleep. The pain of my throat directed my wandering thoughts perhaps, and conjured up horrible visions. I was lashed to the wheel of the *Aguila*, and the schooner went drifting, drifting far away into an unknown sea. All was still around me, though I was not alone. Sailors walked the deck or huddled in the forecastle—sailors with skin of wrinkled parchment, with deep-set, burning yet unseeing eyes, with moving lips from which no sound came; and as we sailed away ever further and further into the darkness, the horror of it maddened me. I struggled desperately to free myself, calling aloud to José to save me. Then a hand was laid softly on my forehead, and a kind, familiar voice whispered,—

"Jack! Jack! Wake up. You are dreaming!" Opening my eyes I saw José bending over me, his face stricken with fear. My head burned, but my face and limbs were wet as if I had just come from the sea. "Get up," said José sharply, "and walk about with me. You must not dream again."

It seems that in my sleep I had screamed aloud; but the sailors took no notice of me either then or afterwards. They had troubles enough of their own, and were totally indifferent to those of others.

The red tinge had now gone from the haze, leaving it cold and gray; the sea was dull and lifeless, no ripple breaking the stillness of its surface.

"Is there any hope, José?" I asked in a whisper, and from his face, though not from his speech, learned there was none.

The captain had stored two bottles of liquor in the cabin for his own use. These he shared amongst us; but it was fiery stuff, and even at the first increased rather than allayed our thirst. Most of the crew were lying down now; but one had climbed to the roof of the forecastle, and stood there singing in a weak, quavering voice. José spoke to him soothingly; but he only laughed, and continued his weird song. His face haunted me; even when darkness closed like a pall around us I could still see it. He sang on and on in the gloom, and it appeared to me that he was wailing our death-chant. Presently there was silence, followed by a slight shuffling sound as the man moved to another part of the deck; then the song began again, and was followed by a burst of uncanny laughter. Suddenly it seemed as if the poor fellow realized his position, as he broke into a sob and called on God to save him.

Making our way to the other side of the vessel, we found him sitting disconsolately on a coil of rope, and did our best to cheer him. The skipper joined us, but no other man stirred hand or foot. Apparently their terrible suffering had overpowered all feeling of sympathy.

"Don't give way," said José brightly, laying a hand on his shoulder; "bear up, there's a good fellow. Rain may fall at any moment now, and then we shall be saved."

"Ah, señor," cried the poor fellow huskily, "my throat is parched, parched; my head is like a burning coal! but I will be quiet now and brave—if I can."

"This is terrible," exclaimed the captain piteously, as after a time we turned away.

"Hope must be our sheet-anchor," said José. "Once cut ourselves adrift from that, and we shall go to ruin headlong."

He spoke bravely, but his words came from the lips only, and this we all knew. Sitting down on a coil of rope, we waited for the night to pass, longing for yet dreading the appearance of another dawn. It was dreadfully silent, except when some poor fellow broke the stillness with his groans and cries of anguish.

It was, as nearly as I could judge, about one o'clock in the morning, when José suddenly sprang to his feet with a cry of joy.

"What is it?" I asked; and he, clapping his hands, exclaimed,—

"Lightning! See, there is another flash.—Get up, my hearties; the wind's rising. There's a beautiful clap of thunder. We shall have a fine storm presently!"

One by one the men staggered to their feet. They heard the crash of the thunder, and a broad sheet of lightning showed them banks of cloud gathering thick and black overhead. Directed by the captain and helped by José, they spread every sail and awning that could be used, collected buckets and a spare cask, and awaited the rain eagerly and expectantly. Would it come? Fiery snakes played about the tops of the masts or leaped from sky to sea; the thunder pealed and pealed again through the air; the wind rose, the sails filled, the schooner moved through the water, but no rain fell.

I cannot tell you a tithe of the hopes and fears which passed through our hearts during the next half-hour. Now we exulted in the certainty of relief; again we were thrown into the abyss of despair. We stood looking at the darkness, hoping, praying that the life-giving rain might fall speedily upon our upturned faces.

Another terrific crash, and then—ah, how earnestly we gave thanks to God for His mercy—the raindrops came pattering to the deck, lightly at first, lightly and softly, like scouts sent forward to spy out the land, and afterwards the main body in a crowd beating fiercely, heavily upon us. How we laughed as, making cups of our hands, we lapped the welcome water greedily! What cries of delight ascended heavenward as we filled our spare cask and every vessel that would hold water! The rain came down in a steady torrent, soaking us through; but we felt no discomfort, for it fed us with new life.

Presently the captain got some of the men to work, while the others ate the food which had lain all day untasted, and then, doubly refreshed, they relieved their comrades. José and I, too, ate sparingly of some food; but even this little, with the water, made new beings of us.

As yet the wind was no more than a fair breeze, but by degrees it became boisterous, and the crew, still weak and now short of three men, could barely manage the schooner. José and I knew nothing of seamanship, but we bore a hand here and there, straining at this rope or that as we were bidden, and encouraging the crew to the best of our ability.

As yet we gave little thought to the new danger that menaced us, being full of thanks for our escape from a horrible death; but the fury of the storm increased, the wind battered against the schooner in howling gusts, and presently the topgallant mast fell with a crash to the deck. Fortunately no one was hurt, and we quickly cut the wreckage clear; but misfortune followed misfortune, and at length, with white, scared face, the carpenter announced that water was fast rising in the hold.

Here, at least, José and I were of service. Taking our places at the pumps, we toiled with might and main to keep the water down. Thus the remainder of the night passed with every one working at the pumps or assisting the captain to manage the vessel.

Morning brought no abatement of the storm, but the light enabled us to realize more clearly how near we were, a second time, to death. The rain still poured down in torrents, the wind leaped at us with hurricane fury, the schooner tossed, a helpless wreck, in the midst of a mountainous sea. The carpenter reported that, in spite of all our labours, the water was fast gaining on us. The sailors now lost heart, and one of them left his post, saying sullenly they might as well drown first as last. It was a dangerous example, but the skipper checked the mischief. Running forward with loaded pistol, he shouted,—

"Go back to the pumps, you coward, or I will shoot you down like a dog! Call yourself a man? Why, that youngster there is worth fifty of you!"

The fellow returned to his work; but as the hours passed we became more and more certain that no amount of pumping would save the ship. Even now she was but a floating wreck, and soon she would be engulfed by the raging sea.

While José and I were taking a rest, the captain told us that, even should the storm cease, the *Aguila* must go down in less than twenty-four hours, and that he knew not whether we were close to the shore or a hundred leagues from it. José received the news coolly. He came of a race that does not believe in whimpering, and his only care was on my account.

"I am sorry for your mother, Jack," said he, "and for you too. We're in a fair hole, and I don't see any way of getting out; but for all that we will keep our heads cool. Never go under without a fight for it—that's as good a motto as any other. You heard the skipper say the schooner is bound to go down, and you know we have no boats—they wouldn't be any good if we had, while this storm lasts; but if the sea calms, a plank will keep you afloat a long time, and maybe a ship will come along handy. Anyhow, make a fight for it, my boy. Now we'll have a snack of something to eat, and then for another spell at the pumps."

By this time a feeling of despair had seized the crew, and but for fear of the captain's pistol they would have stopped work in a body. However, he kept them at it, and towards noon the tempest ceased

almost as suddenly as it had begun. The gale dropped to a steady breeze, and the surface of the ocean became comparatively calm.

The change cheered us; we looked on it as a good omen, and toiled at the pumps even harder than before. We could not lessen the quantity of water, but for a time we kept it from gaining, and a germ of hope crept back into our hearts. Every hour now was likely to be in our favour, as the captain judged the wind was blowing us to some part of the coast, where we might either fall in with a vessel or effect a landing. Thus, between hope and fear, the afternoon passed, and then we saw that the captain's judgment was correct.

Straight before us, though far off as yet, appeared the dark line of coast with a barrier of mountains in the background, and in front a broad band of snow-white foam.

Would the schooner cover the distance? If so, would she escape being dashed to pieces in the thundering surf? These were the questions which agitated our minds as, impelled by the breeze, she drove through the water. We of ourselves could do nothing save work at the pumps and wait for what might happen.

Afternoon merged into evening, and evening into night. A few stars peeped forth in the sky, but were soon veiled by grayish clouds. The broad white band along the shore was startlingly distinct, and still the issue was undecided.

The end came with such unexpected suddenness that the men hardly had time to cry out. José and I were resting at the moment, when the schooner lurched heavily, tried to right herself and failed, filled with water, and sank like a stone.

I often think of that shipwreck as a horrible dream. Down, down I went, holding my breath till it seemed impossible to stay longer without opening my mouth and swallowing the salt water. By an effort I restrained myself till my head shot above the surface and once more I was free to breathe.

The ship had disappeared entirely, and it was too dark to see such a small object as a man's head. By great good fortune I managed to seize a floating spar, and, resting on it, called aloud for José. The only answer was the anguished cry of a drowning man across the waste of waters. Twice again it came, and then all was silent, though in imagination I still could hear that anguished cry. The sea rolled in long surges, carrying me forward without effort and at a great rate toward the clear white line. Live or die, I could not help myself now, but was entirely at the mercy of the waves. I thought of José's advice to make a fight for it, but there was nothing to be done. Clinging to my spar, I was tossed from crest to depth like a ball bandied about by boys.

And now my ears were filled with a great roaring as I approached nearer to the crested foam; then feeling that the end was very near, I prayed silently yet fervently that God would comfort my mother in this her new trial, and prepared myself to die.

From the top of a high wave I went down into the depths, rose again to the crest of a second huge roller, and then was flung with the velocity of lightning into the midst of the great sea-horses with their snowy manes.

Of this part of the adventure I remember but little, only that for a moment I lay bruised and battered at the foot of a high rock.

Once more José's advice sounded in my ear, and loosing my spar, I clambered, dizzy and half blind, to the top. The ramping white horses raced after as if to drag me back, but finding that impossible, retired sullenly to spring yet once again. Shrieking and hissing, the great white monsters tore along, dashing in fury and breaking in impotence against the immovable rocks. The wild, weird scene, too, frightened me; for I was but a boy, remember, who up to this had never met with a more stirring adventure, perhaps, than a tussle with a high-spirited pony. I was worn out, too, by hard toil, faint from loss of blood, saddened by the loss of my faithful José, and by the awful calamity that had overtaken the crew of the schooner. Yet, in spite of all, so strong was the instinct to live, that, almost without thought, I clambered along the rocky ridge which jutted out from the mainland, while the baffled waves raced hungrily on either side of me, as if even now loath to abandon their expected prey.

At length the line of white foam was at my back. I found myself on a boulder-strewn beach, and for the time safe! Although half dead with privation and exposure, I wandered some way along the beach, calling aloud on José and the sailors, forgetful that the roar of the surf drowned my voice.

Presently I could go no further, the beach in that direction being walled in by a rocky cliff, steep and high, and but for a narrow fissure upon which I happily came, insurmountable.

I say happily, for at the summit of the cliff I fancied I saw the flash of a lantern. A lantern meant human beings, who on hearing my story would search the shore, and find, perhaps, that others besides myself had escaped from the wreck. With this idea in my head, I began to climb, going very steadily; for, as I have said, the track was little more than a fissure in the rock, and my head was far from clear. I toiled on, cutting my hands and legs with the jagged rocks, but making some progress, till at length I had covered the greater part of the distance; then I could do no more. A tiny crevice gave me foothold, and I was able to rest my arms on a wide ledge, but had no strength to draw myself up to it. Twice I tried and failed; then fearful lest my strength should give way, I strove no more, but, raising my voice, shouted loudly for help. Very mournful the cry sounded in the silent night, as I hung there utterly

helpless on the face of the cliff.

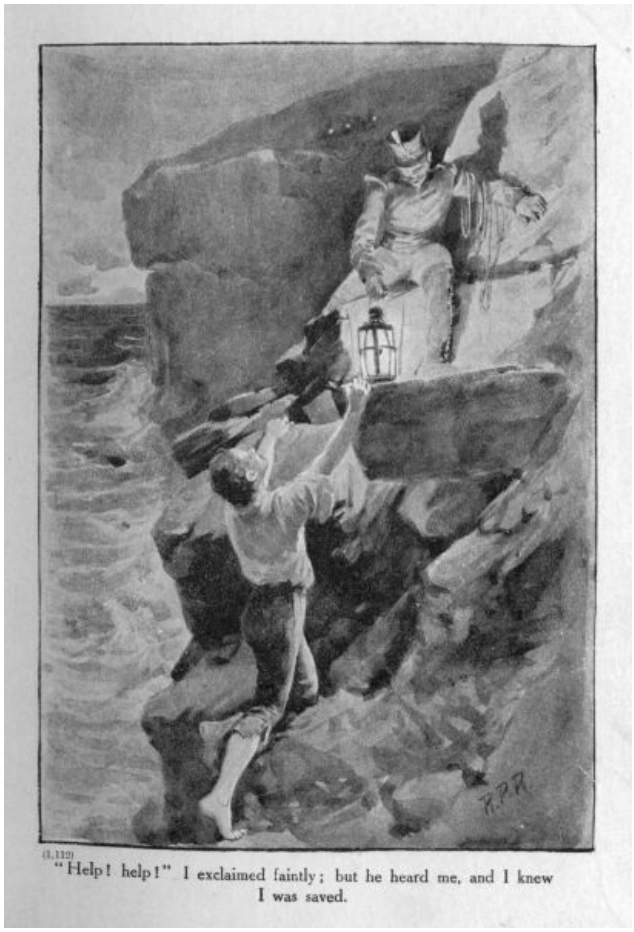
Again and again I shouted with all my might, to be answered at first only by the roar of the surf below. Presently, on the summit of the cliff, not far above me, a lantern flashed, then another, and another, and a voice hailed me through the darkness.

"Help!" I cried, "help!" and my voice was full of despair, for my strength was fast ebbing. I must soon lose my hold, and be dashed to pieces at the foot of the cliff.

The lanterns flashed to and fro above me. Would they never come nearer? What was that? A big stone bounding and bouncing from rock to rock whizzed past my head, and disappeared in the gloom below. Collecting all my strength, I shouted again, fearing that it must be for the last time.

But now—oh, how sincerely I gave thanks to God!—a light had come over the edge of the cliff, and though moving slowly, it certainly advanced in my direction. Yes, I saw a man's outline. In one hand he carried a lantern, in the other a noosed rope, and he felt his way carefully.

"Help! help!" I exclaimed, faintly enough now; but he heard me, and I knew I was saved. Putting the lantern on the ledge and grasping the collar of my coat, he got the noose round my body under the arms, and those above drew me up.



"Help! help!" I exclaimed faintly; but he heard me, and I knew I was saved.

"Help! help!" I exclaimed, faintly; but he heard me, and I knew I was saved.

The lanterns showed a group of men in uniform, who crowded around me as I reached the top; but being uncertain how long my strength would last, I cried,—

"A wreck! Search the beach. There may have been others washed ashore."

Upon this there was much talking, and then two men carried me away, leaving their companions, as I hoped, to search for any chance survivors.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SILVER KEY.

It would be hard for me to tell just what happened during the next day or two. I did not lose

consciousness altogether, but my nerves were so shattered that I mixed up fact and fancy, and could hardly separate my dreams from events which actually took place.

On the third or fourth day my senses became clearer I lay on a bed in a small cell-like apartment. In the opposite corner was a mattress, with a blanket and rug rolled neatly at the head; above it, on the wall, hung a sword and various military articles, as if the room belonged to a soldier.

Presently, as I lay trying to recall things, the door was pushed open, and a man entered. He was young; his face was frank and open, and he had fine dark eyes. He was in undress uniform, and I judged, rightly as it turned out, that he was a Spanish officer. Seeing me looking at him, he crossed to the bed, and exclaimed in the Spanish tongue, "Are you better this morning?"

I nodded and smiled, but could not speak—my throat hurt me so.

"All right!" he cried gaily. "Don't worry; I understand," and at that he went out, coming back presently with the military doctor.

Now I had no cause, then or afterwards, to love the Spaniards; but I hold it fair to give even an enemy his due, and it is only just to say that this young officer, Captain Santiago Mariano, treated me royally. In a sense I owed my life to him, and I have never forgotten his kindness.

As my strength returned he often sat with me, talking of the wreck, from which I was apparently the only one rescued. Three men, he said, had been washed ashore, but they were all dead. Two were ordinary sailors, and from his description I easily recognized the third as Montevo, the skipper.

There was a rumour, the young officer continued, that a man had been picked up by some Indians further along the coast; but no one really knew anything about it, and for his part he looked on it as an idle tale.

There was small comfort in tills; yet, against my better judgment, I began to hope that José had somehow escaped from the sea. He was a strong man and a stout swimmer, while for dogged courage I have rarely met his equal.

One morning Santiago came into my room—or rather his—with a troubled expression on his face. I was able to walk by this time, and stood by the little window, watching the soldiers at exercise in the courtyard.

"Crawford," said he abruptly, "have you any reason to be afraid of General Barejo?"

Now, until that moment I had not given a thought to the fact that in escaping one danger I had tumbled headlong into another; but this question made me uneasy. As far as safety went, I might as well have stayed at my mother's side in Lima as have blundered into a far-off fortress garrisoned by Spanish soldiers.

"I ought not to speak of this," continued Santiago, "but the warning may help you. Did you hear the guns last night?"

"Yes," said I, wondering.

"It was the salute to the general, who is inspecting the forts along the coast."

"I have heard my father speak of General Barejo."

"Well, after dinner last evening the commandant happened to speak of your shipwreck, and the general was greatly interested. 'A boy named Crawford?' said he thoughtfully; 'is he in the fort now?' and on hearing you were, told the commandant he would see you in the morning. This is he crossing the courtyard. He is coming here, I believe."

I had only time to thank Santiago for his kindness when the general entered the room. He was a short, spare man, with closely-cropped gray hair and a grizzled beard. His face was tanned and wrinkled, but he held himself erect as a youth; and his profession was most pronounced.

The young captain saluted, and, at a sign from the general, left the room.

Barejo eyed me critically, and with a grim smile exclaimed, "By St. Philip, there's no need to ask. You're the son of the Englishman Crawford, right enough."

"Who was murdered by Spanish soldiers," said I, for his cool and somewhat contemptuous tone roused me to anger.

He smiled at this outburst, and spread out his hands as if to say, "The boy's crazy;" but when he spoke, it was to ask why I had left Lima.

"Because I had no wish to meet with my father's fate," I answered brusquely; and he laughed again.

"Faith," he muttered, "the young cockerel ruffles his feathers early!" and then, again addressing me, he asked, "And where were you going?"

"On a sea voyage, for the benefit of my health—and to be out of the way."

To this he made no reply, but his brows puckered up as if he were in deep thought. I stood by the window watching him, and wondering what would be the outcome of this visit.

After a short time he said, slowly and deliberately, so that I might lose nothing of his speech, "Listen to me, young sir. Though you are young, there are some things you can understand. Your father tried, and tried hard, to wrest this country from its proper ruler, our honoured master, the King of Spain. He failed; but others have taken his place, and though you are only a boy, they will endeavour to make use of you. We shall crush the rebellion, and the leaders will lose their lives. I am going to save you from their fate."

I thought this display of kindness rather strange, but made no remark.

"In this fortress," he continued, "you will be out of mischief, and here I intend you shall stay till the troubles are at an end."

"That sounds very much as if you mean to keep me a prisoner!" I exclaimed hotly.

"Exactly," said he; then turning on his heel he walked out.

From the window I watched him cross the courtyard and enter the commandant's quarters. Ten minutes afterwards Santiago appeared with a file of soldiers.

"Very sorry, my boy," said the young captain, coming into the room, "but a soldier must obey orders. You are my prisoner."

"I couldn't wish for a better jailer," said I, laughing.

"I'm glad you take it like that, but unfortunately you won't be under my care. Have you all your things? This way, then."

We marched very solemnly side by side along the corridor, the soldiers a few paces in the rear. At the end stood a half-dressed Indian, holding open the door of a cell.

"Oh, come," said I, looking in, "it's not so bad."

The cell was, indeed, almost a counterpart of Santiago's room, only the window was high up and heavily barred. The furniture consisted of bedstead and rugs, a chair, small table, and one or two other articles. The floor was of earth, but quite dry; and altogether I was fairly satisfied with my new home.

"You'll have decent food and sufficient exercise," said the captain, who had entered with me; "but"—and here he lowered his voice to a whisper—"don't be foolish and try to escape. Barejo's orders are strict, and though it may not appear so, you will be closely guarded."

"Thanks for the hint," said I as he turned away.

The Indian shut the door, the bolts were shot, the footsteps of the soldiers grew fainter, and I was alone.

I shall not dwell long on my prison life. I had ample food, and twice a day was allowed to wander unmolested about the courtyard. The general had gone, and most of the officers, including Santiago, showed me many acts of kindness, which, though trifling in themselves, did much towards keeping me cheerful.

Several weeks passed without incident, and I began to get very tired of doing nothing. There seemed to be little chance of escape, however. Every outlet was guarded by an armed sentry, and I was carefully watched. One day I dragged my bedstead under the window, and making a ladder of the table and chair, climbed to the bars. A single glance showed the folly of trying to escape that way without the aid of wings. That part of the fort stood on the brink of a frightful precipice which fell sheer away for hundreds of feet to the rocky coast.

Of course I had no weapon of any kind, but the Spaniards had allowed me to keep the silver key, which hung around my neck by a thin, stout cord.

I had almost forgotten the mountaineer's strange words, when a trifling incident brought them vividly to my mind. One morning the Indian, as usual, brought in my breakfast, and was turning to go, when he suddenly stopped and stared at me with a look of intense surprise. He was a short, stout, beardless man, with a bright brown complexion and rather intelligent features.

"Well," I exclaimed, "what is it? Have I altered much since yesterday?"

The man bent one knee, and bowing low, exclaimed in great excitement, "It is the key!"

Then I discovered that, my shirt collar being unfastened, the silver key had slipped outside, where it hung in full view.

"Yes," said I, "it is the key right enough. What of it?"

His eyes were flashing now, and the glow in them lit up his whole face.

"What is the master's name?" he whispered eagerly.

Now this was an awkward question for me to answer. In the first place, the man might or might not be trustworthy; and in the second, the only name I knew was that of the bandit chief. However, I concluded the venture was worth making, and said, "Men call the owner of the key Raymon Sorillo."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Indian, with a sigh of satisfaction, "he is a great chief. Hide the key, señor, and wait. A dog's kennel is no place for the friend of our chief."

With that he went out, and the door clanged after him, while I stood lost in astonishment. What did he mean? Was it possible that he intended to help me? Thrusting the mysterious key out of sight, I sat down to breakfast with what appetite I could muster. All that day I was in a state of great excitement, though at exercise I took care to appear calm. I waited with impatience for the evening meal, which, to my disgust, was brought by a strange soldier.

"Hullo!" I exclaimed, "a change of jailers? What has become of the other fellow?"

"The dog of an Indian is ill," answered the man, who was evidently in a very bad temper, "and I have his work to do."

Placing the things on the table, he went out, slamming the door behind him, and shooting the bolts viciously. The next morning he came again, and indeed for four days in succession performed the sick man's duties.

Now you may be sure I felt greatly interested in this sudden illness. It filled me with curiosity, and to a certain extent strengthened my hope that the Indian intended to help me to escape from the fort. What his plans were, of course I could not conjecture.

On the fifth night I undressed and lay down as usual. It was quite dark in the cell, and the only sound that reached me was the periodical "All's well!" of the sentry stationed at the end of the corridor. For a long time I lay puzzling over the strange situation, but at length dropped into a light sleep.

Suddenly I was awakened by a queer sensation, and sat up in bed. It was too dark to see anything, but I felt that some one was creeping stealthily across the floor. Presently I heard a faint sound, and knew that the object, whatever it might be, was approaching nearer. At the side of the bed it stopped, and a muffled voice whispered, "Señor, are you awake?"

"Yes," said I. "Who's there?"

"A friend of the silver key. Dress quickly and come with me; the way is open."

"Where is the sentry?" I asked.

"Gagged and insensible," replied the voice. "Quick, while there is yet time."

Perhaps it was rather venturesome thus to trust myself in the hands of an unknown man, but I slipped on my clothes, and keeping touch of his arm, accompanied him into the dimly-lighted corridor.

Turning to the left, we glided along close to the wall. At the end of this passage the body of the sentry lay on the ground, while near at hand crouched an Indian, keeping watch.

This man joined us, and my guide immediately led the way into an empty room, the door of which was open. As soon as we were inside he closed it softly.

"Keep close to me," he whispered, and then said something to an unseen person in a patois I did not understand.

Presently he stopped, and I could just distinguish the figure of a third man, who, grasping my hand, whispered, "The silver key has unlocked the door, señor."

Before I could recover from my astonishment—for the man who spoke was the sick jailer—my guide let himself down through a trap-door, and called to me to follow. I found myself on a flight of steep steps in a kind of shaft, very narrow, and so foul that breathing was difficult. At the bottom was a fair-sized chamber, with a lofty roof—at least I judged it so by the greater purity of the air—and here the guide stopped until his companion caught up with us. The jailer, to my surprise, had remained in the fort, but there was no time for explanation.

The exit from the chamber was by means of an aperture so low that we had to lie flat on the ground, and so narrow that even I found it hard work to wriggle through.

Of all my adventures, this one impressed itself most strongly on my mind. People are apt to smile when I speak of what one man called "crawling along a passage;" yet had the terrors of the journey been known beforehand, I think I could hardly have summoned the courage to face them.

We went in Indian file, I being second, and my shoulders brushed the sides of what was apparently a stonework tube. There was not a glimmer of light, and the foul air threatened suffocation at every

yard. I could breathe only with great difficulty, my throat seemed choked, I was bathed in perspiration, while loathsome creatures crawled or scampered over every part of me.

Before half the distance was covered—and I make the confession without shame—I was truly and horribly afraid. However, there was no turning back—indeed there was no turning at all—so I crawled on, hoping and praying for light and air.

Presently I caught sight of a dull red glow like that from a burning torch, my breath came more easily, and at the end of another hundred yards the guide, rising to his feet, stood upright: we had arrived at the exit from the tunnel. Clambering up, I once more found myself in the open air, and was instantly followed by the second Indian. Two other men waited for us, and the four, with some difficulty, rearranged a huge boulder which effectually blocked the aperture.

Then the light from the torch was quenched, and I was hurried off in the darkness. For an hour perhaps we travelled, but in what direction I had no idea. At first we had the roar of the thundering sea in our ears, but presently that grew faint, until the sound was completely lost. The route was rocky, and I should say dangerous; for the guide clutched my arm tightly, and from time to time whispered a warning.

At last he stopped and whistled softly. The signal was heard and answered, and very soon I became aware of several dusky figures, including both men and horses. No time was wasted in talk; a man brought me a horse, and a loose cloak with a hood in which to muffle my head. I mounted, the others sprang to their cumbrous saddles, and at a word from the guide we set off.

The route now lay over a desert of loose sand, in which the animals sank almost to their fetlocks; every puff of wind blew it around us in clouds, and but for the hood I think I must have been both blinded and choked.

I have not the faintest idea how the leader found his way, unless it was by the direction of the wind, as there were no stars, and it was impossible to see beyond a few yards.

Hour after hour passed; dawn broke cold and gray. The choking sand was left behind, and we approached a narrow valley shut in by two gigantic ranges of hills. Here a voice hailed us from the rocks, the guide answered the challenge, and the whole party passed through the defile to the valley beyond.

It was now light enough to observe a number of Indian huts dotted about on both slopes; and the horsemen who had formed my escort quickly dispersed, leaving me with the guide.

"We are home," said he, "and the dogs have lost their prey."

Dismounting and leading the horses, we approached a hut set somewhat apart from the rest. An Indian boy standing at the entrance took our animals away while we entered the hut.

"Will you eat, señor, or sleep?" asked my rescuer.

"Sleep," said I, "as soon as you have answered a question or two."

I cannot repeat exactly what the man told me, as his Spanish was none of the best, and he mixed it up with a patois which I only half understood. However, the outline of the story was plain enough, and will take but little telling.

My late jailer belonged to the Order of the Silver Key, a powerful Indian society, acting under the leadership of Raymon Sorillo. He had been placed in the fort both as a spy on the garrison and to assist comrades if at any time they endeavoured to capture the stronghold by way of the secret passage. Only the commandant and his chief officer were supposed to know of its existence, but a strange accident had revealed it to the Indians some years previously.

The jailer, of course, could have set me free, but in that case he must have joined in my flight. The plan he adopted was to communicate with his friends, and then, by feigning illness, to divert suspicion from himself. As soon as we descended the steps, he replaced the trap-door, removed all signs of disturbance, and crept cautiously back to his room.

When the Indian had finished his explanation, I asked him to what place he had brought me.

"The Hidden Valley," he replied, "where no Spaniard has ever set foot. Here you are quite safe, for all the armies of Peru could not tear you from this spot."

"Does Sorillo ever come here?" I asked.

"Rarely; but his messengers come and go at their pleasure."

"That is good news," I remarked, thinking of my mother. "I shall be able to get a message through to Lima. And now, if you please, I will go to sleep."

He spread a rug on the earth floor, covered me with another, and in a few minutes I was fast asleep, forgetful even of the dismal tunnel and its horrible associations.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HIDDEN VALLEY.

Perhaps my Indian host overstated the case, but he could not have been far wrong in saying that no stranger had ever succeeded in finding the Hidden Valley.

Let me describe the coast of Peru, and then you may be able to form some idea of the district between the Spanish fortress and my new home. The coast is a sandy desert studded with hills, and having in the background stupendous ranges of towering mountains. From north to south the desert is cut at intervals by streams, which in the rainy season are converted into roaring rivers. Little villages dot the banks of these streams, and here and there are patches of cultivated land.

From one river to another the country is for the most part a dreary desert of sand, where rain never falls nor vegetation grows—a dead land, where the song of a bird is a thing unknown. Sometimes after a sandstorm a cluster of dry bones may be seen—the sole remains of lost travellers and their animals. At times even the most experienced guides lose the track, and then they are seen no more. Over such a desert I had ridden from the fort, and the Indians assured me that, even in broad daylight, I could not go back safely without a guide.

As for the valley itself, it was comparatively nothing but a slit in the mass of mountains. A river ran through it, and the water was used by the Indians to irrigate the surrounding land. Their live stock consisted chiefly of oxen and horses, and the principal vegetables cultivated were maize and coca. You may not know that this coca is a plant something like the vine, and it grows to a height of six or eight feet. The leaves are very carefully gathered one by one. They are bitter to the taste, however, and as a rule strangers do not take kindly to coca. The Indian is never without it. It is the first thing he puts into his mouth in the morning, and the last thing that he takes out at night. He carries a supply in a leathern pouch hung round his neck, and with this and a handful of roasted maize he will go a long day's journey. I had never chewed coca before, but soon got into the habit of doing so, much to the delight of my new friends.

My stay in the Hidden Valley, although lasting nearly two years, had little of interest in it. The Indians treated me with every respect. I was lodged in the best house, and was given the best fare the valley produced. Within the valley I was master, but I was not allowed to join any of their expeditions, and without their help it was impossible, as I have explained, to get away.

Their advice to stay quietly in my hiding-place was indeed the best they could give. I was quite safe, the Spanish soldiers in the fort being unable to follow me, and indeed, as we gathered from the spy, quite at a loss to account for my escape. Away from the valley, too, I should be utterly helpless. I could not return to Lima, and without money there was little chance of making my way into Chili.

The two things that troubled me most were José's fate and my mother's unhappiness. At first I had ventured to hope that my friend still lived; but as the weeks and months passed without any tidings, I began to look upon him as dead. The Indians thought it certain I should never see him again.

As to my mother, she would be in no particular uneasiness until the time came for the return of the *Aguila*; but I dreaded what would happen when Mr. Maxwell had to confess the schooner was overdue, and that nothing had been heard of her. Many miserable hours I spent wandering about the valley, and thinking how my mother would watch and wait, hoping against hope for some tidings of the missing ship.

One night—it was in the December of 1819—I had gone to bed early, when an unusual commotion in the valley caused me to get up. My Indian host had already gone out, so, putting on my things, I followed.

Naturally my first thought was of the Spaniards; but the natives, though flocking towards the entrance to the valley, did not appear alarmed. Several of them carried torches, and a strange picture was revealed by the lurid flames.

On the ground lay a horse so weak and exhausted that it could barely struggle for breath. Close by, supported in the arms of two Indians, was the rider, a short, rather stout man of brown complexion. His eyes were glazed as if in death. Blood gushed from his ears and nostrils, his head hung limply down: it was hard to believe that he lived.

The natives gabbled to each other, and I heard the words frequently repeated, "Sorillo's messenger!" Then an old, old woman—the *mother* of the village—tottered feebly down the path. In one hand she carried a small pitcher, and in the other a funnel, whose slender stem they inserted between the man's teeth. In this way a little liquid was forced into his mouth, and presently his bared breast heaved slightly—so slightly that the motion was almost imperceptible.

However, the old woman appeared satisfied, and at a sign from her the stricken man was carried slowly up the path. One native attended to the horse, and the rest returned to their huts, talking excitedly of what had happened.

"Is that a messenger from Raymon Sorillo, Quilca?" I asked my host.

"Yes," said he, "and he has had a very narrow escape. He has been caught in a sandstorm. Perhaps he lost the track. Perhaps the soldiers gave chase, and he went further round to baffle them. Who knows? But we shall hear to-morrow."

"Then he is likely to recover?"

"Yes; the medicine saved him. Didn't you see his chest move?"

"Yes," I replied, thinking that but a small thing to go on.

"That showed the medicine was in time," returned Quilca. "It has begun its work, and all will be well."

Quilca spoke so confidently that, had I been the patient, I should have started on the road to recovery at once.

"Will he stay here long?" I asked.

"Who knows?" replied Quilca. "The chief gives orders; the servants obey."

"But he will return at some time?"

"It is likely."

"And will he take a message to my mother, do you think?"

"Oh yes," said the Indian; "I had forgotten. Besides"—and he touched the cord supporting the silver key—"he is your servant, as I am."

For three days the messenger was too weak to explain his errand; but the medicine worked wonders, and at the end of a week he sent for Quilca and the other leading men of the tribe.

What orders he brought I did not learn; only my host told me that the rising to which they looked forward had been put off. The Chilians were not ready, and could not be in Peru for at least another six months.

Quilca was dreadfully disappointed; but the chief had spoken, and his word was law. Indeed, it was most extraordinary to see with what reverence his commands were treated. Had it been his pleasure, I am sure his followers would have willingly gone to certain death.

On the day following this I visited the messenger, who, on seeing the silver key, bowed low before me.

"What are my lord's commands?" asked he humbly.

"They are very simple," I replied. "In a short time you are returning to your chief. Say to him that Juan Crawford is safe in the Hidden Valley, and ask him to tell Señora Maria Dolores Crawford at Lima so. Can you remember that?"

The blood mounted into the man's face as he said, "I will remember." Then he added in quick, eager tones, "Are you the son of Don Eduardo?"

"He was my father."

At that the man bent again and kissed my hand, saying,—

"Señor, he was our best friend. He loved our people, and when he was killed there was much weeping in the villages of the Indians."

"He gave his life for you," said I slowly.

"As we will give ours for his son," answered the man; and no one hearing him could have doubted the sincerity of his words.

At the end of a fortnight he was strong enough to travel, and his last words as he struck into the narrow pass were, "I shall not forget, señor."

After his departure I felt much easier. True, there was a terrible journey before him, which hardly one man in a thousand could hope to accomplish successfully; but he was a daring and plucky rider, used alike to desert and mountain. Then, too, any Indian on the route would give him food and shelter, and warn him of any lurking soldiers.

He would relate my story to Raymon Sorillo, and I knew that the gigantic chief would carry the

news to my mother. I no longer fretted at being shut up in the valley, but passed my time merrily with the boys and younger men of the tribe, learning their patois, riding, and practising shooting with the musket, and with bow and arrow.

On my fifteenth birthday Quilca organized some sports, and though not gaining a first prize in any event, I performed so creditably that the Indians were delighted with my prowess.

"The young chief will make a warrior," said they, and I felt proud of their praise.

Let me try to give you a picture of myself at that time. I was tall for my age, standing five feet five inches in height. I had curly dark hair, cut rather short, and brown eyes. My face was tanned through exposure to the weather and regular exercise had made my muscles hard as iron. Like my companions, I wore a short woollen jacket, dark in colour, and breeches open at the knees, and caught up with strips of coloured cotton. My cap was of wool gorgeously embroidered; dark woollen stockings without feet covered my legs, and in place of boots I had a pair of goatskin sandals. Thrown over my left shoulder was a small poncho, which dangled like the cloak worn by some of our cavalry soldiers.

Some time during the month of April Sorillo's messenger returned, bringing me two letters—one from my mother, the other from the chief.

I need not say how eagerly I opened the first. It was very long, consisting of several closely-written pages, but it did not contain a word too much. I read it over and over again, until I could almost say it by heart. No word had reached Lima of the wreck of the *Aguila*; but the British merchants, though bidding my mother be of good cheer, had put the schooner down for lost. My message had shown their fears to be well grounded, but at the same time it had carried joy and thankfulness to my mother's breast.

"I grieve for poor José," she wrote, "but I thank God every hour for your safety."

The letter from Sorillo was brief. After saying how glad he was to get my message, he went on,—

"For the present, stay in the Hidden Valley; there is no safer place in Peru. The fruit ripens slowly, and even yet is not ready for plucking. San Martin has not left Valparaiso, and little beyond skirmishing will be done this year."

Apparently, however, he had sent definite orders to the tribe, as from this date I noticed a great difference in our hitherto peaceful abode. Every man went armed day and night, scouts were posted on the mountains, and swift riders scoured the desert for miles.

Once, too, a band of horsemen, twenty strong, led by Quilca, left the valley at night. I could not learn their business, because Quilca said they were acting under the secret orders of the great chief. They were absent three days, and when, in the gray dawn of the fourth morning, they rode back up the valley, three were missing. The leader had a bloodstained bandage round his head, and several men bore signs of a fierce conflict.

"You are hurt?" said I, as Quilca dismounted.

"It is nothing," replied he carelessly.

"And three of your followers have not returned!"

"It cost six lives to kill them," he answered, with fierce satisfaction, passing into the hut.

This expedition was followed by others, and from the talk in the valley I gathered that Sorillo had started the Indians on the war-trail. Already the Spaniards were safe only in large numbers, for on every weak and isolated detachment the fierce mountaineers swept down like hawks on their prey.

Now and again they were beaten off; but this did not happen often, because they knew the number of their enemy almost to a man, and had learned the most effective method of attack. Generally speaking, the little body of Spanish soldiers had no chance whatever, either of flight or of victory.

From time to time strange and startling rumours reached us. In September we heard that the Chilian army had landed on the coast, and soon afterwards that the Englishman Cochrane had swept the Spanish fleet from the seas. José had often spoken of this daring sailor, who, after performing many glorious deeds in the British navy, had taken command of the Chilian fleet, and had done much to make Chili independent of Spain. Now, with his ships and sailors, he was helping to do the same for Peru.

On hearing these things I became impatient, not wishing to remain cooped up in the valley while the Liberating Army was marching on Lima.

However, my deliverance, though slow in coming, came at length, but before that time I had a most startling surprise. One morning, in the last week of January 1821, I had gone out very early, half expecting to see Quilca returning from one of his excursions. Most of the Indians were astir, when suddenly a man came running from the mouth of the pass.

"Here they are!" he cried; "here they are!"

We pushed down quickly to meet them, I in the very front. Quilca appeared first, riding slowly, as if

his horse were tired out. His men, lolling on their animals, followed, some of them with closed eyes and half asleep.

Presently I caught sight of Sorillo's messenger, nearly at the end of the line; and then I opened my eyes wide, thinking they had played me false. Was I awake, or was I dreaming? Was I—

"Jack!"

That settled it! The Indians stared in astonishment, as with a startled cry I ran past them to where in the rear a man had jumped from his horse to the ground.

"José!" I cried, "José!" and for the life of me could say no more, but stood staring at him as if he had been some strange, unnatural animal.

Had I the skill of an artist, I should love to draw his face as he looked into mine. It was strong and firm and purposeful, but the gray eyes softened into almost womanly tenderness.

"Why, Jack," said he, shifting the reins and laying a hand on my shoulder, "you're quite a man! Your mother would be proud of you!"

"Have you seen her?" I asked.

"Yes; all's well at home. But we'll talk of that later on. So you've turned Indian, eh?"

"It's better than living in a cell!"

"So it is; and you didn't go down in the ship, after all?"

"No; but I must tell you the story when you've had something to eat. Give your horse to this youngster, and now come on to Quilca's hut; you must be tired."

"I was," replied he, "but the sight of you woke me up. I wondered if you'd be waiting to see the braves come home. That Quilca of yours is a born soldier. He'd make a good general if they didn't train him!"

He rattled on, and I listened, glad just to hear the sound of his voice, without reference to what he said.

Quilca bade us welcome to the hut, and his womenfolk brought in the food and drink they had prepared.

José, as I have said, knew the Indian patois, which during the meal, he used for the benefit of our host, whose Spanish was rather halting. He talked of the war, and told how the Chilians had landed, and how the Royalists were broken up and in full retreat. The campaign, he said, was as good as over, and San Martin could be President of Peru any day he chose.

At that I was much astonished, for knowing the Spanish leaders, I had expected them to fight to the death; but it was pleasing news, all the same, and I began to speculate on how soon we should be in Lima.

After breakfast José had a long nap, and then I took him for a stroll in the valley, where we could talk without interruption.

I was anxious to hear about my mother, but first I told my own story—the rescue by the Spanish soldiers, the coming of General Barejo, and the power of the silver key, as also the escape by the underground passage, just as I have related it here.

"Barejo's a dangerous man," remarked José thoughtfully. "He'll spend the last drop of blood in his body to keep this country for Spain. He's Loyalist and Royalist to the core. It's a pity, too, because he is fighting for a lost cause."

"The more honour to him!" I answered warmly.

"Just so," exclaimed José, with a queer smile; "but, all the same, he makes things more difficult for us."

"Well, put him on one side now. Tell me your own adventures, and where you were when my message reached Lima."

"On the way there. When the schooner foundered, I reckoned it was all over. I went down to a great depth, but, as luck would have it, came up just clear of a broken mast. One of the sailors was holding to it, and I joined him, though without any hope of being saved. You know I'm pretty strong, but I was helpless in that wild sea. The waves just flung me about anyhow. The other chap lasted an hour or two, when down he went with a scream, and I heard no more of him. But I needn't dwell on the horrors of that night; you had a strong taste of them yourself. About daybreak I was flung like a spent ball on to a sandy beach. I had just strength to crawl a few yards further up, and then collapsed. It seems some Indians carried me away, and nursed me back to health, but for weeks I was wild as a loon. They searched the coast, but found nothing, and I concluded you were at the bottom of the sea. Then I got a

passage to Pisco in a coasting brig, and from there made my way overland to Callao."

"Where you heard I was alive?"

"Yes; I hardly know whether I stood on my head or my heels when I was told. It was old Mr. Warren who informed me. I went to him because I dared not go to your mother. I was afraid that—"

"All right; I understand."

"So I went to Warren, and he began a long yarn; but as soon as he said you were alive, I was off like a shot to Lima."

Then he talked of my mother, repeating the messages she had given him, and I could have listened for hours. As it was, I plied him with questions, asking this and that—if my pony was well; had he seen Rosa Montilla; was my mother less sad; and a hundred other things, many of them trivial enough, yet full of interest to me.

At the end I asked how he had found his way to the Hidden Valley.

"Oh!" replied he with a jolly laugh, "that was simple. I hunted up your black-browed bandit, who passed me on to one of his band. How he found the way I can't tell you, but he brought me along all right."

"And now what are we going to do?"

"Well, that depends. If the Spaniards give in, we can just go quietly back home."

"And if they don't?"

"Well, in that case—"

"We must join General San Martin!" I exclaimed.

"I suppose so," he said, half reluctantly. "You're only a boy, but there are many youngsters of your age with the army, and you've a big stake in the country. But we can afford to let that matter stand for a day or two longer."

CHAPTER VI.

WE LEAVE THE HIDDEN VALLEY

Now, before proceeding with my story, it will be well to mention here one piece of information which José, not caring, perhaps, to add to my troubles, did not give me. Indeed, very little was said about it at any time, for reasons which will be clear to any one who makes himself acquainted with this narrative.

On the very morning after my flight from Lima, a servant of the government paid my mother a visit of official importance. He brought with him a notable document full of curious legal phrases, which, put in simple language, meant that all my father's vast estates had been confiscated and given over to that loyal and worthy Spaniard Don Felipe Montilla. As an act of mercy, my mother was permitted to retain the house and grounds at Lima during her lifetime.

In presenting this famous letter, the messenger was, of course, only doing his duty, but it is certain that in some way he failed in the respect due to a noble lady. He may have been one of those mean-spirited people who delight in trampling on the fallen. There are, strange to say, many such in the world.

My mother never alluded to the incident, which was related to me by Tomas Peraza, an old and faithful servant, next in importance to José himself.

"The man had been with my lady nearly an hour," said he, in describing the event, "when her bell rang, and I went into the room. She stood in the centre of the apartment, her cheeks very red, and her eyes flashing like summer stars.

"'Peraza,' she exclaimed, 'our house has fallen very low, but even so its members brook insolence from no man. Bid my servants bring stout sticks and chastise this rude fellow back to the place from which he came!'

"You may be sure that I lost no time in obeying. The fellow drew his sword even in the presence of a lady; but it was knocked from his grasp, and we drove him from the grounds with blows and buffets. It was a strange spectacle, and the people came flocking to us in crowds. At first they would have interfered, but on hearing me cry, 'This for insulting the Donna Maria Crawford!' they desisted. And in

this way we pursued him right to the Government House, where he flung himself upon the protection of the soldiers."

It was a harsh measure, perhaps; but then no man should be wanting in respect to a woman, and the fellow had but himself to blame.

José, as I have said, withheld the news, or I should have gone at all risks to Lima. As it was, I stayed contentedly in the valley, waiting until the Indians received the signal to move.

From that time we heard rumours of hard fighting in various parts of the country, and about the middle of March 1821 a messenger arrived from Raymon Sorillo. He brought the order for thirty men to march to Pisco, on the sea-coast, where a small patriot detachment had landed under the command of Colonel Miller.

"A countryman of ours, Jack," remarked José, "and, from what I hear, one of the finest fellows in South America. The patriots think almost as much of him as they do of the famous Lord Cochrane."

"What is he like?"

"I haven't seen him; but he is quite young—not twenty-four yet—though he has been soldiering for the last eight years. He served under Wellington in Spain, fought all through the Chilian War, was Cochrane's right-hand man at the capture of Valdivia, and now he has come to help us. He has been shipwrecked, taken prisoner, wounded times out of number, blown up by a powder explosion—after which he was confined for six weeks in a dark room and fed through a plaster mask—and nearly killed by fever. I should say he has crowded as much excitement into his life as any man in the world."

"He seems to be a lively customer!"

"He is," laughed José; "and nothing will ever kill him, in my opinion!"

"Don't you think we might join him?" I asked, my blood being fired by José's description.

"Well," said my companion, after a pause, "that's what I was about to suggest. You must throw in somewhere, and I'm not over anxious for Sorillo to get hold of you. He's a cruel fellow, though kind enough to us, and all the cut-throats in the country are likely to flock to him. I'm sorry for the Spaniards who fall into his hands!"

Quilca was rather opposed to our plans, but finding us determined, he at last agreed that we should accompany him on the next expedition.

Day had but just broken when we rode from the valley and I turned to take a farewell glance at the place which had been my home so long. I had not been altogether unhappy there, yet I was glad to go into the world again, to take the first step on the road to Lima and my mother.

The march to Pisco passed without incident. We suffered horribly, it is true, from thirst, and from choking, blinding sandstorms; but there were no Spaniards in that desolate district to bar our way.

A few hours' march from the town we fell in with some Indian scouts, and learned from them that the Patriots lay encamped in the Chincha Baja, a beautiful valley. Our joy at these tidings was, however, soon dashed by the report that they were in a deplorable condition—suffering from fever and ague, and unable to move.

The gloomy picture was not overdrawn. The valley was a hospital, but almost destitute of doctors and medicine. The sentries, selected from the strongest of the troops, could barely stand, staggering even under the weight of their muskets. Privates and officers alike were prostrate, and a score of strong men could have killed them all without effort.

As it chanced, the enemy, stationed in an adjoining valley, though suffering less severely, were in no condition to make an attack, and the two parties could do no more than idly watch each other.

Ordering his men to dismount, Quilca went to find an officer, and soon returned with the startling intelligence that the colonel himself lay dangerously ill in one of the huts.

"Not an encouraging start!" I remarked.

"A bad beginning often makes a good ending," answered José cheerfully. "Let us go to see him."

The doctor, a Spaniard, was attending his patient when we entered the hut, and he beckoned us toward the bed.

I could not repress a start at the sight which met our eyes. The colonel was turning restlessly but feebly from side to side; his eyes were unnaturally bright; his cheek bones stood out sharp and prominent. He mumbled to himself in short snatches, but so faintly that only a word here and there reached us.

Once he smiled pleasantly, saying, "Yes, I see the steeple! Dear old Wingham!"

I did not at that time understand the allusion, but afterwards it became plain that he referred to his

home, the home of his childhood, a place called Wingham, in Kent.

"Do you know," said José sharply, turning to the doctor, "that your patient is dying?"

"Perfectly; but what can I do?" replied he. "He is suffering from the tertian ague; the valley is permeated with it."

"We must get him out of it," said José, with decision.

"But where will you take him? the town is as bad."

"On shipboard, and give him a sea-breeze."

"The Chilian squadron is absent, cruising."

"Then we must beg, borrow, or steal a trading-vessel; for go he must and shall."

It was wonderful how the doctor brightened up at these words, and still more wonderful how he allowed himself to be commanded by a stranger. But José was a strong man though not often exerting his strength, and there was that in his face which made most men chary of coming to handgrips with him.

"Come, Jack," said he, "let us go to the bay and find a ship, if we wish to save the colonel's life. Another week of this pestilence and he will be dead, and Peru can't afford to lose him just yet."

"But suppose," said I, as we rode away from the valley, "that the authorities won't allow him to be moved?"

