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by Gustave Aimard**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INDIAN CHIEF: THE STORY OF A
REVOLUTION ***

THE INDIAN CHIEF

BY

GUSTAVE AIMARD,

AUTHOR OF "PRAIRIE FLOWER," THE "TIGER-SLAYER," ETC.

LONDON

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MDCCCLXI.

PREFACE.

With this volume terminates the series in which Gustave Aimard has described the sad fate of the Count de Raousset-Boulbon, who fell a victim to Mexican treachery. In the next volume to be published, under the title of the "Trail Hunter," will be found the earlier history of some of the characters whose acquaintance the reader has formed, I trust with pleasure, in the present series.

L.W.

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CHAPTER I.

THE INTERVIEW.

The Jesuits founded in Mexico missions round which, with the patience that constantly distinguished them, an unbounded charity, and a perseverance which nothing could discourage, they succeeded in collecting a large number of Indians, whom they instructed in the principal and most touching dogmas of their faith—whom they baptized, instructed, and induced to till the soil.

These missions, at first insignificant and a great distance apart, insensibly increased. The Indians, attracted by the gentle amenity of the good fathers, placed themselves under their protection; and there is no doubt that if the Jesuits, victims to the jealousy of the Spanish viceroys, had not been shamefully plundered and expelled from Mexico, they would have brought around them the majority of the fiercest *Indios Bravos*, have civilised them, and made them give up their nomadic life.

It is to one of these missions we purpose conducting the reader, a month after the events we have narrated in a preceding work.^[1]

The mission of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles was built on the right bank of the Rio San Pedro, about sixty leagues from Pitic. Nothing can equal the grandeur and originality of its position. Nothing can compare, in wild grandeur and imposing severity, with the majestically terrible landscape which presents itself to the vision, and fills the heart with terror and a melancholy joy, at the sight of the frightful and gloomy rocks which tower over the river like colossal walls and gigantic parapets, apparently formed by some convulsion of nature; while in the midst of this chaos, at the foot of these astounding precipices, past which the river rushes in impetuous cascades, and in a delicious valley covered with verdure, stands the house, commanded on three sides by immense mountains, which raise their distant peaks almost to the heavens.

Alas! this house, formerly so smiling, so animated, so gay and happy—this remote corner of the world, which seemed a counterpart of Eden, where, morning and night, hymns of gratitude, mingling with the cascade, rose to the Omnipotent—this mission is now dead and desolate, the houses are deserted and in ruins, the church roof has fallen in, the grass has invaded the choir. The terrified members of this simple and innocent community, scattered by persecution, sought refuge in the desert, and returned to that savage life from which they were rescued with so much difficulty. Wild beasts dwell in the house of God, and nothing is heard save the voice of solitude murmuring unceasingly through the deserted houses and crumbling walls, which parasitic plants are rapidly invading, and will soon level with the ground, covering them with a winding sheet of verdure.

It was evening. The wind roared hoarsely through the trees. The sky, like a dome of diamond, flashed with those millions of stars which are also worlds; the moon spread around a vague and mysterious light; and the atmosphere, refreshed by a gusty breeze, was embalmed with those desert odours which it is so healthy to respire.

Still the night was somewhat fresh, and three travellers, crouching round a large *brasero* kindled amid the ruins, seemed to appreciate its kindly warmth. These travellers, on whose hard features the changing flashes of light were reflected, would have supplied a splendid subject for an artist, with their strange costumes, as they were encamped there in the midst of the wild and startling landscape.

A little distance behind the principal group four hobbled horses were munching their provender, while their riders, for their part, were concluding a scanty meal, composed of a slice of venison, a few pieces of *tasajo*, and maize tortillas, the whole washed down with water slightly dashed with refino to take off its hardness.

These three men were Count Louis, Valentine, and Don Cornelio. Although they ate like true hunters—that is to say, with good appetite, and not losing a mouthful—it was easy to guess that our friends were engaged with serious matters for thought. Their eyes wandered incessantly around, consulting the shadows, and striving to pierce the darkness. At times the hand stopped half way to the mouth—the lump of *tasajo* remained in suspense: with their left hand they

instinctively sought the rifle that lay on the ground near them. They stretched forth their necks, and listened attentively, analysing those thousand nameless noises of the great American deserts, which all have a cause, and are an infallible warning to the man who knows how to understand them.