"Why, we'll move him in spite of them. Quilca's men can be trusted to help us. 'Twill be a little campaign on our own account!" said he, with a jovial laugh.

Even José, however, could not impress a vessel that had no existence, and the bay was empty. A few boats only lay peacefully resting on the placid waters, but of a ship there was no sign. We stood for an hour staring seaward, as if our will could conjure up a vessel, and then returned to the town. We paid a visit to the governor, but he could not help us. It was unlikely there would be a vessel, he said, until Lord Cochrane returned with the squadron from Callao.

"When will that be?" I asked.

The governor gave his shoulders an expressive shrug.

"The gallant Englishman does not confide in me," he replied. "He may come to-day; he may not come for a twelvemonth."

It was getting late now, and nothing further could be done till the following morning. José was disappointed, but in no way disheartened.

"If we can't get what we want," said he, "we must be satisfied with what we can get. There's a fine bit of philosophy for you!"

"And what can we get?"

"A house at the seaside. We'll look for a sheltered place on the beach to-morrow, bring down some men to build a hut, and have the colonel removed to it. With the sea air filling his lungs, he may yet have a chance of recovery."

Instead of returning to camp, we slept that night at Pisco, and after an early breakfast went again to the beach. José had just selected an admirable spot for the hut, when we suddenly heard a shout of "Sail ho! sail ho! There's another—and another! Why, it must be Cochrane's squadron!"

In an instant we were gazing seaward, and there, sure enough, rounding the corner of the bay, were several vessels, led by a stately ship.

By this time a number of people had assembled, and more were coming in hot haste from the town. They talked and gesticulated violently—the majority, I observed being doubtful if the incoming vessels were friends or foes.

As they drew nearer, however, all misgiving vanished, every one agreeing that the leading ship was the *San Martin*, so named in honour of the great general.

"The luck's with us!" cried José joyfully. "Before nightfall we'll have the colonel on board one of those craft. How beautifully the admiral's ship is handled! she comes sweeping in like a great sea-bird."

"Hadn't we better get a couple of men to pull us out to her? she'll anchor soon."

"The very thing! we can't afford to lose time."

Our arrangements did not take long to make, and we were soon speeding across the bay, our crazy boat being propelled by two wiry Indians. The whole squadron was now well within the bay, the smaller

craft lying close in, and flying the Chilian colours; but José directed the boatmen to pull for the flagship.

"*San Martin* ahoy!" he yelled, standing up in the stern and hailing the ship in what he believed to be sailor fashion.

"Hullo! Who are you?" came the answer.

"Is Admiral Cochrane on board?"

"Well, he was a minute ago."

"Throw a rope, will you? we're coming up."

This conversation was carried on in English, for many officers in the Chilian navy were Englishmen; and now the man on the *San Martin* exclaimed, "Well, you're a cool customer anyhow! Walt a bit while I tell the captain."

"Hang the captain!" roared José; "it's a matter of life and death." And those on deck, seeing how terribly in earnest he was, flung over a rope, and we scrambled up the ship's side.

"Now, my man," exclaimed a sharp voice, "what is it you are in such a tremendous hurry about?"

"I want to see Lord Cochrane immediately," said José.

"His lordship is engaged in his cabin. Give your message to me."

"I prefer to manage my own business, thank you," replied José coolly. "Tell the admiral I have come from Colonel Miller."

As he finished speaking, a distinguished-looking officer, accompanied by several others, appeared on deck, and I knew instinctively that we were in the presence of the famous Admiral Cochrane, whose marvellous exploits had gained for him the admiration of the world.

Hearing the name of Miller, he stopped, and looking at us, said, "What is that about Colonel Miller?"

"He is dying, sir!" exclaimed José, as much at ease with an admiral as with a private sailor. "His men are all down with ague, and the colonel will be dead inside a week unless you remove him at once."

"Mr. Welsh," remarked the admiral to a handsome young fellow standing near, "this is your affair. Do whatever you think best; but remember, I would rather lose a ship than Miller. He's the one man we can rely upon ashore." Then looking at us, he added, "You are not soldiers?"

"This lad," replied José, pointing to me, "is Jack Crawford. His father was one of the largest landowners in Peru, and a great patriot. The Spaniards shot him some time ago, and the boy has been hiding ever since. Yesterday we arrived at Pisco to join the detachment there, as volunteers, and found the colonel delirious with fever. A few days longer in camp will finish him."

"He shall be removed at once," exclaimed the Admiral.—"Captain Wilkinson, will you order a boat to be lowered!" and then he began to question José further concerning the condition of the troops.

Very quickly the boat was got ready, Mr. Welsh took his seat, and at his suggestion we followed, giving instructions to our own men to return to shore.

"Are you a doctor?" asked José of our companion.

"Yes; I am Lord Cochrane's private surgeon, though, fortunately, he gives me but little work to do," and he laughed merrily. I have said that he was a handsome fellow, with a boyish, fresh-coloured face, and bright, sparkling eyes. He talked to us cheerfully about the campaign, and would not allow that Colonel Miller was in danger of dying.

"You don't know him as well as we do," he said, with a laugh. "Most men who had been through what he has would be dead already; but Miller stands alone. The last time we brought him from Pisco he had a ball in the right arm, another had smashed his left hand, while a third had gone through his chest, fractured a rib, and passed out at the back. Of course we gave him up, but he pulled through comfortably."

"Well, he is pretty bad now," said José significantly.

"He'll be leading a bayonet charge in a month," laughed the young surgeon, "if the war lasts as long. For my part, I expect it to be over sooner."

"I had no idea," said I, "that the Spaniards would be beaten so easily."

"The odds are all against them, you see. Lord Cochrane has scooped up their navy, San Martin is waiting to pounce on Lima, they have to watch General Bolivar in the north, and most of the people are in favour of the revolution. Hullo! here we are! I suppose you'll come with me to the camp?"

"Yes," said José, "and back to the ship if you will let us. We can do no good here."

"All right. I daresay we can find you a berth."

The young surgeon came near to losing his self-possession when he saw the actual state of things.

"Whew!" exclaimed he, "this will have to be altered. Why, the men are dying on their feet! And I suppose it's the same old story—not enough doctors, no proper attendants, and musty drugs. Well, we'll clear the colonel out of it first, and then see what can be done for the others."

While he attended to his patient, we had a litter made ready, in which the colonel was placed and carried to the water's edge, where the ship's boat was in waiting. The sailors rowed steadily and well, and we soon had the satisfaction of seeing the sick man comfortably installed in one of the ship's cabins.

Lord Cochrane showed the greatest concern at his old friend's shocking condition, and did everything possible to help forward his recovery.

As it chanced, I was much in the sick man's cabin; the doctor, to whom I had taken a singular liking, using me as a sort of assistant. In the early evening he went ashore with the admiral, who also took José with him, and together they visited the sick camp. It was late when they returned, but our patient had suffered no hurt during their absence. Indeed he lay very still and quiet, while from time to time I wiped the sweat from his brow and gave him cooling drinks.

José did not come into the cabin again, but I heard from the doctor that it had been decided to bring the soldiers on board, in the hope that a sea voyage would set up their strength. Our own particular Indians returned to the Hidden Valley, but in the course of a day or two the rest of the troops were embarked on the flagship. Then we stood out to sea, bearing southward, the other vessels of the squadron taking the opposite direction.

Thanks partly to the young surgeon's skill, but chiefly, perhaps, to his own marvellous constitution, the colonel began to mend slowly. The fever abated, he was able to take some nourishing food, and at last a day came when we carried him on deck.

It was extraordinary to behold the joy with which his appearance was greeted, not only by his own troops, but by every man on board. Some of them knew him only by report, but most of the sailors had witnessed his daring deeds, while the marines had taken part in them.

The officers, too, from the admiral downward, came about him, and though too weak as yet for much talk, he acknowledged their kindness by a charming and fascinating smile.

At the end of an hour the doctor gave orders that he should be carried back to his cabin, saying with a laugh, "That's enough excitement for the first day, colonel. Mustn't overdo it, you know."

Whether it was the bracing effect of the fresh sea air, or the sight of his men's most obvious improvement, I know not, but from that day his strength increased with astonishing rapidity.

During this period of convalescence he talked with me a good deal, and in the kindest manner, so that shortly I became as ardent a hero-worshipper as the others. He sent for José, too, thanked him for his prompt action, and declared that in a sense he was indebted to him for his life.

"But," said he, smiling, "I don't know yet who you are, or how you came to turn up at Pisco just at the right moment!" Whereupon José gave him an outline of our story.

He listened attentively, and at the end said, "I have heard of your father, my boy, through General San Martin, who will be glad to make your acquaintance. Meanwhile I shall charge myself with your welfare—that is, if you care to share my fortunes."

"I ask for nothing better, sir," I replied, flushing with pleasure. "There is no leader I would rather choose to follow."

"Then you shall have your wish," said he, "unless the general finds other work for you."

CHAPTER VII.

WHOM THE GODS LOVE DIE YOUNG.

It was, I believe, Lord Cochrane's desire to land his troops close to the port of Arica; but two unsuccessful attempts having been made, the plan was abandoned.

Colonel Miller, who had by this time resumed his duties, next transferred his men to two small

schooners captured from the enemy, and having taken on board food and water sufficient for twenty-four hours, set sail for the Morro de Sama, a miserable port ten leagues north of Arica.

José and I accompanied him, as did also, to my great delight, the young doctor. Our two vessels were crazy craft: they had only temporary rudders, and it was impossible to steer with any degree of accuracy. Owing to this the trip occupied just double the calculated time, so that on landing we were half dead with hunger and thirst. The soldiers still suffered somewhat from the effects of the ague: their legs tottered under them, and at first they could not march longer than half an hour at a time without lying down to rest.

You must not, however, suppose that we were at all downhearted on this account. The men had the greatest confidence in their leader, while the gaiety and high spirits of the young doctor acted as a fine tonic. He was full of quips and cranks, and his merry sayings brought a smile to the faces of even the most wearied.

A winding path three miles in length brought us to the summit of a steep mountain, where we stopped awhile to rest, and to enjoy the refreshing breeze.

"Well, Crawford," exclaimed the doctor cheerfully, when we once more resumed the march, "how do you like being on active service? A pleasant change, isn't it, from being cooped up on board ship?"

At the moment I hardly agreed with him, but I made an effort to reply to his banter.

Only to a few of us was the really desperate nature of our expedition known. Of the Spaniards we entertained no manner of fear; the sole terror lay in the route to be traversed. We were already parched by thirst, and more than twenty miles of sandy desert lay between us and water.

Nor was this all. Only one man knew the route, and years had gone by since he had last travelled over it. If his strength or memory failed, it might well happen that the dreary desert would be our burial-place and the loose sand our winding-sheet. It was not exactly a cheering prospect, but we made the best of it.

The colonel marched at the head of his men, the doctor at the rear, so that he might assist any unfortunate stragglers, while José and I went forward with the guide.

With frequent halts for rest we ploughed our way through the shifting sand, our eyes aching and our throats terribly dry.

About midnight, as near as I could judge, the guide stopped irresolutely.

"What is it?" asked José, in an excited whisper; "what is wrong?"

We could not see the fellow's face, but he seemed very agitated, and there was a break in his voice as he answered,—

"I don't know—I am not sure—but I can't be certain that we are on the right track."

The words sounded like a sentence of death, and I could hardly repress a cry of horror.

"Be still!" whispered José; "the men must not know. Stay here a minute while I ask the colonel to halt. That will give us a little breathing-space."

He was soon back, and taking the guide's arm, he exclaimed,—

"Now come, get your wits about you, and let us see what can be done. Where do you think we ought to be?"

"I don't know," replied the guide helplessly. "The saints preserve us, or we are lost!"

"Now look here," said José sternly: "you are giving way, and that won't do. Pluck up your courage, man, and remember that all our lives are in your hands."

I think, perhaps, this awful responsibility had much to do with breaking the guide down. He wrung his hands and groaned, saying aloud that he had brought us to death.

"But we aren't dead yet," I remarked, "and needn't be if only you will collect your wits. Come, let us cast about a bit; maybe you'll find some landmark that will help you."

"No, no," he cried; "we may be right now, and if we stray away we shall certainly be lost. May the saints preserve us!"

I think the fellow would be there yet, but for the click of José's pistol and the stern ring in his voice as he said sharply,—

"This nonsense has to stop.—Take his arm, Jack.—Now go on without a word, until you can make up your mind one way or other about the route."

The next quarter of an hour was one of the worst in my life. The man stumbled this way and that, now going in a straight line, again turning to right or left, and all the time the troops in our rear were

resting in fancied security. I shuddered to think what would happen if the guide failed to locate the track. Suddenly he ran forward quickly, dragging me with him, and then uttered a joyful cry. We were at the foot of a sandy hillock of peculiar shape, much like, as far as I could tell, a truncated cone.

It was not high, but apparently of considerable circumference.

The guide laughed and wept like a man bereft of his senses, and then crying, "We are saved!" he straightway fell on his knees and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving. The strangely-shaped hillock showed him that thus far he had led us correctly; and although during the night he had several further twinges of alarm, he did not lose his nerve again.

As mile after mile was traversed our thirst became excruciatingly painful, and there was no chance of relief. Between us and the valley of Sama no drop of water would be found. Still we plodded on, parched and weary, until in the eastern sky the dawn rose slowly. For just a brief period we felt the cold, damp, but refreshing breath of morning, and then the hot sun added to our misery. Our heads were scorched by its burning rays, and we were almost blinded by the glare reflected from the deep, loose sand.

It was nearly nine o'clock when the guide, extending his arm, exclaimed, "Sama—water!" And looking ahead, we caught a glimpse of the cool green vegetation in the Sama valley.

Under other circumstances it would have been laughable to watch the effect produced by our near approach to the valley. What semblance of order the colonel had kept on the march vanished. Breaking their ranks, the men rushed forward eagerly in search of the welcome water. One who for the last mile had been crawling along, supported by the doctor, darted off like a champion runner, though he fell exhausted before covering half the distance. On reaching the sparkling stream, we all, without exception, flung ourselves down by the margin, and lapped the water like thirsty dogs.

Here we remained till the next day, being supplied with food by the people from Sama, who also procured for us about a dozen horses, two of which, I am thankful to say, fell to José and myself.

Most of the men, after eating and drinking, stretched themselves out on the grass, and were fast asleep in a moment; but our leader had much to do, and the cheery young doctor spent half his time in attending on the sick. In this José helped him. I wished to do so, but in truth the long march, and the want of food and water, had worn me out.

"Lie down and get some rest," said the doctor, "or you will be left behind to-morrow. We have another twelve leagues or so before us yet."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To a village called Tacna."

"We call it a town," laughed José. "Why, there are more than four thousand people living in it."

"Dear me," exclaimed the doctor good-humouredly, "what a considerable place!"

Attended by José, he passed on laughing, and I curled up in the sheltered nook which I had selected as bed and bedchamber in one. I know nothing of what happened after that until José, shaking my arm, told me to rise.

It was scarcely light; but the troops were already preparing their simple breakfast, for they had another long and tedious march before them.

"How do you feel, Jack?" asked José.

"All right, thank you," said I, giving myself a shake, "but tremendously hungry. I could eat a horse!"

At that he laughed, saying, "Before the campaign's over I daresay you will be glad to eat part of one"—a prophecy that was more than fulfilled.

Directly after breakfast the men were assembled, the colonel addressed them in a few stirring words, and the march began. We did not anticipate an attack, but a few sturdy and well-mounted peasants from Sama rode ahead to make sure that the route was clear.

Outside Tacna we were met by the inhabitants, who escorted us, with much noise and cheering, in triumph to the town.

"These worthy people are good patriots, Crawford," said the doctor, who was riding next me. "Hark how they cry 'Down with the Spaniards!' It is lucky for them that we are not part of the Spanish army."

"As to that," I answered, "it is as easy to shout for one side as for the other. It is only a matter of words, after all."

"Well," he laughed, "if cheers were bullets, we need not go short of ammunition."

We remained several days in Tacna, where I had the luck to be quartered on a wealthy Spanish merchant. It was most amusing to be in his company, as he hated us like poison, and, in spite of

himself, could hardly prevent his real sentiments from popping out at inconvenient times. However, either from fear or from policy, he treated me well, and during our stay in the town I lived on the best of everything. This was an agreeable interlude in the making of war, and suited me admirably.

Like all good things, it came to an end much too soon, and very suddenly. José, the doctor, and I had been spending an evening with one of the principal inhabitants, and on coming away met the colonel.

"I am pleased that you keep good hours," said he, with a smile. "We march at dawn. The Spaniards are moving in three detachments to intercept us; we must crush them one by one."

"Well," exclaimed the doctor pleasantly, "we can't grumble; we have had a pleasant breathing-space."

During our stay at Tacna we had received reinforcements, bringing our adventurous party up to four hundred and fifty, of which about a third part consisted of cavalry. The few days' rest had recruited our strength, and we set out in high spirits for Buena Vista, a tiny hamlet at the foot of the Cordillera.

As yet we had obtained no definite news of the enemy; but while we lay at Buena Vista, a native scout brought word that a strong Spanish force was stationed at Mirabe, a village some forty miles distant. The colonel's resolution was instantly taken, and as soon as day broke we were once more moving.

After we had left the valley, our route lay across a region where no blade of grass had ever grown. As far as the eye reached, the scene was one of utter desolation. The horses picked their steps gingerly, and the foot-soldiers stumbled along as best they could, tripping now and then over the stones and boulders that strewed the path. All day long, with intervals for rest, we tramped, and the coming of night still found us pursuing the tedious journey.

The last part was worse than the first. For six miles the road descended amidst steep rocks and mighty precipices. The pass was so narrow that we had to march in single file, each horseman on foot and leading his animal. Had the Spaniards caught us there, not a man would have escaped.

Slowly and carefully we descended in one long line, until at midnight we reached the rugged bank of the river which rushes through the Mirabe valley. In a hollow on the opposite side lay the village, and behind the mud walls surrounding the cultivated grounds were the Spaniards, little dreaming of our proximity.

"Now," exclaimed the colonel softly, "we have them in our power. We have but to cross the river and fall upon their camp."

He had already begun to give his orders, when the report of a pistol—fired, whether by accident or design, by one of our men—rang out, and all chance of a surprise vanished. The Spaniards, in alarm, began firing rapidly, though they could not see us, a thick wood stretching between them and the river.

"I'd hang that fellow," growled José. "He's either a fool or a rogue, and has completely spoiled the colonel's plans."

"Never mind," said the colonel cheerfully; "we must make new ones," and he immediately dispatched two rocket parties—one to the right, the other to the left—in order to engage the enemy's attention.

Meanwhile each mounted man, taking up a foot-soldier behind him, crossed the river, and then returned for another, until in a short time all had safely effected a passage. Then, unable to do more in the darkness, we lay down to wait for the coming of dawn.

Many of the men fell fast asleep in spite of the random firing, but my mind was busy with thoughts of the approaching fight.

About two o'clock, Dr. Welsh, who had been assisting the regular army surgeons, came and lay down beside me.

"Well, Crawford," said he, finding I was awake, "how do you like the music? Rather alarming at first, eh? But you'll get used to it. After hearing the bullets swish round your ears a time or two you'll think nothing of it."

"That may be," I replied, "but it is distinctly unpleasant just now."

He laughed, saying the fight would be only a skirmish at the most, and not worth considering.

"Are you going to stay with us?" I asked.

"Oh no," said he; "this is only a run ashore, just to stretch my legs a bit, you know. They get cramped on board ship. By George, those fellows intend serenading us till daybreak. Who's that on the other side of you—Craig?"

"Yes—sound asleep and snoring. I wish I were."

"Ah, no doubt he has a clear conscience. Take pattern by him, my boy."

"Thanks for the advice," said I, laughing; "it's very kind of you to offer it."

"It costs nothing," he answered banteringly; "which explains why so many people are willing to give it."

After a time I fell asleep, and did not waken till, at the first streak of dawn, an order was quietly passed through the lines for every man to hold himself in readiness.

José sat up, rubbed his eyes lazily, and declared that he could sleep another twenty-four hours.

"There's too much hurry and bustle about this kind of warfare," said he. "Why don't both sides agree to meet at a certain place, and to fight it out?"

"A famous plan, upon my word!" cried the doctor; "it would save no end of trouble."

"And get the business over quickly," said José, who was saddling up. "Hullo, there goes the colonel! I wonder if he ever gets tired?"

"No," laughed the doctor merrily; "he's made of iron."

The dawn was broadening now; and moving from the shelter of the wood, we saw the Spaniards on a level piece of ground about half a mile wide.

"They're trying to gain the ridge on the left," cried José; "that will give them the advantage."

But the colonel had seen the manoeuvre also, and flung his small body of cavalry at them with such force that they drew back, trying to retreat by the winding track through the mountains. Again they were intercepted, this time being forced to the edge of a precipitous cliff.

"By George," exclaimed the doctor, "they're in it now! It's neck or nothing with them."

All this time I had quietly sat on my horse, watching the phases of the fight. The scene was to me so extraordinary that I had no sense of fear. I was not upset even by the strange, wailing sounds made by the rushing bullets.

José and I were with the reserve cavalry; Welsh was at the colonel's side. The Spaniards fought with desperate courage, I could see that, and they pushed our men hard. Fallen soldiers dotted the level tract of ground. Some, raising themselves painfully, began to crawl back.

I make no pretence of giving an accurate description of the combat. To me it was a confused medley of men and horses inextricably mixed; of shining swords, of blinding red flashes; and my ears were deafened with the fierce cries and shouts of men spending their lives recklessly under the rising sun.

At last I saw the colonel raise his sword. Then he shouted something in Spanish, whereat, gathering up the reins in my left hand, I spurred my horse, to keep company with the rest.

"A firm seat, Jack; keep a firm seat!" cried a familiar voice in my ear; and there was José, riding as coolly as if taking a canter over the grounds of our park at home!

We were riding at no great pace, but all well together, when again the colonel's voice rang out, and we broke instantly into a gallop. Then in a flash I saw a body of Spanish cavalry drawn up to receive us, while from our left came a stinging hail of bullets.

A man close to me dropped his sword with a cry of pain, and the next moment his horse, taking the bit between its teeth, rushed madly to the front. I watched its progress with queer fascination. On it went, right through the Spaniards, who edged aside to let it pass, straight to the brink of the precipice, over which it fell, still carrying its hapless rider. It seemed to me that I heard his shriek, though that must have been fancy, as it could not have risen above the tumult of the fight.

"Forward!" roared the colonel, waving his sword, and the next instant we were in the midst of the throng. The young doctor was just in front of me, José on my right hand, and the men pressing close behind. I saw nothing of the fight save that part only which concerned myself. Again and again the shining steel was within a hair's-breadth of me—now at my head, now at my heart—while I was almost suffocated in the press.

Inch by inch, by sheer force of steel, we threaded our way through, re-formed on the further side, and, still headed by the colonel, dashed once more into the fray. This time the resistance was less obstinate. The Spaniards began to weary—to fall back, as if unable to hold their ground.

"Hurrah!" cried the young doctor, "hurrah! they're done for!"

I shall not easily forget the picture he made. His handsome face was flushed with excitement, his beautiful eyes were ablaze with light; he sat his horse erect as a young sapling. A handsomer or finer man could not have been.

I saw the tragedy from beginning to end, but could do nothing to prevent it. It was over quick as a flash of summer lightning. Before us rode a Spanish officer, calling fiercely on his men to come back. At the sound of the doctor's triumphant note he turned, and I saw his face black with anger.

"Ah, Englishman!" he cried savagely; and even as he spoke his left arm rose, there was a flash, a report, and the doctor fell forward on his horse's neck.

"See to him, Crawford!" cried the colonel huskily; and as I clutched the animal's bridle, the troopers swept on in hurricane fury, while from all parts of the battlefield there rose a cry of triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIENDLY OPPONENT.

I had known the young English doctor only a short time, but I had learned to love him as a dear friend. In the fight he had shown himself brave and fearless, but quite apart from this, his qualities endeared him to every one. He was always cheery and full of hope, even in our worst straits; he was tender-hearted as a child, and every sick or wounded soldier worshipped him for his unvarying attention and kindness.

He was not dead when, slipping from my horse, I placed my arm round him as well as I could to support him. I saw that his eyes were open, and that a beautiful smile lit up his face. For a second or two he recognized me and tried to speak, but this was beyond his powers. Then a change came swiftly and suddenly; the light faded from his eyes, his cheeks grew ashen gray, and though quite unfamiliar with death, I knew that his spirit had fled.

Some wounded Indians, staggering from the fight, helped me to place the lifeless body on the ground; and these poor, simple natives filled the air with their lamentations. The death of the brilliant young surgeon had deprived them of a good friend, and they were quick to show their grief.

The fight was now over. The majority of the Spaniards were either killed or captured; but no one took much pleasure in the well-earned little victory. From the chief to the meanest soldier in the detachment, every one mourned sincerely the loss of a trusty comrade.

On active service, however, one has not much time to spend in grieving. There were the dead to be buried, the wounded to be seen to, the prisoners to be secured, and then, after a short space for food and rest, we were marching in hot pursuit of the scanty remnant that had escaped.

"It's lucky," observed José, with a laugh, "that the colonel managed to procure a few horses."

"His command would have been one short without them," I replied.

We were by no means a smart-looking detachment. The officers rode on horseback, and a number of mules had been obtained for the men, who followed the system of *ride and tie*. Our clothes began to show signs of hard wear, we suffered much from hunger and thirst, and most of all from loss of sleep. This last was really a terrible hardship, and I noticed more than one poor fellow fall from his mule in a kind of stupor as I rode along.

However, by dint of pegging away, we arrived at the town of Moquegua just in time to capture most of the runaways, and then, utterly worn out and exhausted, gladly settled down for a few days' rest.

José and I were billeted in a house near the colonel's quarters, and the people gave us a warm welcome. They spread a good meal, to which we did ample justice, and then, although barely noon, we went straight to bed.

"I hope," exclaimed José as he lay down, "that we shan't be disturbed for a month. I can easily do with a month's sleep."

"The chances are," said I gloomily, "that the colonel will be knocking us up before we have fairly begun to dream." At which dismal prophecy José threatened me with all sorts of pains and penalties unless I held my peace.

As it happened, the colonel did not need us, and we actually slept without waking until nine o'clock the next morning, when, having made a hearty breakfast, we went to call upon the chief.

"Why, Crawford," exclaimed the colonel, smiling, "I thought you were lost!"

"Only in dreams, sir," I replied. "We've been catching up a little of our lost sleep. We did not know how soon we might be on the march again."

"So you made the most of your opportunity? Well, I don't blame you; but it is possible we shall make a long halt here."

"Possible," remarked José to me afterwards, "but not probable;" and events proved that, as far as we were concerned, he was right.

That evening the colonel invited us to dinner; but we had scarcely sat down when he was called away to speak to a messenger who had brought important news. He returned looking rather thoughtful, and, catching sight of José, exclaimed,—

"Craig, you are pretty well acquainted with the Indian dialects, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," answered José readily; "I can manage to talk with most of the natives."

"Then you are the very man I want. I'll tell you all about it after dinner. Mustn't send you off without satisfying the inner man, eh?"

José glanced at me with a smile, as much as to say, "I wasn't very far out this morning;" while I was all curiosity as to what the business might be.

As soon as we had finished, the colonel and José had a very earnest and confidential talk, after which my companion rejoined me, and together we left the room.

"What is it?" I asked anxiously; "anything of importance?"

"Rather, unless the Indian has made a mistake. La Hera is hiding with a few wounded men in the mountains, not a dozen miles away."

This was the Spanish leader whom we had defeated at Mirabe. He was a bold, dashing soldier, and a firm Loyalist, whose capture would deal the enemy a heavy blow.

"Get the horses ready," said José, "while I pick out a few men. We mustn't make a mess of this affair, or the colonel won't trust us again. And don't mention where we are going, up at the house. I daresay the folks are all right, but what they don't know they can't tell."

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Outside the colonel's quarters. Now, off with you, we've no time to waste."

The horses had benefited by their unusually long rest, and having saddled them with the help of one of our host's servants, I led them into the street. José soon appeared with a dozen mounted men, wild, fierce-looking fellows, and all natives.

Presently the guide came out, and directly afterwards the colonel, who spoke a few words, telling us that we were bound on an important errand, which he trusted we should accomplish successfully. Then the guide placed himself, on foot, beside José's horse, and we moved off.

He led us at first, purposely, in a wrong direction, in case of prying eyes, turning back at the end of a mile or so, and then steering across a wild and lonely desert track. Having covered nearly a dozen miles, we came to a tiny hamlet at the foot of the mountains. Halting here, we left our horses in charge of two men and pressed forward on foot.

Fortunately, in one way though not in another, it was a moonlight night, and we could see where to step. All around us towered huge mountains, grim and forbidding. We marched in single file by the edge of steep precipices, so close sometimes that we seemed to hang over the awful abyss. Further and further we penetrated into the dreary recesses. We seemed to be a body of ghosts traversing a dreary world. No man spoke; we heard the cry neither of bird nor of animal. The only sound to break the eerie silence was the occasional clatter of a stone, which, loosened by our passage, rolled over into the unknown depths.

I looked neither to right nor to left, but kept my gaze fixed on José, who walked before me. The track narrowed down so that it hardly afforded footing for one, and I prayed in my heart that we might soon come to a better vantage-ground.

I was no coward, and since leaving home had met with more than one adventure, but this was the most perilous of all. Despite every effort to keep firm, my limbs trembled, my head grew dizzy; I was seized by a strong temptation to launch myself into space. The fit passed as suddenly as it had come, but I felt the sweat trickling down my face.

Presently we emerged on to a broad platform, and José, stopping, seized my hand. He was trembling now, but it was at the thought of danger past. One by one the men stole cautiously along while we waited, watching with fascinated eyes, and drawing a deep breath of relief as each stepped safely from the perilous path. Whether they had also felt fearful I could not tell; their faces were wonderfully impassive, and, except when roused by savage anger, quite expressionless.

At a sign from José they dropped to the ground behind a group of boulders, and he, addressing them in some Indian dialect, issued his instructions. I gathered very little from his speech; but presently the men disappeared, gliding like serpents along the side of the cliffs, and leaving me with

José and the guide.

"I don't much like this, Jack," said José. "I almost wish you had stayed behind. I hope the colonel can depend on this fellow."

"What is it?" I asked. "I suppose we didn't come out just for the pleasure of exercising ourselves on that goat-track?"

"No," said he; "though, to be sure, that was an uncommon diversion. The real thing is just about to begin, and this is the way of it. According to the guide, La Hera is in a cave close at hand."

"All the more chance of trapping him."

"I'm not so sure of that. The entrance to the cave is some sixty feet from the ground, in the side of a steep cliff."

"Well, we've had some experience in mountain-climbing."

"Yes, but not this sort. The face of the cliff is as perpendicular as the side of a house."

"The other fellows got up."

"So they did, but it was in the daylight, and there was no one at the top waiting to pop them off with a bullet. It seems the bandits have been in the habit of using this cave as a depot, and one of them guided La Hera there with the real object of betraying him."

"Ugh!" said I; "these traitors make me sick."

"Just so; but they are very useful. Without the help of this one, for instance, we can't capture La Hera, unless we starve him out."

"What does he propose to do?"

"Well, there is a stout rope fixed in the cave which he will let down at the right moment. Up this we shall have to climb by help of the niches that have been cut in the cliff."

"Suppose La Hera finds it out, and is waiting to receive us?"

"That," replied José, with a shrug of the shoulders, "is just what is bothering me. However, we shall soon discover. Our men have had time to hide themselves, and the guide is getting fidgety. But I say, Jack, I wish I hadn't brought you."

"I'm rather pleased now that you have, though I wasn't half an hour ago."

"No; I thought you breathed too hard to be enjoying yourself."

With that he ordered the native to proceed; and we all three crept along, keeping well in the shadow, though the enemy, feeling secure in possession of the rope, were hardly likely to have set a watch.

Coming to a halt, the guide pointed to a towering cliff, which, on that face at least, was in truth steep and smooth as the wall of a house. Our men lay close at hand, but completely concealed, watching for the lowering of the rope.

Now it seemed to me that we were running great risk when our object might have been gained with none at all. Why not, as José had remarked a short time previously, starve the inmates out?

"No good," answered he, when I asked the question. "The guide says there are stores in the cave sufficient to last a small party for months. The war would be over before they had finished their provisions. No; we must get them by surprise or not at all. I should like to see that rope dangling."

It was weary waiting, and a great strain on our nerves too, as every moment's delay gave us more time to appreciate the danger. The longer I pondered the more I disliked the business, and doubted what would be the end of it. La Hera was a bold man, and if he got an inkling of the truth, we should meet with an unpleasant reception. He might not approve of such an unceremonious intrusion into his dwelling-place.

I was still thinking of these things when the Indian guide drew our attention to the cliff. The time had come. There, distinguishable in the pale moonlight, dangled the rope, and as we watched it descended lower and lower, very steadily, until the end of it was not higher than a man could grasp.

It was the signal agreed upon to show that the enemy were asleep.

Calling softly to one of his men, José said, "Stay here and watch. If we are betrayed, take this man back to Colonel Miller. If he tries to escape, kill him."

The Indian moved not a muscle, while his guard took his place beside him with drawn sword, for no muskets had been brought on the expedition. Then word was quietly passed round to the others, and one by one we gathered close to the hanging rope.

We could not communicate with the man at the top, lest we should be heard by the Spaniards, and we dared not make a sound. Holding a knife between his teeth, José clutched the rope firmly, planted one foot in a niche, and began to mount. When he had reached half-way up, I began the ascent, bidding the men be ready to follow me.

I did not mind this part of the enterprise, dangerous though it was. The niches cut in the rock afforded decent foothold, while the rope was knotted at intervals. The peril lay not so much in the climbing as in the chance of discovery. If the Spaniards learned what was going forward, nothing could save us from certain death. This was an unpleasant thought, which I hastened to put as far from me as possible.

Meanwhile José's head was on a level with the cave, and I felt that the best or the worst of the business would soon be known. If the enemy were awake, it would go hard with him. His foot left the last niche, he swung on the rope, and as I watched breathlessly he disappeared.

Casting a glance downward, I called softly to the troopers to hurry, and then went up hand over hand at a breakneck pace. In a short time I was gazing at as strange a spectacle as I have ever seen. The cavern was an immense apartment, with steep walls and exceedingly lofty roof. Near the centre was a fire, on which some one had hastily thrown a fresh supply of dry fuel, and the red flames were leaping high in long, thin tongues.

Just inside the entrance José and the traitorous Indian stood over the windlass, by means of which the rope was worked, and as I ran to their side, one of the Spanish soldiers uttered a cry of alarm. Instantly all was tumult and confusion. Shots were fired at random, men shouted wildly, "We are betrayed!" while, above all, José's voice rang out high and clear, "Surrender! you are my prisoners."

With a rush the Spaniards sprang at us, fighting with the fury of wild animals, while we had to guard not only ourselves but the rope up which our men were swarming. If that were cut or loosened, our opponents would hold us at their mercy. We fought against long odds, but for a time held our own, though once I was stricken almost to my knees, and felt the graze of a sharp blade across my cheeks.

Fortunately help came soon, or it would have gone badly with us. With a wild shout a burly trooper sprang into the fray, and another soon joined him. A third and a fourth followed quickly, and the issue was placed beyond doubt.

Now, although our Indians made splendid soldiers, they hated the Spaniards so much that it was difficult to restrain their passions. Some excuse may be found for them in the long years of misery and oppression they had endured; but, of course, José set his face sternly against cruelties.

Thus it was in our enemies' own interest that I raised my voice, crying, "Surrender, and we will spare your lives! You cannot escape!" And José echoed my appeal. He, too, dreaded the slaughter that must ensue if our Indians got out of hand. Perhaps the Spaniards guessed our motive; at least they must have seen the futility of continuing the contest. One by one they flung their weapons sullenly to the ground, and yielded themselves prisoners.

"Torches!" cried José quickly, "and let us examine our capture. Where is Colonel La Hera?"

No one spoke, but several Indians plucked blazing brands from the fire and brought them to us. By their light we saw one man lying dead near the windlass, and three wounded. Six others, disarmed, stood round, for the most part black-browed and scowling.

José repeated his question. "Where is Colonel La Hera?" he asked.

"Gone to get reinforcements to drive you into the sea," answered a calm voice.

"Then he is not in this cave?" asked José bluntly, but with a certain ring of admiration in his tone.

Now all this time I had been taking particular notice of this Spaniard. His uniform showed him to be a major, though he was quite young. His face was frank and open; he had dark, expressive eyes, and a pleasant, musical voice, which somehow seemed familiar to me. Where had I met this man before? In a moment or two he himself supplied the answer.

"Who is in command here?" asked José.

"I have the honour, and, as it seems, the misfortune also, of commanding these brave fellows. I am Major Santiago Mariano, in the service of His Spanish Majesty, whom may God preserve!"

"I wish him no harm," replied José; "only for the future he must not reckon Peru among his dominions. Now, how am I to know that La Hera is not here?"

"Ask the man who betrayed us," said the major scornfully; and on questioning the Indian, it appeared he had mistaken Santiago for the famous colonel.

"Well," muttered José, "it's a disappointment; but it can't be helped. What are we to do with the wounded? They can't go down the rope."

"Let me stay with them," I suggested, "and you can send a doctor back."

"Meanwhile," interrupted the major, "I have some little skill in surgery, and, with your permission, I will remain also. You need not fear that I shall run away. I will give my parole to come to Moquegua. After that, matters must shape their own course."

"Very well," exclaimed José; "the plan has its advantages. I'll hurry along the first doctor I come across, Jack. But you are hurt!"

"It's only a scratch; nothing serious at all."

José sent half a dozen of his men down the rope; then the dead Spaniard was lowered, the prisoners followed, and José himself descended with the remainder of the troopers.

"Haul up the rope, Jack," he cried in farewell, "and make sure of your visitors before dropping it again."

CHAPTER IX.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

As soon as the party had disappeared, I turned to the major and said with a smile,—

"Now, my dear Santiago, let us attend to the needs of these poor fellows."

I was now standing full in the firelight, and he glanced at my face with a puzzled expression. Then a half gleam of recognition shone in his eyes, and he exclaimed doubtfully—

"Surely you can't be the boy Crawford who vanished so mysteriously from the fort?"

"I am, though!" said I, laughing at his amazement. "But we shall have time for a talk presently; let us do what we can for these poor fellows first. Is there any water in the cave?"

"Yes; there is a spring at the far end. I will fetch some. Put some more wood on the fire; it smokes if allowed to go down."

Of the three wounded men only one was seriously hurt, and he, I feared, was beyond the aid of the most skilled surgeon. However, we did our best for all the sufferers, gave them water to drink, arranged them comfortably on beds of straw, and bathed and bandaged their wounds. Then I washed the cut in my cheek, and Santiago smeared it with a native ointment, which he said possessed wonderful healing properties.

"Now," said he, "I judge you are ready for late supper or early breakfast, whichever you may prefer to call it. The provisions are homely, and I am an indifferent cook, but I can at least give you enough to eat. Those brigands of yours have stored sufficient food here for an army."

Carrying a torch, I accompanied him round the cavern, gazing in wonder at the piles of Indian corn, the heaps of potatoes, and the strings of charqui, the last suspended from the walls.

"Come," said I, "there is no need to starve in the midst of plenty. What shall we have? Roast potatoes and jerked beef? The potatoes will require the least attention."

"And they are not bad if you are downright hungry, as I was when we crept in here after the affair at Mirabe. There's a smart soldier leading your men, Crawford."

"Yes; he is an Englishman named Miller, and a very fine fellow. But how come you to be here?"

"We'll talk over these things presently. Meanwhile, let us cook the potatoes. Bring another handful; I daresay two of the men will be able to eat a little breakfast."

"If it is breakfast!"

"It must be for us, because we had our supper before you paid us so unceremonious a visit. Of course we were betrayed."

"Well, as to that," I replied, "you must ask the colonel; I only acted under orders."

"Just so. Well, I am very pleased to see you, though I dislike the way in which you introduced yourself. Cut this piece of beef up finely while I fetch some salt."

"Have you any?" I asked, in some surprise.

"Oh yes. Your amiable brigands know how to stock a larder."

Two of the wounded men were able to eat, and they were very grateful for the food we took them. Then we returned to the fire, piled up some sacks to serve as seats, and began our meal.

It was all most strange to me and very delightful; it might have been a chapter lifted bodily from one of my favourite story-books. There seemed to be a piratical flavour about the whole business.

"Perhaps it is as well that I gave my parole," exclaimed the major thoughtfully, taking off another potato.

"Why?" I asked.

"I might have felt tempted to escape," he replied, looking at the coil of rope.

"You forget your jailer carries a pistol," I remarked, laughing.

"An empty one," he suggested, shrugging his shoulders. "No, no, my boy; my parole is your only safeguard."

"It is a sufficient one, at any rate."

"Yes," said he, rather dreamily, I thought. "The honour of a Mariano is sacred; my father taught me that. And yet—and yet, do you know, Crawford," he added, in a sharper tone, "I doubt if a parole given to brigands should be held to."

I did not at all like this turn in the conversation, the more especially as my pistol was really empty. I had not dreamed of taking any precautions, trusting wholly in the Spanish officer's honour.

I looked up at him, and felt reassured; there could be no treachery hidden behind that frank, open countenance.

"It seems to me you are talking nonsense, Santiago," I said cheerfully. "A man's word is his bond in any case—that is, if he be a man."

He took no notice of my remark, but sat musing, leaving half his food untouched. As for me, I helped myself to some more beef, though I must confess the major's wild talk nearly destroyed my appetite. His manner had changed so suddenly and abruptly that I knew not what to make of it. I might perhaps have reloaded my pistol without his knowledge, but this would be a confession that I had lost faith in him.

"Come," said I jocularly, pointing to his food, "you pay your cooking a poor compliment."

To this he made no reply, but looking up after a time exclaimed,—

"I have news for you. I had almost forgotten, but I must tell you before going."

"Going?" I cried; "we cannot go before the doctor arrives."

"You cannot, but I can, and must. My mind is made up. Do not try to thwart me; I should be sorry if you got hurt. Sit still, my boy; don't stir a finger, or I will kill you!"

I looked at him in amazement. His face was flushed, his eyes shone wildly; he spoke with a rapid and angry vehemence.

"By St. Philip," he cried, "I should be a cur to place honour before loyalty! My duty is to my king, do you hear? Shall I help a parcel of bandits to set the king at naught? Shall I bring disgrace on a family that has stood by the throne for untold centuries? My father died on the battlefield with the king's banner above his head, as did his father before him. And I am to stay in a cage when the door is open! I am to let these upstarts trample on the king's rights!"

The words swept from his lips in a sweeping, tempestuous torrent, and when they were done he leaped to his feet with an angry cry. I sat in my place looking at him steadily, but making no movement.

"I tell you it is monstrous!" he continued. "I care nothing for myself, but I cannot desert the king!"

"His Majesty must be greatly in need of friends," I remarked dryly, "to accept the aid of a perjured soldier."

It was strong language. I knew it would hurt him cruelly; but a desperate disease requires a desperate remedy. I thought at first he would kill me. His eyes blazed fiercely, and he sprang forward with uplifted hands. Suddenly he paused, and returned abruptly to his seat.

Thinking it best not to disturb him, I rose and made the round of the wounded men. I felt awfully sorry for the young major, and almost wished he had not passed his word to José. Having done so, he must, of course, abide by it, unless he cared to live with tarnished honour.

Presently, returning to the fire, I threw some more fuel on, and sat down again on my heap of sacks. Santiago had covered his face with his hands, and was rocking himself gently to and fro, like a child in pain. Evidently the wild fit had passed, and he had overcome the temptation which had tried him so sorely.

For nearly an hour we sat there, speaking no word, then looking me straight in the face, he said suddenly,—

"Crawford, I have acted like a madman, but there is nothing to be feared now."

"Nor before," I answered cheerfully. "You would not have gone a hundred yards. Come, let us now dismiss the subject. After all, it was no more than a bad dream."

"By St. Philip," he exclaimed, "it was a very ugly one. However, I am in my right mind now, and as soon as we arrive at Moquegua I will withdraw my parole. Then if a chance to escape comes, I can avail myself of it with an easy conscience. You have not reloaded your pistol?"

"No. Why should I? there is no need of it."

"Not now," he said. "I am master of myself now," and he actually smiled.

"You were going to tell me some news," I observed, after a pause. "Now that you have roused my curiosity, I hope you will satisfy it."

I spoke half jestingly, and more for the sake of keeping up the conversation than in the expectation of hearing any particular information. It was unlikely, I considered, that Santiago could tell me anything of real interest. In this I was much mistaken, as you will find.

"I don't know," said he thoughtfully, "that it will be doing you any real kindness, yet it is only right that you should know. Of course, you will understand that your escape occasioned some little stir among the garrison of the fort."

"I am quite ready to believe it," I replied, chuckling at the remembrance. "I have often laughed to think of your astonishment in the morning."

"It was no laughing matter to us, I can assure you. The commandant was furious, and went about vowing vengeance against everybody. Search-parties scoured the neighbourhood in all directions, but with no result, and we at last concluded that by some means you had been taken off by ship."

"Quite a wrong conclusion," I interposed.

"We could think of no other. However, to get on with the story. In the midst of the confusion Barejo turned up on his way back to Lima. He was simply furious, and threatened to put us all in irons, the commandant included; which, by the way, was absurd."

"It was paying me a very high compliment."

"Don't be puffed up, or imagine the general was afraid of you," laughed Santiago.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, affecting to feel disappointed, "that alters the case. But why should he be angry at my escape?"

"Because he really wished to keep you out of mischief."

"Then I have sadly misjudged him."

"I think you have. Of course, I don't profess to understand the matter, but it seems to be something in this way. When we have crushed this rebellion, the estates of those who have borne arms against the king will be confiscated."

"Spoils to the victors!" I laughed; "an old-fashioned principle."

"And, of course," continued Santiago, not heeding the interruption, "your father's estates will be among them. Now, as far as I can gather, Barejo thought that by preventing you from joining the rebels something might be saved from the wreck."

"That was very kind of the general," I remarked. "I had no idea that he took any interest in my affairs. But isn't it possible, major, that you are going a trifle too fast? Suppose, for instance, that the rebels, as you call us, should win?"

The major tossed his head scornfully.

"That is utterly impossible!" he answered, with a short, quick snap.

"But let us suppose it, just for argument," I urged.

"Well in that case," said he, "of which there is no possible likelihood, your father will keep his property."

At first I thought he had forgotten, but something in his face held my attention, and brought the blood to my head with a rush.

"Do you mean— What is it? Tell me quickly! Is my father—"

"Alive! That is my news; but you must not build on it too greatly. I can only tell you he was not slain that day in the mountains. He was dangerously wounded, but was still living when the soldiers carried him away."

"Where did they take him?"

"That I do not know; neither, I think, does Barejo. Perhaps, and in my opinion most likely, to the forts at Callao."

The major's news, as you may imagine, filled me with the liveliest astonishment and excitement. My father alive! I could hardly credit the statement. What would my mother say? How would she receive the startling information? I rose from my seat and walked about the cavern, trying to think it over coolly.

Then it dawned upon me why Santiago had said he would not be doing me any real kindness in talking of the discovery. After all, his information only reopened the old wounds. More than two years had passed since my father's disappearance, and many things had happened in that time. Not every one who entered the casemates of Callao came out alive.

"But," said I aloud, "some one must know the truth. A man can't be shut up without authority, even in Peru."

"I wish I could help you," replied the major. "As soon as I escape from Moquegua I will make inquiries."

"Thank you; but I fear it will be a long time to wait," I answered gloomily.

"Not at all! La Hera will return in a week or two, and your Miller will be too busy running away to look after prisoners. Imitate me, my boy, and make Hope your best friend."

In trying to cheer me he forgot his own distress. The light returned to his eyes, the smile to his face, and he seemed to have banished all memory of his recent despair.

"Come," said he cheerfully, "put your doubts and fears aside for the present. Our wounded want attention; we must not neglect them."

I tried hard to act upon his advice, but all the time continued to wonder whether my father was alive or dead. That was the one question that racked my brain, and to it I could give no answer.

We had just made our patients comfortable, with the exception of one who was dying fast, when a shrill whistle sounded outside.

"The surgeon!" I exclaimed, running to the entrance. "Yes, there he is with the guide and two soldiers."

"Two bandits!" said Santiago banteringly. "Give the men their proper name."

"Soldiers or bandits, they know how to fight. Help me to uncoil the rope, will you?"

"That's almost as bad as asking a man to make the noose he is to hang in. You forget that on leaving here I shall go straight to prison."

"I had forgotten, major, and sorry enough I am to remember it. Still, as La Hera returns so soon, it will be only a temporary inconvenience, and I'm sure Colonel Miller will treat you well."

Santiago laughed.

"You will make me fancy soon that imprisonment is a privilege worth paying for," he exclaimed.

"Hardly that," I replied; "but, as Barejo said, it keeps one out of mischief."

We lowered the rope, the guide attached the surgeon's instruments, and at a signal we hauled up. Then the rope went down again, the two soldiers climbed to the cave, and the doctor followed unsteadily. It was evident that this novel method of visiting patients found no favour in his eyes; he was obviously nervous, and twice during the ascent I quite expected to see him go headlong.

He was a citizen of Moquegua, very young, and utterly unsuited for his present errand. So great was his agitation that when he had planted his feet firmly on the floor of the cave his hands still clung like grim death to the rope.

"You're all right now," I said, leading him away from the mouth of the cave. "Rather a queer way of getting into a house, isn't it?"

"The saints preserve me!" he exclaimed, while his teeth chattered like castanets, "this is horrible. A dozen times, coming up that rope, I wished I'd never been born. But it's the last time I'll practise doctoring outside Moquegua."

"You did very creditably, I assure you, doctor," observed Santiago, whose eyes gleamed with fun; "such grace, such agility, is given to few. I should have thought your life had been spent in scaling

mountains."

The doctor looked from Santiago to me, hardly knowing what to make of such flattery.

"Faith," exclaimed he at last, "I hope there is an easier way of getting down than of coming up."

"There is," said the major, "and much more expeditious. You have but to step outside the cave, and there you are. Most people, however, prefer to go down by the rope."

The doctor groaned.

"I shall never do it," said he, "never! I shall be shut up in this place for the rest of my life."

"There will be one advantage in that," remarked Santiago pleasantly: "your patients will always be able to find you. Now I fear we must tear ourselves from your side."

"Do your best with these poor fellows," I said. "The one in the corner yonder will not trouble you long; the others are getting on nicely. You will find this cavern quite a comfortable dwelling-place. There is plenty of food, a spring of clear water, and enough fuel to keep a fire going for weeks."

"Meanwhile," observed Santiago, "we will ask the good folks of Moquegua to make a nice long ladder, so that you can get down without trouble."

It was really very laughable to watch the doctor's face as the major prepared to descend.

"He will be killed," said he dolefully. "It is a clear case of suicide. Look, he has missed his foothold, and will be dashed to pieces!"

"Nonsense," I said, with a laugh; "there is no danger if you don't think about it. See, it is nothing but going down a flight of steps backwards." But he covered his face with his hands and shuddered.

When the major had reached the ground, I grasped the rope, saying,—

"Farewell, doctor; I hope you will have a comfortable time. And don't worry about coming down; you'll find it an easy matter enough."

"Good-bye," answered he gloomily; "I shall never see you or any one else again. I shall die up here for certain."

The fellow was so genuinely frightened that I assured him we would devise some plan to rescue him; on which he brightened up considerably, and I began the descent. I asked the guide where he had left the horses.

"At the village, señor," he replied, "on the other side of the mountain."

In answer to a further question, he told us that the doctor would not cross the narrow track, and that they had, in consequence, been compelled to travel many miles out of their way.

"I think he was right," exclaimed Santiago, when we reached the spot. "This is a far worse venture than climbing to the cavern by the rope."

And indeed, seen in broad daylight, with every rock standing out pitilessly clear, and every chasm yawning wide, the place was enough to daunt the spirit of the bravest.

Familiarity had rendered the guide indifferent to the danger, but I felt as nervous as when crossing the previous evening. However, I could not make a parade of my anxiety, so I set foot on the narrow path with a jaunty air but quaking heart. Santiago smiled too, but I fancy he was by no means sorry when we gained the farther side without accident. Then we jested about the past danger, talking lightly and as if it were an affair of no moment. Nevertheless, I was thankful the heat of the sun provided an excuse for the perspiration that streamed down my face.

CHAPTER X.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

On our march to the town, Santiago assumed a light-hearted carelessness that was far from his real feelings. He laughed merrily, made joking remarks, and behaved generally as if the prospect of a spell of prison life was most agreeable. This was, of course, mere outside show. He was too proud to let his captors see his real distress; but his acting did not deceive me.

We had reached the market-place, and I was wondering at the absence of the soldiers, when José suddenly appeared, coming from the governor's house. On seeing us, he approached, saying, "You have

been a long time. I began to think you had missed your way."

"The guide was late in the first place, as the doctor would not take the nearest way, and we did not hurry. But where are the troops?"

"Off again!" said he, his eyes twinkling: "the colonel has gone for a little jaunt of ninety miles or so to intercept a Spanish column. Thank goodness, we have missed that!—How did you leave your men, major?"

"One is dying, I fear," replied Santiago; "but the others will soon be all right, unless your doctor kills them!"

"I was sorry to send him," said José, "but I had no choice. He was the only one in the place available. He didn't offer his services, I can assure you."

"I can well believe it," laughed the major. "The poor fellow was half dead with fright when he reached us, and vows he will never risk the danger of getting down again."

"We must have him tied to the rope, and lowered like a sack of potatoes. Meanwhile, what is to be done with you?"

"The only suggestion I can make is that you set me free!"

"Perhaps I had better report to the governor," observed José thoughtfully. "He is Colonel Miller's representative. I daresay he will parole you till the chief comes."

"No, no!" cried the major hastily; "I've done with paroles! From this moment I consider myself free to escape."

"To *try*," corrected José. "Well, the effort will fill up your time, and keep you from being idle. Of course," he added, "it will change the position a little. We can still remain on friendly terms, only I must not forget to load my pistol. And now let us interview the governor."

A sentry stood at the outside gate, and several soldiers were in the courtyard; but passing through, we entered the house, and found ourselves in the governor's presence. He was a military-looking man, though holding no rank in the army—a Spaniard who had recently come over from the enemy. Two or three officers were in the room, and a young man sat at a table, writing.

José told his story briefly, concluding with a proposal that the prisoner should be left in his charge until Colonel Miller's return.

"There is a more agreeable way still," observed the governor, with a bland smile.—"Major Mariano, I am not unaware either of your name or your services. I know you for a dashing and brilliant officer, far and away superior to those nominally above you. I am not without the power to make you an offer. The Spanish cause is lost; in a few months your armies will be crushed; Peru will be independent. Until that time you will languish miserably in prison. Afterwards I cannot pretend to prophesy your fate; but I offer you an opportunity to escape from the wreck. Join the Patriot army, and I pledge my word that San Martin shall give you the rank of colonel at once. In a year it will be your own fault if you are not a general. Come, what do you say?"

Only a few hours previously I had seen an outburst of temper on Santiago's part; now I beheld another, which by comparison made the first appear mild. His eyes literally blazed with anger; his face was red; he actually quivered with passion. Twice he endeavoured to speak, and the words choked in his throat. José laid a hand restrainingly on his shoulder; he flung it off passionately.

"Dog of a traitor!" cried he at last, "do you think the blood of Santiago Mariano is as base as yours? Do you imagine I am a rat like you to leave a sinking ship? What! lend my sword to a parcel of beggarly cutthroats and vagabonds? I would rather eat out my heart in the blackest dungeon of Peru!"

Once a flush of shame overspread the governor's face, but he recovered himself promptly, and listened with a bitter smile till the end.

"You shall eat your words if not your heart," he exclaimed brutally; and turning to an officer, he added, "Rincona, bring in your men and the heaviest irons that can be found in the prison."

Santiago smiled scornfully; but José, pushing forward, said quietly, "You cannot do that, señor. This man is my prisoner, for whom I am responsible to Colonel Miller alone. Until the return of the colonel, therefore, I cannot let him go from my keeping."

For a moment Rincona hesitated, but at the governor's second command he left the room, while the other officers clustered round their chief.

José produced a pistol and cocked it, saying coolly, "The man who lays hands on my prisoner dies."

Santiago turned to him with a pleasant smile. "Thanks, my friend," he said, "but I cannot let you suffer on my behalf. Besides, there is Crawford to be considered. The consequences may be fatal to him, as he is sure to stand by you."

"Don't hesitate on my account, José," said I. But the major's words had made an impression, and a shadow of annoyance flitted across my companion's brow.

However, there was little time for thinking. We heard the tramp, tramp of marching feet, and presently Rincona entered, followed by about a dozen soldiers.

"The irons!" roared the governor, beside himself with passion; "where are the irons?"

"I have sent for them, sir," replied Rincona.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble," remarked José; "they shall not be put on."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Santiago; "what does it matter? Better so than that you two should lose your lives."

I looked at José. His lips were set like a vice, and I knew that no power on earth could move him now. The situation was decidedly unpleasant, and unfortunately there seemed to be no way out. True, he might kill the governor, but that would only still further complicate matters.

The soldiers, as usual, stood with impassive faces; the affair was none of theirs, save so far as obeying orders went. The officers were restless and uneasy, and one of them kept up a whispered conversation with the governor, who listened impatiently, and from time to time shook his head.

At last two other men arrived, bearing a set of heavy irons, and once again Santiago turned appealingly, but without effect, to José.

One might have heard a pin drop when the governor, sheltering behind his officers, cried in a loud voice, "Put that man in irons!"

"Stand still!" said José, raising his pistol, and speaking in the Indian dialect.

How the dispute would have ended I cannot tell, but at that moment a happy inspiration flashed into my mind. The soldiers were all Indians, and judging by their appearance, Indians of the mountains. Was it possible that any of them acknowledged the authority of the Silver Key? If so, we were safe. It was a poor chance, but there seemed to be no other.

Trembling with impatience, I opened my shirt at the neck, and drew forth the brigand chief's gift. At first no one took any notice; but when I held the key to view, the Indians raised a shout of mingled joy and surprise. Then I looked at Santiago and laughed, saying, "We are safe!"

The Indians jabbered away in their own language, talking with one another, and pointing to the emblem of authority which hung from my neck. The governor stood like a man in a dream; the officers gazed alternately at me and the native soldiers, as if doubting the evidence of their senses.

"How many of you are followers of the Silver Key, and of Raymon Sorillo?" I asked.

"All, all, master!" they cried.

"And those outside?"

"All, all!" they again shouted.

"I can trust you to help me?"

"To the death, master!" they cried with one voice.

At that I turned to the governor, saying with a smile, "The position is changed, señor. I have but to raise my hand, and you will feel the weight of your own irons. But there is no need to quarrel. Colonel Miller will be here in a few days, and he shall decide between us. Meanwhile we will guard the prisoner."

The governor nearly choked with anger, and threatened violently that as soon as the colonel returned he would have us all shot. However, as it was evident that the soldiers would obey my orders, he raised no further objection to our taking Santiago away.

"By St. Philip," exclaimed the major, "the room was hot! Are you a magician, Crawford?"

"Upon my word I begin to think so. At any rate, I possess a magical key."

"Which has saved our lives," observed José grimly.

"And I suspect," laughed Santiago, "that once upon a time it unlocked the door of a prison cell! But won't those natives suffer for this?"

"I don't think so. They are too strong, and their chief has more power in Peru than the viceroy and San Martin combined."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, and so does José. He has done me good service, for which I am grateful, though I could never like the man. But here we are at the house. The good folk will wonder at our bringing an uninvited guest."

Fortunately a room had been set apart for us, so we could talk at our ease. I was burning to tell José about my father, but first of all we had to come to an understanding with Santiago. This time he made no demur at giving his parole. "In fact," said he gaily, "you have forced my hand, and I have no choice."

"So much the better," remarked José; "we may as well be comfortable together till the colonel arrives."

"And after that we may be hanged comfortably together!" laughed the major. "How do you like the prospect?"

"I can trust Miller. He is an honourable man, and will do what is right. It is Crawford who will suffer for inciting the troops to mutiny."

"José," said I presently, "I haven't told you that Major Mariano is an old friend of mine."

"And at one time his jailer," interrupted Santiago. "That ought to make him feel grateful."

"Oh," exclaimed José, "you are the captain Jack has often talked about! Well, I'm glad we have been able to do a little for you."

"This morning while we were waiting for your precious doctor," I continued, "he told me a very startling piece of news."

"Yes?" said José.

"About my father."

José sprang to his feet, demanding fiercely, "What do you know of Señor Crawford, major? Don Eduardo came to his end by foul means: he was not slain by the government, but by some one who hoped to profit by his death."

"According to the major's information, he was not slain at all," I said, and proceeded to relate the story.

José listened attentively to every word, and then asked Santiago innumerable questions. Like myself, he displayed great excitement, but I judged from his expression that he entertained little hope of my father being still alive.

"The truth is," said he, "Don Eduardo had made numerous powerful enemies both in public and private life; and as we all know, any stick is good enough to beat a dog with. Besides, he owned vast estates, and—"

"Go on!" laughed Santiago as José hesitated; "the king's party put him to death in order to seize them!"

"No, no," said José hotly; "I don't tar all Spaniards with the same brush. Still, they aren't all saints either, and I say some of them killed him under cloak of the government. And some day," he added, "I will prove it. As to his being alive, I think there is small chance of it.—And Jack, my boy, I would not mention the matter to your mother."

"But," said I, clinging to my shred of hope, "he was not killed in the mountains, and we have heard nothing since."

José let me talk, and listened kindly to my arguments, but I noticed that none of them made any impression. At the best, he said, my father had been thrown into prison seriously hurt, and it was not likely that he had survived the confinement.

"Have you ever seen the casemates at Callao, major?" he asked.

"Yes," said Santiago, "and very unhealthy places they are. But there are more prisons than those in Peru."

It would be wearisome to repeat our conversation, for, after all, we were arguing in the dark, having only the major's imperfect story to go by. Besides, as José said, many events had happened during the last two years, and my father was by no means the only noted man in Peru to disappear. So our talk travelled in a circle, leaving off at the starting-point, and for sole effect it extinguished the gleam of hope which the major's story had kindled.

In the evening, at José's suggestion, I went into the streets to pick up any information concerning the governor's doings. Everything seemed quiet; the sentries were at their posts as usual, while the soldiers off duty wandered about the town.

They greeted me respectfully, raising their hands in salute and standing at attention, as if I had

been an officer of high degree. Recognizing a sergeant who had been in the governor's room, I stopped to ask a few questions. Greatly to my relief, I learned that, with the exception of a few Spanish officers, the troops in the town were all Indians from the mountains.

As the man seemed smart and intelligent, I told him how matters stood, and that we depended entirely upon him and his comrades until the coming of the English colonel.

"You can trust us, master," he replied, and indeed his talk made it quite clear that the friend of Raymon Sorillo and the holder of the Silver Key might rely on the Indians in Moquegua even against Miller himself.

José, I think, felt rather relieved on hearing my news; while Santiago laughed heartily, prophesying that, if the Spaniards were defeated, I should in a few years be king, or at least president, of Peru.

"I had no idea," said he, "that you were so important a person. No wonder Barejo wished to keep you shut up!"

That night we took it in turns to watch; but the governor attempted nothing against us, and the next day we walked openly in the street without molestation.

Colonel Miller had vanished into space, and for nearly a week we heard nothing of him; then one morning an Indian scout rode wearily into the town with the news that the Englishman was close at hand. Immediately the people rushed out in hundreds to line the street, and to cheer the returning warriors.

José stayed indoors with the major, but sent me out to get an early word with our leader. Bright, alert, and cheery as ever, he rode at the head of his troops, smiling and bowing to the inhabitants as they greeted him with rousing cheers. Then came the soldiers—the cavalry on dead-tired horses, the infantry on jaded mules—with a number of prisoners in the midst.

The animals were tired enough; but the men! I can hardly describe their condition. Their faces were haggard, their eyes heavy and bloodshot; some were nearly asleep, others had scarcely strength to sit upright. Very little grass had grown under their feet. As soon as they were dismissed, the citizens pounced on them, taking them into the houses, where food and drink were provided in abundance.

The governor had come out to meet the colonel, whom I expected to see return with him; but at the last moment he turned aside, and with a laughing exclamation went straight to his own quarters, whither I followed him.

"Hullo, Crawford!" cried he. "So you didn't get La Hera?"

"No, sir; but we captured a major, and I wish to speak to you about him."

"Won't it wait?" he asked, with a comical expression.

"I am afraid not, sir. The truth is, we've had a quarrel with the governor, and—"

"You want to get in your version first! A very good plan. Well, fire away, but don't make it long; I've a lot of things on hand."

By this time we had entered his room, and going straight to the heart of the affair, I told my story in the fewest possible words. The colonel listened with rather a grave face, and when I had finished he said, "It's an awkward mess, especially just now. It's absolutely necessary to keep friends with the governor, and I don't like this tampering with the troops. But, of course, I won't have the prisoner put in irons or treated differently from the rest. Bring him here now, and I'll settle the matter at once."

"Yes, sir," said I, thankful to get off so lightly.

The colonel had already begun some fresh work when I returned with José and the major, but he rose from his seat and saluted the Spaniard courteously.

"I understand it is useless to ask for your parole, major," he said. "Your mind is quite made up on the point?"

"Yes, sir," answered Santiago, smiling in his easy, graceful way. "An opportunity to escape may not arise but if it does, I shall certainly seize it."

"Quite right!" exclaimed the colonel; "but I fear you will be disappointed. However, though guarding you rigidly, we shall put you to as little inconvenience as possible. You will find half a dozen companions in misfortune in the prison. Most of the captured rank and file have joined the Patriots."

The major's lip curled scornfully, but he only said, "I am obliged to you, colonel, for your kindness. Some day perhaps I may be able to return it."

"Not in the same way, I hope," laughed Colonel Miller. "I have had a taste of Spanish prison life already, major. But when the war is over I trust we may meet again."

Then he sent for an officer and a file of soldiers, and Santiago turned to bid us a cheery farewell.

"Good-bye," said he brightly; "I have had a pleasant time with you.—If I do succeed in escaping, Crawford, I will inquire further into your father's story.—Ah, here is my escort!" and with a salute to the colonel and a nod to us, he took his place in front of the men, while the officer received his chief's instructions.

"He's a plucky fellow. I should have liked to set him free," I said, as we strolled back to our quarters.

"To do more mischief!" growled José. "I'm sorry for him, in a way, but it's better for us that he should be under lock and key. And that reminds me! How did Colonel Miller take the Silver Key business?"

"Very badly; called it tampering with the troops."

"So it was, but it saved our lives, all the same. I shall be rather pleased when we leave this district; the governor won't regard either of us too favourably."

"He can't hurt us now the colonel is here."

"No," replied José, with a curious smile "but we might meet with a nasty accident. Perhaps you remember my remark, made two years ago, that accidents are common in Peru. It's as true now as then."

As it chanced, José was shortly to have his wish; for although we did not know it then, the colonel had decided to abandon Moquegua. Many of the troops were down with the ague, the place was a difficult one to defend, unless against a weak attack, and La Hera was already on the march with a force far superior to ours. This, however, we did not learn till two days later.

CHAPTER XI.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"It is a great honour," exclaimed José, "and you should feel proud."

I had just returned from an interview with the colonel, who had asked me to undertake for a short time the duties of his private secretary. It seemed a simple task then, but afterwards I regarded it differently. For the next three weeks I was attached to the colonel, who took me with him everywhere. A secretary is generally supposed to write, but my work consisted in riding. Day after day, from morning till night, we were on horseback, now travelling over sandy deserts to the seashore, again penetrating into the heart of the mountains—hungry, thirsty, and tired, and always in danger of falling into the hands of the enemy.

As a measure of precaution our little force retired to Tacna, where, much to my satisfaction, the colonel received from Lima news of an armistice. This, of course, extended to all parts of the country; but I was mistaken in thinking it would increase my leisure, as my time was still kept fully occupied.

In one way this was a good thing, as it kept me from brooding over Santiago's story, though even at the busiest times the thought of my father's fate would creep into my mind. I saw nothing of José, who had been left behind with some Indians to hold a mountain pass, but occasionally I paid a brief visit to the Spanish prisoners for a chat with the friendly major.

We had been at Tacna a month, when one evening Colonel Miller said abruptly: "Crawford, the armistice is at an end, and we must retreat. Tell Videla to send the stores and the sick to Arica the first thing in the morning; then carry this order to Ilo. You will find three small brigs there; they are to sail at once for Arica. Take Castro the guide with you, and rejoin me on the march to Arica."

"Very good, sir," I replied, though my words belied my feelings. However, I went out, gave Videla the colonel's message, and hunted up the guide.

Castro was an educated Indian, trained by one of the missionaries, and a very decent fellow. I found him sound asleep; but he rose at once, looked to see if his bag of coca was full, loaded his pistols, and saddled his horse.

"A pleasant night for a ride, lieutenant,"—the colonel had given me that rank,—"and every yard will take us further from the Spaniards. I hear that La Hera is getting ready to swoop."

"He will find his pigeon a hawk if he comes too close," I answered, laughing. "Bring your horse, and wait for me at the hospital."

The night was still young, and many people, civilians and military, were in the street, talking in excited whispers. It was plain that they had heard of La Hera's approach, and were discussing what

they knew of the colonel's plans.

Soon, however, the town was left behind, and we had fairly started on our journey. There was no danger in it, except that of getting lost, which, with Castro for a guide, was not likely to happen. He knew the district as well as, perhaps better than, I knew the streets of Lima.

We jogged along quietly till midnight, not wishing to tire the animals, and then stopped near the edge of a sandy desert for an hour's rest. By this time I had begun to hate the very sight of sand; it seemed to me more dreary and pitiless than the stoniest of barren ground. Castro did not mind in the least, but lay on his back looking at the starry sky and placidly chewing his coca.

"Come, lieutenant," said he briskly at the end of an hour, "it is time to mount;" and we were soon plodding on as patiently as before.

It was nine o'clock when we finally arrived at Ilo. It may have been owing to my own tired state, but I thought I had never seen such a miserable and desolate spot in all my life. The houses were wretched mud-built hovels, and the few people in the place looked woebegone beyond belief.

The three brigs were in keeping with the village, being old and worm-eaten, and the craziest craft imaginable. I would not have sailed one across a pond. However, I sought out the commander of this ragged squadron, and gave him the colonel's order.

On reading it his face brightened, and he declared his intention of running out to sea that very afternoon.

"He doesn't look much of a hero," observed Castro; "but," with an expressive glance at the three floating coffins, "I imagine there are few braver men in Peru."

"One need not be brave to seize any chance of getting away from this depressing place," said I. "I believe I could easily take the risk of being drowned if there were no other way of escape."

"You will have the risk, lieutenant, if we are to go afloat in these brigs; but my opinion is that the bottoms will drop out of them before they reach Arica."

"In that case we must either beat La Hera or be annihilated."

"That's what it looks like," replied Castro coolly.

We stabled our horses in a tumble-down shed, fed and watered them, and, as it was impossible to leave till they were rested, lay down to snatch a brief sleep on the ground. We were invited to use the floor of a hovel for a couch, but after glancing at it, declined with great politeness and many sonorous words of thanks.

When we awoke the brigs had disappeared, and a roaring wind was sweeping down from the north.

"They'll never make headway against that," remarked Castro. "We can return to the colonel and tell him his brigs are at the bottom of the sea. There will be a pretty tune played presently, and La Hera will provide the music."

To a sailor, perhaps, the danger would not have seemed formidable; but standing on that desolate beach, listening to the hurricane rush of the wind, I could not but think Castro was right. And if indeed he had prophesied truly, then was our little force in sad straits. Burdened with sick, hampered by fleeing patriots, encumbered by prisoners, with half his troops weakened as usual by ague, the English colonel could neither fight nor flee. What, then, could he do? By this time every one knew him too well to dream he would surrender.

"Castro," said I, "we carry bad news, and bad news flies apace. Let us keep up the reputation of the old proverb. Half an hour or so may make all the difference in the world."

He made a grimace as if to say that a few minutes more or less would matter little; but he saddled his horse promptly, nevertheless, and was ready to start as soon as I.

"I reckon," he said, "that we may strike the road from Tacna to Arica by midnight to-morrow, unless our animals founder by the way. Can you trust your horse?"

"The colonel selected him."

"That ought to be sufficient warrant. The chief knows a horse, though he will ride in the absurd English style."

There were few men in the country who would have cared to cut themselves adrift as Castro did on this ride of ours to intercept the marching Patriots. His only guides were those he could interpret from nature. While daylight lasted, he steered by the sun; at night, by the stars and the faint wind that fanned our faces.

For twenty-four hours, during which time we rested, of course, both for our own sakes and for the sakes of our animals, not one human being crossed our path, or even came within sight of us. And during that time, also, we saw neither bird nor beast, nor any manner of living thing, save only

ourselves and our animals.

And then, quite unexpectedly to me, we came upon an oasis in the dreary desert—a little hamlet with mud-walled hovels, but better than those at Ilo, and having patches of cultivated ground enclosed. The natives had reclaimed this piece of land by means of the waters of a moderate-sized stream, and lived in almost as great isolation as if they had been on Robinson Crusoe's island.

They were neither Patriots nor Royalists, and I doubt much whether they knew of the struggle going forward; but they had kind hearts, and gave us a warm welcome, pressing upon us gifts of fruits and vegetables to the limits of their scanty stock. They found ample forage, too, for the weary animals, and we stayed there a matter of three hours to rest Castro's horse, which had shown symptoms of breaking down.

I seized this opportunity to snatch an hour's sleep; but my guide was kept chattering by the natives, who listened with amazement to his news. They knew no Spanish, and could not understand the native patois I spoke; neither could I understand a word of what they said. As for Castro, I suppose no man in South America had the gift of so many Indian dialects.

"After all, lieutenant," exclaimed he, as we took leave of this simple community, "I doubt if these people have not the best of life. They eat, drink, and are at peace, caring no more for a president than for a king."

"And doing nothing for either," I replied, laughing. "How does the horse seem now?"

"I think he will do this journey. But if I'm to ride with the colonel, he will have to provide me with another."

Throughout the evening we rode silently side by side, while all around us was the awful stillness of a dead world. The sun went down, and presently the stars gleamed above us, throwing a ghostly light over the sea of sand.

Midnight found us still riding, and another hour passed before Castro drew rein at the broken track leading from Tacna to Arica. Throwing the reins over his horse's neck, and jumping down, he examined the ground carefully, reading it as skilfully as the student reads a printed book.

To and fro he went, casting off here and there like a hunting-dog, till he was satisfied. Then he returned to me, saying, "Carts have gone by hours since, and the infantry quite recently, but I see no signs of cavalry."

"They would remain till the last minute, so as to deceive La Hera."

"That is so; but the question is, has the colonel stayed with them? It is to him we want to give our information."

"The infantry can tell us."

"We shall waste time if he is in the rear, and time is precious."

"Let us separate. You go forward; I will ride toward Tacna."

"It is dangerous, señor."

"You forget that I have been over this route."

"Well, as you will. If the colonel has not passed, I shall return. Keep to the track; do not wander from it either to right or to left."

"All right, Castro; I will take care."

He vaulted to the saddle, wished me a safe journey, and rode off, while I turned my horse's head in the opposite direction. Fortunately the night was clear, while the dawn was not far off, so that I had a great advantage in steering my way. True, I rode at no great pace, being both afraid and unwilling to spur my jaded beast. Now and again I even dismounted and walked at his head to give him some relief.

It was perhaps about three o'clock in the morning. A heavy fog had arisen, and I was riding with the greatest care, when suddenly I found a musket pointed straight at me, and heard the demand, "Halt, or I fire!"

The man spoke in Spanish, but his accent showed him to be an Indian, and I hoped he was one of Miller's cavalry detachment. Whistling softly, he was at once joined by a second and a third man, the last of whom sharply ordered me to dismount.

At the sound of his voice I laughed aloud, saying, "You post your men well, José, but they have not made a great capture this time. Is the colonel here?"

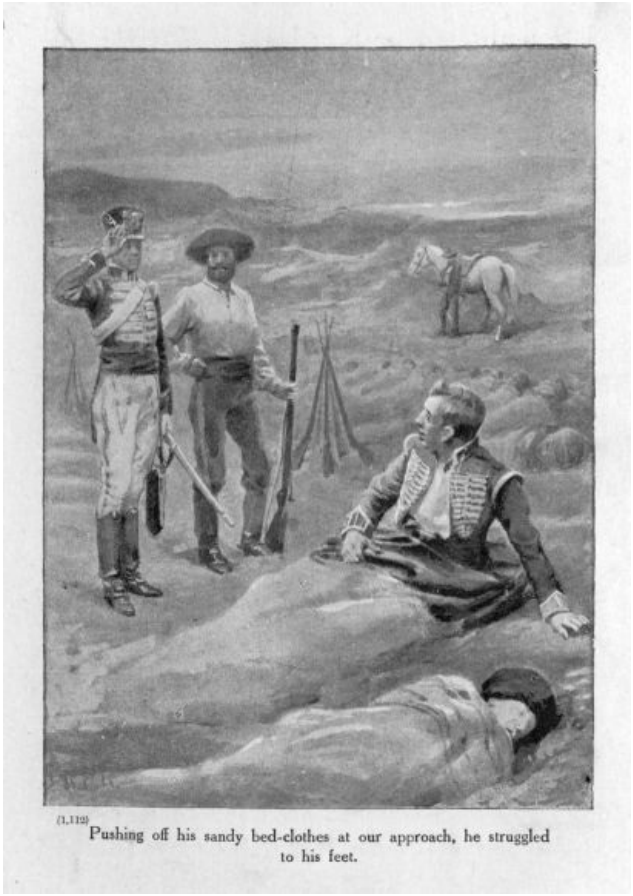
"We are all here," said José, giving my hand a grip; "but I thought you had gone to Arica. Is anything wrong?"

"A good deal," I answered, speaking in English, so that the Indians might not understand. "I must see Colonel Miller at once."

"Jump down, then. Leave your horse here, and I will take you to him. Mind where you step; the men are all tucked in and sound asleep."

But for the fog, I could by this time have seen my way clearly; as it was, I could only just distinguish the ponchos enveloping the men's heads. When the fog lifted, the light showed a more curious spectacle than most of you have perhaps ever seen. It was the custom, whenever we halted in a sandy desert, for each man to scoop out for himself a shallow grave. In this he lay, scraping the loose sand over his body for bed-clothes, and leaving his head, wrapped in his poncho, above ground. It was, indeed, a most comfortable and delicious bed, as in those days, or rather nights, I often proved.

The colonel lay buried alive, as it were, like his men; but he slept lightly, and pushing off his sandy bed-clothes at our approach, he struggled to his feet.



(1,112) Pushing off his sandy bed-clothes at our approach, he struggled to his feet.

**Pushing off his sandy bed-clothes at our approach,
he struggled to his feet.**

"Who is it?" he asked. "Crawford, where is your guide?"

"Gone another way to look for you, colonel."

"Have the brigs left Ilo?"

"Yes; but both Castro and I doubt if they will reach Arica. They are altogether crazy, and as soon as they left the harbour a strong gale from the north, which will drive them out of their course, sprang up."

"You are rather a Job's comforter," laughed the colonel. "I daresay they will arrive all right. Still," he continued, speaking more to himself, "everything depends upon their safe arrival—everything! Jump in, Crawford, and have a nap; I may want you presently."

He went away with José, while I got into his bed, pulled the sand over me, and was fast asleep before the two men had gone a dozen yards.

For two whole hours I lay like a log; then a soldier pulled the poncho from my head, saying that the colonel waited for me at breakfast. I rose quickly, made my toilet—not an elaborate proceeding, you may be sure—and waited on the colonel.

"Sit down," said he, laughing; "it's early in the day for banqueting, but we must feast when we can. I hope you are not blessed with too good an appetite?"

"I don't think I should feel greatly tempted to indulge much at present," I replied, with a grimace at

the dried meat I was cutting. "Indigestion would only too surely follow."

"Then," said he, and his eyes twinkled with merriment, "we will eat sparingly. I am going straight to Arica, and you will ride with me."

"I am afraid I shall have to get you to find me a fresh horse, as my own has broken down, colonel."

Turning to one of the soldiers near, he said, "Ask Major Videla to send me a good horse at once.—Take your time, Crawford; I am awaiting a messenger from Tacna."

Nearly an hour passed before he was ready, during which time I saddled my fresh mount, transferred my holsters, and had a chat with José. He told me they had been compelled to release their prisoners, Santiago among them.

"I had no idea you were so hard pressed," I said.

"If La Hera doesn't blunder," answered José, "he can sweep us all into his net. The only thing that saves us now is Miller's skill and reputation. Every one believes he is going to show fight somewhere between this and the coast."

Presently the colonel came along, accompanied by Major Videla, to whom he gave final directions; and then, bidding me follow, rode from the camp. Four miles out we came upon Castro, walking, and leading his horse, which had fallen dead lame.

"Have you been into Arica?" asked Miller.

"No, colonel; but I have learned some news. There are four fine vessels in the roadstead; if you could get them, the troops would be safe."

"Ah!" cried the colonel sharply; and telling Castro to wait for the cavalry, he rode off at a great pace towards Arica. At four o'clock we staggered into the town, and were instantly met by the governor with a sorrowful tale. He had secured the use of three vessels, but the commander of the fourth absolutely refused to be either coaxed or threatened into lending his assistance.

There was not a moment to be lost, and Colonel Miller, with no other attendant than myself, ran down to the beach. There we got on a balsa, or raft, which carried us to a launch, whose crew at once took us alongside a fine North American schooner.

Clambering on deck, we found the master, to whom the colonel applied for the loan of his vessel. The sour old sea-dog turned a deaf ear. The colonel offered a sum of money that would have bought the schooner outright at market value; he would have none of it.

Now, it chanced that some of the crew were Englishmen who had served under Miller in the Chilian War; and though I did not know that, I could plainly see how interested they were in the discussion. The colonel saw it too, and in a few simple but terse and vigorous words he laid the case before them.

This produced a marked effect. The men growled their approbation, and one sturdy fellow exclaimed stoutly, "I'm not going to see a countryman of mine hard pushed without helping him. What's your sentiments, mates?"

"The same!" cried they.—"We'll stand by you, colonel. The Spaniards shan't cut you off if we can help it."

"Thanks, men," replied Colonel Miller, "and I'll treat you fairly. Neither your master nor you shall have cause to complain."

The skipper, however, was not to be appeased. He threw up his command and went ashore with us, leaving the mate to navigate the vessel. It was rather a high-handed proceeding, perhaps, on the colonel's part, but he was saving his troops from an unavailing fight against overwhelming odds.

All that night we worked like slaves. The launches could not come close inshore, so that every one and everything had to be transported to them on balsas. The colonel did not spare himself, and my position procured me the honour of standing beside him knee-deep in surf while he superintended the embarkation.

Most of the sick were got on board one or other of the four vessels, but the worst cases had to remain in hospital. Then nearly a hundred people of the town, who had recently joined the Patriot cause, clamoured for protection, which was, of course, afforded.

In the morning the colonel insisted I should take a rest, but the work continued all day, while from time to time scouts came in with the news that La Hera was advancing at full speed. At length it was all done; only the colonel and I remained to go on board, and we had just reached the launch, when, with a yell and thunder of hoofs, the Royalist cavalry galloped down to the beach.

"Just too late to take their passage," laughed Miller. "What a pity!"

"There's our late prisoner," I cried, standing up in the launch. "Look at the rascal; he is shaking his

sword at us, and laughing."

"He's a fine fellow," remarked the colonel. "I don't grudge him his liberty."

Taking off my cap, I waved it vigorously; to which Santiago replied with a salute; and then, as pursuit was impossible, he led his men back into the town.

CHAPTER XII.

A STERN PURSUIT.

As soon as our vessels left the shelter of the bay, they felt the full force of the gale; and but for skilful handling on the part of their crews, would most likely have come to grief. Even as it was, the more timid of the passengers began to think they would have done better in trusting to the mercy of the victorious Spaniards.

"It is lucky for us, lieutenant," exclaimed Castro, "that the brigs did not reach Arica."

"I hope they are safe," I said doubtfully.

"Safe enough by this time," he replied—"at the bottom of the ocean!"

Whether or not he was right in his surmise I cannot say, but from that day to this I never again heard mention of the unfortunate vessels.

After being at sea about a week, on reduced rations both of food and of water, we ran one night into the roadstead of Pisco, landed, and before daylight had made ourselves masters of the town, the Royalists hurriedly retreating.

On board the schooner I had obtained a much-needed rest, but directly my feet touched the shore I was set to work again.

There never was such a man for prompt and instant action as Colonel Miller. As José said more than once, he was always packing twenty-four hours' work into twelve, and no one within had ever had a chance to shirk his share.

"We must follow up the enemy—follow them up, and not give them a moment's rest!" said he, almost before the nose of our boat had touched the shore.

First, however, it was necessary to obtain animals, and almost before day broke a dozen parties were dispatched to scour the surrounding district for horses. The Royalists, however, had been beforehand, and it took three days to procure the needful supplies.

Fortunately a woman arrived from Lima with a drove of fifty mules, which our leader instantly pressed into the service, in spite of their lawful owner's protestations. She was a fine, handsome, and remarkable woman, who traded on her own account like a man, and she made a sturdy fight for her property. Directly the mules were seized she bounced into the colonel's room, her eyes ablaze.

"Good-morning, madam," said he courteously.

"It's a bad morning for me," she replied. "Do you know that your men have stolen my mules?"

"Not stolen, madam; only borrowed, by my orders, for the good of the Patriot cause."

"I defy you to keep them!" she cried. "See," and waving & paper, added triumphantly, "that will make you less high and mighty, Señor Englishman!"

The paper was a passport and protection signed by San Martin himself; but it produced no effect on the stubborn colonel.

"I am sorry, madam," he exclaimed, still courteously, "but my men need the mules. They shall be paid for, handsomely, but I must have them."

The woman gasped with astonishment, and pushing the paper close to the colonel's face, cried, "Are you blind? Can't you see General San Martin's name? Don't you know that he can have you shot to-day if he pleases?"

"Not *to-day*, madam. The swiftest messenger could not get here from Lima to-day; and thanks to your mules, which are really very fine animals, we shall begin to chase the Royalists at dawn."

Luckily she could not see my face as she broke into a torrent of abuse. She had a fine command of the Spanish language, which she used for his benefit, besides throwing in a number of odd phrases

picked up from English sailors. And all the while the colonel beamed upon her genially, as if she were paying him the highest compliments. At length she announced, in high-pitched tones, that where her mules went there would she go also; she would not trust them to such a band of thieving scoundrels.

"I am delighted, madam," said the colonel, bowing low; "your society will in some degree atone for the hardships of our journey."

Neither of us thought she would really carry out her threat; but early next morning she appeared mounted on one of her own mules, and attached herself to me.

"Madam," said I gravely, trying to imitate the colonel, "this is a great pleasure for us; but even at the risk of losing your valued company, I must once more point out to you the real nature of this journey. We shall be half starved, besides suffering torments from thirst; we shall be worn out by forced marches, and some of us, no doubt, will fall victims to the Spanish bullets."

"I won't leave my mules," was her only reply.

"But why not sell them to the colonel? he will give you a fair price."

"And what about my profit?" she cried. "Do you know why I came to Pisco?—to buy brandy at eight dollars a jar, which just now I could sell in Lima at eighty! What do you think of that, young man? Why, I should have cleared a handsome fortune by this trip!"

"It is very sad, madam; but soldiers, you know—"

"Soldiers? Bah! Look at them riding on my mules! *My* mules, mark you! And to think that each of the honest beasts might be carrying four jars of brandy at eight dollars a jar! It's a wicked waste of mule-flesh! Eight from eighty leaves seventy-two; take twelve for expenses, there's still sixty, and four sixties are two hundred and forty—all clear profit from! A dozen of your vagabonds would be dear at the price! Look at that rascally fellow cutting my mule with a whip! I will most certainly have your colonel shot!"

"I think not, madam; you have too tender a heart."

"Yes," said she complacently, "that is the truth. I am not stern enough. But fancy"—and here she went all over her calculations again, winding up with the assertion that we were a set of common thieves and rogues.

By degrees, however, her manner changed: the ill-humour wore off, and she became quite a Patriot, saying she would willingly lose her mules if the Royalists were hunted down.

However, about nine o'clock in the morning I left the good lady to pour her grievances into more sympathetic ears, being ordered to push on with a small detachment of cavalry, guided by Castro. José was lucky enough to stay with the main body. Captain Plaza was in command of our party, and he rode with the guide and me. Our course to Ica, the first village on our route, lay over a burning desert of very loose sand, dotted at great intervals by clumps of stunted palms. It was a horrible ride, and when we reached Ica, about four in the afternoon, neither men nor animals could go a step further.

The people received us kindly, provided food and drink, and fresh horses in place of our wearied animals. Then we slept for an hour, and, thus refreshed, resumed the pursuit. I have often wondered since how any of us survived the hardships of the next few days.

Now and again we obtained an hour's rest, but our leader halted only when our animals showed signs of exhaustion. The Spaniards must have suffered as much as, if not more than, ourselves, as occasionally we came upon a dead horse or a dead man, killed by sheer fatigue.

On the third night after leaving lea we had ample proof of their desperate straits. We had left the sandy deserts behind, and were toiling along painfully, sustained only by Castro's assurance that he knew of a capital camping-ground.

"A fine wooded place," said he, "with grass for the horses, and a clear stream of water. You will be tempted to stay there all night, captain."

"Three hours," replied Plaza, "not a moment more. We must be close on their heels now, and I don't mean Santalla to escape if I can help it."

Santalla was a Royalist colonel of whose cruelty I had heard many times. He was a gigantic fellow, of enormous strength; but, according to all accounts, a pitiful coward in spite of his boasting. Indeed, any leader of average bravery would have turned and struck a blow at the handful of tired riders which now pursued him.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Castro presently, and I saw with satisfaction the trees on our left hand to which he pointed. Every bone in my body was racked with pain, my lips were parched, my eyes ached, and for the last hour I had scarcely been able to keep my seat.

Halting his men, Plaza sent me on with the guide to investigate. Leaving our horses, we moved forward swiftly but quietly; there was just the possibility of a trap. The place was almost like an enclosure on a large hacienda, but the fence was composed of trees, and we could hear the plashing

waters of a stream.

Inside the ring was an open space, and there, to our astonishment, we beheld some twenty men lying on the grass in all manner of attitudes. Not one made the slightest movement, and at first I thought they must be dead.

"Don't be too sure," whispered Castro, and stooping down he glided noiselessly to the nearest man, while I waited with breathless eagerness.

"Poor beggars!" said he pityingly; "we must have pushed them hard. I don't believe they would waken if a cannon were fired at them!"

This was an exaggeration, but indeed they slept so soundly that our men, surrounding them, took away most of their weapons before they understood what was going on. Binding their arms, we pushed and dragged them close together, and then the captain placed his men round them in a circle. Sentries were stationed at various places on the outer ring, and, much to my disgust, I was told off to visit them during the first hour.

"Keep a sharp lookout," said the captain, "and go round regularly. They are likely to fall asleep if you don't,"—which I did not think at all surprising. However, I had a good drink of water, and dipped my head in the stream, which freshened me somewhat. Then I began what has, perhaps, been the very longest hour in my life. Fortunately I had to walk, and I tried hard to keep my eyes open all the time. As to the captain's "sharp look-out," I concluded he must have been joking.

The hour came to an end at last, and I was free to sleep. I just lay down on the ground, drew my poncho over me, and was sound asleep. I would not have undertaken another hour's duty just then for all the gold ever mined.

The capture of the small Spanish detachment was a benefit to us in one way: it prevented Plaza from moving so early, and gave us all an extra hour's sleep. However, as soon as day broke, he told off half a dozen men to guard the prisoners until the colonel's arrival, and ordered the rest to be ready for starting in ten minutes.

"It's nothing to do with me," remarked Castro, as he and I rode out at the head of the men; "but the captain's overdoing it. He's taking the heart out of his fellows, and just at the last pinch they'll fall to pieces. There's nothing left in them for a dash at the end."

"We shouldn't shine in a cavalry charge," I admitted, laughing and looking at my horse, "unless, indeed, it were under Don Quixote's banner!"

"Well, Crawford," cried the captain, riding up, "something ought to happen soon now. It's a pity we wasted that last hour this morning, though. We must make up for it during the day. One of the prisoners informed me that Santalla cannot be far ahead. I have a good mind to push on with the men on the strongest horses, leaving you to follow. What do you think?"

"I think that you are going fast enough, captain. Both men and horses are fagged now, and it's useless to catch up with Santalla just as we are all dead beat."

"But if we don't go ahead we shan't catch him at all. The colonel did not send us on in front to sit down by the wayside."

"No, captain; but that's just what we shall be doing soon, whether we want to or not. Most of the horses are nearly done for now."

"Then we'll get fresh ones," cried he (which, by the way, there was no possible means of doing), "or continue the pursuit on foot. Do you think if the colonel were in my place he would lag behind?"

Of course I knew he would not, but then Miller was Miller, who had not, to my thinking, his equal in South America. And Plaza wished to imitate his chief, forgetting he did not possess that marvellous personal influence over men which accounted so much for the English colonel's success.

So we pushed on, till, at the end of the third mile or thereabout, a horse sank through sheer weariness to the ground, and had not sufficient strength to rise again.

"Run on with the rest," said the captain to the rider; "we will ride and tie by turns."

The man saluted and came on, but the last I saw of him he was staggering from side to side of the track, as if he had completely lost control of his limbs. After a time another horse fell, giving us another infantry-man, who in a short time was, I daresay, also left behind on the road.

"'Twill be a plain trail for the main body," remarked the guide; for we ourselves were continually passing broken weapons, mules that could not drag their limbs a step further, dead horses, and now and then a Royalist soldier curled up on the track fast asleep.

"Where will Santalla make for?" I asked.

"Arequipa. But I don't think he can reach it. The Indians bar the direct route, and his only way out, as far as I can see, is by taking to the mountains at Copari."

"My horse won't face a hill just now."

Castro smiled, saying, "The pass near Copari is too rugged for horses at any time; the climbing must all be done on foot," and he smiled again at my gesture of despair.

At ten o'clock Plaza was compelled to halt, three-fourths of the men being tired as dogs, while several horses had foundered on the road. He was very excited, having heard from the last Spaniard picked up that Santalla, thoroughly worn out, was barely two hours' march in front.

He glanced wrathfully at his tired troopers. There they lay, five minutes after the order to halt, sleeping like dead men, and for the time being certainly of no greater use.

"Caramba!" cried he, "it makes me wild! Two hours, Crawford! Do you hear? And look at them! The prize will slip through our fingers after all!"

"Hardly that, captain," I murmured sleepily, "as it has never been in our hands."

"Santalla will have to rest as well," remarked the guide, "so the scales will balance."

"But I don't want them to balance!" cried Plaza testily.

To give the captain his due, he was greatly in earnest, and willing to do himself all that he required of his men. He showed this plainly two hours after we had resumed the pursuit, when his horse suddenly dropped from exhaustion. A dozen troopers at once made as if to dismount, but he ordered them to keep their seats.

"No, no," he roared; "I take no advantage!" and he ran on, holding by the stirrup to the nearest horseman.

The fellows cheered him, and I think we got on better for the incident, though the halts became more frequent now, and our numbers lessened, as one man after another dropped exhausted to the ground. Still we were gaining on the runaways, as a disagreeable episode presently made clear.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and we were straggling at no great speed through a narrow valley, when half a dozen bullets from the rocky sides dropped into our midst.

"Ah!" exclaimed Castro, "now the Spaniards are playing the proper game. These fellows have been left to hold us in check while the main body escapes through the Copari Pass."

"Push on there!" roared the captain, who after a spell of riding had just dismounted. There was, indeed, nothing else to be done. We must run the gauntlet, and trust to luck for some of us getting through. The Spaniards were well hidden, and could not be dislodged, unless, which was out of the question, we came to hand-grasps with them. So urging our jaded beasts to a spurt, we quickened the pace, while now and again a groan and a thud told that a bullet had found its mark.

Those who were hit lay where they fell; the most of us reached the open country just in time to see a dozen or fifteen horsemen mount and ride off. Evidently they had the pick of Santalla's animals, as they easily kept their distance, though allowing us to advance within range, when, discharging their muskets, they recommenced the retreat.

Plaza fumed like one distracted at the galling fire, which considerably delayed our advance, though we suffered in the loss of horses rather than of men. He was riding again now, and well in front, with Castro and myself behind him. Suddenly, after a scattering volley, I felt my horse slip, and the next instant the poor beast was sprawling on the ground with a bullet-hole in its chest.

Staggering to my feet, I ran on, but unsteadily, for in truth I was getting very near the end of my strength. However, a husky shout from those in front encouraged me, and I saw that at last we had come fairly upon the runaways.

Just as Castro had foretold, they were taking to a mountain pass, eastward of Copari, and the main body was already toiling up the ascent. Their stores lay about everywhere; horses and mules were abandoned; only a handful of horsemen, constituting the rearguard, preserved any appearance of order. For a time they stoutly held the mouth of the pass, but at length, leaving their animals, they too disappeared.

Plaza went at the entrance like a bull at a gate, Castro followed, and I toiled after them with the men. Up we went, some cheering, but the majority with closed lips, saving their breath. In our fatigued state the climb was fearfully distressing: men sank to the ground gasping, or fell while trying to grasp the overhanging rocks with nerveless fingers.

As for me, though straining every nerve, I could not keep pace with the leaders. My eyes smarted and ached; my head seemed to spin round; more than once I should have fallen but for a friendly hand. Presently I heard Plaza cheer; but he was out of sight, and the sound seemed to come from a long distance. Then I was placed gently against a rock by a soldier, who pushed on after the rest.

Had I been hit? I really did not know. There was blood on my hands, but they had been gashed by the jagged rocks. But hit or not, I must do my best to keep up; so trying to steady myself, I took another step forward. The pass was filled with strange sounds and with strange shapes too. Large birds hovered

over my head, men and animals stood in my path; I had to dodge here and there in order to find a way through.

Suddenly a man placed his arm round my waist, and saying, "You must lie down, lieutenant," carried me a little distance, and then placed me on the ground.

"No, no," I murmured drowsily; "the captain is calling! Don't you hear the captain calling?"

"Yes," said he: "the Spaniards have escaped, and the captain has sounded a halt."

I did not know then that the man was tricking me for my own good, so I answered innocently, "Thank goodness! Now we shall have a little rest. Waken me when they return."

"Never fear, sir," said he; "I will waken you," and even before he turned away I had lost all knowledge of the situation.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOME AGAIN.

Several days passed before I could recognize any one or anything, and then I found myself lying in bed in a strange room, but with José sitting near me. He rubbed his hands together and smiled when my eyes opened, but he would not talk beyond saying that we were back in Ica.

I felt weak, but in no pain; and in a day or two was able to dress, and with José's help to go for a stroll in the town. Several acquaintances congratulated me on my recovery; but not seeing Captain Plaza, I asked José if he had been hurt.

"Oh no," he answered, with a smile; "the captain is sound in everything but temper. Santalla spoiled that by getting clear off. You won't forget that charming little trip in a hurry, Jack!"

"Oh, it was simply awful! I wouldn't go through it again to be made commander-in-chief. I wonder it didn't kill me."

"It did kill some, and knocked you all out except Plaza and the guide. There was precious little difficulty in finding the route you had taken. One of the troopers showed me where you were. 'The lieutenant is a bit light-headed; said he; 'so I put him in a corner out of harm's way. I told him the captain had stopped the pursuit.'"

"I remember something about it. I was tired out before my horse got hit, and the climb up the pass finished me."

"You weren't the only one to get knocked up. However, the colonel obtained a light cart, and we brought you all back to Ica."

"So we had our trouble for nothing?"

"Not exactly. Santalla escaped, but he left all his stores behind, and nearly a hundred of his men were captured. Most of them, I think, were very glad of it. We couldn't get them to keep their eyes open, they were so sleepy."

"What did the colonel say?"

"Oh, he laughed, and chaffed Plaza a bit, but I think he was very well satisfied. Now we had better turn back."

I offered no objection, as even the short distance we had walked had fatigued me wonderfully. By degrees, however, my strength returned, and at the end of another week I was able to resume my duties.