Still the meal drew to an end. Don Cornelio had seized his *jarana*; but at a sign from Don Louis he laid it again by his side, wrapped himself in his *zarapé*, and stretched himself out on the ground. Valentine was in deep reflection. Louis had risen, and, leaning against a wall, looked cautiously out into the desert. A long period elapsed ere a word was exchanged, until Louis seated himself again by the hunter's side.

"'Tis strange," he said.

"What?" Valentine replied abstractedly.

"Curumilla's prolonged absence. He has left us for nearly three hours without telling us the reason, and has not returned yet."

"Have you any suspicion of him?" the hunter said with a certain degree of bitterness.

"Brother," Louis replied, "you are unjust at this moment. I do not suspect; I am restless, that is all. Like yourself, I feel a too lively and sincere friendship for the chief not to fear some accident."

"Curumilla is prudent; no one is so well acquainted as he with Indian tricks. If he has not returned, there are important reasons for it, be assured."

"I am convinced of it; but the delay his absence causes us may prove injurious."

"How do you know, brother? Perhaps our safety depends on this very absence. Believe me, Louis, I know Curumilla much better than you do. I have slept too long side by side with him not to place the utmost confidence in him. Thus, you see, I patiently await his return."

"But supposing he has fallen into a snare, or has been killed?"

Valentine regarded his foster brother with a most peculiar look; then he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, and an air of supreme contempt,—

"He fallen into a snare! Curumilla dead! Nonsense, brother, you must be jesting! You know perfectly well that is impossible."

Louis had no objection to offer to this simple profession of faith.

"At any rate," he continued presently, "you must allow that he has kept us waiting a long time."

"Why so? What do we want of him at this moment? You do not intend to leave this bivouac, I fancy? Well, what consequence is it if he return an hour sooner or later?"

Louis made a sign of impatience, wrapped himself up in his *zarapé*, and lay down by Don Cornelio's side, after growling,—

"Good night."

"Good night, brother," Valentine answered with a smile.

Ten minutes later, Don Louis, despite his ill temper, overcome by fatigue, slept as if he were never to wake up again. Valentine allowed a quarter of an hour to elapse ere he made a move; then he rose gently, crept up to his foster brother, bent over him, and examined him attentively for two or three minutes.

"At length," he said, drawing himself up. "I was afraid he would insist on sitting up and keeping me company."

The hunter thrust into his girdle the pistols he had laid on the ground, threw his rifle over his shoulder, and stepping carefully across the stones and rubbish that burdened the soil, rapidly but noiselessly retired, and speedily disappeared in the darkness. He walked in this way for about ten minutes, when he reached a dense thicket. Then he crouched behind a shrub, and, after taking a cautious survey of the surrounding country, whistled gently thrice, being careful to leave an equal space of time between each signal. At the expiration of two or three minutes the cry of the moorhen was heard twice from the midst of the trees that bordered the river's bank only a few paces from the spot where the hunter was standing.

"Good!" the latter muttered. "Our friend is punctual; but, as the wisdom of nations says somewhere that prudence is the mother of surety, let us be prudent: that can do no harm when dealing with such scamps."

And the worthy hunter set the hammer of his rifle. After taking this precaution he left the thicket in which he had been concealed, and advanced with apparent resolution, but still without neglecting any precaution to avoid a surprise, toward the spot whence the reply to his signal had come. When he had covered about half the distance four or five persons came forward to meet him.

"Oh, oh!" the hunter said; "these people appear very eager to speak with me. Attention!"

Hereupon he stopped, raised his rifle to his shoulder, and aimed at the nearest man.

"Halt," he said, "or I fire!"

"*Capo de Dios!* you are quick, caballero," an ironical voice answered. "You do not allow yourself to be easily approached; but uncock your rifle—you see that we are unarmed."

"Apparently so, I grant; but who guarantees me that you have not arms concealed about your

person?"

"My honour, sir," the first speaker answered haughtily. "Would you venture to doubt it?"

The hunter laughed.

"I doubt everything at night, when I am alone in the desert, and see before me four men whom I have every reason for believing are not my friends."

"Come, come, sir, a little more politeness, if you please."

"I wish nothing more. Still, you requested this interview; hence you are bound to accept my conditions, and not I yours."

"As you please, Don Valentine: you shall arrange matters as you will. Still, the first time we had a conference together, I found you much more facile."

"I do not deny it. Come alone, and we will talk."

The stranger gave his companions a sign to stop where they were, and advanced alone.

"That will do," the hunter said as he uncocked his rifle, and rested the butt on the ground, crossing his hands over the muzzle.

The man to whom Valentine displayed so little confidence, or, to speak more clearly, whom he doubted so greatly, was no other than General Don Sebastian Guerrero.

"There, now you must be satisfied. I think I have given you a great proof of my condescension," the general said as he joined him.

"You have probably your reasons for it," the hunter replied, with a cunning look.

"Sir!" the general haughtily objected.

"Let us be brief and clear, like men who appreciate one another correctly," Valentine said dryly.

"I am neither a fool nor a man infatuated with his own merits; hence frankness, reciprocal frankness, can alone bring us to any understanding, if that be possible, though I doubt it."

"What do you suppose, then, sir?"

"I suppose nothing, general. I am certain of what I assert, that is all. What probability is there that a great personage like you, general, Governor of Sonora, and Lord knows what else, would lower yourself to solicit from a poor fellow of a hunter like myself an interview at night, in the heart of the desert, unless he hoped to obtain a great advantage from that interview? A man must be mad or a fool not to see that at the first glance; and Heaven be thanked, I am neither one nor the other."

"Suppose that things are as you state?"

"Suppose it, then; I have no objection. Now come to facts."

"Hum! that does not appear to me so easy with you."

"Why so? Our first relations, as you reminded me just now, ought to have proved to you that I am easy enough in business matters."

"That is true. Still the transaction I have to propose to you is of rather a peculiar nature, and I am afraid——"

"What of? That I shall refuse? Hang it! you understand there is a risk to be incurred."

"No; I am afraid that you will not exactly catch the spirit of the affair, and feel annoyed."

"Do you think so? After all, that is possible. Would you like me to save you the trouble of an explanation?"

"How so?"

"Listen to me."

The two men were standing just two paces apart, looking in each other's eyes. Still Valentine, ever on his guard, was carefully watching, though not appearing to do so, the four men left behind.

"Speak!" the general said.

"General, you wish simply to propose to me that I should sell my friend."

Don Sebastian, at these words, pronounced with a cutting accent, involuntarily gave a sign of surprise, and fell back a pace.

"Sir!"

"Is it true—yes or no?"

"You employ terms——" the general stammered.

"Terms have nothing to do with the matter. Now that you have discovered Don Louis is not the accomplice you hoped to find, who would raise you to the president's chair, and as you despair of changing his views, you wish to get rid of him—that is natural."

"Sir!"

"Let me continue. For that purpose you can hit on nothing better than buying him. Indeed, you are used to such transactions. I have in my hands the proofs of several which do you a great deal

of honour."

The general was livid with terror and rage. He clenched his fists and stamped, while uttering unconnected words. The hunter seemed not to notice this agitation, and continued imperturbably,—

"Still you are mistaken in applying to me. I am no Dog-face, a fellow with whom you made a famous bargain some years ago. I have dealt in cattle, but never in human flesh. Each man has his speciality, and I leave that to you."

"Stay, sir!" the general exclaimed in a paroxysm of fury. "What do you want to come to? Did you accept this interview for the purpose of insulting me?"

Valentine shrugged his shoulders.

"You do not believe it," he said: "that would be too childish. I want to propose a business transaction."

"What!"

"Or a bargain, if you prefer that term."

"What is its nature?"

"I can tell you in two words. I have in my possession various papers, which, if they saw light, and were, handed to certain persons, might cost you not only your fortune, but possibly your life."

"Papers!" Don Sebastian stammered.

"Yes, general; your correspondence with a certain North American diplomatist, to whom you offered to deliver Sonora and one or two other provinces, if the United States supplied you with the means to seize the presidency of the Mexican Republic."