The colonel, as usual, was extremely busy, having to keep in order all the affairs of a huge district. Though my services were very welcome, he would not let me do too much, saying kindly, "Take it easy, my lad. One mustn't spur the willing horse. We are not chasing Santalla just at present."

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed. "One can have too much of that sport." And the colonel indulged in one of his merry laughs.

The town at this time was very quiet. There were no Spanish troops within many miles; our own men, through decent food and careful nursing, were rapidly recovering from the effects of their long forced marches; and fierce bands of our guerillas guarded the mountain passes. As far as our particular district was concerned, the war seemed to be over.

One night as I sat making a fair copy of a proclamation, the colonel, looking up suddenly, exclaimed, "Crawford, would you like to go to Lima?"

"To Lima, sir?" and I let the pen fall in my eagerness; "why, I'd give anything to go there!"

"Well, you can go for nothing, my boy, in a day or two. Of course you know our friends have been for some time now in possession of the capital, and that San Martin is Protector of Peru?"

"Yes, sir, though I think 'tis but an empty title until the Royalists are thoroughly beaten."

"All in good time," said he pleasantly. "That will come some day. We shall be masters of Callao shortly; which will be a great step forward. I have received news this afternoon which impels me to make the journey to Lima; so if you think you're strong enough—"

"I'm sure I am," I cried eagerly. "I haven't an ache or pain in my whole body now, and—"

"All right!" interrupted the colonel; "I'll take you. Now finish your copying, and don't fling the ink all over the place; it's wasteful."

It was not only wasteful, but it gave me extra work, the copy being so smeared and blotted that I had to write it again on a fresh sheet.

"Lima in a day or two!" I said softly to myself as my pen drove along the paper. The words sounded like sweetest music to me, and I hummed them to myself over and over again. I pictured the dear old home, the park, the pony I had ridden so often, the silvery pond, and the boats I had fashioned to sail on its waters.

But above and beyond all I saw my mother, with eyes aglint and face suffused with joy. The vision was so real that I stopped in my writing to view it more closely. And when the colonel presently gave me leave for the remainder of the day, I rushed off to find José, hardly knowing whether I ran or flew.

"What is it, Jack?" he exclaimed. "Has Captain Plaza promised to take you on another trip?"

He laughed at his own joke, and I laughed too, being in the humour to see fun in anything.

"You aren't far out, José," I replied, slapping him on the shoulder out of pure good humour. "I am going on a trip, but not with Plaza!"

"Then it must be with the colonel."

"Right this time. But where are we going, José? can you tell me that, eh? No, you'll never guess, so I will tell you. To *Lima*, my boy! what do you think of that?"

"I think that your mother will be very pleased to see you."

"Fancy seeing her again, José, after all these weary months!"

"She will hardly know you," said he. "You have grown so tall and strong and manly. You are the image of what your father was at your age, Jack. Are all the troops to be moved up?"

"I think not. As far as I know, the colonel's only paying a flying visit to the capital. Why are you laughing?"

"Because I'm rather doubtful of that. If Miller goes to Lima, it's a proof there are hard knocks about. And high time too! According to the talk, the war should have been done with long ago."

Next day the colonel made his arrangements, and on the following morning he set out, leaving Major Videla in charge of the district. Rather to my surprise, José formed one of the party, which consisted only of us three.

Under some circumstances the journey would have been tedious; but Colonel Miller was very agreeable, and told us many interesting stories of his adventurous career. Thus the time passed pleasantly enough, and on the evening of September 11, 1821, we arrived in the neighbourhood of Lima.

The capital, as I have said, was in possession of the Patriots; but a Royalist garrison still held Callao, and the Royalist general, Canterac, with a small army, had just swooped down from the mountains to help his friends. Our soldiers were chiefly stationed between the two towns; but the citizens of Lima had armed themselves, and swaggered about talking of the great deeds they were about to perform.

The colonel, aware of my anxiety, agreed that I should pay a visit to my mother at once.

"I must see General San Martin," said he. "He may give me a post here, and if so, I will send for you. But you have earned a few days' rest, and I shall not omit to mention you favourably to the protector."

As soon as he had gone, José and I rode on quickly. My heart beat fast, and my hands trembled so that I had to use both in holding the reins.

"I suppose it is all right, José," I remarked as we drew near the house. "I suppose there is nothing wrong?"

"No, no," replied he; "why should there be? You are nervous, my boy, that's all. Cheer up; in a short time you will be in your mother's arms."

At the outer gate I drew back, leaving José to accost the janitor, who greeted him heartily. Then in silence we rode through the park to the courtyard, and in response to our knocking Antonio appeared.

On seeing me the old man would have screamed with delight, but I checked him, saying softly, "Hush, Antonio; tell me quickly of your mistress, my mother. Is she well?"

"In health, señor, but sad. Ah, the house has been very lonely for many a long day!"

"Go you, José," said I, "and prepare her."

"Joy never kills," answered he, laughing; "but perhaps it will be as well for me to go in first."

I waited a few moments, and then dismounting, walked softly towards the entrance. What would she say? what would she do? My heart almost ceased beating as I stood in the shadow listening. The door was wide open, and a stream of light came from the spacious hall.

Suddenly I heard a quick step, and then my mother's voice crying, "Juan! my Juan! where are you?" And running forward, I threw myself joyfully into her arms. She kissed me repeatedly, and then hand in hand we went inside.

"Mother!" I cried, "mother!" and for a long time that was the only word spoken. We sat down side by side, and her beautiful eyes, dimmed by very joy, looked into mine. She pressed my hand, smoothed my cheeks, and brushed back the hair from my forehead, murmuring softly, "Juan, my Juan!"

I think, perhaps, that great happiness, like great grief, kills speech. At least it was so with us, and we were content to sit there silently gazing into each loved face.

At length the good old major-domo, knocking timidly at the door, announced that supper was served, when my mother with a sigh suffered me to leave her for a few minutes, in order to make myself more presentable for the table.

I would have had José sit down with us, but he disappeared, and perhaps after all it was as well. My mother made only a pretence at eating, and sat with her eyes fixed on me, as though fearful I should in some mysterious way suddenly disappear.

After supper we returned to the drawing-room, where I related my adventures, telling her the story of the shipwreck, of my rescue and imprisonment in the fort, of my marvellous escape, and all the various incidents which had happened since I left home. Of Santiago's information concerning my father I said nothing, though I longed greatly to do so.

"I think General Barejo wished you well," she exclaimed after a pause. "He is not of our way of thinking, but he has a kind heart, and he was a true friend to me before these troubles came upon us."

"Was he ever friendly with father?" I asked.

"He respected him much, though he thought him greatly mistaken. You see, their ideas were altogether opposed, but in private life each esteemed the other."

Presently, remembering that the Royalists no longer held Lima, I said, "What has become of little Rosa? I hope our people have not disturbed her, though it must be lonely for her living in that great house alone. Could she not have come to you?"

"There was no need," and my mother's lips curled scornfully; "she is safe enough with her father."

"With her father?" I echoed, in astonishment. "How can he take a delicate child like that into a rough camp?"

"His house is not a rough camp, Juan!"

The truth did not strike me at first, so I said innocently, "Oh, has he been wounded and obtained permission to be nursed at home? Is he seriously hurt?"

"He is quite well, I believe, and is one of us."

"Felipe Montilla turned *Patriot*?" I cried in amazement.

Now let me not be misunderstood. I honestly believed our cause just. In my small way I had ventured my life for the independence of Peru, and was quite ready to venture it again. But this man had boasted his loyalty to the Spanish king, had fought under his flag, had taken high rank in his army! He had accepted from him both honours and broad lands, and then at the first reverse in his fortunes had slunk away like a whipped cur.

"A fig for such Patriots!" cried I hotly. "Were I San Martin, he should be whipped back to the men he has deserted. Give me a loyal friend or a stout enemy, I care not which; but these *jellyfish*—bah! they are an abomination."

"You are young, my boy, and not quite wise enough to understand these things. Is it not to Don Felipe's credit that he should openly confess his mistake?"

"And save his estates into the bargain," said I wrathfully. "Let the Spaniards get the upper hand, and you will find him back in their ranks quickly enough."

"A man must follow the guiding of his conscience, even if it lead to his advantage," remarked my mother quietly. "But if you are indignant with Don Felipe, you will be equally delighted with Rosa. She is still Loyalist to the core, and makes no secret of it. She told San Martin the other day that he was a busybody, meddling in affairs that did not concern him, and that the people of Peru could settle their disputes without his interference."

"Bravo, Rosa!" I cried, with a laugh; "there is nothing like speaking one's mind. I'll wager San Martin prefers the girl to her father. Have you seen the general?"

"Yes; he paid me a friendly visit on purpose to show his admiration for your dear father. He is a most remarkable man."

It was not until the evening drew to a close that my mother spoke of what lay nearest her heart—our plans for the future. She admitted with a sigh that I must in honour offer my services to San Martin. I was still young, but there were many boys fighting in the ranks, and some had already sacrificed their lives for the cause.

"It is hard to let you go again," said she, pressing me fondly to her, "and yet I must. God grant that the war may soon be brought to an end!"

"Amen to that!" I exclaimed fervently. "Fighting is not to my liking, but I cannot stand idly by while others risk their lives for my benefit."

"No," said my mother, kissing me good-night; "you must do your duty, my boy. Your father would have wished it."

A few minutes later I went to my room, and was just closing the door when José appeared. He looked hot and flushed, and I asked where he had been.

"To the camp," said he, with a laugh, "to see what's going on. I thought the colonel must have had some special news. Unless San Martin holds his hand, the Spaniards are lost. They can't stay at Callao, as there isn't food even for the garrison; they aren't strong enough to take Lima: they must retreat or starve."

"Well?" I exclaimed questioningly.

"Why, don't you see, directly they begin to retreat we shall crush them. Already nearly two hundred of their men have deserted."

"More deserters? Why, we shall soon be able to form a battalion of turncoats for Don Felipe to lead!"

It was now José's turn to look astonished, and his expression of amazement was so ludicrous that I laughed outright.

"What a poltroon!" he cried contemptuously. "But I'll see you get no harm by this right-about face. He is mistaken if he thinks his treachery will give him a hold on your estates."

"A hold on my estates, José? What do you mean?"

"Oh," said he, "I have not cared to speak of it, but I must now." And he proceeded to inform me that all my father's property had passed into the possession of Don Felipe Montilla.

"But," I exclaimed, striving to appear calm, "that will be set aside now. San Martin will never allow our property to be confiscated because my father died for the Patriot cause."

"Montilla is a fox, Jack, and has made a good bargain for himself, no doubt. I expect he obtained the general's written promise to confirm him in all his estates. And if so," he concluded gloomily, "yours form part of them."

"He shall not keep them," I cried angrily, "whatever San Martin has promised!"

"No; but we must not quarrel openly until the Spaniards are done with. Montilla has influence, and no doubt San Martin finds him useful. But don't take it to heart, Jack; we will defeat him in the end."

"If we don't," said I grimly, "it will be because the son has followed the father. And that reminds me, do you think Montilla knows what actually happened to my father? It always seemed strange to me that Rosa should learn of that affair so quickly."

"You don't suspect—"

"That he had a hand in his death? No, hardly that, though he is mean-spirited enough for it. But it struck me that, being high in the viceroy's favour, he probably knew what was going on."

"That is possible at least."

"Probable, I should say. However, to-morrow I intend putting the question to him."

"Do you mean that you are going to interview him on the subject?"

"Why not? There can be no harm in asking a straightforward question."

"Mind you don't lose your temper, my boy. It's dangerous work rousing a venomous snake until its poison bag is extracted."

"Never fear, José. I have learned how to take care of myself during the last few months. Thanks to you and the colonel, I have done some hard practising. And now turn in. It will seem strange to sleep in one's own bed again, won't it?"

"Make the most of it," advised he laughingly. "It may be a long time before you have another chance."

I felt very tired, and yet it was long before I fell asleep. I was angry at Montilla's double-dealing, sorry for Rosa, my old playmate, and agitated by a thousand vague doubts and suspicions.

In the morning I rose very little refreshed, had a simple breakfast in my room, and went to find José. He had already returned from an early visit to the camp, and brought word that matters were still in the same state. The Spaniards remained sheltered under the guns of the fortress, and San Martin, knowing their provisions were almost exhausted, would not attack.

Presently we were joined by my mother, who made José happy by praising him for his care of me. Then we took a stroll round the grounds, looked in at my workshop, where my half-painted boat still lay, and paid a visit to the lake.

After a while I asked José to have my horse saddled, saying, "Excuse me, mother, for a short time, please. You know the colonel may send for me at any moment, and I should like to see Rosa once more."

This was only partly the truth, but I could not speak of my principal motive, for as yet, acting under José's advice, I had made no mention of Santiago's queer story. It would have been cruel to raise hopes that might have no actual foundation.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIEND OR FOE!

I have before said that Don Felipe was our nearest neighbour; the grounds of his house, indeed, joined our own, and I might easily have gone there on foot. Perhaps it was a touch of pride which induced me to go on horseback, as I was a good rider, and young enough to feel a certain satisfaction in my appearance.

I had grown beyond the recollection of the gatekeeper, who admitted me to the courtyard with a show of deference, saying that both his master and young mistress were at home. Rosa's mother had been dead for some years.

Don Felipe had numerous servants, and to one of them I threw the reins, telling him to mind my horse. Then going to the door, I inquired for Don Felipe.

The major-domo was showing me to a small room, when a girl, merrily humming a popular Royalist song, came tripping along the corridor. Suddenly she stopped, looked hard at me, and then came forward again, saying, "Juan! Surely you are Juan Crawford?"

I have sometimes laughed since at my stupidity, yet there might be found some excuse for it. During my absence from Lima I had often thought of my little playmate, but it had never occurred to me that time would change her as well as myself. And now, instead of the merry child with whom I had romped and played, there appeared a beautiful girl at whom I gazed in wonder.

"Are you not Juan Crawford?" she asked again, speaking softly.

"Yes," said I, "I am Juan; but you, señorita?"

Her face rippled with merry laughter; but pouting her lips, she said,—

"What a poor compliment to your old friend, Juan! Surely you have not forgotten Rosa!"

"Nay, that have I not; I have forgotten nothing. But you are so changed, Rosa—so different!"

"So are you; but I knew you at once. When did you come home? Have you come to see me?"

"Yes, and your father as well. I have some business with him."

"Oh!" cried she, tossing her head and frowning, "of course you and he are on the same side. My father is a Patriot now, and cries, 'Down with the king!' I suppose your meddlesome general has sent you with a message."

I did not undeceive her; and while the servant carried my name to his master, we entered one of the rooms and continued our conversation. I saw she was troubled; yet with great skill and grace she put me at ease, and led me to talk of what had happened during the last two years.

"What a fire-eater you are, Juan!" she cried banteringly. "I am quite afraid of you. But what a fine sword you have! Ah, if I were only a boy! Can you guess what I would do?"

"No," I replied, with a shake of the head. "No one can guess what a girl will do."

"But I said a boy."

"Ah! that would be altogether different."

"I will tell you then," she said, standing up and speaking very earnestly. "I would get a sword and pistols and join the king's friends. I would be a loyal Spanish cavalier, Juan, if I were the only one in Peru!"

"Then it is lucky you are a girl, Rosa, or you would soon be killed. I would not harm the king, even if he were here instead of being in Spain, thousands of miles away; but I have no love for those who rule in his name."

"No," said she, casting down her eyes, and I thought her voice sounded sad; "you have suffered at their hands. But it is not the king's fault, Juan; he would have seen you righted."

"It is a long way from Peru to Spain," said I, trying to speak carelessly, "and it seems as if in these days one must right one's own wrongs."

After that we sat speaking very little, each afraid lest the talk should drift into an awkward channel, for I felt sure that she knew how her father had robbed us of our estates.

On the return of the servant she whispered earnestly, "My father has changed greatly. I am sure he is unhappy. If he should appear cross and irritable, you will bear with him, won't you, Juan?"

"I will do my best, Rosa. But why should he be angry with me? I am only going to ask him a question."

Don Felipe was truly much altered. His dark hair was plentifully sprinkled with silver; there were deep lines in his forehead and around his lips; his eyes had become shifty, and there was a look of cunning in them. He gave me just one swift, searching glance, and then looked away. It was an awkward meeting, and I hardly knew what to say. Fortunately Don Felipe took the lead.

"You have grown almost out of knowledge, my young friend; and I notice you have obtained military rank," said he, with a covert sneer.

"I have the honour to be a lieutenant in the army to which we both belong, señor," I replied.

He winced at that, and his eyes glowed angrily.

"If you have brought me a message from your general," said he, "will you at once deliver it? I am very busy just now."

"I will not take up more than five minutes of your valuable time, señor. My errand is an important one, though *at present* it has nothing to do with General San Martin."

Again he glanced at me sharply, and I thought he seemed slightly nervous.

"I must ask you to be quick with it," he said coldly.

"I only desire to ask you about the death of my father. I am sure you will give me all the information in your power, as he died for the independence of Peru, which to-day both you and I are trying to secure."

At that he started up, his eyes blazing, his hand on his sword.

"Do you think I killed your father?" he roared furiously. "He died through his own fault. I warned him again and again that the time was not ripe, but he paid no heed to me."

"Are you not mistaken?" I asked. "According to the Indians' account, he was slain while trying to prevent them from rising."

"Then the government was deceived. No good can be done by digging up the dead past, but you shall hear all that I know of the story. At that time there were three parties in the country. One section, led by your father, resolved upon armed insurrection; another, composed of Royalists, determined that nothing should be changed; the third, to which I belonged, endeavoured to obtain reform by moderate means. I need not say that your father was a marked man. One day the viceroy received word that he had started for the mountains in order to rouse the Indians to revolt, and, to prevent mischief, it was arranged that he should be placed in prison. As you may know, he refused to submit quietly, and, unfortunately, was shot in the fight which ensued."

"Was his body brought back to Lima?"

"I never heard so. Most probably it was left on the mountains. I was sorry for him; but he was a headstrong man, and would not listen to reason."

"That was foolish of him," I remarked quietly. "Had he waited till the proper time to declare his real opinions, he would not have lost his life, nor my mother her property. It is possible, indeed, that our estates would have been largely added to."

"The estates were confiscated, it is true," said Don Felipe slowly, "but they fell into friendly hands." Then, in quite a kindly tone, he added, "You feel bitter against me, Juan—I see it in your face. Perhaps it is natural; yet you really have no reason to do so. I must not say more now, but all will come right in the end."

"So I intend," said I stoutly, yet feeling rather mystified.

The man's sudden change of manner puzzled me. After all, I was only a boy, with little ability and no training to seek for things lying beneath the surface. And Montilla seeing the state of my mind, played upon it with consummate skill.

I cannot truthfully say that he made any definite promise, but this was the impression I received:—Knowing that all my father's property was forfeit to the law, he had exerted his influence to secure it. At that time he thought the trouble would be settled without fighting, and intended in a year or two to restore the estates. When the war broke out, he endeavoured to bring the viceroy over to the cause of reform, but finding that impossible, was compelled reluctantly to join the Patriots. Of course, in the matter of the estates, nothing could be done now till the war was over.

"Thus," said he cheerfully, "the future is safe. If the Patriots win, we can have the confiscation revoked; while, on the other hand, I count so many friends among the moderate Royalists that the viceroy would hardly care to thwart me."

"In any case," said I bluntly, though with no wish to vex him, "the Indians will see that I am not wronged!"

"Trust me," he answered, his voice sounding now like the purring of a cat; "Felipe Montilla never makes mistakes."

I had a stinging reply on my lips, but refraining from giving it utterance, I bade him farewell.

"Come again, Juan," said he, "if the general can spare you!" And though not overburdened with wits, I had a sense of being laughed at.

I was joined in the corridor by Rosa, who wanted to know why I was going so soon.

"I really must," I answered, smiling. "I have spent no time with my mother yet, and I may be sent for at any moment."

"But this will not be *good-bye*?"

"On the contrary, I hope to see you often. Your father has given me the kindest of invitations."

At this she opened her eyes wide; but quickly recovering herself, she smiled pleasantly, and accompanied me to the hall. As I rode by, she was standing at a window waving her hand.

I had much to think of during the short ride home, but I got little satisfaction from my thoughts. Nothing had been gained by my visit to Montilla, and his story only went to confirm the truth of the reports of my father's death. As to my faith in his startling promises, it grew weaker with every step my horse took.

I said nothing to my mother; but José, to whom I related all that had passed, laughed loudly.

"The cunning old fox!" cried he; "he hasn't his equal for craft in Peru! You will see that, whoever sinks, Don Felipe Montilla will swim."

"Not at my expense," I exclaimed, "while I have strength to raise an arm."

The rest of that day I spent with my mother, forcing myself to forget that any trouble existed in the world. It was only a brief spell of happiness, but we enjoyed every second of it, and by nightfall my mother's face had lost some of its sadness, and her eyes shone brightly as in the olden days.

Early next morning an order was brought to me to rejoin Colonel Miller, as it was arranged that, for a time at least, José should remain behind to look after the affairs of the hacienda. The servants assembled in the courtyard to see me off, and my mother came to the hall door. There she embraced me, and stood smiling bravely as I mounted. Whatever sorrow she felt was locked up tightly in her own breast.

Accompanied by the man who had brought the order, I rode briskly to Mirones, the headquarters of the Patriot army, and about a mile from Callao.

The colonel was with San Martin and a group of officers, watching the enemy's movements; but he turned to me at once, saying, "General, this is Lieutenant Crawford, of whom I spoke."

San Martin, the Protector of Peru, was a tall man with black hair, bushy whiskers, and a deep olive complexion. He had black, piercing eyes, fringed by long lashes and overhung by heavy brows and a high, straight forehead. He was strong and muscular, with an erect, military carriage. He looked every inch a soldier, and one, moreover, with an iron will that nothing could bend. His voice was harsh and unmusical, but he spoke in a kindly, simple, and unaffected manner.

"Colonel Miller has told me many things of you, lieutenant," said he, "and all to your credit. I am glad to know that the son of Don Eduardo Crawford is following so well in his father's steps."

"Thank you, general," I replied, bowing low.

"I understand," he continued, "that Colonel Miller wishes to keep you with him. It is certainly an honourable post; but I fancy you are likely to get many hard knocks," he concluded, with a laugh.

"He has had a strong taste of the service, general," observed Miller, with a merry smile.—"Are you willing to stay with me, Crawford?"

"Yes, certainly, sir, with the general's permission."

"Very well," said San Martin. "And, by the way, colonel, let him have on hour's sleep now and again,"—a little joke at which the group of officers, knowing the Englishman's habits, laughed heartily.

The general presently rode off to his quarters, the officers went to their several duties, and I accompanied Colonel Miller to that part of the field in which his men were stationed. He had been appointed to the command of a column seven hundred strong, which was held in readiness to move at any moment. The officers were unknown to me, but they seemed pleasant, genial fellows, and in a short time I felt quite at home with them. The younger ones were grumbling because San Martin did not at once attack the enemy, saying that Canterac would slip away to the mountains in the night.

"Then his army will break up of its own accord," remarked a grizzled major. "He can't take his guns, and his troops are starving. Hundreds will throw down their weapons on finding us close at their heels."

"Better have a straight fight and have done with it," grumbled a youngster. "There's no fun playing at hide-and-seek in the hills."

"Should you live to be a man," said the major reprovingly, "you won't talk in such a light-hearted way of a battle." And the boy's face flushed at the laugh which greeted the remark.

"Don't be too sarcastic, Gamarra," cried another. "The youngster's right in the main. If Canterac escapes, the war may drag on for months, and will cost thousands of lives. The mountains will kill more than a pitched battle would."

"Canterac can't escape if we follow him up properly," said the major, "and Colonel Miller seems the man to do that."

"That is so; but he can't move without orders; and there's more than one man in high places who will prefer Lima to a pursuit."

Thus they talked during the afternoon, and early in the evening Colonel Miller ordered that every one not on duty should turn in at once; which we took to be a sign that something was going to happen shortly.

At ten o'clock the column was roused. The men assembled silently, and a whisper went round that Canterac had begun his retreat. For more than an hour we awaited fresh orders, the colonel on horseback fuming impatiently, until at last the word came to march.

"An hour thrown away," muttered the colonel angrily. "Canterac will laugh in our faces."

To our disgust, we found that the column was attached to the main army, and that we had to move step by step to the will of the chief. I knew very little about military tactics, but it was a strange kind of pursuit, and made me think of a tortoise chasing a hare.

"I wonder what Captain Plaza would think of this performance?" said the colonel, rather bitterly, as we jogged along. "This isn't the way he took you after Santalla, eh?"

"Indeed no, colonel!" I replied, laughing. "The captain would have had us on the other side of Lima by now."

"It's like a funeral procession," he muttered impatiently; "and if they don't mind, 'twill be a funeral procession in reality. We shall be burying the independence of Peru."

The ridiculous part of it was that our column had been formed of all the light companies on purpose to swoop down on the foe. As far as I could judge, the swoop was much like that of a hawk whose wings had been carefully tied to its body.

However, we tramped along throughout the night, halting at daybreak without getting a glimpse of the exulting Canterac.

"Never mind," exclaimed the colonel, who hated to look on the dark side of things; "we may catch them during the day."

In this he was disappointed, as we proceeded in the same leisurely manner, just as if we were out for a quiet stroll on a summer's day. Several times Miller rode off to the staff, but on each occasion he returned looking more dissatisfied than before.

The men wondered, and at each halt the officers talked pretty freely among themselves, giving their opinions with refreshing vigour.

"Canterac has the start of us now," said one, "and we shall never overtake him. We had the game in our hands, and have simply thrown it away."

The grizzled major remained optimistic, saying, "You may depend that San Martin has some scheme in his head." But the rest of us were doubtful.

"If I had an enemy in a trap, my scheme would be to keep him there and not to let him walk out through an open door," laughed a young captain. "The war might have been finished to-day; now it's likely to go on for another twelvemonth."

"Well," remarked one of his comrades, "it's a comfort to think we shan't kill ourselves through over-exertion."

By degrees we pushed on to a place about nine leagues east of Lima, where it seemed as if the lumbering machine had broken down altogether. It was evening when we arrived and halted; the men ate the last morsel of their scanty rations; the chief officers, though no one could imagine what they found to discuss, held a conference, and presently it leaked out that the pursuit had been abandoned.

"I don't profess to understand it," exclaimed Major Gamarra, "but you will find that there's some grand scheme in the air."

"Ah!" interrupted another officer, in a sarcastic tone, "and no doubt it will stay there; most of these precious schemes do. What I should like to see would be a little common sense."

"Would you recognize it if you saw it?" put in the major quick as lightning; and all the others laughed.

"Perhaps not. I've had little opportunity of renewing my acquaintance with it since San Martin came to Peru."

This was a dangerous remark, as we were a very mixed crowd. Some had come from Buenos Ayres with San Martin; others were Chilians who had fought with him throughout the Chilian War; several, like myself, were natives of Peru; while two or three were Englishmen.

Fortunately, before the dispute had had time to become hot, the colonel returned from the conference, and joined us at the fire.

"I don't know, gentlemen, that anything is likely to happen," said he; "but we may as well enjoy a night's rest while we can," and wrapping his cloak around him, he lay down, setting an example which most of us followed.

CHAPTER XV.

WE CATCH A TARTAR.

When I awoke at six o'clock in the morning, most of the officers and men were still sleeping, but

the colonel had disappeared. There was nothing to be done beyond feeding and grooming my horse, which I always made a point of doing myself. As to my own breakfast, my haversack was empty, and I think there was hardly a pound of meat to be found among the whole column.

After a short time the men were roused, and just after seven o'clock we saw the colonel come tearing along on horseback, as if pursued by a cavalry division. Evidently he was in a great hurry, and his face was wreathed in smiles.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he cried. "You will be glad to hear my news: we move in an hour's time. The general has only a scanty stock of provisions, but there is sufficient to provide your men with breakfast.—Crawford, hunt up Lieutenant-Colonel O'Brien, and ask him to come to me at once."

O'Brien was a famous Irishman who had served with San Martin all through the Chilian War. He was a fine fellow, standing six feet six inches high, and well proportioned. Every one loved him for his winning ways, his ready smile, his perfect honesty, and his absolute fearlessness.

"Colonel Miller?" said he, on hearing my message. "Faith, I'll come instantly." And we rode back together.

"You're prompt, O'Brien," exclaimed the colonel, laughing; "Have you had enough of this slow-time business?"

"More than enough, colonel. What are your fellows looking so pleased about?"

"First, the prospect of a breakfast; and then—"

"You've badgered the general into giving you a free hand!"

"Not quite that; but I have permission to push on. I fear it's too late. Canterac is a fine soldier, and will be ready for us now; but I am going to see if he has left any weak places. Would you care to come with me?"

"You're just a jewel, colonel," exclaimed the big Irishman enthusiastically, "and I'm eternally devoted to you. When do we start?"

"Directly after breakfast. Will you take some with me?"

"That will I, colonel, and I'm as charmed with the second invitation as the first. I dined with the general the day we left Mirones, and haven't had a decent meal since."

The colonel laughed, saying, "I'm afraid I can't say much for the quality of our food."

"Never mind the quality, colonel; I think more of quantity just at present."

"Well, that's on a par with the quality."

This did not sound very promising; but we managed to satisfy our hunger, and the men, having eaten their scanty rations, were drawn up ready for the start. At nine o'clock we left the camp, and a rapid march brought us to the village of Macas, which the enemy had just abandoned. Here, to our great delight, we discovered a number of sheep dressed and ready for cooking; so, for once in a way, we enjoyed a really good meal, while cracking many jokes at the Spaniards' expense. Then having rested, we pushed on to the foot of the mountains, where the men bivouacked, being too tired to drag themselves any further.

I was just preparing to off-saddle when the colonel said, "Crawford, if you aren't too tired, you can come with me. I am going just a little way up the mountain."

"Very good, sir," I answered, climbing into the saddle again, but wishing that he had taken it into his head to sleep instead.

"I should like to find out where Canterac is. He is quite clever enough to set a very ugly trap for us."

It was dark now, and the road was difficult; but we rode cautiously, listening for sounds, and keeping our eyes well open. At the end of perhaps half a mile the colonel suddenly stopped, and said in a whisper, "Some one is coming towards us."

The position was very awkward. We were on a narrow road with no hiding-place at hand, and must either retreat rapidly or plump ourselves right into the arms of the strangers. In another minute we had no choice at all, as several dusky figures loomed up before us. Fortunately Colonel Miller favoured the practice of taking the bull by the horns, and levelling his pistol, he cried in a stern voice, "Halt! Who are you?"

Taken by surprise, the men stopped, and we heard one of them say, "No, no; he's no Spaniard. I can tell by his speech."

"Quite right," cried the colonel. "I'm an English officer in the Patriot army. Who are you? Make haste; we don't want to stay here all night."

"We're deserters from General Canterac's army," replied one boldly, "and want to give ourselves up."

"Then you're just right. We will return with you to the camp, or the sentries might shoot you.—Crawford, turn your horse round so that they can pass between us.—Now, my good fellows, march, and I hope for your own sakes that you've given a true account of yourselves."

Thus we journeyed back to the camp, where, beside a good fire, Colonel Miller examined the prisoners. From them we learned that General Canterac had halted in a strong position halfway up the mountain; upon which I could see, by his restlessness, that the colonel was eager to resume the pursuit at once. A glance at his wearied men, however, showed him the folly of such an enterprise.

"No," said he at last; "they couldn't stand it." Which was quite true.

Having given the strangers into the charge of the guard, we unsaddled our horses, wrapped ourselves up, and lay down near the fire. Two seconds later we were fast asleep. At daybreak we were moving again, and I fancy the colonel felt glad he had not attempted to lead his men up the mountains in the darkness of night. The road was simply horrible, and the pass might have been defended by a score of resolute men against an army. Halfway up we received a check. O'Brien, going forward with a handful of men, got in touch with the enemy, who immediately turned about and threatened to overwhelm us by a sudden attack.

Under some leaders we should most certainly have come to grief; but the colonel's cheery, smiling face kept the men at their posts. Drawing them up in a strong position, he awaited the attack calmly.

"If you try to run away, my lads," he said pleasantly, "the Spaniards will make mincemeat of you; so it is wisest to stand firm."

We watched three battalions come down from the height and halt just beyond musket-range.

"I don't believe they're going to attack, after all!" exclaimed O'Brien excitedly.

"Not until we move," answered the colonel, "and then they'll fall on us tooth and nail. I expect they are just gaining time while the main body gets away. It's aggravating, too, because they have the whip hand of us. We aren't strong enough to turn them out."

O'Brien shook his head, saying, "If the provisions would last, we might stand here staring at each other till doomsday."

Darkness found the position unchanged, while numerous watch-fires gleamed fitfully through the gloom.

"I wonder," said the colonel thoughtfully, "if Canterac intends keeping his men there all night? Those fires may be just a blind; he's quite equal to a dodge of that sort."

"Let me find out," said O'Brien.—"Crawford, do you feel in trim for a stroll?"

"Oh, thanks! it's very kind of you to think of me."

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow! It's a weakness of mine to remember my friends.—We'll be back in an hour, colonel.—Take off your sword, Crawford; we must trust to our pistols. Are you ready? Come along, then."

Passing our outposts, we began to climb warily, keeping a keen lookout, and taking care to make no unnecessary noise. It was possible—indeed I thought probable—that we should meet the enemy stealing down to surprise our camp by a night attack. However, we kept steadily on our way, and had nearly reached the outer ring of fires, when, clutching O'Brien by the arm, I dragged him bodily to the ground.

"What's the matter?" he asked quietly.

"A sentry! Listen! He's talking to some one."

We lay quite still, trying to hear what was said; but in this we were disappointed, and presently the two men separated, each walking slowly in opposite directions.

"Now's our chance!" whispered O'Brien; and crawling on hands and knees, we passed quietly between the two. Several yards away was a big fire, and a number of men had gathered round it, where they could easily be seen.

"Then they haven't bolted, after all!" said O'Brien, in surprise.

"It doesn't look like it; but don't let us be too sure. You stay in this hollow while I investigate. You are not a good performer on all-fours."

"No," said he, chuckling, and I was afraid that, in spite of our danger, he would laugh aloud; "this is a sort of circus trick not taught at our school. Can you judge where to find me again?"

"Easily, if they don't let the fires out;" and I crawled further into the camp, and in the direction of a second fire. It looked very comfortable, but no one was there to take advantage of it, and the third and fourth I visited were equally deserted.

The trick was plain enough now. After lighting the fires, the three battalions had marched off, leaving just sufficient men to tend them, and to act as sentries. The sight of a soldier crossing the camp to throw fresh fuel on one of the fires changed suspicion into certainty, and I hastened back to O'Brien with my information.

"That's an old dodge," said he, "but a good one. It almost always pays in this part of the world. Now let us get back and tell the colonel."

Cautiously we crawled back, waited nearly an hour for a favourable chance to dodge the sentries, and then hurried down the pass.

"Thanks," exclaimed the colonel, on hearing our report. "We can afford now to let the men have a couple of hours' sleep; they need it."

"And I daresay some of the officers will lie down, if you press them," laughed O'Brien.—"What do you say, Crawford?"

"Well, the colonel need not press me much," I replied.

"Good boy! I'm pleased you're so willing to do as you're told."

"Well, he has certainly earned a rest," observed Miller. "But we are moving sharp at daybreak, remember."

"There's nothing strange in that," said I sleepily; "the wonder would be if we didn't." At which the colonel and O'Brien laughed heartily.

Next day we marched into the village of Puruchuco, on the eastern side of the mountain, and about six miles distant from the small town of Huamantanga, where the Royalists had halted. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining food, Colonel Miller now sent most of our infantry back to Macas; the Indians were thrown forward to act as a screen in front; while the rest of us bivouacked in some meadows near the village. The next day the colonel and I rode to within five hundred yards of Huamantanga, where we saw the enemy formed up in marching order.

"What restless fellows they are!" I exclaimed laughingly; "they're on the move again!"

"Yes; but this time, unless I'm much mistaken, they are moving backwards. Ride round to the right, warn the Indians to be ready for an attack, and rejoin me at Puruchuco."

I had barely reached the village when the colonel's suspicions were verified. Two thousand of the enemy, all picked men, as we afterwards discovered, rapidly descended the heights, drove the Indians back by sheer strength of numbers, and at last sent them flying pell-mell to seek safety in some of the numerous ravines. We had barely three hundred regular soldiers, many of whom were young boys, and scarcely one had ever smelt powder in a real fight. But Miller was a host in himself, and though the odds were so desperate, I did not despair of victory.

O'Brien, with a picked detachment of infantry, occupied a strong position, and began firing as soon as the assailants came within range. The cavalry and the remainder of the infantry were posted lower down the mountain side.

"Aim low, lads," said the colonel, "and don't waste your ammunition. If they reach you, give them a taste of the steel."

The flight of the Indians left us a great deal exposed, and in danger of being surrounded; but O'Brien had placed his men on a rocky platform, from which they kept one detachment in check. Meanwhile, in our own quarter the fight raged furiously. A large body of Spaniards, slipping past O'Brien, came on again and again. We beat them back, but they gave us no rest. Our men began to fall, and once I saw a shade of anxiety flit across the colonel's face. It was gone in less than a second, but it confirmed my opinion that we could not hold our ground.

For the most part, we contented ourselves with repelling the enemy's attacks; but twice our leader flung himself against their dragoons at the head of his cavalry. We broke them easily, but could not pursue, and the experiment cost us a dozen in killed and wounded.

"This won't do," said he. "They will eat us up.—Crawford, tell O'Brien to retire on us slowly. I intend to retreat.—Captain Prieto, get your men posted in that ravine to the left, and hold it until you are told to withdraw."

I did not hear the captain's reply, being on my way to deliver the colonel's order. I had left my horse behind, but even so, the journey was distinctly unpleasant, as my body was a prominent target for dozens of muskets.

"Warm work, Crawford!" exclaimed O'Brien. "I think the colonel is right. We've caught a tartar this time, and no mistake.—Steady, my lads! we'll make them fight for every yard."

I stayed with the detachment, helping to carry a wounded man. The cheering Spaniards pressed us closely; if they could break through our cordon, Miller's men were doomed. But we returned shot for shot, and stopped their occasional rushes by steel. Every moment of delay gave our brave fellows further down the pass a better chance of escape.

"Well done, O'Brien!" cried the colonel, as we joined him where he stood with a few horsemen. —"Steady, my lads! Captain Prieto holds the pass. Don't lose your heads, and we shall come out all right."

At the ravine the horsemen halted, while the infantry continued the retreat; first O'Brien's men, and afterwards those who had held the pass under Captain Prieto. This was the fiercest part of the struggle. The fighting was at hand-grips now, and I wondered we were not swept away headlong.

"Stand firm, my lads, stand firm; it's your only chance!" sang out Miller cheerfully, and his eyes brightened with the passing minutes, as he knew that the bulk of his command was rapidly getting out of danger.

For half an hour we held the narrow way with sword and pistol, and then a body of Spaniards, who unseen by us had worked round to the right, appeared lower down the pass.

"We must cut our way through, and at once!" cried our leader. "About face, lads, and into them. Ride hard, and strike hard."

We were in a trap now, and the only way to get out was by smashing the door. The colonel led, the troopers followed as best they could, while O'Brien and I remained in the rear to help to check the rush of the enemy's main body. There was a flash of swords, the sound of pistol-shots, an outburst of mocking laughter from the enemy, a "Viva!" from our own men, a vigorous "Hurrah!" from the colonel, and then we were through!

"Go on, my lads!" cried the colonel, dropping to the rear. "Your comrades are at the foot of the mountain.—A narrow shave, O'Brien!"

"Yes! and we aren't clear yet," replied the Irishman, turning in his saddle to glance behind. "There would be more chance for us if we could bring down that tall fellow who is leading."

Whiz! whiz! The bullets were buzzing about our ears now, too close to be comfortable, and but for our horses, we must soon have been killed or captured. At any other time I would not have ridden down that mountain side at a foot pace. It was a succession of steep descents, which made one dizzy to look at; and how my animal managed to keep its feet I could not understand.

"Push on!" cried the colonel suddenly, "and tell Prieto to line the mouth of the pass, in case these fellows chase us all the way."

He and O'Brien had stopped, intending to try the effect of a shot or two, and in another minute I was out of sight. Fifty yards further down the road forked, and fancying the branch to the right looked the easier, I turned into it.

"It may take a little longer to reach the bottom," I thought, "but it's a far less dangerous way. I wonder if the others will think to turn down here."

It often happens that we come to grief when feeling most secure, and it was so with me now. I was riding at a swift gallop, and perhaps with less care than was necessary, when all at once my horse stumbled, failed to recover itself, and fell heavily. Fortunately it lay still, and I was able to drag myself free, feeling dazed and bewildered. Here was a pretty pickle! What could I do? In any case the colonel would reach the bottom first, and the retreat would be continued without me.

Getting up, I tried to help the animal to its feet; but the poor thing either could not or would not move. It was clear that I must leave it, and though hating to do so, I walked a few paces down the narrow path. The fall had shaken me considerably. My head ached, and I had much ado to grope my way along. Three several times in the course of a short distance I stumbled, and the third time fell heavily to the ground, twisting my left foot underneath me. I tried to rise, but could not. Now, what should I do? I dared not call for help, lest the Spaniards should hear me. For two hours I lay thus, wondering what would become of me. The noise of the shouting and firing had now died away; the enemy had probably returned to their stronghold. Not a sound broke the stillness, and the gloom of evening began to envelop the path.

It was now only that I realized fully my frightful danger. Unless some one passed that way by accident, I should die of hunger and exposure! The idea nerved me to a fresh effort. Rising painfully, and steadying myself here and there by the rocks, I limped a short distance, though every step wrung from me a cry of agony. Several times I stopped to rest, and to wipe the sweat from my brow; twice in less than five minutes I was obliged to sit down, and at last the pain in my foot became so excruciating that I could struggle no further.

"It's no good!" I exclaimed; "I must stay here till the morning, at least." And finding a kind of recess in the rocks, I crept in. Then it occurred to me to take off my boot; so opening my knife, I hacked at the leather till I succeeded in getting my foot free.

This, after the first sudden rush of pain, was a great comfort. I felt easier and brighter, and lay down to sleep in a happier frame of mind, intending to make a fresh start as soon as daylight appeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

GLORIOUS NEWS.

Many times during the night the pain and the cold wakened me; but I contrived to get some sleep, for which I fell much better in the morning. To my dismay, however, I found it impossible to walk; my ankle had swollen considerably, and the pain of putting my foot to the ground made me cry out in anguish.

Yet, unless I wished to starve, something I must do. Unbuckling my sword, and hiding it in the recess, I began to crawl along, trailing my injured foot carefully. It was slow work, and I felt faint and dizzy, not only from my hurts, but also from want of food.

Feeling sure that the Spaniards had by this time retired, I ventured to call for help, though little expecting to obtain it. I cried aloud, both in Spanish and in the native patois, but received no answer. Again I crawled on, but now even move slowly than at first; and when I again tried to shout, my voice seemed weak and quavering. My strength was nearly exhausted, when suddenly, and rather to my astonishment, I caught sight of a man peering at me curiously from behind a rock. He was evidently a Spaniard, and an ugly customer. He wore a long beard, a half-healed scar disfigured one side of his face, and on his head was jauntily set a small cap decked with gay-coloured ribbons. On his coming forward I saw that he was dressed in the most grotesque manner, and heavily armed.

"By St. Philip," I muttered softly, "I should have done better to give myself up to the soldiers! Surely this fellow is the prince of ruffians."

He stood a moment, leaning on his gun and regarding me with curiosity.

"I don't know who you are," said I irritably, "but if you have a spark of human sympathy, you will give me what help you can."

"Are you hurt?" he asked; and the cool tone in which he spoke made me angry beyond measure.

Then he drew a step nearer, saying, "Perhaps the señor will give me his pistols; the mountain air makes one suspicious."

"Take them," I cried, "and anything else you desire; but get me some food and drink, and I will pay you well."

"Ah," exclaimed the fellow, with renewed interest, "the señor has money on him! I had better mind that also. There are lawless people in the mountains," and he grinned knowingly at me.

"I have no money here," I answered, "but I will pay you well to get me carried to Lima."

"That is a long way," he observed cautiously. "No doubt the señor has rings or some articles of jewellery?"

"I don't possess a single valuable except this," said I, producing the silver key, "and that I must not part with."

On seeing the key the fellow's manner changed instantly.

"How did you get that?" he asked. "Are you one of us?"

The question could hardly be considered a compliment, but it assured me both of safety and of good treatment.

"If you belong to the Order of the Silver Key," I remarked, "and recognize the authority of Raymon Sorillo, all is well. He is my friend, and will give me shelter."

"The chief is in the mountains, señor, and not far off. I will get help, and take you to him. Meanwhile, eat a little coca; it will keep up your strength. I shall not be long gone."

"Thanks," said I, taking some of the coca, and chuckling to myself at this unexpected stroke of good fortune.

The fellow was as good as his word. He returned shortly with three Indians, armed like himself, and dressed in the same grotesque way. They were all sturdy fellows, and two of them, raising me gently from the ground, carried me in their arms with the greatest ease.

Every step took me farther from the main track, and into a wilder part of the mountains, till at last my bearers stopped in a romantic ravine. There were several huts dotted about in an irregular ring, but most of the men were in the open, seated round a blazing fire.

Three-fourths of the band were pure Indians, some were mulattoes, while a few were Spaniards of the lowest type. They looked what they were, bandits and outlaws, and I must say that my acquaintance of the morning was not the most villainous of them. They formed a striking company, quite in keeping with the gloomy grandeur of their home, shut in on every side by overhanging rocks and towering mountains.

"Who is that?" suddenly roared a deep voice, and I saw the gigantic leader stride from the ring of men. Approaching us, he looked me full in the face.

"A stranger?" cried he. "Why have you brought him here?"

"I must have changed much since we last met," I interposed. "But if you don't remember me, you will doubtless remember the present you gave me," and I showed him the silver key.

He looked at me again, and this time with a gleam of recognition.

"I know you now!" he cried.—"Make way there. Room for an honoured guest—room for the son of Don Eduardo!"

The name carried no meaning to the Spanish brigands; but the Indians received it with a great shout, for they knew how greatly my father had suffered in his efforts to make their lives easier. They would have pressed round me to touch my hand, but the chief waved them back, saying I wanted food and rest. They made a space beside the fire, and Sorillo himself attended to my injuries.

"No bones broken," said he, after making an examination with as much skill as a surgeon. "We have only to reduce this swelling of the ankle. You can make yourself comfortable for a fortnight, at least. Now you must have some food, and then we'll talk."

Now, I have no wish to give you a false impression of Raymon Sorillo. He was a wild, lawless man, who had passed his life in fighting against the Spanish government. He had extraordinary courage and ability, and no man of his band was ever known to question an order issued by him. He had himself founded the Order of the Silver Key, and it was always my father's opinion that, but for the coming of San Martin, he would in time have transformed Peru into an Indian kingdom. I am at least certain that his ambition tended in that direction.

When the war broke out, numerous desperadoes flocked to him, and he was held responsible for many acts of cruelty. Whether he was deserving of blame I cannot say. José held him to be cruel, and he generally had that reputation. Perhaps it was only a case of giving a dog a bad name. However that may be, it is certain he had a high opinion of my father, and for his sake was exceedingly kind to me. But for him I might have lain long enough in the Spanish fortress, or perished in the sandy coast deserts. Another service he did, which we only heard of afterwards, and then by accident, was the guarding of my mother. From the time of my escape till the withdrawal of the Royalists from Lima, several of his men, unknown to her, kept ward over the hacienda. They had received strict orders to protect its mistress against every danger, even at the risk of their lives. In case of anything occurring, one was to rouse the natives belonging to the order in Lima, while another rode post-haste to the chief.

Remembering these things, and others not here set down, I can hardly judge this remarkable man without bias; but even his most bitter enemies could not truly say he was wholly bad. And it may be stated here that during my stay in the ravine I was treated like a prince. The best of everything was set before me, my slightest wish was law, and even the fiercest of the white men, forming a small minority of the band, were compelled to behave peaceably in my presence.

After I had eaten and slept for a time, I told the chief the story I had heard from the young Spanish officer, Santiago Mariano, concerning my father, and asked his opinion.

"I would build no hopes on that," said he, shaking his head thoughtfully. "If your father is alive, we shall find him at Callao; but I doubt it."

"The governor was expected to capitulate when I left Lima last," I remarked.

"Yes; his provisions must be gone by now. Your San Martin is an old woman. Why did he allow Canterac to escape? My men and I have been marched about from place to place just where we could do no good. I shall not trouble to obey orders any more. We are not children to be treated thus."

Sorillo was very sore on the subject, and returned to it over and over again. In the evening one of the band arrived with the information that Colonel Miller had sent out search-parties to look for me, and that three men were waiting at the entrance to the ravine.

"Tell them," said the chief, "that Don Juan Crawford is with me. He has sprained his ankle very badly, and cannot move for several days; otherwise he is unhurt. As soon as he is well enough we will take him home."

"I wish the colonel would let my mother know," said I; "she would be less anxious."

"That is a poor compliment to me," observed Sorillo, smiling. "My messenger is already on his way to the hacienda with the news. I have told him to say you are in absolutely no danger, so that your mother will not be alarmed."

"Then I am more than ever in your debt," said I gratefully, for the chief's action showed a thoughtful consideration quite unexpected.

"We shall never pay all that is owing to the son of Don Eduardo Crawford," he answered gravely. "And now let me carry you to my hut. A bed has been prepared there for you; it is a simple affair, but you will be comfortable."

I slept well that night. The pain had considerably decreased, and I had no cause for fear or anxiety. Sorillo slept in another corner of the hut, going out so quietly in the morning that he did not disturb me. Indeed the sun was high in the heavens when I wakened.

The chief's messenger had not returned, and another day passed before he appeared; then, to my delight, he brought José with him.

"Well, Jack," exclaimed my old friend, on finding that I was really not much hurt, "you gave Miller a fine fright. He thought you were either dead or carried off. His troops are back in Lima. It seems Canterac was too good for you."

"He flung half his army at us," I responded rather sulkily, for one does not like being reminded of a beating. "It must have been a matter of ten to one. But never mind that. What news do you bring from Lima? How is my mother? and how are events moving there?"