"And you have those papers?" the general said with ill-restrained anxiety.

"I have the letters, with your correspondent's answers."

"Here?"

"Of course," Valentine said with a laugh.

"Then you will die!" the general yelled, bounding like a panther on the hunter.

But the latter was on his guard. By a movement as quick as his adversary's, he seized the general by the throat, threw himself upon him, and laid his foot on his chest.

"One step further," he said coldly to the general's companions, who were running up at full speed to his aid, "one step, and he is a dead man."

Certainly the general was a brave man. Many times he had supplied unequivocal proofs of a courage carried almost to temerity: still he saw such resolution flashing in the hunter's tawny eye, that he felt a shudder pass through all his limbs—he was lost, he was afraid.

"Stop, stop!" he cried in a choking voice to his friends.

The latter obeyed.

"I could kill you," Valentine said; "you are really in my power; but what do I care for your life or death? I hold both in my hands. Rise! Now, one word—take care that you do nothing against the count."

The general had profited by the hunter's permission to rise; but so soon as he felt himself free, and his feet were firmly attached to the ground, a revolution was effected in him, and he felt his courage return.

"Listen in your turn," he said. "I will be as frank and brutal with you as you were with me. It is now a war to the death between us, without pity and without mercy. If I have to carry my head to the scaffold, the count shall die; for I hate him, and I require his death to satisfy my vengeance."

"Good!" Valentine coldly answered.

"Yes," the general said sarcastically. "Come, I do not fear you! I do not care if you employ the papers with which you threatened me, for I am invulnerable."

"You think so?" the hunter said slowly.

"I despise you; you are only adventurers: You can never touch me."

Valentine bent toward him.

"Perhaps not," he said; "but your daughter?"

And, taking advantage of the general's stupefaction, the hunter uttered a hoarse laugh and rushed into the thicket, where it was impossible to follow him.

"Oh!" the general muttered, at the expiration of a moment, as he passed his hand over his damp forehead, "the demon! My daughter!" he yelled, "my daughter!"

And he rejoined his companions, and went off with them, not responding to one of the questions they asked him.

[1] See "Gold-Seekers." Same publishers.

THE MISSION.

Valentine, after suddenly parting from the general as we narrated, did not appear at all alarmed about pursuit; and if he hurried on at first, he soon relaxed his speed. On arriving about a hundred yards from the spot where his interview with Don Sebastian had taken place, he stopped, raised his eyes to the sky, and seemed to consult his position. Then he went on; but, instead of proceeding toward the mission, he turned his back completely on it, and returned to the bank of the river, whence he had before been retrograding.

Although the hunter was walking at a quick pace, he seemed greatly preoccupied, and looked mechanically around him. At times he stopped, not to listen to any strange sound, but through the thoughts which oppressed him, and robbed him of all sense of external things. Evidently Valentine was seeking the solution of a problem that troubled him.

At length, after about a quarter of an hour, he saw a faint light a few paces ahead of him. It glistened through the trees, and seemed to indicate an encampment. Valentine stopped and whistled softly. At the same moment the branches of a shrub, about five yards from him, parted, and a man appeared. It was Curumilla.

"Well," Valentine asked, "has she come?" The Araucano bowed his head in reply. The hunter made an angry gesture.

"Where is she?" he asked.

The Indian pointed to the fire the hunter had noticed.

"Deuce take the women!" the hunter growled; "they are the least logical beings in existence. As they let themselves ever be guided by passion, they overthrow unconsciously the surest combinations."

Then he added in a louder voice,—

"Have you not executed my commission, then?"

This time the Indian spoke.

"She will listen to nothing," he said; "she will see."

"I knew it!" the hunter exclaimed. "They are all alike—silly heads, only fit for mule bells; and yet she is one of the better sort. Well, lead me to her. I will try to convince her."

The Indian smiled maliciously, but made no reply. He turned away and led the hunter to the fire. In a few seconds Valentine found himself on the skirt of a vast clearing, in the centre of which, by a good fire of dead wood, Doña Angela and her camarista, Violanta, were seated on piles of furze. Ten paces behind the females, several peons, armed to the teeth, leant on their long lances, awaiting the pleasure of their mistress. Doña Angela raised her head at the sound caused by the hunter's approach, and uttered a slight cry of joy.