"Your mother is well, and sends her love to you, and events are shaping just as we could wish them to. We are masters of Callao."

"Then the forts have fallen? O José, tell me quickly—I am burning with excitement—was my father there?"

"Keep cool!" said he, smiling; "I don't want you to throw yourself into a fever. Yes, we found your father there."

"Thank God for that!" I murmured reverently. "You can tell me the rest at your leisure."

"There isn't much to tell," he replied. "It seems that your father was suddenly surrounded in the mountains by a body of regulars, and ordered to submit. Taken by surprise, there was nothing else to do; but while he stood hesitating, some one—not the captain in charge—shot him down, and he remembers nothing more till he found himself in Callao. The governor, La Mar, happens to be a kind-hearted fellow; so he had your father's wound dressed, gave him the most comfortable cell, and altogether treated him so well that, in spite of a long illness, he is entirely recovered."

"This is better and better, José! I hope we shall have a chance of doing La Mar a good turn."

"Your father will be in a position to see to that, as San Martin has already made him a member of the government."

"That's all right then.—By-the-bye, have you seen Montilla?"

"Yes. The old fox plays the game well. He is delighted—so he says—to be able to hand over the estates, which he was keeping in trust for you, to the rightful owner."

"Do you think my father believes him?"

"I can't say. Your mother doesn't; neither do I."

"Nor I."

We remained silent for some minutes, when, Sorillo joining us, I told him the good news. At first he did not seem to comprehend. When he did, I thought he would take leave of his senses. Even José, who was not given to judging by outward show, was impressed by the man's genuine pleasure.

But the grand event took place some days later, when my father himself came to remove me to Lima. Sorillo marshalled his Indians at the mouth of the pass, and they escorted him up the ravine in a triumphal procession, amidst enthusiastic cries of "Long live Don Eduardo Crawford! long live the Indians' friend!"

There is not much to tell about our meeting. It was all very simple, though I suppose there were not at that moment two happier people in Peru. My father was exceptionally loving and kind-hearted, but he never made a fuss, while my English blood kept me from being too demonstrative.

"Well, Jack, my boy," he exclaimed, giving me a warm grip of the hand, "I reckon you never expected to see me again?"

"Well, father, I had heard it was possible you were alive, but I hardly dared hope so."

As José said, he was looking very well, considering the circumstances. His cheeks were thinner, and had lost their colour; his hair had turned gray; he seemed less robust than formerly; but his mind was brisk and alert, and his eyes retained their old fire.

Sorillo would have kept him awhile as an honoured guest; but he was anxious to return, and the carriage waited at the foot of the mountains. On one point, however, the guerilla chief would not be denied. Leaving the Spaniards and mulattoes in the ravine, he insisted on accompanying us, with his Indians, to Lima, and my father did not like to refuse him. From the ravine they carried me on a comfortable litter to the foot of the mountains, where José had stayed with the carriage. Then forming up in front, they marched along singing and cheering for Don Eduardo Crawford.

We slept that night in a deserted hacienda, and arrived at our home next day. José had ridden forward to inform my mother of her coming visitors, so that she might be able to provide them with food and drink.

It was a grand home-coming for me, and a great triumph for my father. Though not a vain man, the incident pleased him, because it showed that the people for whom he had suffered so much were grateful for his efforts to do them good.

As the journey had made me rather excited, I took no part in the rejoicings which were kept up through the night; but after breakfast the Indians took their departure, and the noise of their cheering might have been heard at the other end of the town.

"It's rather rough on you, Jack," laughed my father, coming into my room; "but now you will have a chance of a little quiet."

"I am not sure of that," observed my mother, who was looking from a window: "here are two cavaliers crossing the park. By the way they ride, I should say they are Englishmen."

"Is one a big, handsome man?" I asked.

"Well, yes, he is certainly big!"

"That is O'Brien, then; and the other most probably is the colonel."

I was not mistaken. In a short time Colonel Miller and his friend were in the room, and each in turn shook me heartily by the hand.

"We hardly expected to see you again so soon," said the colonel, laughing. "We thought Canterac had taken a fancy to your company. I hope there is no permanent injury to the foot?"

"Oh no, colonel; only I shan't be able to do any more mountain climbing yet awhile."

"There's none to do," broke in O'Brien; "we've taken to dancing instead."

"I shall not be able even to join in that for some time."

"No? What a pity! We are enjoying ourselves immensely, though it seems rather an odd way of carrying on a war."

"The general perhaps considers that his troops require rest," suggested my mother.

"Even so, staying here is a great mistake," said the colonel. "We are giving the Royalists time to recover their strength, and we shall suffer for it later on. Unfortunately the general appears to think that Lima is Peru."

"Not the general only," remarked my father; "many of his officers would be sorry to exchange Lima for the mountains."

"That is so," admitted O'Brien frankly. "The truth of the matter is, the citizens have treated us too well. They have made us so comfortable that we wish to stay here as long as possible."

"In that case," said my mother, smiling, "we must steel our hearts against you."

"And drive us into the wilderness again!" laughed O'Brien gaily. "Señora, you will not be so cruel?"

"I will not begin to-day," she replied merrily, "because I hope you will stay and dine with us. To-morrow—"

"Ah! let us think of to-morrow when it comes; to-day we will enjoy ourselves."

"A pleasant creed," remarked my father, "though more often than not it leads to ruin. I shall begin to think you are falling a victim to our South American vice."

"What is that?"

"Never to do to-day what can be put off till to-morrow."

"That is exactly what we are doing," remarked the colonel, "and I quite agree with you that it is not

a paying game, especially in time of war. A chance once missed never presents itself again."

"An excellent reason for accepting Donna Maria's gracious invitation," laughed O'Brien. "Colonel, I congratulate you on your powers of argument."

Although talking in this bantering way, it must not be thought that he was really in favour of remaining idle; but he was a soldier, and had to obey orders, however much he disliked them.

My father, being a member of the government, was in a much worse position, as many held him responsible in a measure for the lazy way in which the war was being conducted. Really he had no power over the army at all, and could not on his own authority have moved a section of recruits.

O'Brien had spoken truly in saying that the officers had taken to dancing instead of climbing. All the chief families opened their doors to them, and our neighbour, Montilla, who had so suddenly been converted to our side, gave a ball more brilliant than even the oldest inhabitant could remember.

Thus the days passed into weeks; my ankle grew strong and well, I was able to resume my duties, and still there was no sign of moving. We held possession of Lima and Callao, but on the other side of the mountains the Royalists did as they pleased.

"I hope," remarked my father more than once, "that when we wish to move we shall be able to do so."

CHAPTER XVII.

DUTY FIRST.

As far as we in Peru were concerned, the winter of 1821-22 passed without disturbance; but Colonel Miller busied himself in drilling the new regiment of Peruvians which had been placed under his command. As he had made me his aid-de-camp, we were much together, and he paid frequent visits to our house, where he was always gladly welcomed.

Owing to my father's office, I saw a great deal at this time of the protector, who treated me with extreme kindness. Although such a great soldier, he had no love for war, and planned to bring about the real independence of the country without fighting.

"I do not wish the Peruvians to kill each other," he repeatedly declared. "I wish them to live at peace with each other; and whenever they are ready to do that I will step aside, so that they may choose whatever kind of government they please."

My father, who admired him greatly, several times pointed out the dangers that loomed ahead.

"You are reckoning without Bolivar," said he. "He has already driven the Spaniards from Venezuela and Colombia, and is steadily pushing them into Peru. He will follow them and mix himself up with our affairs. He is mad with ambition, and you will find there is not room enough for both of you in one country."

"In that case I will go away," answered San Martin, with a sad smile. "I am here, not for my own good, but for that of Peru."

"After bearing the heat and burden of the day, you will give up your just reward? It is monstrous!"

"I seek no reward, Crawford; I seek only the happiness of Peru. In order to gain that I shall willingly sacrifice myself."

"We will not permit it, general!"

"You must, because it is your duty. Having made South America independent of Spain, it would be sheer wickedness to turn and rend each other. Let Bolivar have the glory. I shall have a quiet conscience. But it seems to me that we are giving substance to shadows. Bolivar will join hands with me. We shall establish a strong government in Peru; then having done our duty, each will retire."

My father shook his head, saying, "You are mistaken; General Bolivar's ambition is to make all South America into one country, with himself at the head. Nothing less than that will content him."

"Then he will fail," answered San Martin. "Let us hope he will not drag the country to ruin with him."

About this time, March 1822, news reached us that our forces at Ica had met with a terrible defeat. By a swift and daring march, the Spanish general, Canterac, had thrown his army against them with startling suddenness. They tried to retreat, but, being attacked in the night, were cut to pieces, and an

enormous quantity of stores passed into the hands of the Royalists. The news cast a gloom over the city, and many weak-kneed Patriots lost their heads entirely. Unless we could obtain help from General Bolivar, they cried, our cause was undone. My father did not believe this; he distrusted Bolivar, and made no scruple of saying so.

"Still we must find out just what he means to do," remarked San Martin one evening.

"His intentions are evident," replied my father, rather bitterly. "He means to make himself master of the country, and to push you aside."

"I think you misjudge him; but in any case I place the happiness of Peru before personal ambition. —By the way," he added, turning to me, "have you ever seen this remarkable man?"

"No, general."

"Would you like to do so? Ah, I see you would. Well, you shall. I am going to meet him at Guayaquil; you shall go with me, unless your father objects."

"I have no objection, general. It will do him good, by opening his eyes!"

"Very well; let him be ready to-morrow morning. I will let Colonel Miller know of the arrangement."

"Jack," exclaimed my father when San Martin had gone, "this is a great honour for you. I don't expect the protector will take any one else, except Guido, who goes with him everywhere. I almost envy you, my boy, for San Martin and Bolivar are certainly the two most wonderful men in South America."

"Will there be any danger?" asked my mother.

"I think not; the visit is a friendly one."

The next day, having put on my gaudiest uniform, blue with red facings, white edging, and abundance of gold lace, I went over to Callao, meeting the general and his "aid" just as they were embarking on the schooner *Macedonia*. As usual, the general looked grave and rather stern. He was very silent too, and as the schooner slipped from her moorings he disappeared within his cabin. Guido, who shared a cabin with me, was far less reserved than his chief.

"This is a fool's errand," said he brusquely. "The protector is just playing into Bolivar's hands."

"He knows what he is doing, I think."

"That makes me the more angry. But for him the Spaniards would still be in possession of Peru; and now, rather than make a bother, he'll let the other fellow take the prize."

"What would you have him do?"

"Do?" cried he excitedly; "why, stand his ground. I would say, 'I have done all the hard work, I have made Peru free, and I am going to be master of the country. Let Bolivar or any one else come here at his peril!'"

"Then there would be a three-cornered fight, and the Spaniards would have the best of it!"

"That wouldn't be San Martin's fault. Do you think Bolivar cares how the country suffers as long as he comes out on top? Not he!"

"If that is so, San Martin is certainly playing the better part."

"The better part? a fig for the better part! He can beat Bolivar and the Spanish put together if he chooses. He is far and away the finest general in South America."

"And one of the best men, if he acts as you say he will."

But Guido was much too angry to take that view. When I added that without Bolivar's help we could hardly reduce the Spaniards to submission, he laughed scornfully and turned away.

On the evening of July 25, 1822, the *Macedonia* dropped anchor in the harbour of Guayaquil, and immediately afterwards two of Bolivar's officers came on board with a friendly greeting from their chief.

"Caramba!" muttered Guido beneath his breath, "it makes me mad! It's like the old custom of garlanding a victim before offering him up as a sacrifice!"

That night we slept on the schooner, disembarking the next day. The route was lined by Bolivar's soldiers, who saluted stiffly, and by thousands of people cheering wildly for their renowned visitor.

"There it is, you see," whispered Guido; "the people want San Martin. If they had their way, Guayaquil would be a part of Peru, with him as president."

"But they haven't," said I, "and Bolivar has; which makes all the difference."

"Look!" exclaimed he contemptuously, as the carriage stopped; "isn't it like a circus show?"

In front of a house stood a group of officers dressed in the most magnificent and gorgeous uniforms. As San Martin stepped from the carriage, one of them, moving a pace forward, embraced him.

"That's Bolivar!" whispered Guido, and I gazed at the great captain with intense interest.

Perhaps I was prejudiced against him, but he did not come up to my expectations. He was short, thin, and narrow-chested, his skin was sallow, his high but narrow forehead was deeply lined. His hair was black and curly; he had thick lips and beautiful white teeth, which he was fond of showing. His eyes were large and black but deeply sunken; now bright and sparkling, again dull and glassy. His features, to me at least, were harsh and unpleasing; but he was evidently a man of great energy, to whom action was as the breath of life.

Arm in arm the two leaders entered the house, Guido and I following with Bolivar's staff. The saloon presented a striking scene, being filled with officers in brilliant uniforms and by beautifully-dressed ladies. A young girl, stepping forward, greeted San Martin, and placed a laurel wreath of gold upon his head.

"What rubbish!" muttered Guido testily. "Does she think he is as great a mummer as Bolivar?"

"Hush!" I whispered, not wishing his outspoken comments to be heard. "See, he is taking it off."

We could not hear what he said, but he spoke pleasantly, and beckoning to Guido, placed the wreath in his hand.

"Take great care of this," said he; "I value it highly for the sake of the giver."

"Bolivar would have worn a dozen, one on top of the other," growled Guido.

Presently the two chiefs proceeded to an inner room, where they remained alone for nearly two hours, while we chatted with the Bolivian officers, several of whom were Englishmen.

At length the door opened, the leaders came out, and San Martin accompanied Bolivar to the street, where they parted with a show of cordial friendship. Directly afterwards the assembly dispersed, and we were left in peace. The next day they had a much longer interview, and at its close I read in San Martin's face that he had resolved to sacrifice himself for the good of Peru.

"Guido," said he quietly, "let the baggage be taken aboard. They are giving a grand dinner in my honour this evening; as soon as I can get away, we sail for Callao."

The banquet, which was held in the house set apart for Bolivar, was on the most magnificent scale. The room was bright with showy uniforms; every one appeared to be covered with stars and crosses and decorations. I almost regretted that my silver key was not dangling outside my tunic.

San Martin sat in the chair of honour at the right of our host. Of all the good things set before him he ate and drank little, his thoughts being evidently far removed from the banqueting-room.

This was the first time I had been at a public dinner, and but for anxiety on our leader's account, I should have enjoyed it immensely. Presently, when the servants had removed the dishes, Bolivar filled his glass with wine, and stood up. Instantly the buzz of conversation ceased; the officers gazed intently at their chief, who was about to propose a toast. I listened too, wondering if my ears were playing me false. As to Guido, I thought that, in his scornful contempt, he would have kicked the table over.

"Gentlemen," said our host, "to the two greatest men of South America—General San Martin and myself!"

There was a round of cheering, while Guido and I hardly dared look at each other, and not at all at our chief.

Soon afterward we adjourned to the ballroom, but did not stay long, San Martin saying, "Let us go; I cannot stand this riot!"

Quietly bidding Bolivar farewell, we followed one of the high officials, who let us out through a private door, and escorted us to the quay. There we boarded the schooner, which in less than an hour was under way. The protector went straight to his cabin without speaking. He was bitterly disappointed at the result of the interview, but all that passed his lips on the subject was, "Bolivar is not the man we took him to be." These words were said as we paced the deck together next morning, and they were spoken more to himself than to us.

"It has happened as I predicted," remarked Guido that afternoon, "and the rest will follow. As soon as he has put things in order, he will leave Peru to make room for Bolivar. And he will not let people know the reason; he will even make Bolivar's path smoother."

"You would plant it thick with thorns, I suppose?"

"I would plant it with naked swords!"

"Ah, Guido," I cried, "that is not San Martin's teaching!"

"No," said he surlily; "it's a lesson of my own composing."

The voyage passed uneventfully, and on the twentieth of August the *Macedonia* once more sailed into the Bay of Callao.

During our absence a riot had taken place in Lima; but the people received San Martin enthusiastically, coming down in thousands to the port, and escorting him to his country house in triumph.

I said little of what had taken place to any one except my father, and he was able to judge of things by other signs. The protector, who told him Bolivar had agreed to help Peru with troops, worked feverishly day and night, until the opening of the first Peruvian Congress. Then removing his sash of authority, he resigned his office, and formally handed over the care of the country to the new Parliament. That same evening my father and I called at his house, where we found Guido, ever faithful, waiting in the anteroom.

"Where is the general?" asked my father.

"Here, Crawford!" answered San Martin, opening the door of an inner room. "Is anything wrong?"

"No, general, but I fear there soon will be. Do you know it is whispered in the town that you are about to leave Peru?"

"The rumour is correct, my friend, as I have just been telling Guido. No, it is useless to talk; my mind is made up. I can do the country no more good."

For a long time both Guido and my father tried to prevail upon him to stay, but in vain.

"The world will regard you as a deserter!" urged Guido.

"What matters it as long as I know the truth? I care not for the applause of the world, my friends, nor fear its frowns. I leave my work unfinished, it is true, but others will finish it and reap the glory. Besides, Peru will be the better for my absence."

"No, no!" exclaimed my father earnestly. "The people love you and trust you. They will uphold your authority."

San Martin held out his hand, saying,—

"You are a true friend, Crawford, but you are a true patriot and a shrewd man as well. Now listen to me. Without help it will take two years at least to subdue the Spaniards. That will mean two years of misery. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"With help the war can be brought to an end in six months. The Chilians can do no more, and we can look only to Bolivar. Now, do you imagine that he and I can run in double harness?"

My father shook his head sorrowfully.

"Of course not. Bolivar is a great man, a remarkable man; but he is ambitious, and will brook no rival. Now, suppose I remain. It will be difficult to avoid strife, and the country will be plunged back into its old condition of slavery. Do you think that San Martin will give a day of delight to the common enemy? No, my friend; if only Peru retains its independence, I care nothing for self. Let men call me what they please. The path of duty lies plain before me; I am going to walk in it. Let Bolivar have the glory; it is but a breath. I shall not say this publicly; neither will you. I am broken in health; let that do for the present. In years to come, perhaps, the world will recognize my good faith; if not, never mind!"

Even after that my father endeavoured to dissuade him from going, but his efforts were useless.

"Let me wish you good-bye, Crawford," said he. "I need hardly counsel you to accept the help which Bolivar offers. The man may not please you, but—country first!—Good-bye, my boy; if you make half as good a man as your father, you will not do amiss."

We grasped his hand for the last time, and leaving Guido with him, went into the road, mounted our horses, and rode slowly homeward.

Next day it became known that San Martin had left Peru for ever, and instantly men's tongues were loosed in a babel of talk. Some few judged him rightly; but for the most part his splendid services were forgotten, and with sickening haste people turned their gaze toward Bolivar, the new sun.

"There is a lesson for you, Jack, worth heeding," remarked my father. "If only these people knew the truth!"

"They wouldn't understand it!" said I hotly. "The idea of a man making such a sacrifice is beyond them. You know I have sometimes thought the general made a big mistake in the conduct of the war,

but he atoned for everything last night. He looked simply splendid when he talked about giving up everything for duty."

"Ah!" exclaimed my father thoughtfully, "with all his battles to look back upon, he never won a greater victory than he did last evening. It must almost have broken his heart, Jack, but he did not whimper."

Few spoke in this strain, and I was disappointed that even José took sides with the majority. Sentiment, beyond his love for us, did not appeal to him; he looked only on the practical side of things.

"I shouldn't have thought San Martin would have thrown up the sponge," said he. "I gave him credit for more pluck than that. They do say in the town that he was keen on making himself king or emperor."

"A pack of rubbish!" I cried.

"Well," said José, "I would have seen the thing through, anyhow. It won't be pleasant for your father, either, when Bolivar gets the whip-hand. San Martin's friends will be in Bolivar's black books. I'll guarantee Montilla has written to him already."

"You aren't in a very good temper this morning, José," said I, with a laugh.

"No; because I am looking a long way ahead, and see things. Is your father going to keep in office?"

"I expect so. He may be able to do the country a little good."

"And himself a lot of harm! Shall you resign your commission?"

"How can I? the Spaniards are still in the field."

"And will take a lot of beating yet! 'Twould have answered better if the Peruvians had done the job by themselves."

I might have mentioned that if they found it so difficult with the aid of others, they could hardly have done it alone; but dear old José was too angry for argument, so I let the subject drop.

Among the officers opinion was divided, but no one had much to say on the matter. It almost seemed as if they feared to express their real opinion in case of future trouble. Colonel Miller, however, spoke his mind freely, and so did the other Englishmen with him.

"I am sorry San Martin has gone," said he; "but my duty is plain. I am an officer in the army of Peru, and must obey orders from the government. If they give the chief command to Bolivar, why, I shall fight under him, just as I have done under San Martin. That's one good thing about soldiering—you always know where you are."

"Humph!" said José, on hearing the remark, "I'm not so sure that the colonel's right. In my opinion there's more than one soldier just at present wondering if he hadn't better join the other party again. Another affair like the one at Ica would send them flying to Canterac in scores. The great thing with some of them is to be on the winning side."

As soon as San Martin had left Peru, Bolivar sent a message, offering the aid of his troops; but the government declined all assistance. A new spirit seemed to enter into the nation: the people declared the country would fight its own battles, and preparations to meet the Spaniards were eagerly pushed on.

What came of them we shall shortly see.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DARK DAYS.

"I have decided to leave you in Lima, Crawford, to help Videla with the second battalion. I have good reasons for doing so," continued the colonel, observing my disappointed look; "and, anyhow, you are well out of this expedition. I don't expect much from it."

The expedition of which Colonel Miller spoke had been planned on a large scale for the purpose of crushing the enemy in the south, and the first battalion of the Peruvian Legion formed part of it. Naturally I had quite looked forward to sailing with it, and was not at all pleased, therefore, to be left behind. I had many friends, some of them not much older than myself, among the officers of the first battalion, and on the morning of the embarkation I went over to Callao to see them off. They were delighted at the thought of active service, and of course chaffed me unmercifully.

"Take care of the town, Juan," said one; "we shall want it when we come back."

"Some day, when you are a man, we will take you with us," laughed Ensign Alzura, a merry, round-faced youngster of sixteen; "but we must have seasoned men for this trip, dear boy."

"Should the Spaniards arrive while we're away, ask them to wait till our return," remarked another.

"I don't wonder you are so excited," said I coolly; "I felt the same before I knew what a battle is really like."

"Bravo, Crawford!" cried the colonel, who had joined us unperceived; "that's a round shot for them. They haven't heard the whistle of the bullets yet, eh? Well, good-bye; it's time you were getting ashore. You'll hear news of us from time to time."

"Good news too, I hope, colonel.—Good-bye, Zuviria, Alzura, and all of you. I hope you've shipped a schoolmaster," and with that parting shot I ran down to the quay.

The Peruvians were on board the *O'Higgins*; but there were several other vessels, and presently they all stood out of the bay amidst a regular salvo of cheering from the spectators.

I returned to Lima feeling rather gloomy, but Lieutenant-Colonel Videla, who commanded our second battalion, gave me little time for brooding. Fresh recruits were coming in every day, and the work of attending to them kept me employed for weeks. There was still a Patriot army encamped outside Lima, but it did nothing, though who was to blame I could not say.

About the end of the year, vague yet disquieting rumours began to circulate in the city. It was said that our troops in the south had met with defeat, had been cut to pieces and practically swept out of existence. The victorious Spaniards, uniting all their forces, were making ready for a swoop on Lima. Everything was lost!

Don Felipe brought us the news, and it was easy to see, in spite of his talk, that it did not displease him.

"We shall have to call in Bolivar now," said he, "or make peace with the viceroy. Of course you and I will suffer. Our estates will be confiscated; we shall probably be thrown into prison; but we are good patriots, and will not shrink from our duty."

"If the others agree with me," replied my father, "we shall neither call in Bolivar nor make peace. There is still an army left!"

"Just so, but we cannot trust it. The troops are almost in open rebellion, and this news will not quiet them."

"We do not yet know that it is true."

"I am sure of it," said our neighbour hastily. "I have—that is to say, there can be no doubt of it."

A week or two later—January 20, 1823, to be precise—there walked into the quarters of the second battalion a young officer. His face was white and drawn, his eyes were sunken; he looked so pitifully weak and ill that at first I failed to recognize him.

"Well, Crawford," he exclaimed, "am I as changed as all that? Don't you know your old chum Alzura when you see him?"

"Alzura?" I echoed, aghast.

"All that is left of him."

"Where is the first battalion?"

Spreading his hands out dramatically, he said, "Haven't you heard? Don't you know what has happened at Torata and Moquegua?"

"I have heard nothing but some very dark rumours," I replied uneasily.

"They cannot be darker than the truth. The army has been destroyed, and the battalion with it."

"And the colonel?"

"Oh, he was in another district with the light company. But I'll tell you all about it. We had a wretched voyage, and arrived at Arica half dead. After that we sat down for three weeks doing nothing, when Alvarado, who was in chief command, sent the colonel north with the light company. A lucky thing for them, too!"

"Go on!" said I impatiently.

"Well, at last we moved, and marched as far as Torata. Do you know the place at all?"

"Oh yes; it's a few miles from Moquegua, isn't it?"

"That's it. Well, the Spaniards were at Torata, and we tried to turn them out, but failed. Then they attacked, and we were beaten. It was simply awful. The legion fought like a battalion of heroes. Every one praised us; but praise won't bring the dead to life. We broke two cavalry charges, and stood our ground till there wasn't a cartridge left."

"Then you retreated?"

"Some of us did, not many! We left fifteen of our officers there and three-fourths of the battalion, all dead or dangerously wounded. Alvarado took us back to Moquegua; but the Spaniards caught us again. The second defeat was worse than the first, and when the battle was over there was no army left. As to the battalion—! O Juan, isn't it awful? La Rosa, Tarramona, Escobar, Rivero—all gone! I should think," he added, with a bitter laugh, "I must have been senior officer."

It was, indeed, a terrible story. I could hardly realize that of all my high-spirited young friends who had sailed from Callao this was the only one to return.

"How did you get back?" I asked, after a time.

"With General Martinez. We embarked at Ilo, while General Alvarado went on to Iquiqui. The game's up in that part of the country, Juan!"

"Oh, nonsense!" I replied brusquely. "We aren't going to lose heart over a couple of defeats."

Of course the news soon spread, and the people, especially the soldiers, were wild with anger. They said it was the fault of the government, and called for fresh rulers. Some advised sending for Bolivar, while a few prominent citizens even talked of coming to terms with the enemy.

One morning, toward the end of February, Videla called a council of the officers belonging to his battalion. He looked pale, but firm and determined, as if he had resolved on some particular course.

When we had taken our seats, he rose and said, "Señors, I have called you together to discuss an important proposal. Affairs, as you know, are in a bad state; the country is in disorder, and the enemy are triumphing everywhere. Under these circumstances, the chiefs of the army have decided to force the hands of the government. To-morrow the troops will march to Lima and demand that a president shall be appointed with full powers. Now, I will have no part or lot in this matter. I call it treason. If the government choose to resign, well and good; if they resist, my sword, at least, is at their service."

A round of cheering greeted his remarks, and one after another the officers sprang up, pledging themselves to support him.

"Thank you," said he quietly; "I knew you would not fail me. Nothing will be done until the morning. Then, when the order to march is issued, I shall command you to stand still."

"Suppose they use force, colonel?" I suggested.

His face grew paler, but he answered steadily, "I trust they will not be so foolish. Should they be, the battalion, will know how to defend itself."

"Caramba!" exclaimed Alzura, when the meeting broke up, "it seems to me that the second battalion is likely to follow the first. What can we do against an army?"

"There will be no fighting," I answered cheerfully. "They will simply march without us, and the government will agree to their demands."

I spoke as if my opinion were conclusive, but nevertheless I did not sleep comfortably that night. The troops were wakened early, breakfast was hurried over, and then, to the sound of bugles, the various regiments paraded. Presently they began to move, and a mounted officer dashed over to know why our battalion remained still.

"By my orders they remain. I refuse to join in what my officers and I regard as an act of treason," calmly replied Videla. "We will willingly march against the enemy, but not against our own government."

Bending over, the officer whispered something in his ear.

"We have counted the cost," replied our chief, "and are not to be frightened. Let the men who are unwilling to obey me fall out; no harm will happen to them," said he, turning to the troop.

Not a man moved, the brave fellows stood in their ranks, firm as rocks. Again the officer whispered to Videla, and then dashed off at full speed. It was, as Alzura afterwards remarked, a bad quarter of an hour for us. If the chiefs endeavoured to force us into submission, there could be but one result. Videla would not yield, and we could not desert him. Perhaps the firmness of our bearing saved us; perhaps the chiefs feared the people, for the battalion was composed entirely of Peruvians; but whatever the reason, we remained unmolested, and the army marched off without us. Then the men were dismissed, and we gathered in groups to chat over the incident.

"What will happen now?" asked one fellow.

"It is all decided," replied Videla. "I heard last night that the government will yield. Riva-Aguero is to be made president, and Santa Cruz commander-in-chief."

"And what shall we do, colonel?"

"Obey orders," he answered, smiling. "We cannot fight for a government that has resigned its powers."

The evening proved Videla's words true. The troops, having accomplished their object, returned to camp, rejoicing that the country had a new ruler.

"Now," exclaimed Alzura, as we turned in for the night, "I suppose we shall see great things done!"

"New brooms sweep clean," said I, laughing, "but unfortunately they soon become old ones."

However, it really did seem as if the new general intended to push on the war in vigorous style. Preparations were made for another expedition to the south; Bolivar was invited to Peru; and Sucre, his most brilliant general, had already come.

At this time we knew nothing of Colonel Miller; but about the end of March he returned to Lima, having done more with his handful of men than all the southern army. The stories told by officers who served with him filled us with envy.

"Did you hear how we cleared the Royalists out of Arequipa?" asked Captain Plaza. "That was a rich joke," and he laughed even at the recollection of it.

"Let us hear it," said I.

"Well, of course, it loses in the telling, but I'll do my best. First of all, we caught a peasant and shut him up where he could hear all and see nothing. The poor fellow imagined we were going to shoot him as a spy. About every half-hour or so one of us would go to the colonel to report the arrival of fresh troops, and ask where they were to camp. Then we spread our few men about the valley and kindled dozens of blazing fires. As soon as it was dark enough, the colonel ordered the man to be brought out."

"His face was a study," interrupted Cordova. "He certainly expected to be shot."

"The colonel read him a lecture," continued Plaza, "and wound up by offering to spare his life on his promising to take a letter to the governor of Arequipa. 'But,' said the colonel sternly, 'you are not to tell what you have seen here. I want him to think we are very few in number. Do you understand?' The fellow promised readily enough, placed the letter in his hat, mounted his horse, and rode down the valley, counting the fires as he went. Of course he told every Royalist officer the truth as he believed it, and they cleared out of the district in double-quick time. Then we forced the governor to supply us with forage for five hundred horses."

"But you didn't have five hundred!"

"That was the joke. We carted the stuff to some sandhills, where a part of the force was supposed to lie in ambush. When the Royalists returned with large reinforcements, they wasted days, being afraid of falling into a trap. It was very funny watching their manoeuvres."

"Then there was the officer with the flag of truce near Chala," said Cordova. "He carried back a pretty report to his chief!"

"Yes," said Plaza, laughing; "he believed we were just the advance-guard of a large force. He stayed with us the night, but I'm afraid his slumbers were troubled ones. The bustle was tremendous—soldiers coming and going every few minutes. The colonel was giving all kinds of impossible orders; in fact, you would have thought we had quite a big army there. Next morning I escorted the Royalist a mile or so on the road. All our men were spread out, some in fatigue dress, to make him believe there were at least two regiments."

"That was a good trick," laughed Alzura.

"And the officers galloped about, shouting to the men to go to their camps in the rear. Turning to me, the fellow exclaimed seriously, 'It is all very well for Miller to have a couple of battalions; but we have a couple as well as he!'

"'Ah,' said I, trying to keep a straight face, 'you keep your eyes open, I see. I warned the colonel not to let you see so much.'"

"Did you really fool him?" asked half a dozen men in a breath.

"Yes, and kept our position till the colonel was ready to move. If I had my way, Miller should be commander-in-chief. He is now the best man in the country for the post."

"Bravo!" cried Cordova. "As it is, I suppose we shall all be under Bolivar's thumb soon."

"I don't much care who leads," said Alzura, "as long as we win; and it's about time something was done. The Royalists are getting a strong following in the city again."

"Bah!" exclaimed Plaza scornfully, "they're just weather-cocks, twisting about with every wind that blows—first Royalist, then Patriot, then Royalist again! It's enough to take away one's breath. Did you hear about Camba?"

"He was one of us," said Alzura, "went over to the Royalists, and came back again."

"And was appointed second in command of the Legion!"

There was a cry of amazement from every one in the room; but Plaza continued, "It's a fact; only Miller put his foot down. 'My officers are gentlemen,' said he. 'If you appoint this man over them they will break their swords, and I shall be the first to do so.' That stopped the game, and Camba was pushed in somewhere else."

"It's a wonder he hasn't changed again," I said.

"He is only biding his time, like a good many others."

"I know nearly a dozen myself," said Alzura, "and one of them is a neighbour of yours, Crawford."

"Do you mean the fellow with the pretty daughter?" some one asked.

"Yes. I respect the girl. She is an out-and-out Royalist, and makes no attempt to deny it; but the old man is a schemer—he runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds."

"Don't vent your opinion too freely, my boy; Montilla has powerful influence in high quarters."

"Well," said Alzura doggedly, "if he isn't working hard to bring back the Royalists, I am very much mistaken."

The young officer's words made me very uneasy. I knew little of Don Felipe's proceedings, as, although he was an occasional visitor at our house, a certain coolness had sprung up between us. For this feeling it would have been difficult, perhaps, to give any particular reason. To all appearance the man had acted fairly enough; indeed, according to his own account, he had always been my best friend.

Still, I had very little love for him, and no respect at all. I was rather suspicious of a man who changed sides just when it best suited his interests. With Rosa things were different. She was a born Royalist, and though I thought her views mistaken, I admired her pluck in holding so stoutly to them.

But the idea that her father was preparing to turn his coat again worried me. True, he might win a big reward by helping the Spaniards; but in the event of discovery, he could hardly expect to escape death. I told myself the punishment would serve him right, and that the business was none of mine; yet somehow I could not get rid of the uneasy feeling. If Alzura's suspicions were correct, the man might be taken and hanged at any moment. I said again it would serve him right, but the justice of his sentence would not lessen Rosa's suffering.

All that night I lay awake thinking. I could not get the girl out of my head. You see, I had known her so long; we had played together like brother and sister; she was so pretty and winsome that I hated the idea of trouble assailing her.

In the morning I was inclined to laugh at my fears. Every one knew there were many people in Lima willing to welcome the Royalists, and it had been openly stated more than once that Don Felipe Montilla had only changed sides to secure his property. Doubtless Alzura, knowing this, had jumped to the conclusion that he would willingly return to his former allegiance.

"That is about all there is in it," said I, feeling a little more assured. "It is marvellous what stories some men can build up from a word here and there! If Alzura lives till the end of the war, he should be a novelist."

At this time I was a great deal in Lima, being employed by Colonel Miller in connection with the new expedition which Santa Cruz was to lead south. Several nights a week I slept at home, much to mother's satisfaction. My father continued to be busy in public matters, though he had resigned his office as a protest against the invitation to Bolivar.

Now, it chanced, about a fortnight after young Alzura's disquieting talk, that I had occasion to go late at night to Callao, and José offered to accompany me. It is likely enough that my mother put the idea into his head, for though brave enough herself, she was always fearful on my account. However, I was glad to avail myself of José's offer. The night was fine, the sky was studded with stars, and the moon, nearly at the full, gave forth a splendid light.

"You may go to bed, Antonio," said I to the old janitor, as he opened the gate. "We are not likely to return till morning."

"Do you remember our first night ride to Callao?" asked José. "There was no need for any one to sit up for us then."

"Yes, that I do. And the voyage in the schooner," I added gaily. "That was an adventure, if you like! We were as near to death then, José, as ever we have been since."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "I have often wondered how we managed to escape."

Passing through the outer gates of the park on to the highroad, we cantered our horses about a quarter of a mile, and then turned up a narrow lane which separated our property from that of Don Felipe Montilla.

Suddenly checking his horse, José whispered, "See to your pistols, my boy; there are horsemen coming this way."

CHAPTER XIX.

FALSE PLAY, OR NOT?

There was no actual reason why we should feel alarmed; but Lima was an unsafe place in those days, and people who travelled at night generally went well armed.

As yet the bend in the road prevented us from seeing any one, but listening intently, we distinctly heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs.

"There's only one, José," I whispered; and he nodded. I do not know that we should have taken any notice of the man, but for his efforts to conceal his identity. We came upon him suddenly, while the moon shone full in his face, and before he had time either to draw his poncho closer or to pull the slouch hat over his eyes. Both these things he did quickly, but meanwhile we had seen, and a look of keen surprise shot across José's face. Recovering himself instantly, he said cheerfully,—

"Good-night, señor. Fine night for a ride."

"So you seem to think," replied the other surlily.

"You have come from the town, I see," said José, for we lived eastward of Lima; "is all quiet there?"

"Why shouldn't it be? Kindly allow me to pass; I am in a hurry," responded our morose stranger.

"Then 'twas lucky that you knew of this short cut," remarked José, nothing daunted by the fellow's manner. "Well, good-night, señor. Pleasant ride!" and he drew his horse aside that the stranger might pass.

"He isn't any too polite!" I remarked, as digging his spurs into his horse the fellow galloped off. "He's a fine horseman, though, and has the air of a military man, if I'm not mistaken."

"Yes," agreed José; "he certainly rides like a soldier."

"But he isn't in uniform."

"No; he has left his uniform at home, I expect."

"He must be pretty familiar with Lima to know this short cut."

"I daresay he is. But didn't you recognize him? Well, I suppose it's hardly likely you would; you were only a little chap at the time, and perhaps never saw him. He's a rascal to the marrow!"

"But who is he?" I asked impatiently.

"Pardo Lureña."

"Lureña? Haven't I heard my father speak of him?"

"Very likely. He was one of the 'young bloods' of Peru, and, being a cadet of a wealthy family, able to do much as he pleased. He was always a thorough ruffian, and the common people hated him like poison. His pranks, however, were hushed up by those in authority, until, for some offence more startling than usual, your father got him clapped in prison. The Dons howled finely, but your father stood firm, and the people backed him up; so young Lureña had a taste of prison life. There was great excitement over it at the time."

"What happened afterwards?"

"Lureña left Lima. He went from bad to worse, and finally joined the ranks. Of course his relatives used their influence, and he was given a commission; but he never rose very high, I believe."

"What could he be doing in Lima to-night?"

"Something rascally, I'll be bound! He may have been to the town, but I believe the last place he

stopped at was over there," and José pointed toward Don Felipe's house.

"You don't think there's some treachery afoot between them, do you?"

"Why not? Once a traitor, always a traitor! Montilla means to save his property at all costs, and to pick up as much as possible in the general scramble. Should the Spaniards win, your father will say good-bye to his estates."

"Isn't your prejudice making you a little unjust, José? Remember that we know nothing against Don Felipe."

"Oh, don't we? He got the estates into his hands once, and by hook or by crook he'll get them again!"

I thought José exaggerated the danger, but this meeting with Lureña set me thinking. The fellow was evidently a Royalist soldier, and on a secret errand. If José's idea was correct, there could be only one object in his visiting Montilla.

But our neighbour was not the man to compromise himself unless there was a distinct chance of success. Had he learned any news favourable to the Royalist cause? If so, that might account for his action.

Silently we rode through the sleeping town and along the road to Callao, where José waited at an inn while I did the business which had brought me to the port. The bay was filled with shipping, and men were hard at work fitting out the transports for the troops ordered south.

"Isn't it rather risky to remove so many troops?" I asked the colonel. "Suppose the enemy should swoop down on the capital?"

"They're quite welcome to do so," he replied, with a laugh. "Lima is of no use to us really; it's Callao that matters."

"Are you going with them, colonel?"

"No; I stay behind with General Sucre."

There was one question I wanted very much to ask, but it was long before I could muster the courage to do so.

"Colonel," I said at length, "I want to ask a rather queer question, but I have reasons for it. Do you think the war will end in favour of the Spaniards?"

"That depends," he answered, looking at me in surprise. "It certainly will do so if our people quarrel among themselves, which is what the enemy reckon on. That is their sheet-anchor, in fact."

"Would a clever man think they had a chance just now?"

"Why, yes," replied the colonel thoughtfully; "he might think they stand an excellent chance."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and the incident of the preceding night loomed up larger and uglier than ever.

Day had fairly broken when I sought José for the purpose of returning home. I said nothing to him of my talk with the colonel, though the remembrance of it kept running through my mind. On our return I found my father alone, so I told him my suspicions, and asked his advice.

"It certainly has an ugly look, Jack," said he; "yet it may be easy of explanation. For Rosa's sake, I hope Montilla isn't playing false. He is in our counsels, and knows everything that goes on, so that he could make the Spaniards pay high for his treachery."

"And if he is discovered?"

"He will be shot."

"And you couldn't save him, if you would?"

"I couldn't and wouldn't. A man may be a turncoat in good faith, but a traitor—bah! But after all, my boy, it seems to me we are hunting a fox that hasn't broken cover. This Lureña, whom José recognized, is no friend of mine; and though he was an ensign in the Royalist army years ago, it does not follow that he is a Royalist now. Ah, I have it!" said he, in a tone of relief.

"What—an explanation?" I asked curiously.

"Yes; and the right one, I'll wager! It is through Lureña we get our information of the enemy's doings! No doubt Montilla employs him as a spy."

"Then why was he so put out at meeting with us?"

"Well, naturally he would not want his secret known."

My father's idea was feasible enough, but it did not altogether satisfy me; yet what could I do? If Montilla were playing false, I seemed almost as guilty in not denouncing him. But for Rosa's sake I could not bring myself to act; and after all, it was merely a matter of suspicion.

About three days before the sailing of the expedition I rode home to spend the evening. José met me at the outer gate, and I saw in a moment that something had happened.

"What is it?" I asked. "Have you come to meet me?"

"Yes. Send your horse on; I want to talk to you."

We walked across the park out of earshot, when José said in a whisper, as if still fearful of being overheard,—

"He is here again."

"He!" said I; "who?"

"Lureña. He went into Don Felipe's house half an hour ago."

"Well, what of that? You know what my father said."

I spoke boldly, as if there could be nothing in the business; but José smiled grimly.

"Look here, Jack," said he at length, "we can easily settle this affair. If Montilla is innocent, there's no harm done; if he's guilty—well, better for one to suffer than thousands."

"What do you propose?"

"To waylay this Lureña. He is almost certain to have papers on him which will tell all we wish to know."

"I can't do it, José. Don Felipe is Rosa's father, and I am reluctant to bring trouble to her."

"Would you rather sacrifice your own father and mother?"

"How dare you ask such a question, José?" I cried angrily.

"I dare anything for my master," said he, unmoved. "If the Spaniards win, your father is doomed, and you also, while your mother will be a beggar. See, Jack, I have no right to speak thus, but I can't help it. With or without your help, I intend getting to the bottom of this matter."

I knew José of old, and that once his mind was made up, no amount of threats or coaxing would turn him from his purpose.

"If your father is right," he continued, "so much the better—the knowledge will make our minds easy; but I can't and won't stand this suspense any longer."

In a sense I was completely in his power. Whether I went or not he would go, and by himself would most certainly proceed to extreme measures.

"Very well, José," I said reluctantly, after weighing the matter in my mind, "have your own way."

"There is no other," he replied. "Come, let us go to the workshop and get a few tools."

I did not know his plan, but it was evident he had thought it all out. First he made a simple but effective gag; then he selected a long piece of thin but tough rope, several strips of hide, a large rug, and a tiny lantern.

"Now," said he with a chuckle, "I think we shan't have much trouble with Mr. Lureña."

On our way to the lane he told me his plan, and gave me full directions as to my share in it. The night was dark, but we moved quietly, speaking only in whispers, and straining our ears for the slightest sound.

At the bend in the narrow lane José unrolled the cord, and I, taking one end in my hand, sat down in the darkness, laying the gag and a strip or two of hide on the ground near me. José moved to the other side of the lane, and we let the rope lie slack across the road. Then we waited in silence for the coming of Lureña, feeling confident that he would not leave the house till the night was far spent.

This adventure was not to my liking, and I could only hope that in some way my presence might be of use to Montilla. Somehow I had not the slightest hope of my father's idea proving right. My old distrust of the man returned in full force, and I dreaded what an examination of Lureña's pockets would reveal.

Slowly, very slowly, the minutes passed; a whole hour went by, and still there was no sign of our intended victim. Had he left the house by the front? I almost hoped he had. Yet, should he escape us this time, I knew that now José had started his quarry he would run it to earth.

A second hour passed. He must come soon now or not at all. My limbs were dreadfully cramped, and I began to get fidgety. Once I coughed slightly, but a sharp pull at the rope warned me to be silent. At last the hoof-beats of a horse could be distinctly heard. From the way he rode, the horseman evidently knew the road well. Nearer and nearer he came, while we, raising the rope, stretched it tight. The figure of horse and man loomed up dimly, came close to us; there was a stumble, a low cry of surprise, and the next moment our man lay on the ground, his head enveloped in José's rug.

A spectator might easily have mistaken us for professional thieves, we did the thing so neatly. Almost in less time than it takes to tell, we had thrust the gag into our victim's mouth, and bound both his legs and arms. Then, while I removed his weapons, José lit the lantern, and we looked for the incriminating papers. We searched minutely every article of his clothing and the trappings of his horse, but without result, except for a scrap of paper hidden in his girdle.

José pounced on this like a hawk, and we examined it together by the light of the lantern. I could have shouted for joy when at last we were able to read it: "To all good friends of Peru. Pass the bearer without question." It was signed by the president, Riva-Aguero, and bore the official seal.

"It seems you were right," whispered José sulkily. "Help me to raise the horse, and we will let the fellow go."

Fortunately the animal was unhurt, and very soon we had it on its feet. Then we unbound the man, removed the rug from his head, and slipped out the gag.

"Mount and ride on," said José sternly, disguising his voice. "We wish you no harm."

"Give me my pistols, you rascal!" cried Lureña, stamping his foot angrily.

"Mount!" repeated José, and the click of his own pistol sounded ominously on the still air.

There was nothing for it but to obey, and fuming with passion, the fellow clambered sullenly to the saddle. Shaking his fist at us and vowing all manner of vengeance, he disappeared in the gloom.

"I'm glad we came," said I, helping José to pick up the things; "that bit of paper has removed a load from my mind. I thought my father might be right, but must admit I was rather doubtful."

"I am in no doubt whatever," responded José. "Either the fellow was too sharp for us, or we made our venture at an unlucky time. If there was nothing wrong, why did he ride off so quickly?"

"Well," said I, laughing, "the click of a pistol in one's ears is not much of an inducement to stay. I think he acted very wisely."

"If all were square and aboveboard, he would have shouted for help."

"And drawn more attention to himself! That would have been foolish in any case. No, no, José; the case is clear, I think. We have misjudged Montilla, and though I don't admire his methods, it is evident he is working on our side. Let us be just, at least."

"I wish it were possible," muttered José, leaving me to conjecture what his words exactly meant.

Strangely enough, my distrust of Don Felipe was as strong as ever next day. The incident of the spy should have removed any lingering doubt as to his fidelity, but it did not. Perhaps it was owing to José's influence, but whatever the cause, I still found myself speculating keenly on our neighbour's honesty.

Now, mind you, I do not wish to be praised or blamed on false grounds. What I did afterwards may have been right or wrong—and much, perhaps, can be said on both sides—but it was not done through either love or hatred of Don Felipe. True, the man was no friend of mine, but his daughter was, and I could not bear to think of her suffering through his misdeeds.

On the very day that the troops for the south embarked, I met her quite by accident. She had been for a gallop, and was returning home. Her cheeks were flushed with the exercise, her eyes were bright and sparkling; I had never seen her look so beautiful.

"Well, Juan," she cried saucily, "so you have sent away your band of ragamuffins? I wonder how many of this lot will come back! Upon my word, I feel half inclined to pity them."

This, of course, she said to tease me; because, if our men lacked something in discipline, they were at least a match for the Spaniards in bravery.

"You are pleased to be merry," said I, riding with her to the gate, "but I hope you do not seriously think that the Spaniards have any chance of winning."

"Why not? It is you who live in a fool's paradise Juan. Before long the king's flag will be floating over Lima again."

She spoke so confidently that I looked at her uneasily. Was there really a Royalist plot on foot, and did she know of it?

Perhaps I acted foolishly, but what I did was done with a good motive.

"Send your horse on," said I, "and let me walk with you to the house. There is something on which I wish to speak seriously to you."

"Is it a penance for my sins?" she laughed, holding up her riding-habit. "Please don't be too severe, Juan! Now begin, and I will try to be good."

"To begin is not so easy as you think, Rosa; but first let me tell you one thing—the Spaniards will never again be masters of Peru."

"Pouf!" cried she, tossing her head; "that is rubbish, and says little for your understanding, Juan."

"I am sorry you don't believe it; yet it is true, nevertheless. There are Royalists in Lima who hope otherwise, but they will be disappointed. More than that, some of them who are working secretly against us will meet with just punishment."

"What is that to me? I can't work for the king, being only a girl, but no one can accuse me of hiding my opinions."

I could have laughed at that had I been in the mood for merriment. All Lima knew that Peru did not contain a stancher Royalist than Rosa Montilla.

"It is not of you I speak, but of the so-called Patriots, who are sedulously plotting for the enemy. Already names have been mentioned, and before long some of these people will be shot."

I think it was then she first began to suspect my meaning. Her eyes flashed fire, and looking me full in the face, she cried,—

"What is all this to me? What have I to do with your wretched story?"

My face was hot, my forehead clammy with perspiration. I mumbled out my reply like a toothless old woman.

"Don't be angry, Rosa," I said. "I hate to give you pain, but—but—can't you understand?"

"No," replied she calmly; "I understand nothing."

"I wish to warn you," I continued desperately—"to put you on your guard. There is a rumour—I heard it in camp, but I do not vouch for its truth—"

"Come, make an end of this," she said haughtily, "or allow me to proceed to the house. What is this rumour which seems to have tied your tongue so?"

"I will tell you. It is said that the leader of the conspiracy is Don Felipe Montilla! Let me—"

"Thank you, Juan Crawford," said she, making a superb gesture of disdain. "Now go! If our friendship has given you the right to insult me thus, you have that excuse no longer. Go, I say, before I call the servants to whip you from the place."

I tried in vain to offer some explanation.

"Go, señor, go!" she repeated, and at last I turned sorrowfully away.

I had done my best and failed. I had lost my friend, and had effected no good, for I saw by her face that she would think it treason to mention the subject to her father. And as I rode from the gate, I wondered whether, after all, we had been mistaken in our judgment.

CHAPTER XX.

"SAVE HIM, JUAN, SAVE HIM!"

"Aren't you coming, Juan?"

Two days had passed since my interview with Rosa Montilla, and I was sitting in my room at the barracks, feeling at enmity with all the world.

"It's a pity we've nothing better to do than to make fools of ourselves," said I savagely, when young Alzura burst in on me excitedly.

He was dressed to represent some hideous monster that never was known on sea or land, and in his hand he carried a grotesque mask.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed; "some one been rubbing you down the wrong way? Caramba, you are in a

towering rage! Pray what has offended your Royal Highness?"

"Why, all this tomfoolery! Fancy a masked ball with Canterac in the mountains ready to swoop down on us at any moment!"

"The more reason why we should enjoy ourselves while we can. Besides, you are as bad as the rest: you promised to go!"

"I have forgotten it, then."

"Well, you did; so make haste—the carriage is waiting."

"I have no dress ready," said I coldly.

"That doesn't matter in the least. Go in your uniform; you look very well in it."

"Thanks, I prefer to stay here."

"You forget the ball is given in our honour! Colonel Miller won't be too pleased at finding you absent. 'Twill be a slight on our host and hostess."

"Very well, if you put it that way, I'll join you in the messroom shortly," said I indifferently.

"That's right. Slip your things on sharp; the animals will get restive."

Alzura was in high spirits. He loved fun of all kinds, and this ball was just to his taste. Plaza and Cordova shared our carriage, and both of them rallied me on my glum looks.

"Crawford's a bloodthirsty fellow," cried Alzura banteringly—"never happy unless he's fighting!"

"That's a libel!" said I warmly; "I'm sick of the whole thing. When this war's over, I hope never to hear a shot fired again."

"Be easy," laughed Cordova; "you'll be an old man by then, and too deaf to hear even the report of a pistol."

"There may be more truth in that than you think," I observed, bitterly.

"Never mind, my boy," said Plaza; "you won't hear any shots fired to-night. There's no great harm in enjoying ourselves for an hour or two. Here we are! What a crowd outside!—Put on your mask, Alzura; the people will like the fun."

There was a roar of laughter from the spectators as Alzura, appeared, and we went into the hall amidst a round of cheering. Most of the guests wore some fanciful costume, but several officers, Miller and O'Brien among them, were in uniform.

The magnificent *salons* were illuminated by thousands of lights; the guests were numerous, and represented most of the beauty and wealth of Lima. My father and mother had not come, neither did I see Montilla. Rosa, of course, would have scorned to attend a ball given to the Patriots.

Despite the lights and the music and the striking gaiety of the scene, I could not banish my feeling of dread. I felt, as people say, that "something was going to happen," and moved listlessly among the brilliant assembly, wondering what it would be.

"You look bored, Crawford," remarked O'Brien, coming across to me. "Is anything the matter?"

"No, thanks; I'm a bit off colour—that's all."

"Would you rather be in the mountains?" asked Colonel Miller, who had joined us.

"It depends on circumstances, colonel," I replied, trying to smile.

When they had left me, I fell back on my occupation of gazing indifferently at the brilliant scene. I could take no interest in it, nor in the chaff and nonsense of my friends, who tried hard to make me more like myself. It seemed that in some mysterious way I was waiting for something, though what I could not imagine. When the summons actually came, I was not in the least surprised.

Alzura, who brought it me, had no idea he was assisting at a tragedy, but, with a merry laugh, exclaimed, "Crawford, there is a lady outside waiting to see you; she will not leave her carriage."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"I don't know; I haven't seen her. A servant gave me the message, and I set off to find you."

"Thanks," said I quietly, and crossing the brilliantly-lit *salon*, took my cap and went into the vast hall.

Who had come for me—my mother? That was my first thought, but a moment's reflection showed that it was unlikely. Had there been anything wrong at home, she would have sent José on a swift

horse. The answer to my question came as I stood on the flight of steps leading to the hall. The crowd of people had dispersed, and only a solitary carriage with its attendants stood at the door. Recognizing the Montilla livery in an instant, I ran down the steps with a beating heart.

The carriage door was open, and the light from the hall fell full on the white face of Rosa.

"What has happened?" I cried. "Why do you look so frightened? Tell me, quick!"

Her only answer was to bid me step inside. The footman sprang to his place, the coachman gathered up the reins, the carriage turned with a swing, and almost before I realized it we were off at a gallop. The girl's face was hidden now in darkness, but I had seen it for a moment, and could not forget it. She was white and scared; her cheeks were tear-stained, and her eyes full of apprehension and grief.

Some terrible disaster had happened, but I could not learn what it was. To all my questions she replied, "Home! home!" and ordered the coachman to drive faster. Then she burst into a fit of crying, uttering incoherent words, of which I could make nothing.

"Is it your father, Rosa?" I asked. "Has anything happened to him?" At which she cried still more, upbraiding me for I knew not what.

The gates of the hacienda were wide open. We passed through at a gallop, and the trembling, foam-covered horses drew up at the front door. As soon as the carriage came to a standstill, I jumped out and assisted Rosa to alight. All the servants seemed to have gathered in the hall. Their faces were white, their eyes wild with dread; some of them still shivered. Evidently a great calamity had occurred. What was it?

Looking around, I noted the absence of Don Felipe. That gave me a clue to the nature of the disaster. Perhaps he lay dead in his room; perhaps the government, suspecting him of treachery, had torn him away. I did not hit on the exact truth, but my conjectures went very near it.

Rosa's wild fit had passed; she was no longer a weeping girl, but an imperious mistress. Her tears were dried; she had banished her fear. There was a light of scorn and command in her eyes.

"Away, cowards!" she cried. "Do you call yourselves men, and would not try to save your master? Begone!" and she stamped her foot in passion.

The servants slunk off abashed, and she led me along the corridor. The door of her father's room was closed, but she opened it, and said, "Come in, Juan; see your friends' handiwork!"

The apartment was in total disorder. Chairs were overthrown; the table was stripped of its contents; all kinds of articles lay strewn about the floor: there were very evident signs of a fierce and prolonged struggle. On one wall was the mark of a bullet, and a corner of the apartment was splashed with blood. I gazed round eagerly for Montilla's body, but it was not there.

"See," said the girl, "he was sitting there when the ruffians burst in upon him. He fought for his life like a cavalier of old Spain, but the cowards were too many. They flung themselves upon him like a pack of wolves, and bore him to the ground."

"But who were they?" I asked in amazement. "Who did it? Tell me plainly what happened."

"Need you ask?" she said coldly. "The ruffians were your friends—your servants, for all I know."

"Rosa, you are speaking wildly. I do not wonder at it: this terrible affair has upset your nerves."

Then she turned upon me, her eyes blazing with angry scorn.

"What is it that you wear beneath your tunic, Juan Crawford?" she cried. "Are you ashamed that it should be seen?"

At first I did not understand her meaning; then a glimmer of the truth began to dawn on me, and slowly I drew out the silver key.

"Do you mean this?"

"Yes! 'The chief of the Silver Key'—that is what the black-browed ruffian called himself. Fancy my father, a Spanish gentleman, the prisoner of a band of half-dressed savages—your friends, Juan Crawford!"

"But I know nothing about it," I cried. "These men take no orders from me. The key was given me by the chief when I myself stood in need of protection."

"Nevertheless they are your friends, and they have dragged my father from his home."

"But why? Surely there must be a reason! Tell me what they said. Try to be calm, Rosa; your father's life may depend on your words."

"I know nothing. How should I? I was in bed. My father sat there writing when they broke into the house. The servants fled, and hid themselves like frightened sheep. The cowards! I dressed and ran

here. My father had killed one ruffian, but—but he could not struggle against so many."

"I'll wager that he showed himself a brave man."

"He did; but they overcame him," she continued, speaking more calmly. "They bound him with cords: he was helpless. I begged the big bandit to release him; I would have gone on my knees—I, a daughter of the Montillas!" and she drew herself up proudly.

"But the chief, Rosa—what did he say?"

"That my father was charged with a serious offence, and that he must be tried by the officers of the Silver Key. Think of that, Juan Crawford!—my father tried for his life by those dirty bandits! Oh, how I wish I was a man! Then they took him away. I was alone and friendless; I thought of you, and told the coachman to drive me to Lima. Then I remembered you were one of these people, and would have turned back. But my father's life is precious; I would beg it even of an enemy. O Juan, Juan, save him for me!"

She broke down utterly. I tried to comfort her, and failed. She did nothing but cry, "Save him, Juan, save him!"

"Save him, Juan, save him!"

I had no faith in my power to help her, but I could not tell her so. Why Raymon Sorillo had done this I knew no more than she—unless, indeed, he had discovered Don Felipe conspiring with the Royalists. In that case, perhaps, I might prevail on him to spare the prisoner's life, and to restore him to liberty when the war was over. It was only a tiny spark of hope, but I made the most of it.

"Listen, Rosa," I said cheerfully. "I do not belong to this society of which you speak, but its chief will do much for me. I will go to him now and use all my influence. I will beg him earnestly to spare your father's life, and I think he may grant it me. Cheer up, Rosa! In a few days I shall return and bring your father with me, most likely."

"O Juan, how shall I ever thank you! Forget the wild words I said to you. I was distracted with fear and anger; I did not mean them, Juan!"

"No, no," I answered soothingly; "I have forgotten them already. Now go to bed; I must start at once. I shall take a horse from your stables."

"You have no sword!"

"I shall not need one. There is no danger for me in the mountains. The Indians will do me no harm."

As soon as she had promised to go to her room I returned to the hall, and calling the servants, sent one to explain matters briefly to my father, and asking that my mother would come and stay with Rosa

for a while. Then going to the stables, I selected two good horses, and ordered a groom to help me to saddle them. Sorillo might or might not listen to my request, but it would be as well to waste no time on the journey.

The thought of taking José occurred to me, but I put it aside. There was really no danger in the journey, while if Sorillo would not listen to an appeal made in my father's name, he was not likely to listen at all.

Leading the spare horse, I rode through the grounds, cantered down the narrow lane, struck the highroad, and turned in the direction of the mountains. Just where Sorillo might be I could not tell, but I determined first of all to try the ravine where I had once spent several days.

I have said that I had little faith in the success of my mission. Why the Indians had committed this outrage was a mystery, and I could think of nothing which would help me to solve it. That Don Felipe had acted treacherously I could well believe; but why, in that case, did not Sorillo hand him over to the government? Why should the officers of the Silver Key take it upon themselves to try him?

I rode on gloomily till the sun was high in the heavens, halting at a solitary hut, where the woman gave me food and drink for myself and the animals. She was kind enough in this matter, but to my questions she would return no answers. She knew nothing about the war, except that the soldiers had slain her only son, and her husband had been absent for over a year. He might be Royalist or Patriot, she did not know, only she wished people were allowed to live in peace, and to cultivate their little plots of land.

Giving her some money, I mounted and rode on, feeling refreshed by the brief halt. The district was for the most part bare and uninhabited. Here and there were the remains of a ruined hut, and on the route I passed the deserted hacienda which had once afforded me a night's shelter. I met no people, except occasionally a few women and little children; the men and growing boys were in the mountains or in the ranks of the army.

It was evening when I reached the foot of the mountains. My horses were tired out, and the worst part of the journey still lay before me. However, the light had not altogether faded, so I began the ascent, hoping to meet with some of Sorillo's men. As it chanced, I had not long to wait.

A sudden "Halt! who are you?" brought me to a stand, and I answered at random, "A friend of the Silver Key."

"Are you alone?" asked the voice, with just a tinge of suspicion.

"Yes," I replied. "I am Juan Crawford, and am looking for Raymon Sorillo. Can you take me to him?"

A man stepped from behind a rock, and eyeing me suspiciously, exclaimed, "Wait, señor. I cannot leave my post, but I will call for a guide;" and putting his hand to his mouth, he whistled softly.

The sound was answered by one from higher up, and presently a second Indian, armed to the teeth, came running down. The two talked together in whispers, and at last the second man said, "Come this way, señor; I will lead you to the chief. He will be pleased to see the son of Don Eduardo."

Under the circumstances I thought this rather doubtful, but I followed him up the path.

"Are you staying in the ravine?" I asked.

"Yes, señor, for the present."

"Did you go with the chief to Lima?"

"Ah, the señor knows of that! The old crocodile showed fight, and killed a good man; but he is safe enough now."

"He has not been put to death?" I asked, my forehead clammy with perspiration.

"Not yet, señor; he must first be tried."

"But what have you discovered?" I asked, thinking the fellow might be able to give me some information as to the cause of Don Felipe's abduction.

In this I was mistaken. The man knew, or pretended to know, nothing about it. The chief had given orders, but not reasons, and had, as usual, been obeyed unquestioningly. At a word from him his men would have ridden into Lima and dragged the president from his palace.

It almost seemed as if Sorillo expected his stronghold to be attacked. The path was guarded by sentries, and a score of men were stationed at the entrance to the ravine, They passed us through without trouble, and before long I found myself in the presence of the chief.

"You are surprised to see me?" I said briskly.

"Yes; I thought you were in Lima."

"I was there last night."

"You have made a wonderfully quick journey. You must be tired and in need of refreshment. Come; I can at least offer you a good supper."

"Not yet, thank you. I want to ask you a question first. What have you done with Don Felipe Montilla?"

"The dog is in the hut yonder."

He spoke with both anger and contempt; his face underwent a sudden change; for the first time I saw how cruel it could look. My heart sank as I realized the uselessness of any appeal to him for mercy. Then I thought of Rosa, and said,—

"It is on Don Felipe's account I am here. What has he done? Why has he been brought here?"

"If another dared question me like this, I would answer him with a pistol shot," he cried fiercely; "but I do not forget that you are the son of Don Eduardo Crawford. Come, let us eat and forget this business."

"Will you tell me afterwards?"

"I will tell you nothing, but you shall hear for yourself. To-morrow the man will be tried, and if he is found guilty, not all South America shall save him. But we will try him fairly, and you shall bear witness to our justice."

"I want mercy!" said I.

"You do not know what you ask yet. Wait till the morning. And now come; you must not be able to accuse me of inhospitality."

The guerillas led away my horses, and I followed Sorillo to his own hut, where in a short time a plentiful meal was laid. I was both hungry and thirsty, yet I had to force myself to eat and drink. Sorillo made no attempt at conversation, and I did not care to talk.

When the things were removed, he had a bed made on the floor, and suggested I should lie down.

"I am busy," said he. "Most likely I shall be up all night, but that is no reason why you should not rest. I will have you wakened in good time in the morning."

"Thank you," I answered; and as he left the hut I lay down on the bed and closed my eyes.

Though tired out, hours passed before I was able to sleep. In the darkness I could see Rosa's white face, and hear her pitiful cry, "Save him, Juan, save him for me!"

What had he done to make Sorillo so angry? Surely he was not so bitter against every traitor? He had hinted that even I would not beg for mercy when I knew the truth. It would have to be something very dreadful, I thought, to make me forget my promise to Rosa.

And what of Don Felipe? How was he passing the night? Did he know the charge to be brought against him in this most irregular court? and would he be able to clear himself? I wondered.

So thinking and dreaming, between sleep and wakefulness, I lay on the chief's bed, while the long hours rolled slowly away.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROUGH JUSTICE.

I did not take much rousing in the morning, and even before remembering the exact circumstances, felt oppressed by the weight of coming sorrow. I breakfasted alone, Sorillo sending a profuse apology for not being able to join me, though I was rather glad than otherwise at his absence.

Leaving the hut, I went into the ravine. There were perhaps a hundred men in sight, all armed, and apparently waiting for some signal. Their comrades, no doubt, had been dispatched on an errand, or were guarding the neighbouring passes. In front of Don Felipe's hut stood a sentry, and, somewhat to my surprise, I now noticed a second hut, slightly lower down and similarly guarded.

"Two prisoners!" I thought. "I wonder who the other is? Sorillo did not mention him."

Nearer the head of the ravine some soldiers were at work, and going towards them I beheld a strange and significant sight. In the side of the hill was a natural platform, broad and spacious, while

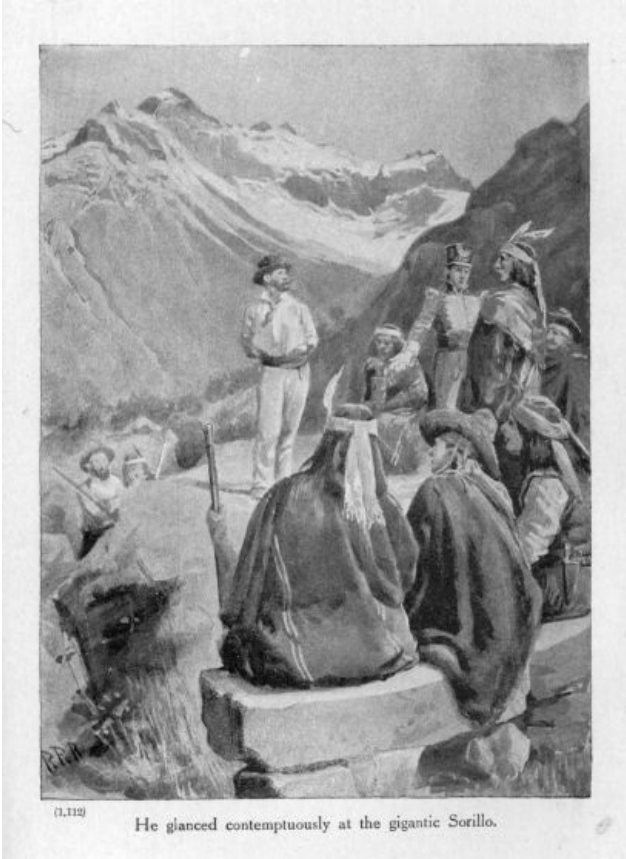
round it stretched in a semicircle a wide stone seat, which the men were covering with bright red cloth. Below the platform stood a ring of soldiers with impassive faces.

I was still wondering what this might mean, when Sorillo, touching my arm, led me to the centre of the stone seat, saying, "Sit there; you shall be a witness that the people of the Silver Key treat their enemies justly."

Rather reluctantly I took the seat indicated. Sorillo sat next me, and six officers, ascending the platform, took their places, three on either side of us. That portion of the seat occupied by the chief was slightly raised; but this, of course, makes no difference to the story.

At a signal from Sorillo the door of Don Felipe's hut was opened, and the prisoner came out escorted by two armed men. The soldiers, opening to right and left, made way for him, and by means of the boulders, which served as steps, he climbed to the platform.

In spite of my prejudice against the man, I rejoiced to see how boldly he held himself. He appeared to have summoned to his aid all the pride of his dead-and-gone ancestors. He glanced contemptuously at the gigantic Sorillo, and meeting my eyes, smiled defiantly. As to the officers, he did not give them even a look.



He glanced contemptuously at the gigantic Sorillo.

"Thank goodness," said I to myself, "no one can call Rosa's father a coward!"

Then Sorillo began to speak, clearly and distinctly, but with no note of anger in his voice.

"Don Felipe Montilla," he said, "you are brought here by order of the Society of the Silver Key." Don Felipe's lips curled as if in amusement. "It is charged against you that you, having taken the oath of loyalty to the government, have since been in traitorous communication with the Royalist leaders. Do you deny or admit the charge?"

Don Felipe shrugged his shoulders carelessly, saying, "A truce to your mummery! Do you think I would plead for my life to a band of cut-throats? What care I for your society?"

I thought this outburst would provoke his captors beyond measure, but, as far as I could judge, it produced no effect at all. They sat quite still, as if the remarks had been addressed to others.

"It is our custom," continued Sorillo, "to give those brought before us every chance to defend themselves. We are not lawyers; we do not juggle with words; our one desire is to get at the truth."

"By St. Philip," muttered Montilla, "this is the last place I should have thought to find it in!"

"For this reason," continued the chief, ignoring the sarcastic interruption, "the story shall be told plainly, and then you will understand exactly what you are charged with. Three nights ago we stopped a man returning from Lima. Many times he had gone to and fro unmolested, protected by a pass from Riva-Aguero. At last he was recognized by one of our men as Pardo Lureña, an utterly worthless man,

who had already changed sides several times during the war."

"He would have made a good recruit for you," remarked Montilla.

"Suspecting this man, we had him watched," continued the chief, again passing over the interruption, "and found that always he went to your house, señor, returning under the cover of night. We knew you to be an excellent Patriot, yet the circumstance made us uneasy. At length we decided to ignore the president's passport. Lureña was stopped and searched, with this result," and he flourished a letter before the prisoner.

Don Felipe must have known by now how helpless his case was; but he only smiled. In truth, at this crisis of his life he showed no want of pluck.

"There is much in this letter," said the chief mercilessly. "It contains a full list of the troops just dispatched to the south, and of those still remaining in Lima, with an exact statement as to the quantity of their stores and ammunition. It describes their position, and advises General Canterac how he can best enter Lima and seize Callao. It provides also a list of those who will join him, and stipulates that the writer shall keep not only his own estates, but shall be given those of which he has lately been deprived."

At this last revelation Don Felipe changed colour somewhat, and withdrew his eyes from my face.

"This letter," said Sorillo, "came from your house; it is signed F. M., and I charge you with having written it. Can you deny that it is in your handwriting?"

The prisoner seemed to have regained self-possession, for looking steadily at Sorillo, he exclaimed, "A gentleman of Spain does not answer the questions of a mountain robber."

Passing the letter to me, Sorillo said, "You know this man's handwriting; perhaps you will satisfy yourself that he wrote this letter?"

"No," said I coldly, thrusting the paper away; "I will be neither judge nor witness in this case."

"Very well," answered the chief; "let the second prisoner be brought forward." And two men immediately fetched Pardo Lureña from his hut.

He was still a young man, but looked old. His eyes were shifty and cunning, his lips full and thick; he did not seem to be at all the kind of man to play so daring a game. Don Felipe looked at him so scornfully that he turned away his face in confusion. He gave his answers clearly, however, and told the story from beginning to end without a tremor.

It was as Sorillo had said. The fellow admitted being a Royalist spy employed in carrying messages between General Canterac and Montilla. The Don, he declared, had procured him the pass signed by Riva-Aguero, and had given him the letter now in the guerilla chief's possession.

Don Felipe never once interrupted him either by word or gesture; to look at him, one would have thought he was merely a spectator, with no interest in the matter one way or another. But when at last the tale ended, and Sorillo called upon him to speak, his attitude changed.

"Do your murders your own way," he cried defiantly. "If the farce pleases you, play it. What has it to do with me? When I am accused of crime by the government of my country, I will answer."

"Don Felipe is right, Sorillo," I interrupted. "If he has done wrong, let him be brought before a proper tribunal. Whether he be innocent or guilty, if you kill him you commit murder. You and your followers have no right to punish him."

"In the case of a traitor we take the right," answered Sorillo drily.—"But there is a further charge, Don Felipe Montilla, more serious still. You have been proved false to your country; I accuse you also of being false to your friend."

Hitherto, I am bound to admit, the guerilla chief had acted like a perfectly impartial judge; now there was a ring of anger in his voice and a dangerous glitter in his eyes. As to Montilla, I could hardly suppress an exclamation of surprise at the change in his appearance. No longer boldly erect, he stood with drooping head, pale cheeks, and downcast eyes. In the first act he had behaved like a man of spirit; the second he began like a craven.

"Listen!" exclaimed Sorillo sternly, and his first words told me what would follow. "For many years there has lived in Lima a man who loves the Indians. He saw that they were treated as dogs, and because of his great pity he resolved to help them. To this end he worked day and night, making many enemies among the rulers of the country. They tried to turn him from his purpose, now with threats, again with offers of heavy bribes: he would not be moved. So badly were the Indians treated that it mattered little whether they lived or died. They banded together, procured arms and ammunition, and determined to fight for their liberty. Their friend sent them word that the attempt was hopeless; but they were very angry, and would not listen. Then he left his home to speak to them himself, and endeavour to dissuade them from their purpose."

Montilla had not once raised his head, and now his limbs quivered. As for me, I sat listening with fascinated interest.

"Side by side with this friend of the Indians," the chief continued, "there lived a Spanish gentleman, who told the viceroy falsely that his neighbour was going to the mountains to raise the standard of rebellion. The viceroy, who was frightened, sent soldiers to seize him. Second in command of the party was a lieutenant, young in years but old in crime. To him this Spaniard went secretly. 'If this man should be killed in the scuffle,' said he, 'you can come to me for five thousand dollars.'

"The lieutenant did his best to earn the money, and thought he had succeeded. As it chanced, however, his victim did not die, but his estates were confiscated and given to the man who had betrayed him."

The speaker stopped. All was still; save for the leaping waters of the torrent, no sound was to be heard. I glanced at Montilla: he was deathly pale, and on his forehead stood great beads of perspiration, which, with his bound hands, he was unable to wipe away.

"Shall I tell you who these men were?" asked Sorillo. "One is Don Eduardo Crawford; the others stand here," and he pointed to the prisoners. "Listen to your accomplice, Felipe Montilla, if you care to hear the story repeated."

Again Lureña gave his evidence glibly. I think he had no sense of shame, but only a strong desire to save his life. He might not have committed the deed for the sake of the money alone, he said, but he hated my father for having cast him into prison.

It was poor evidence on which to try a man for his life, yet no one doubted Montilla's guilt. There he stood with trembling limbs and ashen face—truly a wretched figure for a cavalier of Spain! His courage had broken down completely, and to all the questions put by his self-appointed judge he answered no word.

At length Sorillo asked his officers for their verdict, and with one consent they pronounced him "Guilty!"

"It is a true verdict," exclaimed Sorillo; "any other would be a lie.—And now, Felipe Montilla, listen to me for the last time. You have been proved a traitor to your country, and that alone merits death; but this other crime touches the members of the Silver Key more closely. When the great men of Peru called the Indians dogs, Don Eduardo was our friend. He took our side openly, encouraged us, sympathized with us, pitied us. And you tried to slay him! not in fair fight, mind you, and only because you coveted his possessions. For that you die within forty-eight hours, as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow!" And all his hearers applauded.

The condemned man still made no reply, uttered no appeal for mercy, but stood as one dazed. But I thought of the daughter who loved him so well, and sprang to my feet.

"Hear me!" I cried excitedly. "If Don Felipe has done wrong, it is against my father. Do you think he will thank you for killing his enemy? Is that his teaching? You know it is not; you know that he would forgive him freely—would beg his life from you on his bended knees. If you really love my father, if you feel that he deserves your gratitude, spare this man's life. If he has sinned he will repent. I have come here for him. Do not let me go back alone. Am I to say to my father, 'You are foolish in thinking the Indians care for you; they care nothing! I asked of them a boon in your name, and they refused it'? Raymon Sorillo, I appeal to you, give me this man's life for my father's sake!"

I looked at him earnestly, hoping to find a spark of mercy in his eyes. Alas, there was none! He was hard as iron, cold as ice; on that day, at least, there was no pity in him.

"You are foolish," said he; "you are like a child who cries for the moon. Set this man free and he will immediately begin his old games of deceit and trickery. He cannot help himself. It is his nature, as it is a spider's to weave its web. Your father's happiness depends on this traitor's death."

I heard him patiently, and then renewed my appeal. It was quite useless.

"Remove the prisoners," said he; and at a sign the troops marched off, the officers dispersed, and none save we two remained on the platform. For a long time neither spoke. I was thinking of Rosa anxiously awaiting my return. I had bidden her hope, and there was no longer any hope. I made no attempt to deceive myself in this respect. Sorillo would do much for me, but this one thing he would not do. I dreaded the thought of returning to Lima. What would Rosa say and do when she heard of her father's shameful death? Perhaps that part might be spared her; she need not learn the whole truth. I must invent some story which would save her the knowledge of his double treachery.

At last I turned to the chief, saying, "Will you allow me to speak with Don Felipe in private? He has a daughter at home; he may wish to send her a last message."

"He is not worth your kindness; but do as you please."

I thanked him, and walked toward the hut in which Don Felipe was confined. The sentry let me pass without protest, and opening the door I entered.

The sight before me was a pitiful one. The wretched prisoner sat on a wooden bench in the dreary hovel. His arms were bound, but he was free to walk about if he so wished. At the click of the latch he raised his head, but seeing me dropped it again quickly, as if ashamed to meet my gaze.

"Don Felipe," I began, "have you any message for your daughter?"

Instead of answering my question, he himself asked one.

"Will that brigand really put me to death?" he said.

"I am afraid so. I have begged hard for your life, but in vain."

Looking at me curiously, he exclaimed, "I cannot understand why you should wish to save me!"

"For Rosa's sake! When you were carried off, she came to me, and I promised if it were possible to bring you back with me."

"Then you do not believe the story you heard to-day, about—about—"

"My father? Yes, I believe it; but that is no reason why I should be unkind to Rosa. Poor girl! 'twill be hard enough for her to lose you."

"Is there no way of escape?"

I shook my head. "An armed sentry stands outside; a hundred soldiers are in the ravine; the path is closely watched. I would help you if it were possible."

"It will be dark to-night."

"That would help us little. Even if you escaped from the hut, you would be challenged at every dozen yards. No, I can see no way out."

I think that at this time he began to fully realize the danger he was in. He had a hunted look in his eyes, and again the perspiration stood on his forehead. Fear was fast killing shame, and he seemed to care nothing that I was the son of the man whom he had tried to murder.

"Juan," said he, "can't you make an excuse to visit me after dark?"

"I should think so," I replied.

"And will you cut these cords?"

"If you think it will help you at all."

"Leave that to me," said he, speaking almost hopefully. "By St. Philip, I shall escape the ruffian yet!"

What his plan was he did not tell me, but it seemed to please him greatly. He even laughed when I again mentioned Rosa, and said he would carry his message himself. And with hope there came back to him something of the old cunning and smoothness of speech for which he was so noted.

"I am sorry you were misled by that preposterous tale," said he softly. "Pardo Lureña is a villain, but we will unmask him. Of course, there was a little truth in his story, but so twisted and distorted that it could not be recognized. Your father will understand, however, and even you will come to see that I am not greatly to blame. A little thoughtlessness, Juan, and a desire to help a friend—no more; but that can wait. You will be sure to come, Juan; you will not fail me?"

"I will do my very best, Don Felipe, for your daughter's sake."

Wishing him farewell, I returned to the chief's hut. He was not there, so I lay down to think out the situation; but my head was in a hopeless muddle. I went into the ravine again, and, watching the soldiers, wondered how the unhappy prisoner hoped to escape them.

As it chanced, his plan was doomed to disappointment. Toward the end of the afternoon I stood chatting with Sorillo and some of his officers, when a messenger rode up the ravine. His horse had travelled far and fast, while he looked worn out with fatigue.

Springing to the ground, he saluted, while the chief cried, "What news, Sanchez? it should be worth hearing!"

"I think it is," replied the man, with a significant smile. "General Canterac is marching on Lima at the head of a Spanish army."

"How many men has he?"

"Nine thousand, perhaps ten—horse, foot, and guns. The advance-guard is not far off."

"Thanks, Sanchez.—Let the men assemble, Barros: a dozen to stay here, the rest to follow me. Has Cerdeña sent word to Lima? Good. He knows his business.—Juan, you will just have time to ride clear, and not much to spare. No doubt Canterac has sent some of his troops by the near cut."

All was bustle and activity in the ravine. Officers issued commands, troopers saddled their horses, muskets were seen to, an extra supply of ammunition was served out, and in a very short time

everybody save the few men left to guard the ravine was ready to march.

"What can your handful of men do against Canterac's army?" I asked Sorillo as we rode away.

"Not much beyond cutting off a few stragglers," he replied, smiling; "but we shall obtain information of which our leaders in Lima seem to stand badly in need."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE "SILVER KEY" AGAIN.

Since these events happened I have asked myself many times whether I did right or wrong, and even now I scarcely know how to decide. Those who blamed me said I was Sorillo's guest, and should not have abused his confidence. Others urged that I was bound, if possible, to prevent him putting a man to death unlawfully. All, however, agreed that none but a madman would have embarked on so preposterous an enterprise.

The idea occurred to me suddenly. The guerillas, split up into groups, had gone, some this way, some that, to watch the movements of the Royalist troops. Sorillo had kept me company till we cleared the pass, when he, too, with a word of farewell, rode away. It was now dusk, and, as the chief had truly said, there was no time to waste; yet I did not move. Right in my path, with outstretched arms and pitiful, beseeching face, stood Rosa Montilla. I knew it was but the outcome of a fevered brain; yet the vision seemed intensely real.

The girl's eyes looked at me reproachfully, her lips moved as if in speech. I fancied I could hear again her parting cry, "O Juan, save him!"

I asked myself impatiently what more could be done. I had tried my best and failed, and there was an end of it. Besides, the words of the chief rang in my ears in ominous warning: Don Felipe could not be trusted! To set him free was like giving liberty to a venomous snake; his hatred would now be all the more bitter in that he had struck and failed.

Why should I add to my father's danger? The fellow had tried to slay him once; the next time he would make no mistake. I would make no further effort to help such a traitor; I would ride on. But again the beseeching face of the girl stopped me, and again I was moved to think how I could aid the miserable prisoner. Like a flash of lightning I thought of the silver key. *That* would unlock his prison door. Although I fully believed in Don Felipe's guilt, I remembered he made no effort to defend himself. He would not admit Sorillo's right to try him. Before a lawful judge he might be able to vindicate his actions in some way; at least he should have the chance to do so. Thus thinking, I turned back in the direction of the ravine.

Half of the sentries, I knew, had been withdrawn to ride with their chief, but the number on guard mattered little; the silver key was an all-powerful talisman. I rode slowly, not wishing to tire the horses, to whose speed and strength we might later be indebted for our lives. I thought, too, it would serve my purpose better to reach the ravine in the dead of night, when the men would be sleepy and less likely to ask inconvenient questions.

I was stopped at the entrance to the pass, but not for long. The Indians who had seen me ride out with their chief had no suspicion of my object.

"Where is the chief?" asked the officer. "Have the Royalists got clear of the mountains?"

"No; they are still in the defiles. But I am in a hurry; I have come for the Spanish prisoner Montilla."

Fortunately this officer had not attended the trial of Don Felipe, and Sorillo was not the man to give reasons for his orders. My main difficulty would lie with the sentry at the door of the hut, but I did not think he would disobey the authority of the Silver Key.

In any case, boldness was my best policy; so I clattered up the ravine, stopping hardly a yard from the astonished sentry.

"Quick, man!" I cried, springing to the ground; "are you asleep? Open the door. I have come back for the prisoner. Is he still bound? Good. Can you tie him to this horse so that he cannot escape?"

"Yes, señor, if the chief wishes it. But, pardon me, señor, I have no orders."

"Orders!" cried I angrily; "what would you? I have but just left the chief; and is not this" (producing the silver key) "sufficient authority? Am I to tell the chief that he must come himself for the prisoner?"

"No, no, señor; but I am only a simple soldier. I must not open the door unless my officer bids me."

"He is below," I said; "we cannot pass without his permission. And I must hurry, or it will be too late. Quick, drag the fellow out and bind him firmly on the horse; then come with me."

The sentry had no inkling of the truth, and, never dreaming that his officer could be deceived, opened the door. Then the prisoner, whether from fear or from cunning I could not tell, acted in such a manner that no one would think I was helping him to escape.

He refused to stir an inch from his bench, and kicked vigorously when the sentry tried to seize him. Then he yelled so loudly that the officer came running up in alarm.

"The bird has no wish to leave his cosy nest," laughed he.—"Give me the rope, Pedro, and get a gag; the chief won't want to hear that music.—Now, señor, if you'll bear a hand we'll hoist him up.—Be still, you villain, or you'll get a knock on the head.—Had not one of my fellows better go with you to guard this wild beast, señor?"

Now, from the officer's point of view this was a very sensible proposal, and one which I dared not oppose for fear of exciting suspicion.

So I answered carelessly, "A good thought, and I am obliged to you; though," with a laugh, "the prisoner won't be able to do much mischief when you have finished with him."

"No, indeed; he'll be pretty clever if he can get these knots undone," replied the officer complacently.—"Now, the gag, Pedro. Quick, or he'll spoil his voice in the night air.—There, my pretty bird! you shall sing later on."

All this occupied time, and I was in dread lest dawn should break before we left the ravine. Then we had to wait till Pedro had saddled his horse; and I watched the sky anxiously. At last we were ready, and bidding Pedro ride in front, I took leave of the unsuspecting officer.

"A safe journey," he cried. "I should like to know what Sorillo means to do with the fellow."

"You'll hear all about it when the troops return," said I, laughing and hurrying after Pedro.

Thus far the venture, with one exception, had succeeded admirably. The prisoner was out of his cage, and would soon be clear of the pass. Then I should only have Pedro to deal with. His company was a nuisance, but it must be borne with for the present; later I should have to find means to get rid of him.

We rode slowly down the narrow path, Pedro in front, Don Felipe and I abreast. The poor fellow was in a hapless plight. The gag hurt his mouth, and the cords cut into his flesh. Had we been alone, I should, of course, have done something to ease his pain; but as long as Pedro was there, this was out of the question.

"Anyhow, it's better than being shot," I thought; "and really the wretch deserves it all."

We passed the sentries without trouble; but at the bottom of the pass my difficulties began again.

"I suppose the chief has gone to San Mateo, señor?" said Pedro questioningly. "That is the best place to watch from."

This was an awkward question, as I had intended making a straight dash for Lima; but it would not do to arouse the man's suspicions. We were too close to the mountains to run any unnecessary risks, and if Pedro showed fight there, our chance of escape was gone.

So I answered, "Yes," and rode along, wondering what would come of it. Every step led us into greater danger. We might run into the arms of the guerillas, in which event Don Felipe's fate was certain; or be stopped by the Royalists, when I should be made prisoner.

Day was now breaking, and with the strengthening light I began to see our position more clearly. It was not promising. We were farther from Lima than we had been when in the ravine, and were making straight for the mountains again. Another half-hour's riding would cut us off from escape completely. What could be done? There was no time to lose, and I must hit on a plan at once. The simplest and perhaps the only one likely to be successful I set aside without a moment's hesitation. Not for a dozen men's lives, my own included, would I harm the unsuspecting man whom chance had thrown into my power. I might, however, frighten him into obedience. As far as I could see, it was that or nothing, and the attempt must be made at once.

So, with beating heart and greatly doubting what would be the issue, I whipped out my pistol, and, levelling it at him, said quietly, "Move your hand to your musket, and you are a dead man! do as I bid you, and no harm will befall you. Leave your gun, get down from the saddle, and hold your hands above your head."

In the circumstances it was a risky experiment, because if the man should guess the truth I was entirely at his mercy. For him there was no more danger than if my pistol were a piece of wood.

"But, señor—" he began, staring at me in surprise.

"Get down!" I repeated sternly. "It is my order. Don't waste time, or I shall be obliged to fire."

Pedro was a brave man; indeed, all the Indians in Sorillo's band held their lives cheap. He did not exactly understand what was happening, yet he seemed to think that all was not right.

"The chief!" he exclaimed. "Does he—"

"Get down!" I cried once more, brandishing my weapon.

With a thundering shout of "The Silver Key! Help for the Silver Key!" he clubbed his musket and dashed straight at me, regardless of the levelled pistol.

One moment's pressure on the trigger and he would have dropped to the ground helpless, but I refrained; instead, I pulled the rein, and my horse swerved sharply, though not in time. The musket descended with a thud; the pistol slipped from my nerveless fingers; I seemed to be plunging down, down beneath a sea of angry waters.

How long I lay thus, or what happened during that time, I do not know; but I awoke to find myself beside a roaring fire, and to hear the hum of many voices. A soldier, hearing me move, came and looked into my face.

"Where am I?" I asked anxiously.

"Not far from Lima," said he. "A few hours since you weren't far from the next world. How did you get that broken head?"

I tried hard to remember, but could not; the past was a total blank.

"Well, well, never mind," exclaimed the man kindly. "Try to sleep; you will be better in the morning."

With the coming of dawn I saw that I was in the midst of a large camp. Thousands of soldiers wrapped in their ponchos lay motionless before smouldering fires. Presently there was a blowing of bugles, and the still figures stirred to life. Officers rode hither and thither issuing orders, the men ate their scanty rations, the cavalry groomed and fed their horses—there were all the sights and sounds connected with an army about to march.

Then the infantry formed in battalions, the horsemen mounted, bugles sounded in numerous places; there was a cracking of whips, the creaking of wheels, and all began to move slowly forward. Soon but a few men remained, and it seemed that I had been forgotten.

At length a man came to me. He was dressed in uniform, but his words and actions proved him to be a surgeon.

"Feel better?" he asked. "Can you eat something? I can only give you army food; but that will fill up the hollows. Now let me look at the damage. Faith, I compliment you on having a thick skull. A thinner one would have cracked like an egg-shell. Don't try to talk till you've had something to eat."

"Just one question," I said faintly. "Who are the soldiers just moved out?"

"Why, General Canterac's troops. I see you belong to the other side. But don't worry; we shan't hurt you."

"Then I am a prisoner?"

"That's always the way—one question leads to a dozen, Yes, I suppose you are a prisoner; but that's nothing very terrible," and he hurried off to procure food and drink for me.

Later in the day he came to have another talk, and I learned something of what had happened.

"We crossed the mountains almost without a check," he began. "The Indians did us some damage; but they were only a handful, and we saw none of your fellows."

"But how came I to be here?"

"Ah! that's a queer story. A party of scouts screening our left flank had just reached the base of the mountains, when they heard a fellow yelling at the top of his voice. By the time they got in sight, the man had evidently knocked you down, and was off at a mad gallop."

"Alone?" I asked.

"No; that's the strange part of it. He was leading a spare horse which carried something on its back. Our men could not get a good view, but it looked like a full sack, or a big bundle of some sort. They followed rapidly, and were wearing the runaway down when the Indians appeared in force on the hills. Of course that stopped the pursuit, and after picking you up, they came on with the army."

My memory returned now, and I understood what had happened. Pedro had escaped, and carried Don Felipe with him to the Indians of the Silver Key.

"Poor Rosa!" I sighed; "it is all over now. She will never see her father again. Sorillo will take care that he doesn't escape a second time."

My thoughts dwelt so much on this that I took little interest in the rest of the doctor's conversation. He was very jubilant, though, I remember, about his party's success, telling me that in a short time General Canterac would be master of Callao, and that the Patriots had nowhere the slightest chance of victory.

"What will be done with me?" I asked.

"I shall send you with our sick to the hospital at Jauja. The air there is bracing, and will help you to recover more quickly."

"Thank you," I said, though really caring very little at that time where I was sent.

Next day I was placed with several Spanish soldiers in an open wagon, one of a number of vehicles guarded by an escort of troopers. My friendly surgeon had gone to Lima; but I must say the Spaniards behaved very well, making no difference between me and their own people.

As to the journey across the mountains, I remember little of it. The worthy Pedro had made such good use of his musket that my head was racked with pain, and I could think of nothing. Most of the sick soldiers were also in grievous plight, and it was a relief to us all when, after several days' travelling, the procession finally halted in Jauja.

Here we were lifted from the carts and carried to a long whitewashed building filled with beds. They were made on the floor, and many of them were already occupied. Accommodation was found for most of us, but several had to wait until some of the beds became vacant.

Two or three doctors examined the fresh patients, and one forced me to swallow a dose of medicine. Why, I could not think, unless he wanted me to know what really vile stuff he was capable of concocting.

I shall pass quickly over this portion of my story. For weeks I lay in that wretched room, where dozens of men struggled night and day against death. Some snatched a victory in this terrible fight, but now and again I noticed a file of soldiers reverently carrying a silent figure from one of the low beds.

By the end of September I was strong enough to get up, and the doctors pronouncing me out of danger, I was taken to another building. This was used as a prison for captured officers of the Patriot forces, and the very first person to greet me as I stepped inside the room was the lively Alzura.

"Juan Crawford," cried he, "by all that's wonderful! From the ballroom to the prison-house! There's a splendid subject for the moralist. Where have you been, Juan? your people think you are dead. Miller is frantic; all your friends in Lima are in despair."

"Do you know anything of Don Felipe Montilla?" I asked.

"Montilla? No; there is a mystery about him too. It is given out that he was abducted by brigands, but some people whisper another story."

"What?"

"That he fled to the Royalists, my boy, as I prophesied he would."

"Then you were a false prophet."

"Then I ask the worthy Don's pardon for suspecting him without cause. But how did you get here?"

"I was brought in a wagon."

"Lucky dog! Always lucky, Juan. I had to walk," and he showed me his feet, naked, and scored with cuts.

After sympathizing with him, I asked him how events were shaping.

"Canterac did not capture Callao, as he hoped, and is now back in the highlands. Many things have happened, however; let me be your chronicle. Where shall I start?"

"From the day that Canterac swooped down on Lima."

"That was nothing. He sat down in the capital; we hugged the guns at Callao and looked at him. When he got tired he took himself off, and we returned to our quarters."

"Nothing very exciting in that."

"You are right, my boy. Your judgment is marvellous. But we had a day of excitement shortly before I came on this trip. You should have been there. Lima went stark mad! The guns at Callao thundered for hours; the capital was decked with flags; the people cheered till they were hoarse; there was a very delirium of joy. It was the greeting of Peru to her saviour—her second saviour, that is."

"Why can't you speak plainly? Do you mean Bolivar has come?"

"Your second question, Juan, shows there was little need for the first. Yes, Bolivar, the protector or emperor, or whatever name the new master of Peru cares to be known by. The hero of South America has arrived; let the Spaniards tremble!"

"For any sake give your tongue a rest. What has Santa Cruz done?"

"What has Santa Cruz done? A very great deal, my boy, I assure you. He has lost his whole army—men and horses, guns and ammunition, wagons and stores. What do you think of that, young man? You will be compelled to swallow Bolivar after all."

"Let us change the subject. Tell me about yourself."

"Ah," said he, "that is indeed a great subject! Your discernment is worthy of praise. I can talk on that topic for hours without tiring. Where shall I begin?"

"Where is the jailer?"

"Why?"

"That I may ask him to send me back to the hospital."

"Juan, you are a fraud! But hark! that is the bell calling us to dinner. Blessed sound! Come with me to the banquet."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN OPEN-AIR PRISON.

There were fifteen or sixteen Patriot officers of all ranks in the prison, and I found most of them jolly fellows. We lived all together in two large rooms, one of which was used as a bedroom. In addition, we were allowed at certain hours to walk up and down a long corridor, so that we got a fair amount of exercise.

Alzura and a few of the other youngsters spent much time in planning methods of escape, and they were glad of any suggestions I could offer. As a rule, our arrangements ended in talk. The viceroy put his trust rather in keen-eyed sentries than in locks, bolts, and strong walls. An armed man stood on either side of the door leading to the corridor, which was itself guarded by a chain of soldiers. At the yard-door, through which we were not permitted to pass, an officer with several men always stood on duty.

Three or four times every week, in the middle of the night, an inspecting officer would summon us to get up and answer our names. This was a great nuisance, as it disturbed our sleep, but fortunately it did not take long. We slept on the floor fully dressed and wrapped in our ponchos, so there was no delay in making our toilets.

We were given sufficient food—of a sort; but we had no amusements of any kind, and absolutely nothing to do. Our sole occupation was walking round and round the room like caged bears, and chatting about the war.

Most of us voted Alzura a bore in this respect, but I think on the whole he did us good. His was the first voice heard in the morning, and the last at night. He was equally ready to talk with ensign or general, and on any subject under the sun. He would jest or laugh, or, I really believe, weep with you at a moment's notice. He would instruct the artillery officer in the management of guns, advise the cavalryman how to ride, and show the general the best way to order a battle. Alzura was a genius, and most of us were only now beginning to find it out.

When the talk turned to the best way of escaping, he was delightful. Never was there a fellow with such ingenious schemes; only, as it happened, they were not quite suitable to our circumstances. Had we been in an underground cell, with massive walls and an iron door, he would have had us out in less than no time. When I mentioned casually that we were not so placed, he would reply good-humouredly, "No, dear boy, but some day you may be, and then my instructions will come in handy. But, as you say, the position at present is slightly different. First, we have to pass the sentry on this side of the door. I suppose we are all agreed on that point? Well, then, having got rid of him—"

"But we haven't got rid of him!"

"No; quite true. I can see him from here, and a very surly fellow he looks. I wonder the officer doesn't give us some one with a more amiable face. However, that's outside the argument. Now, supposing we had disposed of this fellow, the question is, what to do next."

"But we haven't disposed of him!"

"Just so; but we ought to be prepared in case he is withdrawn, or anything of that sort, you know. However, if you won't follow my advice, it's no use giving it. It's simply folly to go on talking."

"I felt convinced you would say something sensible before you had finished," laughed one of the youngsters gaily.

Alzura laughed too, and gave the fellow a playful tap on the head, for he loved a joke whoever chanced to be the victim.

That same evening he told us of a fresh plan—for Alzura was as full of plans as an egg is of meat—and before he came to the end, we were laughing so uproariously that the sentry ordered us to make less noise.

"I daresay you fellows have wasted the day as usual," he began; "that is the worst of having some one to do your thinking for you. I really wish you wouldn't depend so much on me."

"That's the penalty of being so clever, my boy. The world always overworks its greatest men. It's quite reasonable, after all."

"But it's hard on me, nevertheless," observed Alzura; "though I suppose one ought not to complain of being a genius. Well, I've been working my brains all day—"

"Your what?"

"Oh, shut up, and let me speak! I've hit on a lovely plan: it will work like a machine; it can't possibly fail. We have been on the wrong tack, trying to meet force with force. What we want is craft. Do you follow me, boys?"

"Yes, yes; go on! Let's hear the lovely plan."

"When you do hear it, you will wonder why no one thought of it before. It is simple beyond belief, almost."

"A true mark of genius, Alzura. But we're waiting to hear this infallible plan."