"There you are at last!" she exclaimed. "I almost despaired of your coming."

"Perhaps it would have been better had I not done so," he answered with a stifled sigh.

The young lady overheard, or pretended not to hear, the hunter's reply.

"Is your encampment far from here?" she continued.

"Before proceeding there," the hunter said, "we must have a little conversation together, señora."

"What have you to say to me that is so interesting, or rather, so urgent?"

"You shall judge for yourself."

The young lady made a gesture signifying her readiness to hear something which she knew beforehand would be disagreeable.

"Speak!" she said.

The hunter did not allow the invitation to be repeated.

"Where did Curumilla meet you?"

"At the hacienda, just as I was mounting to start. I only awaited him to begin my journey."

"He tried to dissuade you from this step?"

"He did; but I insisted on coming, and compelled him to guide me here."

"You were wrong, niña."

"For what reason?"

"For a thousand."

"That is no answer. Mention one."

"Your father, in the first place."

"He has not yet arrived at the hacienda. I shall have got back before he comes. I have nothing to fear on that side."

"You are mistaken. Your father has arrived: I have seen him—spoken with him."

"You! Where? When?"

"Here, scarce half an hour ago."

"That is impossible," she said.

"It is the fact. I will add that he wanted to kill me."

"He!"

"Yes."

The young lady remained thoughtful for a moment; then she raised her head, and shook it several times.

"All the worse," she said resolutely. "Whatever happens, I will carry it out to the end."

"What do you hope from this interview, niña? Do you not know that your father is our most inveterate foe?"

"What you say is too late now. You ought to have urged these objections when I sent my request to you."

"That is true; but at that time I still had hopes, which I can no longer entertain. Believe me, niña, do not insist on seeing Don Louis. Return as speedily as possible to the hacienda. What will your father think if he does not see you on his arrival?"

"I repeat to you that I will have a most important conversation with Don Louis. It must be, for his sake and for mine."

"Think of the consequences of such a step."

"I think of nothing. I warn you that, if you still refuse to perform your promise to me, I will go alone to find the conde."

The hunter regarded her for an instant with a singular expression. He shook his head sorrowfully, and took her hand, which he pressed affectionately.

"Your will be done," he replied gently. "No one can alter his destiny. Come, then, as you insist on it. God grant that your obstinacy does not entail frightful disaster!"

"You are a bird of ill omen," she said with a laugh. "Come, let us start. You will see all end better than you anticipate."

"I consent; but trust yourself to me, and leave your escort here."

"I ask nothing better. I will only take Violanta with me."

"As you please."

At a sign from her mistress the camarista went up to the peons, who were still motionless, and gave them orders not to leave the clearing under any pretext before her return. Then, guided by Valentine, the two females proceeded toward the camp of the filibusters, Curumilla forming the rear guard. On arriving about a hundred yards from it Valentine stopped.

"What is the matter?" Doña Angela asked him.

"I hesitate about troubling my friend's repose. Perhaps he will be angry with me for having brought you to him."

"No," she said, "you are deceiving me: that is not your thought at this moment."

He regarded her with amazement.

"Good heavens!" she continued with animation, "do you fancy I do not know what is troubling you now? It is to see a girl of my age, rich and well born, take what your countrymen would call an improper step, and which, were it known, would inevitably destroy her reputation. But we Americans are not like your cold and staid European women, who do everything by weight and measure. We love as we hate. It is not blood, but the lava of our volcanoes that circulates in our veins. My love is my life! I care naught for anything else. Remain here a few moments, and let me go on alone. Don Louis, I am convinced, will understand and appreciate my conduct at its just value. He is no common man, I tell you. I love him. In a love so true and ardent as mine there is a certain magnetic attraction which will prevent it being spurned."

The young Mexican was splendidly lovely as she uttered these words. With her head thrown haughtily back, her flashing eye and quivering lip, she was at once a virgin and a Bacchante. Subdued, in spite of himself, by the maiden's accent, and dazzled by her glorious beauty, the hunter bowed respectfully before her, and said, with considerable emotion in his voice,—

"Go, then; and may Heaven grant that, by your aid, my brother may be again led to take an interest in life!"