"Well, look here. Just study that sentry's face a minute. Who is he like? Don't know? Why, isn't he just like our friend Crawford?"

The little group laughed with delight, while I said reproachfully, "Oh, come, Alzura!"

"Not so much the face, dear boy," said he, "but the figure. He's just your height and build; you will admit that. And his clothes will fit you, Juan. Now, do you see?"

I confessed to being still in a fog, so he continued his explanations.

"This is the idea," said he. "You and Barriero—Barriero is wonderfully strong—stroll down to him presently. Pretend you want to ask him a question. That will put him off his guard. What happens? You spring on him suddenly, clap a rag in his mouth, and with our help hold him so that he cannot struggle. Then you exchange clothes and stand on guard. When the relief comes you march away. Understand?"

"Nothing could be simpler," I murmured, while we were all nearly choking with suppressed laughter.

"Grand, isn't it?" said he. "I knew you would be struck."—I was.—"Then we'll serve the next fellow the same way, and the next, and so on till we are all out. After that we'll seize the viceroy—"

But by this time we were convulsed with laughter, and the sentry, in no very gentle tones, advised us to be quiet.

"It's a great scheme, Alzura," I said presently, "a wonderful scheme, but it can't be carried out. Suppose the trick was discovered after my escape, all you fellows would be punished sharply, and I shouldn't like that."

"No," said he, in a disappointed tone; "I thought your scruples might stand in the way."

Alzura's plan was still fresh in our minds when the Royalists showed us how to pass the sentry. One morning, directly after breakfast, an officer entered the room with a number of soldiers, and we were ordered to stand in line. Producing a paper, he read a list of the names, and each man, as he answered, was told to step forward. Then we were marshalled in twos, the left arm of one man being tied to the right of the other. My companion was Alzura, and very disgusted he looked at the treatment.

"What are they going to do with us?" he asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps they heard we wanted to get away, and are obliging us."

"Silence!" roared a Royalist sergeant; "no talking!" And Alzura groaned. How was he to live if he had to keep his tongue still?

A long strip of tough hide was now brought, and was knotted at intervals to the fastenings between

each pair of prisoners. It formed a sort of gigantic single rein, and I suggested in a whisper to Alzura that we were to be harnessed to the viceroy's chariot.

"'Twill save horseflesh, and we shall be doing something for our living," I added.

Some of the soldiers now went to the front of us, some to the rear; the door was flung wide open. "March!" cried the officer, and into the corridor we marched, through the yard, and so into the open road.

"Out at last," I remarked to Alzura. "The Royalists have hit on an even simpler plan than yours."

"Simple, but not clever. There is no art in this kind of thing."

"Oh, isn't there?" I laughed, giving the thongs a tug. "The arrangement strikes me as unusually artistic."

"You are trying to be witty, dear boy. Don't. The Royalists will be revenged on us, and who shall blame them? Hullo, they aren't taking us into the town!"

"No; we're going for a pleasure trip somewhere, I expect. How kind of them to think we need a change!—I say, Barriero, don't you think this is an improvement on Alzura's plan?"

Barriero, who was one of the couple in front of us, laughed and said, "Well, I can't say yet. I'll tell you when I know more about it."

At the gate of the prison our escort had been strengthened by a number of horsemen, who now rode on either side of us, so that any hope of escaping was quite extinguished. We knew nothing as to our destination, which I think the officer in charge did not make known even to his subordinates. A few people stood at the outskirts of the town to watch us pass, but during the remainder of the day we saw no one except our guards.

The march was terribly painful and fatiguing, though I have no wish to suggest that we were ill-treated. The fact was, the long confinement we had undergone made us keenly alive to the trials of a wearisome journey such as this. About midday a halt was called, our fastenings were loosened, while we were allowed to sit down and eat a ration of meat which was served out to each of us. Some of the soldiers rested; others stood on guard, with orders to shoot any man who made the slightest effort to escape.

"They needn't fear my running far," said Alzura ruefully, showing me his bleeding feet.

"Caramba!" cried a soldier sitting near, "that won't do, señor. The rocks are sharp in this part of the country. Wait; I have some green hides in my knapsack. I'll make you some sandals if the colonel halts for an hour."

"I shall be very grateful for your kindness," said Alzura; "the pain in my feet has kept me from admiring the scenery, and there are some grand views about here."

"I've seen finer in Lima," muttered the man, who was already busy at his self-imposed task.

"Give me some stuff," said one of his comrades; "I'll make one sandal while you make the other. The youngster will have his feet cut to the bone. He ought to be at school instead of marching about the country."

"I'm not eager to march," laughed Alzura; "I'll stay behind willingly."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the first soldier, "you would soon be dead in this wilderness. We have seen some sights in this district—haven't we, Alonzo?"

"That we have," replied his companion, "and I don't want to see any more of them."

The two worthy fellows worked so industriously that in less than half an hour the sandals were completed, the holes pierced, and the laces put in, all ready for use.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Alzura earnestly, "but if we manage to live through this war, I may be able to pay you back. At present you must take the will for the deed."

"It's all right, señor; we could not see you suffer like that. And our officer will say we did right. Just in time, too! There's the summons to assemble."

At the evening halt we were again set free a short time, being refastened for the night. After travelling for four days in this way, we saw from the top of a high hill the waters of a magnificent lake, studded with islets. It seemed quite near; but several hours passed before we reached its border—a broad morass, through which ran devious tracks.

Our leader now stopped, and we saw a number of soldiers carefully crossing one of the tracks from the lake. As soon as they reached us we were unbound and placed in single file, while the chief of the escort said, "The journey is ended. Yonder is your home while the war lasts. It is not a lively place, but you will be out of mischief. Follow your guides, and walk carefully; you will not enjoy sinking in the

quagmires."

We appreciated his advice more when, about half-way across, a stout middle-aged major, missing his footing, plunged into the liquid mud. In an instant he was immersed to the chin, and but for Barriero, who grasped his head, would have disappeared altogether. As it was, he presented a miserable appearance, and showed us how terrible was the danger.

Several boats were moored at the edge of the lake, and an officer directed us to get in, one by one. Barriero, Alzura, and I entered the same boat; which was fortunate, as the prisoners were divided into three groups and taken to different islets.

There were six of us in our group, and twelve soldiers under the command of a non-commissioned officer. The guard occupied comfortable quarters, while three mud huts were reserved for us. The islet was quite bare of trees, and was so small that Alzura pretended he could not stretch his legs comfortably for fear of slipping into the water.

The men who had rowed us over did not land, but took the boats to another islet, much larger than ours, which we guessed to be the headquarters of this novel prison.

"The governor of this place is a clever warder," remarked Barriero; "there's no getting away from here."

"Why not?" I asked.

"The risk is too great. Just think for a minute. First one would have to swim to the shore, and then cross the morass in the dark, as it would not be possible to escape in the daytime. It's really waste of time to mount a guard over us."

"We must set our wits to work," observed Alzura gravely.

"No, no," I cried; "Barriero's is the only way, and a very poor one it is. The swim is a trifle, but to cross the morass—"

"Why not build a bridge?" suggested Alzura.

"And use our bodies as part of the foundations," said Barriero, laughing. "If you make any more idiotic remarks, Alzura, I'll throw you into the lake."

"All right," said he. "You'll be sorry when Crawford and I escape and leave you behind."

"I've a long time to wait," replied Barriero, "so I'll pass some of it in sleep."

Alzura and I shared one of the huts between us. There was no furniture; the floor was of mud, and so were the walls, while the roof was thatched with some dried vegetable matter. The place was not exactly a palace, but it sheltered us, and for that we were thankful.

The sergeant in charge of the islet was a good-humoured fellow. Feeling sure that we could not escape, he treated us quite genially, though maintaining discipline at the same time. He often talked of the war, giving us news now and again of events which never happened.

On the third morning after our arrival, we saw several boats leave the main island and visit the various islets on which prisoners were kept.

"That's the governor making a tour of his kingdom," the sergeant explained. "He is bringing us a week's provisions, and will no doubt have a peep at his new subjects."

The governor was a Spanish officer, quite old, but stiff and erect in spite of his many years. He ordered us to draw up in line, called our names from the list, hoped we should be comfortable, ordered the sergeant to put in irons any man who disobeyed him, wished us all good-morning in courtly old-world style, stepped into his boat, and was rowed away.

"Not a word about attempting to escape!" remarked Barriero.

The sergeant heard the remark, and said with a laugh, "It is needless, señor. No one ever got away from here. Some have tried, and they are at the bottom of the morass. Why, even I would not venture to cross that terrible place, except in broad daylight with a trusty guide. If you think of trying, señor, let me advise you to stay where you are. Here you can be comfortable; there—ugh!" and the man shuddered at the very thought of it.

"Your advice is good, sergeant, and I intend to profit by it," cried Barriero. "We saw one man slip when we were crossing, and I shan't forget his face in a hurry. Caramba! it makes me shiver yet."

"Besides," continued the sergeant, "suppose that by some miracle you cross the marsh, what would happen then? You would die of hunger. But I will grant you a further miracle. You shall cross the mountains and join your friends. Is the danger over? It is but just beginning. You will be killed in battle. But your luck clings to you, and you still survive. Well, then, the war comes to an end; you are hunted down, captured with arms on you, and shot as rebels."

"What a charming picture, sergeant!" laughed Alzura. "It seems to me we are better off where we are."

"I am glad for your own sake that you think so," said the officer gravely. "I grow attached to my birds with their clipped wings, and only desire their welfare. There was a young fellow here once, a pretty boy, señor, like yourself"—Alzura bowed gracefully—"and I had grown to love him. But he got tired of the place and the company, I suppose, and one night he slipped into the water. I fired my musket, and a boat which is always kept ready started in pursuit. He reached the morass first, and found a track. My men followed cautiously. They could not see him, but presently they knew there was no need to go further."

"How?" asked Alzura curiously.

"The shriek of the boy as he went to his death told them what had happened. Ah, it was not the first time some of them had heard such a wail!"

"Sergeant," said Alzura, "you tell such lively stories that I wonder at any one becoming tired of your society!"

"You are pleased to be merry," replied the man, "and I, too, can be the same, only not when speaking of the morass. Come, let us forget it for a while. Although you are my prisoners, you will not find me a harsh jailer."

This was quite true, but not all his kindness could make up to us for loss of liberty. Barriero and the other three prisoners seemed quite resigned to their fate, but Alzura was always hankering after the delights of Lima and home, while I, too, longed very much to see my parents and friends. So we often sat for hours watching the margin of the lake, envying the men who went ashore. They carried on their heads whatever bundles they had, and we carefully noted the landing-place, as well as the track across the morass which they appeared to take.

"It seems easy enough, doesn't it?" Alzura would say; "but in the dark it would be different! Think of the quagmires, Juan! Caramba! the sergeant was right. We had better give up our dreams, Juan, eh?"

I felt sure that this was wisely spoken, but somehow the next day we again went to look at the opposite shore and possible freedom. That horrible morass had a wonderful fascination for us. We thought of it by day and dreamed of it by night; but the weeks slipped away, and still we were prisoners on the islet.

The new year came, and in May 1824 we were joined by another captive. This was a treat for us, as he brought news from the outside world. He told us there had been many disturbances, that Bolivar was now undisputed ruler and leader of the Patriots, but that the end of the war seemed as far off as ever.

"If they keep us till the country is at peace," said he, "we shall die of old age on this islet."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY.

"I think," remarked Alzura, one day toward the end of June, "I'll get the sergeant to put me in irons."

"Why?" I asked in surprise.

"Because sitting here and looking at the land is driving me crazy."

"Then don't look at it."

"I can't help it, and that's the truth. Wouldn't it be grand if we could only cross that morass safely!"

"But we can't!"

"No," said he; "but suppose we could? Suppose there came a night when it was just dark enough to hide us, and yet light enough to show us the track? Wouldn't it be a feather in our caps if we could get back safely to Miller?"

"It would; but we should lose our nerve in that horrible swamp, even if we reached it."

"Very likely; and our lives too. Let's go back to the hut."

We had often talked like this, but now there seemed more purpose and earnestness in my chum's manner. I looked at him closely as we returned to our quarters, and wondered if he had decided to run

the risk.

"A quarter of a mile isn't a long swim, is it?" he said, after a time.

"Oh no!" I agreed cheerfully.

"And we might easily save sufficient food from our rations to last a long while."

"Most likely we shouldn't need it long."

"It would be very useful if we did."

"Look here, Alzura," said I, turning on him suddenly, "let's make an end of this business. What are you driving at? Are you going to risk your life in that morass?"

"I'm very tired of this place," he answered moodily.

"So am I; but that doesn't lessen the danger of the swamp. Now, let us make no mistake. There is, perhaps, one chance in a hundred. Is it worth risking? Death in a morass must be rather horrible. Don't you think so?"

"Well, it can't be very pleasant; but you admit we stand a chance of getting across."

"One in a hundred, no more."

"Ah, well," said he thoughtfully, "let us sleep on it."

I could not help thinking that my chum must want his freedom badly to even suggest such a venture. Any hot-blooded enterprise, I knew well, appealed to him strongly; but this one required cool, dogged patience and nerves of iron. Barriero was a brave fellow too, but he honestly admitted he would rather be shot than try to cross the morass in the dark. As for me, I trembled at the thought of taking part in so hazardous an enterprise.

However, it seemed to me that Alzura was making up his mind to go. Every day he let fall broad hints, and at last stated his intentions without reserve.

"Juan," said he one evening, "I'm going. The war may last a couple of years yet. Are you coming with me? Don't if you'd rather not risk it."

"Have you counted the cost?"

"Yes. I know it's a touch-and-go affair; that is why I won't press you to join me."

"Two will stand a better chance than one," said I thoughtfully, "and you mustn't try it alone. Shall we ask Barriero to come with us?"

"May as well pass the compliment," answered Alzura, laughing. "But he won't, I'm positive."

And he was right; for Barriero, on being asked, said hotly,—

"You're a pair of idiots, and I don't know which is the bigger."

"It must be neither or both, if we're a pair," chuckled Alzura.

"Why can't you be satisfied?" growled Barriero. "You've plenty of food, no work to do, and are well treated. And there isn't one chance in a thousand of your getting through."

"Crawford said one in a hundred!"

"Well, anyway, you're certain to lose your lives, and I shall be blamed for not stopping you. It's my duty to inform the sergeant, and have you chained up."

"You can't," said Alzura—"you can't betray us."

"You're two lunatics—stark, staring lunatics—and I wish you had told me nothing of your mad scheme."

"It's awfully risky," said I, "but not so mad as you think. We shall choose our night, and we know just where to land. Then we shall take provisions to last us three or four days."

"You won't need them," interrupted Barriero, in a tone of conviction which was far from encouraging.

But now that the affair had really been decided on, the dangers of the morass soon lost some of their terrors. We were able to talk about them calmly, and thus grew familiar with them, at least in imagination. Every day we set aside a portion of the dried meat and biscuit which formed the chief part of our food, until at last we had as much as could be carried easily. It would be stupid to load ourselves with too heavy a burden, as Barriero rather unkindly reminded us.

We waited three whole weeks after coming to our decision before starting on the venture, and then, one favourable night, slipped down to the edge of the islet. Barriero, who had kept the secret, came to wish us good-bye, and the poor old fellow shook like a timid child.

"It is a mad game," said he, "a downright mad game. I shall never forgive myself for allowing you to go. It isn't too late now to draw back. Do take my advice, and don't risk it. I shan't sleep a wink all night if you go."

"Never mind, my boy," replied Alzura, laughing; "you'll have plenty of time afterwards for a nap.—Now, Juan, off with your clothes."

The other prisoners were sound asleep in their huts; so were the soldiers, with the exception of the two sentries. These men were supposed to keep a sharp lookout, but nothing had happened for so long a time that their duty was mostly a matter of form. However, Barriero kept watch while we each stripped and made a bundle of our food and clothes to carry on our heads.

"Good-bye, old man," we said to him when we were quite ready; and he, gripping our hands, whispered back,—

"Good luck; but I wish you would not go. Take care, and come back here rather than lose your lives, if you cannot find the track."

We promised to do so, and then took quietly to the water. The first part of the journey gave us no trouble whatever. We were both good swimmers, and quickly arrived at the spot which we had selected as the landing-place. Here we crouched on a patch of firm ground, undid our bundles, and proceeded to dress quickly. A smothered exclamation from Alzura made me glance at him. In his hurry he had whisked his shirt a yard or two away, and it had settled in the liquid mud.

"There's an end to that garment!" said he. "Well, after all, it's no great loss; 'twas mostly made of holes. What have you found, Juan?"

"A stout staff tipped with iron, left here by the soldiers, most likely. What a piece of luck, my boy! Now we shall be able to test the ground."

"Yes, the balance is on our side," said he happily, buttoning his tunic. "Are you ready? Give me the staff, and I'll go first."

Of course I could not let him do that; so turning it off with a laugh, I cried,—

"No, thank you. I'm not going to trust my life to your hands, or rather feet. Now, follow me closely. Walk just where I do, and if you see me disappearing, pull me back sharp. We're on the track now, and must try to keep on."

"Spoken with the wisdom of a sage!" said Alzura saucily. "I say, Juan, how shall I know when you're moving?"

There was certainly reason for his sarcasm. As often as not, when I raised my foot I brought it down in the same place again, or, according to Alzura, even went a step backward. The night was not particularly dark—indeed, we had doubted whether it was dark enough for us to swim ashore unobserved—but the marsh was fearfully deceptive.

In places the track was merely a dry hump here and there, for which I had to feel with the staff. Twice, in spite of every precaution, I missed my footing, and the second time had sunk to the waist before Alzura could pull me out.

"I can't see you very well, Juan," said he, laughing, "but I have an idea that you would cut a fine figure in a ballroom just now."

"Especially if it were a fancy-dress affair," I replied in the same tone.

We were in no merry humour, mind you; but the weakest joke was better than dwelling on the horrors which surrounded us. Each of us knew that, but for Alzura's quickness, I should have disappeared for ever, leaving no trace behind me. Twice before the break of day I had saved him from a similar fate.

We left the islet about ten o'clock, and at midnight were still in the morass, unable to move. Alzura had joined me on a piece of firm ground, just large enough for us to stand on, and no more. It was darker now, so that we could see nothing clearly, while I failed to touch any solid substance, except that behind us, with my pole. Alzura's attempts were equally unsuccessful.

"You're a pretty guide!" said he. "You've got off the track; we had better try back. Give me the staff."

"Be careful; mind how you turn. Can you feel the ground where we stood just now?"

"Yes; here it is," and the next minute he stepped back to feel for the proper path, while I stood trembling lest he should slip in and be smothered before I could get to his assistance.

"Can you find a place?" I asked.

"Only towards the lake. It's nothing but marsh to right and left. I think I'll come to you again. What is it? Did I hurt you?"

"Oh no, not at all!—only crushed my toes a bit with the pole! What are we going to do now?"

"I suppose it's too early for breakfast?" he began, and then in a different tone he added hastily, "Oh, I say, what a joke! I've dropped my bundle of food somewhere. Perhaps it's just as well; I shall walk lighter."

"But you'll want something to eat," I suggested.

"Of course I shall. How dense you are! Don't you see how the accident will benefit us both? There are two now instead of one to eat your rations, so you will have all the less to carry."

"Oh," said I doubtfully, not quite appreciating the logic. "Well, we don't want breakfast yet, and the question is, what are we to do? The sergeant's bound to discover our escape at breakfast-time, and a search-party will be sent ashore immediately."

"It will be light in an hour or two," observed Alzura cheerfully—"at least light enough for us to find the track again. Let us sit down; it won't be so tiring, and we can't make ourselves any wetter or dirtier. It's a good thing I didn't start on this journey alone; I should be with my provisions now."

"It's always pleasanter to have company," said I, shivering, and not noticing the absurdity till Alzura laughed.

There was certainly very little pleasure in our position just then. We were wet through, chilled to the marrow, and plastered with mud from head to foot. Our limbs felt horribly cramped, yet we almost feared to stretch them, and the enforced delay was fast diminishing our chances of escape. The dawning light might show us the route, but it would also set the soldiers on our heels. Altogether, I was rather inclined to envy Barriero, sleeping peacefully in his hut.

As soon as ever it became light enough, Alzura jumped up, saying, "Where is the pole?" and grasping it, he began trying to touch bottom. He poked long and vigorously in all directions, but without success, till it seemed as if our only plan was to return and give ourselves up.

"Yet there must be a way out," said I impatiently. "The track leads here plainly enough, and it wouldn't come to an end just in the middle of the morass."

"I shouldn't think so," said Alzura. "I wonder whether they've missed us yet. How old Barriero will grin on seeing us back again!"

"We aren't back yet," I replied. "Look at that hump yonder. It seems solid, doesn't it? Lend me the pole. Ah, too short! What d'you think, Alzura?"

"It looks all right," said he; "but appearances are often deceptive. Besides, we can't reach it."

"We can jump it, perhaps."

"Yes," said he thoughtfully, "we might. It's a big risk, though. If it isn't firm ground, the one who jumps will go to his death."

"I'll chance it," said L

"No, you won't; it's my venture. Stand aside, and give me room for a take-off. Remember me to the others if I go down."

"Wait," said I; "there's no need for you to go. We can put it to the test without risking life," and I hastily unslung the packet of provisions which hung over my shoulder.

"Bravo, Juan! that is a good dodge. Mind your aim, though!"

"All right," and raising the bundle, I swung it carefully to and fro, trying to gauge the distance. Then giving it an upward sweep, I let it go, and we watched breathlessly as it fell plump on the spot.

"Firm as a rock," cried Alzura. "Viva! now for the jump, my boy; it's easy enough."

"As long as we come down in the proper place. Stand back," and pulling myself together, I took the leap, landing close beside the bundle. This I picked up, and, telling Alzura to throw me the pole, proceeded to investigate.

"Is it all right?" he cried softly.

"Yes," said I, and stood back while he jumped across.

"Caramba!" said he, "that's a nasty bit well over!" and I noticed that his limbs trembled.

"All's well that ends well," I replied. "Come on, my boy; we've done the worst part, and the track's

as plain as a pikestaff now. If we can reach the hill we came down months ago, 'twill be an easy matter to hide."

"I wonder if the sergeant has discovered anything yet? According to his account, the guards will think us dead."

"So much the better for us; they'll give up the search sooner. Hurrah! the ground's getting firmer at every step. I believe we're out of the morass."

The words were hardly spoken, when, my foot catching in some coarse grass, I fell sprawling, face downwards.

"Not quite," observed Alzura, pulling me up, while I tried to get the mud from my mouth and eyes. "It's a lucky thing you didn't try that trick before. Faith, Juan, you do look a picture! I'd willingly give a hundred dollars to be able to pop you down in Lima!"

"Come along, and don't be idiotic, or we shall find ourselves back on the islet."

"Yes," said he, still grinning all over his face; "we can't stay here laughing all day."

"I'm not laughing," I cried indignantly.

"Aren't you? Well, you see, old fellow, it's rather difficult to tell what you're doing through that black mask. I shouldn't try to rub it off. Let it cake, and we'll chip it off with a stone."

"This way," said I gruffly, taking no notice of his attempts to be funny. "We'd better make straight for the mountains and hide ourselves."

"We've need to," he replied, with a meaning laugh.

We were now in a wide plain, dotted with numerous hillocks, and a good deal cut up by streams from the overflow of the lake. The ground was damp, while here and there we plumped straight into a marsh. By this time, however, we were in such a state that nothing mattered, and being unwilling to lose time, we took the shortest though not the most pleasant route.

We had a good start of the soldiers, who, as it happened, were completely thrown off the scent through finding Alzura's bundle. Knowing the terrible nature of the morass, they concluded we were both dead, and returned to the island with the tidings.

We learned this long afterwards from Barriero, who told us how he had mourned our sad fate, and blamed himself repeatedly for having let us go. At the time, however, we expected every moment to hear the patter of feet behind us, and raced on till, breathless and panting, we reached the base of the mountain.

Here we stopped a few moments to recover breath, and then, climbing some distance, proceeded to search for a cavern.

"There ought to be several," said Alzura, "for the mountain has been mined. Didn't you notice the *rodados* as we came down?"

"Those heaps of rubbish?"

"Yes. All that refuse has been taken out of the mountain. Here's a heap, and the mouth of the tunnel won't be far away. Now, keep your eyes open."

I did my best; but Alzura found the cavern, and in a short time we were both inside. The place was dark, and smelt dreadfully, the roof almost touched our heads, and the passage was very narrow.

"A nice trap!" I remarked. "If the soldiers catch us here, there's an end to our freedom."

"I'm not so sure of that. The gallery may run a long way back, and perhaps communicate with another. Shall we explore it?"

"Not now; I'm hungry and tired."

"So am I, and wet and cold too. I wish we had a fire. Better take your things off and wring them; you'll be a bit more comfortable."

I followed his advice, and then we sat down to feast on the dried beef and biscuits, which, happily, we had been able to keep in good condition. It was not a brilliant banquet, but we were hungry, and our teeth were sharp.

"I think it's a pity I lost my stock," remarked Alzura, lazily enjoying the food. "That bit won't last long."

"You must eat less. I shall put you on short rations in the morning."

"Tell me that to-morrow; I'm sleepy now."

"Aren't we going to keep watch?"

"I don't think it's worth while. The soldiers aren't likely to look here for us, unless you attract their attention by snoring too loudly," and the rascal chuckled himself off to sleep.

In a few minutes I lay down beside him, and slept soundly till he wakened me by beating a tattoo on my ribs, and saying that he wanted his supper. We had, in fact, slept through most of the day, and it was too late to think of making a fresh start till the first thing in the morning.

However, as soon as day broke we set out with a hazy idea of making our way to Lima. By dint of careful economy, our provisions would last for three days, and then we must trust to luck. We had no notion how the war had gone, and I should not have been surprised to hear that the Royalists were again masters of the country.

About noon on the third day of our journey we sat down beside a pleasant stream in a picturesque ravine. There was sufficient food left for one meal, and Alzura voted for having it at once.

"It's a long time since breakfast," said he, "and this mountain air sharpens one's appetite. Besides, it's good policy to make sure of a thing while one has the chance."

"All right," said I, laughing, and opening the bundle, "here you are. Don't grumble with me when we have to go to bed without supper."

"We may get a fresh supply before then; who knows?"

I did not think it likely; but all the same I joined him in an attack on the provisions, which we devoured to the very last morsel. Then we had another drink of water, and rose to resume our journey. As if this were a signal, the rocks round about suddenly became alive with armed men, who yelled some orders which we could not understand. Then clambering over the boulders, they surrounded us, and in a short time had bound our arms tightly with strips of hide. They were fierce-looking fellows—Indians, never seen westward of the Andes—and apparently unfamiliar with the Spanish language. I tried to question them, but they did not understand, while neither of us could make out a word of their patois. It was clear, however, that they meant to take us with them; and as we marched off, Alzura said, with a laugh,—

"What a lucky thing, Juan, that we ate our supper in good time!"

CHAPTER XXV.

BACK TO DUTY.

Since the beginning of the war I had seen a great deal of Indian endurance, but nothing to equal that of our new captors. They marched along in a curious fashion at a kind of jog-trot pace, taking short steps and carrying their feet close to the ground. Mile after mile was covered without apparent effort, and when at last a halt was called, not a man looked the least bit tired. As for Alzura and me, we were exhausted, and lay down just as we were. The Indians lit a fire, roasted some maize, and loosening our bonds, gave us a share of the food, a drink of water, and a little coca. Whether they were friends or foes we could not tell, but despite their ferocious looks they did us no harm.

While on the march I had resolved to try them with the charm of the silver key; but, to my dismay, I found it was no longer round my neck. A part of the chain was still there, but it had snapped off, and the key was gone, sunk probably in the dreadful morass. However, turning to one of the fellows, I said, first in Spanish, then in the patois used by Sorillo's men, "We are officers in the Patriot army, and friends of Raymon Sorillo and the Silver Key; who are you?"

He shook his head solemnly, and looked at me with a blank stare.

"Try him with English, Juan," laughed Alzura. "I wonder where he lives when he's at home? Perhaps he knows Portuguese. I'll have a shot at him."

If Alzura knew Portuguese—which I rather doubted—the Indian was ignorant of that language, and was quite unmoved by my comrade's flood of oratory.

Perhaps he thought Alzura was singing. But my companion in adversity did not take the suggestion in good part; indeed it seemed to annoy him.

"Never mind," said I cheerfully; "they can't march us about for ever. We are bound to meet with civilized beings some time or other."

"But these fellows may belong to the Royalists! Many of the Indians on this side of the mountains do. Then we shall be taken back to the island!"

"We shall have guides across the morass, though; that's one thing to be thankful for."

"And be put in irons! Perhaps you think that's a subject for cheerfulness?"

"We shouldn't be able to risk our lives again, at all events."

"Oh, go to sleep," exclaimed Alzura, "if you've nothing more sensible than that to say!" and he rolled a little nearer the fire.

The next morning the Indians resumed their journey, and after a weary tramp of many miles, encamped on the side of a mountain, where stood several huts in a half-ruined state. One of these was set aside for us, and a sentry was placed at the door.

Here we remained for three weeks while our captors made frequent excursions, starting early in the morning and returning late at night, though of their object we had not the faintest idea. At the end of that time we were taken with them; and from morn till night, for several days in succession, we roamed about those dreadful mountains, till every muscle in our bodies ached with fatigue.

"What is the use of it all?" I asked Alzura gloomily. "What do they expect to gain by this continual tramp up and down?"

"It's my belief that they can't help themselves," he replied. "It's a disease, a form of madness, which keeps them continually on the move. Yesterday we climbed the same hill a dozen times, and finished at the starting-point. Or perhaps it's some new kind of warfare they've invented."

"It's awfully ridiculous, anyhow, and I don't see that we've gained much by leaving the island—unless it's exercise."

"When the war is over, I'll give up walking altogether," said my chum resolutely. "When I'm not on horseback, or in a carriage of some kind, I'll be carried about in a chair. If this lasts much longer, my feet will be worn out."

That evening the Indians lit their fire earlier than usual—a circumstance for which we were duly grateful. We ate our supper, and sat chatting together cheerfully, being put in good humour by the warmth and brightness of the ruddy flames.

Suddenly we heard in the distance the long-drawn-out note of a night bird, repeated again and again, and each time nearer to us. It was answered by our sentries; but the men round the fire made no movement, nor did they show the slightest interest when half a dozen horsemen rode up. The leader, however, rose slowly and talked to the strangers, who, after seeing to their horses, came and sat down.

"Juan," said Alzura, "these fellows belong to a different tribe. Perhaps we shall have a chance of making ourselves understood."

"They are looking at us very pointedly," I answered; and raising my voice, I said, "Can any of you talk Spanish?"

"Yes," cried several together, coming near to us; "what do you want?"

"To make ourselves known," I replied. "These worthy fellows can't understand us, and we're tired of playing hide-and-seek in the mountains."

"Who are you? Where do you come from? Are you for the king?" asked one.

This was treading on dangerous ground; but as we really were worn out, and there seemed no chance of escape, I thought it best to take the bull by the horns. At the worst we should only be handed over to the enemy and sent back to prison.

So I answered quietly, "No; we are Patriot officers who have escaped from the Spaniards. If you are on our side, perhaps you will help us to return to our own people."

"You are with friends, señor, if what you say is true," remarked one who seemed to have some sort of authority.

"*If?*" said I, trying to speak haughtily; "do you doubt it?"

"Well," said the fellow, with a knowing grin, "you don't look much like officers of any kind." And he was right.

We were, in fact, a pair of as dreary-looking objects as one would be likely to meet. Our sandals were worn out, our clothes hung in rags, and the holes in Alzura's tunic made it painfully apparent that he did not indulge in the luxury of a shirt. Whether we wore uniform, and if so what kind, would have been difficult to decide, as we were still plastered with mud from head to foot. So I could not altogether blame the man for his distrust.

However, I repeated my statement, told him we had fought under the Englishman Miller, and at last introduced the name of Raymon Sorillo.

"We know him well," I said in conclusion, "and are good friends of the Silver Key."

Apparently my words were interpreted for the benefit of our captors, who jabbered together for a considerable time, while Alzura and I anxiously awaited the result of the conference.

At last the leader of the horsemen, turning to me, said, "Señor, it is decided that I shall take you to the army, where your words can be proved. If your story is not true, you will be shot as spies."

"All right; we agree!" I exclaimed joyfully, for it was a delightful thought that we were to escape the strange beings who spent their time in running about the rocks.

"We shall start early," he continued, "so you had better get some rest." Which we did, as soon as our excited state permitted.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Alzura, after breakfast the next morning; "this is an improvement. Fancy being on horseback again! This will be better than trudging on foot, Juan, eh?"

"What about the men who have lent us their horses?"

"Oh," said he merrily, "I believe they would as soon walk as ride, and I'm sure they could keep up longer than the animals."

By this talk you will understand we had been provided with a couple of horses; and taking leave of our original captors, we rode off with our new ones. Of course, both Alzura and I were unarmed, and the leader, in a quiet way, so arranged that we were never very far from a man with a musket.

He was rather a lively fellow for an Indian, and having made sure we could not escape, talked with us freely. He told us the men we had just left were very useful, having already sent in a great deal of valuable information to the Patriot army. He also said that Bolivar had crossed the Andes with a large army, and that a decisive battle was expected at any time. He was very curious about our escape, and could barely credit that we had crossed the morass without assistance.

"It has been done before," he said, "but only once or twice, and then by natives."

"We shan't do it again," laughed Alzura. "It nearly turned our hair white. It was the nastiest experience I have ever had—worse than when the Royalists cut us up at Torata."

"Were you in that battle, señor? Wasn't it terrible?" and the man looked at my comrade with renewed interest.

Indeed, from that time he treated us both with increased respect, and the journey passed quite pleasantly in his company. During the second day we met several groups of mounted Indians, and a detachment of regular soldiers; which showed that we could not be far from the main encampment, on the plain between Rancas and Pasco. Our guide expected to reach it that night, but we did not get in till after breakfast next morning.

The plain was a splendid place for a camp, though rather high up, being some twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea. Surrounding it on all sides, huge mountains towered, their mighty summits hidden by the clouds. The table-land itself was alive with soldiers, and presently I caught sight of the flag which had been presented to the Peruvian Legion.

"Take us over there," I cried excitedly to the guide.—"There are our comrades, Alzura. I see Plaza, and Cordova, and the sour-faced old major. Viva! viva!" and I rose in the stirrups with delight.

What explanation the Indian gave I do not know. We were plucked from the saddles and bandied about from one fellow to another in less than no time, every one helping to keep up a running fire of remarks.

"Now let the Royalists tremble!" exclaimed Plaza, striking a dramatic attitude, spoiled only by the fun and twinkle in his eyes.

"Only think, our little Alzura has returned to us!" cried another; "let us embrace him."

"Wait till he's been scrubbed a few times," suggested Plaza. "The legion should be proud of these 'young bloods.' What airs and graces! What remarkable and novel costumes! What—"

"Can any one lend me a shirt?" interrupted Alzura.

"A shirt?" exclaimed Cordova. "My dear fellow, I have a dozen, quite clean and doing nothing, I shall be proud to let you and Crawford each have one."

"Oh, thanks!" said Alzura. "I thought something practical ought to come from all that talk. Come on, my boy, let's have them at once. Where are they?"

"Just down in Lima. You have only to—" but a roar of laughter drowned the end of the sentence.

"You really don't require one," remarked Plaza; "it would spoil the rest of your uniform—that is, if you have one under that dirt."

Every one was still enjoying the joke, when a number of officers in brilliant uniforms approached our quarter of the plain. In the leader I recognized Bolivar; and, to my great satisfaction, Colonel Miller was one of his suite.

"Your men seem to be enjoying themselves, colonel," we heard Bolivar remark; "what is it all about?"

At that moment Miller caught sight of us, and leaving the general's question unanswered, called us over, saying, "Alzura! Crawford! Where have you been, my boys? We had quite given you up.—General, these are two of my young officers who have been missing for months."

Bolivar, who was in good humour that morning, made us stand by him and relate our adventures. Then he complimented us on our pluck, and turning to an officer, said, "Take these youngsters to O'Brien, and ask him to supply them with decent clothing; they have at least earned that. And I am very proud of you, boys; and so, no doubt, are your comrades." At which Plaza led off a round of cheering.

I was very glad to see the great, big, jolly Irishman again, and he lost no time in getting us fresh uniforms from the stores, with an extra poncho apiece.

"You'll be glad of that at night," said he, "for up here the thermometer is generally below freezing-point. I must come to see you, if there's time, and hear your story."

O'Brien was quite right about the biting cold, but on that first night at least we hardly felt it. Dressed in our new clothes, comfortably wrapped in our ponchos, seated close to a roaring fire, and surrounded by old friends, Alzura and I felt amply repaid for all our toils and privations.

In honour of our arrival our brother officers had organized a grand supper, the greatest delicacy being a small loaf of white bread, which they insisted on sharing with Alzura and myself. After supper, we had to give an account of our adventures; and many a laugh went up as I told of my chum's plans, of our disasters in crossing the morass, and of the strange Indians who had mistaken us for Royalists, which, Plaza unkindly remarked, was a poor compliment to the enemy.

"After all," he continued, "you haven't had such a very bad time. Now, while you've been playing, we've been at work."

"Oh," cried Alzura, smiling blandly, "that would be a change for you!"

"We've made roads," said Cordova, with a solemn air, "built huts, collected fuel, carried corn, and driven cattle. We've worked harder than the labourers on your father's estates."

"Glad to hear it," laughed my chum. "I thought Bolivar would make something of you. A pity we weren't with you, though."

"A great pity! With Crawford and you helping, there would have been little for us to do."

"It must have been rough work crossing the mountains," I observed.

"Rough? rather! especially as Bolivar has turned us into cavalry," and he proceeded to give a graphic account of the passage.

"The shelving ledges on the mountain sides are so narrow that the troops were obliged to advance in single file. The cavalry, of course, were greatly handicapped. Each man rode a mule, and had a led horse, which he dragged after him by a lasso. Sometimes a break in the track, caused by a deep gully or a waterfall, occurred, when the men had to dismount, and to lead their animals.

"But the worst of all was when night came while we were still on the march," said Plaza. "We always walked then, and more than one fellow went tumbling down some frightful precipice. We lost our way two or three times, though there were plenty of trumpeters stationed at intervals. But Cordova will tell you about that," and there was a general laugh.

"Oh," said Alzura, scenting a bit of fun, "order, please, for Cordova's story.—Now, my boy, out with it!"

"'Twas nothing," replied Cordova airily. "We missed our way, and had to return, that's all. A mere accident, only these fellows make such a fuss about it."

"Plaza, you tell the yarn," said I. "Cordova's much too modest, and that's quite a new thing for him, too!"

"Well, it happened on the wildest night of the whole journey. A terrific snowstorm came on, half blinding us. We were wet through and tired as dogs, and the camping-place was still a long way off. We couldn't see much, but there was plenty of noise. The wind howled, the trumpeters blew loud enough to wake the dead, officers shouted to their men, horses neighed and mules brayed: it was a regular pandemonium! To crown all, we were following the windings of a roaring torrent."

"And Cordova was leading," interrupted Major Gamarra.

"Some one suggested we were on the wrong track, but our friend knew better. 'Follow me,' said he;

'I can guide you by the sounds of the trumpets.' And we followed."

"Like a flock of sheep," chimed in the major.

"We went on," continued Plaza, "till even Cordova admitted something was wrong; then we stopped."

"Why didn't you turn back?"

"Out of the question, my boy. We tried it, and lost half a dozen animals in the attempt. The only thing possible was to advance till we reached an open spot. When all our fellows were across we turned round, and began the march back."

"Bravo, Cordova!" cried my chum, who was bubbling over with laughter.

"Oh, come, wait a bit. You haven't heard the best of the joke yet. We had done nearly half the distance, when we met the head of another squadron that followed us. 'Go back,' we yelled; 'you've missed the proper path.' 'Go back yourselves,' they shouted in reply; 'we can't!' Well, you know, neither party dared move till daybreak; so we stood there, crouching against the rocks and holding on to the animals. We could neither eat nor sleep. The wind flung the snow at us in masses, and we were frozen to the marrow. Some pretty things were said about Cordova before the morning, I can assure you."

"To hear them talk, one would think they were made of sugar!" grunted Cordova.

"It took us four hours the next day to get out of the mess," laughed Plaza, "and then we had to catch up with our division. Altogether, it was a very pleasant incident, though the major here and a few others failed to see the fun."

"But how came Canterac to let you through the passes without a fight?" I asked.

"A case of pride going before a fall, I expect. He thinks to serve us as he did at Torata.—By the way, Crawford, you gave Miller his wrong rank this morning. He's a general now, and chief of all the Peruvian cavalry."

"Bravo, that's grand news! There isn't a better soldier in the army."

"Only he's so fearfully energetic. He'll keep one on the move for sixteen hours, and then suggest a little scouting as a titbit to wind up with," said Cordova.

"You've had a good rest now, anyway."

"We shall pay for it, though."

And Cordova was not far wrong. We had barely fallen asleep when the bugles sounded. The troops rose, and mounted officers dashed about, carrying orders to different squadrons and battalions.

"Breakfast at once; ready to march in an hour," were the commands, and we wondered what information Bolivar had obtained.

Some said one thing, some another, and very soon a fine crop of rumours sprang up. Canterac was advancing with twenty thousand men; his troops had mutinied, and declared for the Patriots; he was retreating hot-foot for Cuzco; he was a prisoner in the hands of the mountain tribes. Every man suggested the event he fancied most, and seemed quite annoyed if one expressed any doubt of its accuracy.

"Just our luck," grumbled Alzura. "I did think we should have had a little rest."

"It's just because you're here that we're moving," laughed Plaza. "Directly Bolivar caught sight of you and Crawford yesterday morning, he determined to march. 'Canterac won't stand against those fellows,' he said."

"Bolivar is a capable fellow and a good judge," said Alzura. "I wonder where General Miller is."

"Went off in the night, reconnoitring with a party of mountaineers. It's wonderful how those wild fellows have taken to him. They'll go anywhere with him. Come along; it's nearly time for us to move, and Bolivar doesn't like to be kept waiting."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HUSSARS OF JUNIN.

Contrary to custom, we moved off the ground slowly, marching along with swarms of Indians on

our flanks and in front. For once in a way Bolivar had adopted caution instead of the fiery recklessness he usually displayed, and seemed resolved on running no unnecessary risks. Our course lay southward, over very rough, broken ground, and a staff officer informed Plaza we were making for the plains of Junin, to the south of Lake Reyes.

"We shall catch Canterac there," said he, "or Canterac will catch us; I hardly know which at present."

Our bivouac that night was cheerless and uncomfortable. The position was a very strong one, but Bolivar was evidently determined to leave nothing to chance. The sentries were doubled and in some places trebled, so that most of us were unable to snatch more than a few hours' sleep. Early in the morning the journey was resumed, and after a tedious march of fifteen miles through mountainous country we suddenly beheld the Royalist army crossing the plains at our feet. The men, breaking into a thundering "Viva," waved their caps or swung their lances in the air, and the cavalry were ordered to shift their saddles from the mules to the led horses.

"'Twill be a cavalry action," said Plaza, vaulting into his saddle. "Here comes an 'aid' with orders."

"There goes Miller with a squadron," cried Alzura. "We shall be out of it. The Colombian Horse are moving too. We shall be left behind with the infantry."

"Not so fast," said Plaza, laughing, as Bolivar's messenger dashed up to Colonel Suares, who was in charge of our squadron. "Now for it!"

"You won't be quite so eager presently," growled the tough old major. "Look at the ground; see the defile between the swamp and the hills. Canterac can cut us to pieces there, and he's soldier enough to know it."

"No, no, major; his cavalry aren't a patch on ours. We've never had a chance to show our mettle before."

"Well, we shall have one now," said the major, as we began to descend to the plain.

Two Colombian squadrons were in front of us, while Miller was still further ahead and bearing to the left. On the other side of the defile we caught a glimpse now and then of the Royalist cavalry forming up. The ground was so broken that we could only go at a foot-pace, and I began to think the major might be right.

As we entered the defile there came a great shout of "Viva el Rey!" from the plains ahead, and the next instant the Royalist horsemen, thirteen hundred strong, and led by Canterac himself, dashed madly to the attack.

"Viva! viva!" they yelled, cutting and thrusting with sabre and lance. The onset was like a mighty avalanche, and our men were for the most part overwhelmed. A few of the strongest and best mounted cut their way through, but numbers were overthrown, and the rest came flying back, with the victorious Royalists slashing and cutting on all sides.

"By St. Philip," muttered Plaza, "we shall be swept away."

Our colonel, seeing the danger, manoeuvred us into an angle of the marsh, just as the mob of horsemen, friend and foe inextricably mixed, swarmed down, shouting, struggling, fighting.

"Forward! forward!" yelled the exultant Royalists, sweeping past like a whirlwind.

Farther away on the left, another body was driving Miller's men into the swamp, and it seemed that the Patriot cavalry must be annihilated. But our squadron remained untouched, and leading us into the plain, Suares issued an order to charge the Royalists who were handling Miller's troops so roughly.

"We must win or die, my lads!" he cried; "the country depends on us."

The men cheered with a will and shook their sabres; we settled more firmly in our saddles; the colonel rode to the front; the squadron moved forward and broke into a trot. Men and officers alike knew that our leader had spoken no more than the truth. We must win or die! On us alone hung the issue of the battle. If we failed, hardly a man of the Patriot cavalry would leave the field alive; if we won, the Royalists must stop the pursuit in order to help their comrades.

It was a heavy task, but one thought cheered and nerved us. We were all Peruvians belonging to the Legion, and it was but fitting that the desperate venture should fall to us. How our infantry battalion would cheer, how proudly they would greet us, should we return victorious! It would be glorious to show both friends and enemies that the Peruvians could strike a stout blow in their own defence.

"Gallop!"

We received the order with a cheer, bent low in the saddle, and grasped our sabres firmly. Suares knew his work, and led us across a wide stretch of smooth, firm ground, the very spot for a cavalry charge.

Finding themselves between two foes, the Royalists faced about and dashed at us. The shock was tremendous: men and horses were bowled over like ninepins; great gaps appeared in the ranks; men went down and were trampled under foot in the furious fray; there was a ring of steel as sabre clashed with sabre, and the defiant shouts of the combatants mingled with the groans of the wounded.

Reeling and panting, I found myself on the other side of the press. Plaza was there, too, with a dozen of his men. Alzura broke through smiling in spite of a nasty cut across the face, and was followed by many more. Then above the din General Miller's voice was heard, and we flushed with pride.

"Bravo, my boys!" he cried; "I'm proud of you! All the army will sing your praises presently."

Freed from the Royalists, his men had got out of the swamp, and now came to join us. The few Colombians who had cut their way through in the first attack galloped back, and inspirited by General Miller's stern "Hurrah!" we once more flung ourselves on the foe. It was steel to steel now, and the Spaniards stood their ground well till they saw their comrades retreating from the defile. Then, with the exception of a devoted few who stayed in a grim ring around the standard-bearer, they turned to flee.

"The flag!" cried the general; "have at the flag!" And like a torrent in flood, we swept down on the little band.

"Rally to the flag!" cried a voice I knew well, and the next instant I was crossing swords with Santiago Mariano. I do not care much to dwell on this part of the fight. These Royalists were the pick of their squadron, and it seemed as if each man would die where he fought rather than surrender the colours. Three or four times the flag disappeared, but came up again the next instant, and presently I saw it borne aloft by Santiago, who had been forced away from me in the fierce turmoil. Hardly a dozen men remained with him now, and we were all round him.

"Surrender!" cried the general. "It is a pity to kill so brave a man!"

Santiago laughed lightly, dug the spurs deep into his horse's sides, cleared a passage with his sabre, and wheeling his horse by the pressure of his knees, bounded away, crying defiantly,—

"Rally to the flag! Viva el Rey!"

A young Colombian officer levelled his pistol; but Miller struck it up, saying,—

"The odds are heavy enough now. If you want the flag, get it with your sword."

The youngster's face flushed, but he kept his temper, and saluting the general, dashed after Santiago, crying,—

"To me, Colombians!"

As Suares had foreseen, our action gave the beaten squadron a chance to rally; officers and men who had survived the crushing avalanche collected in groups, and the fight was proceeding fiercely on the open plain. Ordering our squadron to re-form, the general placed himself at our head.

Meanwhile, I was watching the gallant Santiago and his handful of men. He was a superb rider, and able to guide his horse without using the reins, thus leaving both hands free. His Royalist comrades, now reunited, were opposite the defile, and too far off to help, while several detachments of Patriot cavalry were hurrying to cut off his retreat. Behind him, too, thundered the hot-headed Colombian officer with a dozen troopers.

"That plucky Royalist officer will be killed," said the general to Colonel Suares. "He's a gallant fellow—eh, Crawford?"

"He is, sir," I answered warmly; "and I'd give anything to see him get through safely."

"Why, Crawford," returned the general, smiling, "that sounds very much like treason."

By this time we ourselves were in motion, but as my place was on the flank, I had a good view of Santiago's desperate venture. A body of Colombians, some twenty strong, had thrown themselves across his path; and though they were our allies, I could hardly keep from cheering as he dashed through them, losing, as far as could be seen, only one man of his little band.

Casting a backward glance to see how his followers fared, he waved the flag again, and I could guess at the defiant shout of "Viva el Rey!" that came from his lips.

"He's just splendid," said I, between my teeth. But surely now his time was come! Close on his heels rode the beaten Colombians, while in front another detachment, far stronger, awaited him. What would he do—surrender? That, I felt sure, would never enter his head.

One chance of escape there was if he would take it. By swerving sharply to the left he might avoid the hostile troopers, and gallop across the plain to the Royalist infantry. It was evident he saw this way out; but his blood was up, and he made straight for the forest of lances.

"Lost!" said I, with a groan. "Poor old Santiago!"

I counted eight men with him, and Royalist and Patriot troops combined held none braver. It was magnificent, and yet terrible, to watch them spring at the massed troops, Santiago only slightly in advance of them. I held my breath as they leaped into the throng and were swallowed up. We were not near enough to distinguish the flag amidst the flashing sabres and the long-handled lances, but I feared it had fallen with its daring protector.

The tumult showed that some of the brave few still lived, and suddenly I heard General Miller, as if his feelings had surprised him into speech, say in English,—

"By Jove, he's through!"

It was true. There in the distance rode a man bare-headed, waving a flag defiantly, and for all we knew cheering for the king. One by one four others joined him, and continued the gallop: their comrades lay dead on the plain.

Had half the Royalist cavalry possessed Santiago's pluck, the story of this affair at Junin would have had a different ending.

As it was, the Spaniards began to waver. They could barely hold their own against the reassembled squadrons from the defile, and our arrival had turned the scale. They began to give ground slowly but surely, in spite of their officers' appeals. I saw Santiago again; indeed he was the most conspicuous man, though not the highest officer, on the field. Wherever the troops seemed weakest, there he was, flag in hand, cheering them on and fighting desperately.

When at last they could stand it no longer, but broke and fled, he got together another little band to protect the retreat. But for him, I doubt whether Canterac would have saved a quarter of his cavalry. Once, when turning at bay to repel a fiercer rush than usual, he caught sight of me, and his face lit up with a smile. He had been wounded, but not dangerously, and his sword-arm was vigorous as ever.

Again and again, with the aid of his choicest troopers, he stemmed the onset; but his efforts were vain—we were too many. His men dropped one after another, and he was forced to continue the retreat, till the remnant of the Royalist horsemen found shelter behind the lines of their infantry, who greeted us with a scattering fire.

It was now growing dusk, and we could not attack an army, though General Miller decided to hang on a little longer. In the long pursuit our men had become scattered over the plain, and he dispatched various officers to collect them. Then turning to me, he said,—

"Crawford, ride back, find General Bolivar, and tell him the Royalists are in full retreat. If followed up strongly, I believe they would disperse."

Saluting, I turned my horse and rode back rapidly. The scene was bewildering. Officers galloped this way and that, shouting to their men; riderless horses careered madly about; slightly-wounded troopers were hobbling to the rear; others, more unfortunate, lay on the ground groaning and calling for water; while here and there mounted men were escorting groups of prisoners toward our infantry lines.

Several times I stopped to ask where General Bolivar was. He had entered the defile with the cavalry; but from the time our first squadrons were routed I had seen nothing of him. At last an officer told me that, seeing his horsemen overthrown, the general had galloped back to the infantry, which he had posted on a very high hill about a league away.

"He quite expected to be attacked," added my informant, "never dreaming we should recover ourselves. The Peruvians saved us. They are fine fellows!" For in the gathering gloom he could not distinguish my uniform.

"Thanks!" said I, laughing; "I'll repeat that compliment to my comrades," and rode on.

Bolivar was standing, or to be correct, walking about, on the brow of the hill, looking anxiously toward the plain. Several messengers had brought him word of the varying fortunes of the fight, but none had arrived from Miller.

I passed close to the head of the Peruvian infantry, and the colonel shouted,—

"What news, Crawford!"

"Good!" I replied, hurrying along; and reaching Bolivar, I jumped to the ground and saluted.

"Where do you come from?" he cried.

"General Miller, sir. The Royalists are in full retreat—horse, foot, and artillery. The general wishes me to say that a vigorous pursuit would probably disperse them altogether."

"Too late," said he; "tell General Miller I have ordered the cavalry to retire on me.—Caza," to one of his officers, "lend—"

"Lieutenant Crawford, sir."

"Lend Lieutenant Crawford your horse; his is done up.—Now ride as fast as you can, and give General Miller my message."

I saluted, sprang into the saddle, dashed past the Peruvian infantry, down the hill, and into the defile. Here I found the main body of our cavalry retiring in accordance with Bolivar's command, and heard that Miller, with a squadron of Peruvians, was still following the Royalists.

It was quite dark now, and the route was covered with hillocks; but I rode on swiftly, trusting to luck, and at length came up with the general, who had halted in his pursuit. On receiving Bolivar's message he immediately gave orders to retire, and about seven o'clock we reached our camping-ground.

Fortunately we managed to collect a little fuel, for the night was so intensely cold that few of the seriously wounded, though receiving every possible attention, survived its rigours. Even lying close to the fire and enveloped in our ponchos we shivered.

A surgeon had sewn up the cut in Alzura's face, and we gave him the most sheltered place, and the one nearest the fire. There was not much sleep for any of us that night; we were far too excited, and spent most of the time fighting the battle over again.

To my delight, every one talked of Santiago and his magnificent bravery.

"Didn't we take him prisoner once, down south?" asked Plaza. "His face seemed familiar to me."

"Yes," said I: "his name is Santiago Mariano, and at that time he was a major."

"Faith," observed Alzura, looking up, "as far as fighting goes, he ought to be a commander-in-chief! A wounded Colombian told me the fellow sprang on them like a lion falling on a herd of deer. A lucky thing for us that the Marianos are in a minority among the Royalists."

"Canterac nearly did the trick though," growled the major. "I thought he would drop on us in that defile. I tell you what it is: Bolivar can thank our colonel that he has any cavalry left."

"Bravo, major! I heard this evening that we saved the army."

"So we did," chuckled Plaza; "and we can say it without a word of boasting. I don't care about praising my own men." But the rest was drowned in good-humoured laughter, as every one knew that the finest troop in South America—and the world, too, for that matter—was Plaza's.

However, it appeared that we really had done a smart thing: for the next morning Bolivar held a grand parade, and in presence of the whole army ordered that henceforth the regiment of which we formed part should be known as the "Hussars of Junin;" and General Miller publicly said that we deserved the honour.

After the parade we marched into the town of Reyes, which had been sacked by the Royalists. Bolivar occupied the only hut that had a roof, the rest consisting of nothing but bare walls. The inhabitants had fled into the surrounding country, but now they returned, and did all they could to assist us, lighting fires, cooking our scanty rations, and erecting sheds to shelter us from the cold.

"I suppose it's all right," said Alzura; "but I can't help thinking Bolivar has made a big blunder. While we hang about here, Canterac is pulling himself together, and we shall have all the work to do over again. If I were the general—"

"I should join the other side immediately," laughed Plaza.

"Please don't interrupt," said Cordova. "It amuses me to hear these youngsters talk. I'll wager Alzura would have finished the war two years ago, only the end might not have been as we anticipate." At which there was a general laugh.

"What I don't like about Bolivar is his play-acting," I said. "Have you seen his hut? Have a look at it in the morning. The doorway is hung with silver ornaments in place of laurel wreaths, which the Indians were unable to get."

"But he can't help the Indians idolizing him!"

"Nonsense! Did you ever hear of such rubbish with San Martin? And the Indians worshipped him!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Plaza, "you're a San Martin man, and jealous of the new sun!"

"A new comet," said I, a bit testily perhaps, because Plaza had happened on an explanation very near the truth.

"At any rate," observed Cordova, "it's better to be here at our ease than tramping fruitlessly about the mountains. I'm fairly tired of that fun. I want a day or two at Lima."

None of us guessed how much weary marching lay before us ere we returned to the capital. However, for the time we were in comparatively good quarters, and though grumbling occasionally because Bolivar had not followed up the victory at Junin, were quite prepared to make the best of

things.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DISASTROUS RETREAT.

When General Canterac retreated from Junin, he fled from his own shadow. Instead of pursuing him closely, we advanced in a leisurely way to Guamanga, and stayed there a month doing nothing. Then we marched to Challuanca, where Bolivar, being needed at the capital, left us under the command of General Sucre, who had shown himself a very skilful soldier. It seems we were not strong enough to proceed, and as the rainy season was at hand, no one thought the Royalists would return to the attack.

The Patriot army was spread across the country for many miles, our post being on a high tableland four leagues from Challuanca. The weather was abominable. Frequent storms swept through the district, the rain fell in torrents, the thunder pealed in reverberating claps among the mountains, and many animals and some men were killed by the lightning. It was bitterly cold, too, and our only shelter was a cluster of miserable Indian huts, where we passed all our time when not on duty. Often I returned to my cheerless quarters cold, shivering, and drenched, yet with no change of clothing.

To add to our misfortunes, it was rumoured that the various Royalist armies, having united, were marching to attack us; so for days together we were kept on the alert, riding for hours over the desolate country and returning thoroughly exhausted.

One evening early in November I got back after a twenty miles' ride with a small patrol, and found the camp in a state of confusion.

"What is it, Alzura? what's all the fuss about?" I asked, wearily getting off my mule—for we rode horses only when absolutely necessary.

"Oh, my dear Juan, you will be delighted," he replied, his face brimming with fun. "We are just going back to Challuanca. The viceroy is somewhere in our rear with all his army, and we have to run for it."

"My animal is dead-beat," said I gloomily.

"You must walk, and lead both animals. Never mind, dear boy; the excitement will keep you going," he answered, laughing.

"Hullo! is it you, Crawford? In luck's way again! And I've been worrying about your being left behind," said Plaza, coming up.

I did not exactly see where the luck came in; but the sound of the bugle cut short my reply, and I took my place in the column. That march was the longest twelve miles I remember. Sometimes riding, sometimes walking, aching in every limb, and more than half asleep, I plodded along the rocky path, dreamily wondering at every step whether I could take another. As soon as we arrived at Challuanca I just lay down on the bare ground, and was fast asleep in a second.

It was daylight when the sounds of bugles awakened me, and I rose sleepily. The army had disappeared, with the exception of our squadron, which I afterwards found formed part of the rearguard.

"Come on, sleepy-head," sang out Alzura, "or you'll get no breakfast. I've seen to your animals. A wonder they didn't kick you to death in the night!"

"The poor beasts were too tired to have a kick left in them. Where's General Sucre?"

"Going on to a place called Lambrama. Do you know Miller is a prisoner?"

"A prisoner? I don't believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless. His scouting party has returned without him. From what I can hear, we're in a tight fix."

According to rumour, Alzura was right; but after a long and wearisome march we reached Lambrama, where General Sucre halted. During the afternoon, while we rested in the valley, a great shout from the troops on our right brought us to our feet, and we saw a soldier on a beautiful white horse descending a pass into the valley.

"That's General Miller's horse!" I cried excitedly.

"And the general's on its back!" said Plaza. "Viva! viva Miller!" And the cry was taken and repeated

by thousands of lusty throats.

I had witnessed San Martin's brilliant reception, and had seen Bolivar fêted by his admirers; but this outburst was the most remarkable of all. One would have thought the general was a personal friend of every man in the army.

Each battalion, as he passed it, broke into renewed cheering, the men flung their caps into the air, and the whole scene was one of amazing enthusiasm. The general rode along slowly, and his smiling face showed how greatly he was touched by his reception.

"The man's a marvel!" exclaimed Plaza admiringly. "Look at him! One would think he had just come from a pleasure-trip instead of being hunted through the mountains. I warrant the viceroy would count his capture cheap at half a million dollars."

"Say a million, and it would still be cheap," said Alzura; and most of us agreed with him.

General Miller apparently brought important information, as, shortly after his arrival, orders were issued for a fresh start. I need not dwell long upon our sufferings during that disastrous retreat. The Royalists had outmarched us, and, hoping to stop our advance, closed many of the defiles and destroyed the bridges by which we should have crossed the numerous rivers.

Several times we caught a glimpse of the enemy, and one night the hostile armies bivouacked within two miles of each other, but separated by a deep and rugged valley. The terrible march was so weakening us that many officers hoped the enemy would attack at once. But this the viceroy, who was a clever old soldier, would not do. His plan was to wear us down by degrees and only fight at an advantage.

For several days we remained watching each other, but on November 25th the Royalists disappeared, and Sucre immediately made preparations to cross the valley. A swollen river lay in our path; the bridge was destroyed, and there was no material with which to build another.

The crossing was simply terrible. The weather was intensely cold, and even at the ford the infantry were breast high in icy water. It was death to remain behind, however, and though many men, numbed and exhausted, were swept down the stream, only two lives were lost.

On the last night in November we reached a valley whose sides were clothed with enormous trees, and the order to encamp was gratefully received.

"Thank goodness!" said Alzura. "We shall have a comfortable night at last. The trees will shelter us from the cold winds, and we shall be as cozy as in bed."

"Humph!" said Gamarra testily; "much you know about it. In half an hour you'll wish we had camped on the top of a mountain."

"Why?" I asked curiously, for the valley seemed to me a very suitable camping-ground.

"Wait!" growled the crusty old major; "you'll soon know."

This sounded very mysterious, but in a short time the secret was out. We had just settled ourselves comfortably when Alzura started up, and some one said, in a tone of great disgust, "Mosquitoes!"

They were very fine specimens, and, I suppose, exceedingly angry at our invasion of their territory. They came buzzing up in countless thousands, and though many were slain, the slaughter made no apparent difference in their numbers.

I had put on my gloves, and now hastily covered my face with a handkerchief. The mosquitoes were by no means dismayed. Thirsting for blood, they would not be denied, but drank deeply. To any one mosquito-proof the scene would have been most laughable. We made a desperate fight, but the victory was to the mosquitoes.

Our hands, necks, and faces were swollen from their venomous bites. Some of the men could hardly see; and though we were dreadfully fatigued, every one longed to hear the bugle-call to fall in. No one wanted to remain in what Plaza christened "Alzura's paradise."

The welcome sound came at break of day, and we moved out quickly, abandoning the battlefield to our active and vigorous foes. As soon as we reached the open country the rain began to fall, and continued in torrents all that day and the following night.

"I don't exactly see how much better off we are than Barriero," remarked Alzura, as we lay down to sleep in a muddy puddle.

"You should have stayed with him, then."

"It's all very well to say that now. Why did you bring me away?"

I was too much staggered by the audacity of the question to make a suitable reply.

Hungry, cold, and wet, we resumed the retreat, and soon began defiling into another valley. Our

squadron was right in the rear, and suddenly the sounds of firing and the cries of startled men were heard in front of us.

"Mount!" cried the colonel; for we were still leading our horses, and most of our mules were dead. "Forward! Trot!"

"Some of the enemy have doubled and cut in on our flank!" said Plaza excitedly.

"Gallop!" roared the colonel, as entering the valley we caught sight of what was going on.

Unperceived by us, a Royalist detachment had stolen down the valley and flung itself on the flank of our two rear battalions. Taken by surprise, and outnumbered, our men were speedily overpowered, and before we had arrived on the scene they had dispersed in all directions.

To the shouts of "Viva el Rey!" and encouraged by their officers, the Royalists were hotly chasing their beaten enemy. The valley was in a state of terrible confusion. The dead bodies of men lay scattered about; a few of the victors were dragging off an abandoned gun; others were carrying away stores and baggage. The fight was a complete disaster for our side.

"We can't do any good," whispered Alzura, as the colonel halted us, "and I doubt if we aren't cut off ourselves."

"Better charge at once," muttered Plaza; "the more we look at it the less we shall like it."

"My lads," cried the colonel, riding down the ranks, "there is a stiff bit of work before us. Let us remember we are the Hussars of Junin."

The troopers responded with a ringing "Viva!" and as we got a firmer seat on our saddles, Alzura remarked,—

"That's the way to talk, Juan. These fellows will fight to the death now."

There was something fresh happening on the other side, but we had no time to see what it was. The bugle sounded, and with the colonel leading we dashed straight across the valley. An infantry battalion peppered us from the right, and a squadron was drawn up right across our path.

Men began to fall. Here and there a riderless horse, darting from the ranks, tore across the valley. We were, as Alzura said, in a warm corner.

Bullets whizzed past our ears, but we noticed them not, riding straight as a die at the hostile cavalry.

"The major's down!" cried Plaza. "Poor old major!"

That was his only epitaph. We had no time to sorrow for any one just then, though we mourned for him sincerely enough afterwards.

"Charge!" roared the colonel; and the sabres flashed as the horses bounded forward, thundering with their hoofs on the ground.

"Caramba!" cried Plaza; "it's your old friend Mariano. Well, friend or foe, this is his last fight if my blade can reach him."

Yes, the officer who had accomplished this daring flanking movement was none other than Santiago Mariano, who, with the flush of success on his handsome face, was again leading his men to the charge.

"Viva el Rey!" he cried, and his voice rang high and clear above the din. "Down with the bandits!"

Crash! We were into them, fighting our way through desperately. Horses pranced, and bit, and kicked. Men shouted triumphantly, or went down with a cry of agony on their lips. Here a gap was made and filled at once, as some daring fighter urged his way forward.

Alzura rode with the colonel, carrying the colours, and we pressed after them, knowing that our sole chance of safety was to get through the Royalist squadron. On coming out at the other side we heard a voice crying, "Bravo! bravo, my bold hussars!" and there was General Miller, who seemed to scent a fight as a hound scents its quarry.

By this time Santiago had re-formed his squadron, and was dashing at our rear, when from the rocks above us sprang a line of fire, and his horsemen, wheeling round, rapidly withdrew. While we had been fighting, General Miller had rallied the beaten battalions and posted them in a commanding position to cover our ride through the pass.

That night in bivouac we counted Santiago's venture had cost us more than two hundred men, all the spare horses, and a quantity of stores.

"I hope you are proud of your Royalist friend," said Alzura to me. "He has done us a nice bit of mischief."

"He's a smart soldier."

"He is that," agreed Plaza, "and a splendid swordsman. I had a good bout with him, but could not pass his guard, though he was defending himself against three of us."

"Did any one see the major after he fell?" I interrupted.

"No," said Alzura; "but I feel sure he is dead, as the bullet passed through his forehead. He was a grim old fighter, and I'm sorry he's gone."

"So am I. But he died a soldier's death, poor old chap," said Cordova. "We must have lost heavily since the retreat began. I wonder what Sucre intends doing now."

"Why, continuing the retreat."

"To Lima? If so, he won't have a hundred men left by the time he reaches the capital."

"Well, what can he do? We can't stay here and starve, and he can't make the Royalists fight."

"As to starving," laughed Alzura, "I would as soon starve here as elsewhere. I'm getting used to it."

"And I don't know," remarked Cordova, "that forcing a fight will be so very brilliant for us. We have had one sample to-day."

"Oh, go to sleep! You might be a raven as far as croaking's concerned. One would think we were in a hole and couldn't get out. Trust to Sucre and Miller; they'll pull us through all right."

"I'm going to sleep," announced Alzura gravely. "I had a beautiful dream last night, and want to go on where reveille interrupted it. I dreamed we were in Lima, at a banquet given by the city to the Patriot officers. There was a band to play during the feast; the hall was brilliantly lit; the table was laden with all kinds of good things. We were just beginning when the band struck up, and I woke to hear Crawford saying, 'Are you going to sleep all day?' It was a splendid feast, though. Such a quantity of—"

"Sit on him, Juan! stifle him with his own poncho! Fancy talking of banquets now! Cruelty to animals I call it."

"Why, I thought you'd be delighted," grumbled Alzura.

In a very short time we were all asleep. We rose at dawn, hungry and shivering, to resume our journey. On this day the enemy marched parallel with us, but on the other side of a deep gorge, and General Sucre tried in vain to draw them into an engagement. Their leader was too crafty. Why need he sacrifice his men?

"It's a pity from our point of view," remarked Plaza, as we toiled along, "but they are playing the proper game. We're like fruit ripening on a tree. When thoroughly fit we shall just drop and be gathered without difficulty."

"Who's croaking now?" asked Cordova,

"I'm simply stating facts," replied Plaza. "Look at the road."

"Thanks; I've seen more than enough of it already."

"We're half starved."

"That's less than a fact," laughed Alzura. "You can put me down as three-quarters. If decent food were set before me, I shouldn't know how to eat it."

"We're losing hundreds of men," continued Plaza quietly, "and we've one miserable field-gun."

"Take a dose of your own medicine," said I, laughing. "Trust to Sucre and Miller; they'll pull us through."

The captain's gloomy fit soon passed off, and he was as cheerful as ever; but there was no doubt of our being in a very awkward position. As far as fighting went, we could hold our own till doomsday; but we were bound to eat, and food did not grow on the mountains.

Bolivar was working with all his fiery energy to hurry up reinforcements from Colombia and Chili, but until they arrived he could not send them on. Then, too, the viceroy had gained over several Indian tribes, and they had already cut one detachment to pieces. As far as I could judge, the Royalists had the whip-hand, and unless they made a mistake we should very shortly be at their mercy.

On the sixth of December we halted at a little village, and a thrill of joy went through the troops when it was rumoured that our leaders intended to attack the enemy at all risks. Wearied men, who had thrown themselves exhausted on the ground, struggled to their feet; starving men forgot their pangs; the very invalids crawled into the ranks, some of them so weak that they could barely trail a musket.

"Stand by your horses!" said the colonel, as the enemy were only three miles off, and we might be

required at any moment.

An hour passed and we still waited; the morning wore away; afternoon merged into evening, and we were ordered to encamp. Something, we knew not what, had gone wrong.

"I don't know if there was a chance to-day," observed Plaza, "but won't there be one to-morrow?"

"Why?"

"Because the Royalists will block the road along which we must retreat. Then we must either throw ourselves against a terribly strong position, or stay here and starve."

Events soon proved that he had not spoken at random. Early next morning the enemy moved to an almost impregnable post. Twice our number of strong men, flushed with victory and well equipped with guns, might well have hesitated to attack. As for us, it was sheer madness.

Things had come to the worst now. Further retreat was barred; our provisions, even if we subsisted on the shortest of short rations, would not last five days, while to move against the foe was simply to commit suicide.

"Lucky Barriero, sitting in his little hut!" said Alzura; "no fighting, no starving! The next time we're taken prisoners we'll make the best of it, Juan."

"I doubt if the Spaniards will make many prisoners—that is, among the officers," growled Cordova. "The men will be spared, but we shall be put out of the way of doing mischief."

I think myself Cordova exaggerated the danger; but his opinion was shared by the great majority of the Patriots, and it was this fear which made them resolve to fight to the bitter end rather than surrender.

After breakfast we lounged about on the heights watching the Royalists, who had encamped just without gunshot, wondering what our leaders would decide to do.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE GENERALS.

"They're coming down!" cried Alzura excitedly, rushing into our tent.

It wanted two hours to sunset; we had done nothing all day, and tired of watching the enemy on the opposite heights, most of us had gone to sleep.

Alzura's announcement woke us up, and running forward, we glanced eagerly at the hill, which a battalion of infantry was descending.

"Skirmishers, nothing more," said Plaza quietly. "They fancy we might attempt a night attack. Take my word for it, they won't be foolish enough to meet us on the plain."

"Unless they try a rush in the dark."

"That's just possible, but not probable; they're sure of us without that."

"There goes a battalion of our light infantry in extended order," remarked Cordova; "but there won't be any real fighting to-night. I'm going back to bed."

"A very sensible proceeding, too," exclaimed a genial voice; and turning round we beheld General Miller. "I should advise all of you not on duty to do the same," he added.

"Are we going to fight, general?" I asked eagerly.

"Hullo, Crawford! I've been so busy that I've lost sight of you lately. Well, I hardly know. Perhaps the viceroy would be better able to tell you; he knows more about it than I do."

"I don't think he'll abandon his strong position just to give us a better chance, sir," remarked Plaza.

"Perhaps not," replied the general. "But you mustn't think he's in clover up yonder. His men are as hungry as ours, and that's saying much. If it is a fight, however, 'twill be a fight to the finish, and the Hussars of Junin won't be missing!"

"Take us with you, sir!"

"That's just what I've come to see the colonel about. I intend to get all the regiment together and

use it as a battering-ram."

"He thinks the Royalists will attack," said Alzura, as the general passed on. "He has heard something important, you may depend. And why shouldn't they? they're two to one, and have no end of guns."

"I like his idea of using all the regiment," laughed Cordova. "Nearly a half of the third squadron are mounted on baggage mules; their horses are all dead."

"They must get fresh ones from the enemy," I suggested.

"Come," said Plaza; "there's nothing more to see here." And we returned to the tent.

Anxious to have a good long night, Cordova soon fell asleep; but Alzura and I sat up chatting till within an hour or two of dawn. We could hear the hostile skirmishers peppering away at each other at intervals, and somehow the sounds seemed to be the prelude to a coming battle.

Fortunately the morning dawned fair, but there was a nip in the air which impelled us to move about smartly. Then the sun rose gloriously over the eastern peaks, and its genial warmth raised our drooping spirits. I cannot account for the feeling, but somehow the whole army felt that a battle was imminent, and the faces of the troops wore a look of excited expectancy.

Directly after breakfast, or what we were pleased to call breakfast, the men began moving to their positions, each corps being formed in close column. For the better understanding of what happened, I must try to describe our position. We were drawn up on a nearly square tableland known as the Plain of Ayacucho, a league in circumference, and flanked right and left by rugged ravines. We had the village at our backs, and the only road by which we could retreat was effectually blocked. The Royalist army was perched just below the summit of a gigantic ridge called Condorcanqui, which formed the eastern boundary of the plain.

At seven o'clock our regiment moved out, and the men of the third squadron, of whom Cordova had spoken, provoked much humour and good-natured chaff as they rode past on their baggage mules. It was thought that they would help to make a show, but no one suspected that later on, when ordered to remain in the rear, they would answer firmly, "No, we will conquer or die with our comrades!"

The cavalry, consisting of four regiments, was stationed in the centre, with an infantry division on either side, and a third in the rear as a reserve.

About nine o'clock a great cheer rose from all parts of the plain: the Royalists were descending the craggy side of Condorcanqui. Between the infantry of each division appeared the cavalry, the riders leading their horses and advancing with difficulty. It was an impressive scene, and we stood watching with breathless interest.

Then our fellows renewed their cheering as General Sucre, riding along the line, addressed a few rousing words to each particular corps.

"A tough nut to crack," remarked Plaza, watching the Royalists form, "but we'll get at the kernel before the day's over."

"There's the beginning!" cried Alzura, as the infantry on our right slowly advanced. "Hurrah! we're to help!" for an aid-de-camp from General Sucre had just dashed up to Miller with orders.

We waited eagerly for the word to mount, but our turn had not yet come. Two cavalry regiments moved off with Miller, and left us gazing at the drama being unfolded before our eyes.

Our infantry columns marched to the attack like so many automatic machines; the Royalists waited firmly, as if confident of victory. We stood holding our horses, and quivering with excitement. Much would depend upon the result of that first encounter.

"They're stopping to fire," cried Alzura. "Now they're moving again. Viva! they're going to charge. Look at the sun on their bayonets."

Would the Royalists give way? No; they stood firm as the rocky heights behind them—not a man moved. It seemed to me that there was not even a tremor in the whole mass. If our fellows charged and failed, they would be cut to pieces. We were like spectators in a theatre, only the drama was a real one.

A mighty "Viva!" floated back to us as our men broke into the charge. It was neck or nothing now—decisive victory or stern defeat.

"The Royalists will run," muttered Plaza; "they must."

But they did not, and the next instant bayonet crossed bayonet in desperate conflict.

Excitement drove us well-nigh crazy. We cheered and shouted and waved our sabres, as if by so doing we could help in the fight. Our troops had met their match, and seemed to make no impression. Unless they went forward shortly they must retreat.

"If they're driven back," remarked Plaza, "they are lost."

How the struggle would have ended I cannot tell, but just then we broke into a cry of relief. The two cavalry regiments which had made a wide detour were seen bearing down on the Royalists' flanks. They swept along at hurricane speed. Nothing could stand against the shock of their long lances. A portion of the Royalists, facing about, delivered a telling volley at short range. Men and horses went down with a crash, but the survivors were not checked. A second volley crashed into them, making wide gaps, and then, with the force of a roaring torrent, they literally swept away the barrier of men and steel.

"That settles it," said Plaza, breathing deeply; "the bravest troops in the world couldn't recover from such a smashing blow. It's a case of complete rout, in that part of the field at all events."

He was right too. The enemy would not, indeed could not rally. Here and there small groups stood at bay, fighting desperately but vainly to stem the onset of their pursuers. All they could do was to die fighting, in the hope that the sacrifice might save their comrades. Even those who reached the heights were not out of danger. Whiz, whiz sped the bullets; and numbers of the fugitives rolled down the mountain side till their bodies were caught by crag or brushwood.

So greatly was our attention absorbed by the scene that we had scarcely noticed what was happening on our left. Suddenly, however, a heavy fire broke out, followed by the quick reports of hundreds of muskets. Our colonel glanced in the direction uneasily. His orders were strict. He was on no account to move his regiment, and yet—

"Crawford," said he, looking round, "see what that firing means."

I sprang to the saddle and galloped off. But for our success on the right, I should have felt inclined to take a gloomy view of things: our left had given way.

Two Royalist battalions were advancing in pursuit, while still further on the left a cavalry regiment was swooping down on one of our reserve battalions sent in support. The crafty enemy had crossed a deep ravine, on the farther side of which a whole division was stationed.

A mounted officer, with cap gone and cloak flying in the wind, pulled up on seeing me, and said rapidly, "Where is your regiment? Take me to your colonel quickly. We want cavalry; we must have cavalry, or our whole left will be rolled up!"

"This way," I replied, and together we galloped towards the Hussars of Junin, reaching the colonel just as General Miller dashed up from the right.

"What is it?" he asked hastily.

"We are overpowered, sir. The enemy have four field-guns across a ravine; our division has suffered terribly, and the troops are giving way. The general requires a regiment of cavalry immediately."

"Tell him it's coming," replied Miller.—"Now, colonel, here's a chance for your men to show their mettle. We've smashed the enemy on the right; let the 'Hussars of Junin' do the same on the left."

How we did cheer as our colonel led us out! General Miller's face wore an anxious expression as he glanced over the field. Everywhere the victorious Spaniards were driving back our left wing; we should only be just in time to repair the mischief.

"Push those two infantry battalions across the ravine while I rally the fugitives," said Miller. But he had barely spoken when the Royalist cavalry dashed down on the right flank.

"Here's Crawford's friend again!" said Plaza. "We might have guessed he had a hand in this business."

Santiago made a handsome picture as he tore along well in front of his regiment, and enemy though he was, I could not help feeling proud of him. We turned to meet this vigorous onslaught, and though Santiago fought with all the traditional valour of his race, his men, already tired by their great exertions, could not stand against us.

Stopping their flight, our own infantry rallied, and advanced in support, while their loud cheers proclaimed the arrival of a second cavalry regiment. Nothing daunted by his repulse, Santiago led his troopers against the new enemy, while we bore down on the hostile infantry.

"Gallop!" cried our colonel; and neck by neck the horses flew over the ground, the men waving their sabres and cheering lustily. We could see the glittering steel of the bayonets now, could almost look down the barrels of the muskets, when there came a blinding flash, the thud of falling bodies, and hoarse shrieks of pain.

"Forward!" thundered the colonel, "forward; remember the 'Hussars of Junin!'"

Crash we went right into them before they could fire another volley, and then it was horseman against footman, sabre against bayonet. To and fro we surged, striking parrying, thrusting, till at last the brave enemy, unable to continue the struggle longer, fled to the ravine, hotly pursued by our victorious regiment.

In a calmer moment we should have pulled up, but there was no stopping now. Some one raised a

warning cry: it came too late. Down the ravine we went, the horses slipping and scrambling—some rolling over and crushing their riders; the majority, keeping their feet somehow, reached the opposite bank. A small detachment of the enemy halted to fire a scattering volley, which did some mischief. A man close to me fell forward on his horse's neck.

"Good-bye, Crawford!" said he faintly; "I am done for."

It was Cordova; but there was no time to help him. On we dashed straight at the guns, which the gunners dared not fire, so mixed up were friend and foe. A cry of "Viva el Rey!" arose in our rear. Santiago was galloping back.

The Royalists could not stand. Miller had brought up three battalions in double-quick time; the guns were ours; horse and foot we swept over the plain, driving the enemy pell-mell in all directions. Only the regiment led by the undaunted Santiago endeavoured to cover the retreat, and at last it too fled.

Not so their brave leader; he remained on the field. I found him later, with a hole in his side and a nasty gash across the face. He was not dead, however, and with assistance I carried him to the village, where a surgeon dressed his wounds. Then I returned to my regiment.

"It's all over!" cried Alzura exultantly. "The viceroy is taken prisoner, and Canterac has come to sue for terms. He is with Sucre now."

"Where is Plaza?"

"Just gone to find poor Cordova. It's hard lines to drop off in the moment of victory. And the war is over now; the Royalists will never lift their heads again."

This was not quite correct, as a few still held out in other parts of the country, but they were powerless to do any real mischief. This battle of Ayacucho—or Battle of the Generals, as we called it—secured the independence of Peru. Fourteen Spanish generals, some of them the most famous in South America, gave up their swords; nearly six hundred officers and most of the rank and file became prisoners of war.

Late that evening I went to see Santiago. He lay on a bench in a miserable hut, where several wounded officers had been brought for shelter. Two small earthen lamps gave a feeble light, barely sufficient for us to see each other's faces. I bent over him, and choked back the sob that would rise in my throat. We neither of us tried to gloze over the truth. He was dying, and we both knew it.

"I am glad you have come," he whispered. "It will soon be over, and I am not sorry; I have tried to do my best."

"Indeed you have, old fellow; friend and foe alike are loud in your praise."

"I have been loyal to my king; I have done my duty," he continued, not heeding the interruption. "Life is precious, Juan, but honour is the first thing. My name is unstained. I die as I have lived, a cavalier of Spain!"

That thought cheered him as he took his last and long journey. He was young and handsome and well beloved; he had fair estates and hosts of friends; he might have risen high in the councils of his nation; but death, stern and unyielding, claimed him, and he braced himself to meet it.

"Thank God!" he murmured; "I die with a clear conscience."

I stayed with him till nearly midnight, when he became unconscious. Then having work to do, I sorrowfully went away. Next morning, on my way to the hut I met General Miller.

"Poor fellow!" he said, when I told him of Santiago's state. "I will come with you. I remember him well."

Just as we were moving on, we met General Sucre accompanied by a Spanish officer, who on seeing Miller ran forward and embraced him.

"I know you!" he cried. "I am Valdés. You and I must be friends." Then turning to General Sucre, he added, "This Miller has often kept us on the move. I am called active; but he was a regular wizard—here, there, everywhere, without giving a clue to his intentions until he dealt us some sly blow."

I looked at this celebrated Spanish general with a great deal of interest. He was a small, spare man, with keen eyes and rough, weather-beaten face. He wore a broad-brimmed beaver hat, a coarse gray surtout, and long brown worsted leggings. He stooped slightly, and to judge by appearances, one would never have thought he was perhaps the finest soldier in the Spanish service.

Sucre left the two chatting, and presently Miller said, "I was just going to visit one of your men, a Colonel Mariano. Do you know him?"

"Mariano? He was my best cavalry officer. It was he who helped me to cut up your rearguard some time ago, and to drive back your left wing yesterday. I'll come with you."

"He will be very pleased to see you, no doubt.—You go first and show us the way, Crawford."

Santiago lay with closed eyes, breathing so faintly that at first we thought he was dead.

"Santiago," I softly whispered, "do you know me? I have brought you a visitor."

His eyes opened slowly, and there was a fleeting smile in them, but he did not speak.

"Colonel!" said Valdés, stepping to the side of the bench. The sound of that voice brought the poor fellow for a short time from the Valley of the Shadow. By some extraordinary means he managed to sit up without assistance, raised his hand to the salute, and in a clear, ringing voice exclaimed, "At your service, general!"

It was the last act of his life. On placing my arm round him to prevent him from falling, I found he was dead.

"A fine fellow," said General Miller quietly.

"A thorough soldier to the end!" cried the Spanish general.

I said nothing, but mourned none the less the true friend I had found in the ranks of our enemies.

We were very quiet in camp that day. The excitement of battle had passed, and we were counting the cost of our triumph. Many familiar faces were missing, and the death of Cordova especially affected us. We had been through many perils together, had endured many hardships, and it seemed a pity that he should not have lived to taste the sweets of victory.

Shortly before sunset that same day I received a message from General Miller asking me to go to his quarters. I found him expecting me, and he at once plunged into the subject upon which he wished to speak.

"The war is now over, Crawford," said he, "and General Sucre is able to release a large part of his force. I am proceeding to Cuzco, but there is no need for you to do so. You have done your share, and I intend sending you on special service to Lima."

"Oh, thank you, general!" I answered, my eyes sparkling and my cheeks flushing with pleasure.

"The regiment will return in a few weeks at the most," he continued. "Be ready to start in the morning, and don't forget to remember me kindly to your parents. Some day I hope to call upon them."

"I am sure you will receive a very warm welcome when you come, general," I replied, taking the hand held out to me.

"Well, dear boy," said Alzura, on my return to our quarters, "what is the news?"

"Good," said I, "though perhaps it's a bit selfish to say so. I start to-morrow for Lima. The regiment proceeds to Cuzco, but it will return to the capital in a few weeks."

"All right, old fellow. I'm glad to hear of your good fortune, though I shall miss you awfully. Mind you hunt up my people and tell them I'm all right and hoping to see them soon."

Of course I promised to do so, and then went to wish the others good-bye.

"I hope you will find all your people well," exclaimed Plaza on hearing the news. "After all, you're only a sort of advance courier, and we shall soon meet again."

"We shall expect you to give a ball to the officers of the regiment, and a feast to the men, when we reach the capital," cried Alzura merrily.

"Meanwhile," said Plaza gravely, "take my advice, and have a good rest."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOME AGAIN.

Home again! The weary journey was at an end.

I had crossed the desolate mountains, and was riding into Lima. The city was gay with flags and bunting; decorations abounded on all sides; joy-bells pealed, and the streets resounded with the merry laughter and chatter of the citizens.

News of the brilliant victory at Ayacucho had evidently preceded me.

I longed to ride home at a gallop and throw myself into my mother's arms; I yearned eagerly for a glimpse of my father's face. I was (do not think the confession weak) utterly homesick. Duty, however, claimed me a while longer, and I turned my horse's head toward the Government House.

It was not possible to move at more than a foot-pace. The crowd surged around me; little children, garlanded with flowers, ran close to my horse's hoofs. I was terribly afraid some of them would be trampled to death.

Many soldiers were there, too, their uniforms spick and span, and unspotted by the soil of the Andes. Mine was dirty, bloodstained, and not altogether free from rents. I rode carefully, but my eyes were heavy and my limbs ached with fatigue.

Darting suddenly from the throng, a man seized my bridle-rein and cried aloud, "A soldier from Ayacucho! Here is one of our brave deliverers!"

"A soldier from Ayacucho! Here is one of our brave deliverers!"

"A soldier from Ayacucho! Here is one of our brave deliverers!"

Instantly I was surrounded by the crowd, which pressed me so closely that my horse could barely move. Viva after viva rent the air; laughing girls and women half smothered me with flowers; men marched beside me or fell into line behind, forming a kind of triumphal procession. One would have thought I was the saviour of the country—a second Bolivar!

Thus, laughing, cheering, and singing, they escorted me to the Government House, where, leaving my astonished horse with the guards, I hurried inside. An official, in all the glory of a gorgeous uniform, demanded my business, and remarked haughtily that the president was engaged.

"Tell him," said I, "that a lieutenant of the Hussars of Junin is here with dispatches from General Sucre."

After waiting a few minutes, I was conducted through the spacious hall to a room guarded by a file of soldiers. My attendant knocked timidly at the door, which was immediately opened, and I entered the apartment.

Bolivar sat at a table dictating letters to his secretary and talking to several officers of high rank. His complexion seemed sallower than ever, his dark hair had more of gray in it, but his eyes had lost none of their penetrating keenness.

I saluted and stood at attention, waiting for him to speak.

"Ah," exclaimed he, in his loud, rasping voice, and turning his eyes askance as he usually did in conversation, "you are Lieutenant Crawford! I have not forgotten you. How is it that you still have only two stripes?" pointing to the stripes of silver lace round my cuff, which denoted the rank of lieutenant.

"I do not know, general," I replied.

"Your Excellency!" corrected one of the officers standing near.

"Let him alone!" cried Bolivar; "he is a soldier, and 'general' comes more naturally to his lips.—Where are the dispatches?"

I presented them.

"Humph! enough work here for the rest of the day," said he on glancing through them.—"Garcia," turning to one of the officers, "countermand the reception; I shall be too busy.—Ah, here is a letter from Miller! I see he commends you very highly, young man, and desires to bring you to my notice. There is nothing I like so much as rewarding true merit.—Garcia, make out Lieutenant Crawford's commission as captain in the Hussars of Junin, for bravery on the field.—I congratulate you, captain. I see by your face you are anxious to go."

After thanking him for my promotion, I said, "Yes, general; I have not seen my father and mother for a very long time."

"Your father—ah, now I remember. He is no friend to me—would be glad to see me out of Peru, in fact, eh? Well, I shall go some day. But he is a true man for all that, and an Englishman. I love the English. Perhaps it is as well for your father that I do. Tell him, Captain Crawford, that Bolivar has some good points."

"He has already recognized them, general," I answered.

"He conceals his discovery well, then. But I will not keep you longer. Present yourself at my levee in the morning, and don't forget to wear that extra band of lace."

"There is no fear of that, general," said I, with a smile; "I am too proud of the honour."

Apparently the remark pleased him, as he was very gracious when I took my leave, though the officers-in-waiting looked at me as if I had been overbold.

Out again into the street. The crowd had dispersed, and only a few people were about as I once more mounted my jaded animal. Now for home! Forward, good horse! My spirits rose with every step; the tired feeling left me; I could have sung aloud for very joy.

The sight of the Montilla hacienda sobered my happiness somewhat. The grounds were trim and well-kept, but the dwelling looked untenanted. What had become of Rosa? Perhaps—yes, that must be it—she was staying with my mother. I urged my horse into a spasmodic gallop, but the poor beast soon resumed his old pace.

There was a horse behind me, though, that could gallop. I turned quickly to see who the rider was, and laughed gaily.

"Why, Jack!" cried the faithful José, his eyes brimful of pleasure.

"Captain Crawford, if you please!" I interrupted with assumed dignity.

"Captain or general, it's all the same to me, as long as you're home again, Jack, with no scratch on you! Hurrah! won't there be a fuss in the house to-night!" and away he went at breakneck speed toward the gate.

"Better so," said I, jogging along. "He'll be able to prepare them a little.—Come, old boy," to my horse, "can't you manage even a trot? Well, never mind; we're nearly there."

The gate of the park was wide open, and inside stood more than half of my father's servants. They could not wait for me to reach the courtyard. How they cheered, to be sure! It was a pleasant foretaste of the welcome that awaited me.

Good old Antonio was at the little gate, so I dismounted and spoke a word with him, though my feet itched to be dashing along the courtyard. Then I sent my horse to the stables, with strict orders that it should be carefully groomed and fed, and made comfortable.

At last! My heart beat loudly; my head was dizzy; I could barely distinguish the figures in the hall. But my mother's arms were round me, her lips pressed close to mine, in a fond embrace.

Then came my father's welcome, and presently, in the brilliantly-lit drawing-room, a young girl came forward and placed her hand in mine. She was dressed in black, and looked somewhat sad and careworn, as if life had not been particularly pleasant of late.

"Welcome home, Juan," said she softly; and I saw by her face she was thinking of the night when I had ridden hurriedly away in the vain endeavour to save her father's life. We did not speak of it then, and when, after changing my clothes, I returned to the drawing-room, Rosa was not there.

"She has gone to her own room," explained my mother, noticing my look of disappointment. "It would have been difficult for the poor child to stay with us this first evening."

"She has heard of her father's death, then?"

"Yes," said my father, quickly and with a warning glance. "She knows that the Indians shot him, thinking he had been in correspondence with the Royalists."

I understood at once that my father was aware of the truth, but that, with his usual kindly thought, he had kept it from both the bereaved girl and my mother. He never alluded to the miserable incident, nor did I; and Rosa was left in ignorance of the real reason for her father's untimely end.

Of course, we sat late talking over my adventures in the mountains, and of the terrible battle which had secured the independence of Peru.

"Yes," said my father confidently, "whatever else happens, the Spaniards will never again rule over this country; their power is broken. But we are not yet out of the wood: as a Peruvian, I still fear Bolivar's ambition."

"Oh," I exclaimed gaily, "I had forgotten Bolivar! He has made me a captain!" and I told them all about my interview with the celebrated general.

"I admit his good points," laughed my father; "but I do not like to see one person invested with such tremendous power. Still, there is no doubt we owe our liberty in great part to his wonderful energy, together with his determination never to acknowledge defeat. He has toiled day and night like a slave."

"I shall be glad when your regiment returns, Juan," said my mother. "I am longing to see your brave friends, and especially Alzura. I seem to know him quite well already."

"You are sure to like him, mother. He is a delightful companion, full of fun, and always laughing and joking. Plaza is older and more of a soldier, but I owe a great deal to his kindness."

"We will endeavour to repay it, my boy," said she brightly, kissing me good-night. "Don't stay up too long. Remember you have to attend the levee in the morning."

When she had retired, I asked my father for news of Raymon Sorillo.

"He is still serving against the Royalists, but his band has sadly diminished. He came here secretly one night, and informed me of your attempt to rescue Montilla. I think he was very angry; but he said it was a daring act, and almost successful. However, he bears no malice, and is as ready as ever to stand your friend."

"Ugh!" said I, getting up with a shiver; "I hope I shall not need his assistance."

The next day, after attending the levee, where Bolivar was particularly gracious, I obtained an indefinite leave of absence, and returned home.

Rosa was alone, and though rather dreading to be asked about the business of the silver key, I thought it best to get the interview over. As it happened, I need not have worried myself at all.

"I wanted to see you, Juan," she said, giving me her hand. "It seems ages ago when I sent you out on that terrible errand. I ought not to have done it; but my father's life was at stake, and I did not think of the danger to you."

"Think no more of it, Rosa. After all, the danger was trifling; the Indians would not have hurt me."

"I don't quite understand the story," she said thoughtfully, "but I know you risked your life."

"There was little risk. I had a slight chance to rescue your father from the Indians, and seized it. Unfortunately the attempt failed, and I was captured by the Royalists. So in one way you did me a good turn; for while the other fellows were starving and fighting in the mountains, I was pretty comfortably off."

"But you were in the great battle?"

"Yes, I was. I escaped from prison chiefly to please a mad-brained young lieutenant of my regiment. But it is all past now, Rosa, and there will be no more fighting."

"I am sorry for his Majesty," she said simply, "and for the loyal gentlemen who have died for him."

"There were some splendid fellows amongst the Royalists," I said, and proceeded to tell her the story of the gallant Santiago Mariano.

"He must have been a brave man, Juan!"

"He was, and he had equally brave comrades. Now that the struggle is over, they will join us, and we shall all work together in peace for the prosperity of our common country. The war has been a terrible evil, but I am hoping that much good may come from it. I dream of a grand future for Peru, and of a time when the Land of the Sun shall recover its ancient glory."

"I hope your dream will come true, Juan. I am sure you will try to make it do so," she said. "But you must not expect me to be pleased that we are no longer loyal subjects of the Spanish king."

Here ends the story of my adventures during the War of Independence. The Spanish power was completely crushed; but, as my father had foretold, there were still many misfortunes in store for our unhappy country. The men who had fought so hard for liberty quarrelled among themselves. There were endless disputes and conspiracies, and many soldiers who had bravely faced death on the battlefield were executed by their fellow-countrymen.

For two years Bolivar ruled at Lima. He was at the height of his glory. He had freed Venezuela, New Granada, and Ecuador from the Spaniards, and joined them into the one country of Colombia. Upper Peru he had formed into another country called Bolivia, and he was the real master of Peru proper.

His boundless ambition, however, overreached itself. Enemies rose up against him on all sides. He was driven from power, and seven years after the battle of Ayacucho died a broken-hearted man.

After his departure from Lima, my father's Spanish friend, General La Mar, who had once been Governor of Callao, was elected president, and the country settled down into a state of something like order.

There still remain a few personal matters to be recorded before my pen is finally laid aside.

Among those who opposed Bolivar's rule in Peru, none was more bitter or reckless than the guerilla chief, Raymon Sorillo. Unfortunately for him, the war had greatly weakened the society of the Silver Key. His bravest men and ablest lieutenants had died fighting, and he was left with only a shadow of his former power.

Undaunted by this, he openly defied Bolivar's authority. For several months he held his own against the regular troops, but at last, being captured, was tried as a traitor, and condemned to death.

My father made strenuous efforts to save him, and would have succeeded but for Sorillo himself.

"The man is a desperate ruffian," said Bolivar, in answer to my father's appeal for mercy; "but I will pardon him on condition that he takes the oath of allegiance and swears to obey the laws."

Overjoyed by his success, my father hurried to the prison where Sorillo was confined. The doughty mountaineer refused the offer with scorn.

"I took up arms for the independence of Peru," said he, "not to exchange the tyranny of the Spaniards for that of a Venezuelan adventurer. I thank you, señor, from my heart, but I prefer death to these conditions."

My father stayed with him nearly the whole day, but could not shake his resolve. So in the early morning the redoubtable chief was led into the prison yard, and was placed near a wall. Some of the soldiers wished to bandage his eyes, but he would not allow it.

"No," said he; "I have looked in the face of death too closely and too often to fear it. Fire! I shall not tremble."

Thus he died, and whatever else may be said, it cannot be denied that, in his own headstrong, obstinate way, he was faithful to the cause for which many better men had laid down their lives.

Of my friend Plaza it is only necessary to say that, through General Miller's influence as well as by his own merit, he rapidly advanced to high office, being made governor of one of the inland provinces. He has paid me several visits since he left the hussars, and his sole regret is that Cordova did not live to share in the general good fortune.

An old acquaintance, who has also since done well in the world, is Barriero. When the victory at Ayacucho became known, the prisoners on the island rose in revolt, and overpowered their guards. Barriero placed himself at their head, seized all the arms and ammunition, and formed the patriots into a company. Then, assisted by some Indians, he crossed the morass and marched to Cuzco, where, to his joy and astonishment, he heard that Alzura and I had safely escaped across the dreaded swamp.

Alzura resigned his commission shortly after the regiment returned to Lima. He succeeded to a fine estate near the capital, and is one of our most frequent visitors. My father is very fond of him, and as for my mother, I sometimes say she thinks more of him than of myself; indeed, the dear fellow has almost become like a second son to her.

José is still my father's right-hand man. He has long since amassed a snug fortune; but I expect he will die in the old home, where he is an esteemed and valued and trusty friend.

Felipe Montilla's hacienda no longer stands desolate. Rosa has again taken up her residence there, but under the name of Crawford, and employs me, as my father jokingly says, to look after her estates. She is still a Royalist at heart, but as the years pass she becomes more and more reconciled to the changes which have taken place since Peru obtained its independence

THE END.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by

the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.