She smiled with an undefinable expression of archness and serenity, and flew, lightly as a bird, into the thicket. Valentine and Curumilla, who were near enough to the camp to see what occurred, though the sound of voices could not reach them, resolved to wait where they were till their presence became absolutely necessary.

The encampment was in the same state as when the hunter quitted it to go and meet the general. Don Louis and Don Cornelio were fast asleep. Doña Angela remained for a moment silent, fixing on Don Louis a glance in which an unbending resolution flashed. Then she stooped down gently over him. But at the moment when she was about to lay her hand on his shoulder to arouse him, a

sudden sound caused her to tremble. She sprang back, threw a startled glance around, and disappeared once again in the thicket.

Hardly had she retired ere the sound which smote on her ears, and interrupted the execution of her project, became louder; and it was soon easy to distinguish the cadenced sound of a large body of men on the march, and the harsh creaking of cartwheels.

"Your companions are arriving," Doña Angela said hurriedly to Valentine as she rejoined him; "they are only a short distance from the mission. Can I still count on you?"

"Always," he answered.

"I have changed my mind: I will not explain my views to the count in this way, but in the presence of all of you, by the light of the sun. You shall soon see me again in your midst. Good-by! I am going back to the hacienda. Prepare the count for my visit."

After making a parting sign to the hunter, and smiling on him, the young girl remounted her horse, and set off at a gallop, followed by her escort.

"Yes, I will prepare Louis to receive her," the hunter muttered, as he followed her with his eyes for a moment. "That child has a noble heart: she really loves my foster brother. Who knows what will be the consequences of this love?"

And, after shaking his head two or three times dubiously he re-entered the encampment, accompanied by Curumilla, whose Indian stoicism was unshaken, and who seemed perfectly a stranger to all that was taking place around him.

Valentine awoke Louis. The latter sprang up at once.

"Have you any news?" he asked.

"Yes, the company is coming up."

"Already! Oh, oh! it has pushed on. That is a good omen."

"Shall we stay here long?"

"No, two days at the most, or long enough to rest the men and cattle."

"Perhaps it would be better to push on at once—"

"I should like it as much as yourself, but it is impossible, as the 40,000 rations we ought to have found here have not yet arrived, and we are forced to await them."

"That is true."

"I am the more annoyed at this oversight, because our provisions are rapidly diminishing. Still, do not let our comrades see our disappointment, but let us put on a good face. They know we went ahead of them to make the commissariat arrangements, so let them fancy we have succeeded."

Valentine bowed in affirmation. The night was almost at an end; already the sky on the horizon was beginning to be shaded with large white strips of cloud; the stars had all disappeared one after the other; and the sun was just about to rise. Curumilla threw a handful of dried wood on the fire in order to make a flame, and neutralise the effect of the icy night air.

"*Caramba!*" Don Cornelio exclaimed, as he woke up suddenly; "I am frozen; the nights are so cold."

"Are they not?" Valentine said to him. "Well, if you want to warm yourself, nothing is easier. Come along with me."

"I am quite willing. Where are you going?"

"Listen."

"I am doing so. Stay!" he said at the expiration of an instant. "Can that be the company?"

"It is. But it is unnecessary for us to put ourselves out of the way, for here they come."

In fact, at this moment, the French advanced guard entered the mission. According to the treaty made with the Atrevida Company, 40,000 rations should have been prepared at the mission for the troop. The count gave the command to Colonel Florés, with orders to push on, and, accompanied by Valentine, Curumilla, and Don Cornelio, had gone on ahead. Unfortunately the company had not carried out its engagements with that loyalty the count had a right to expect. Instead of 40,000 rations he had found scarce half, ranged with a certain degree of symmetry in a ruined cabin. This breach of faith was the more injurious to the interests of the expedition, because the count, owing to this perfidious manoeuvre, found himself almost unable to push on, as he was about definitively to leave the inhabited and cultivated plains to bury himself in the desert.

Indeed, since the company had left Guaymas, the ill-will of the Mexicans had been so evident under all circumstances, that Don Louis had required a superhuman energy and will of iron not to give way to discouragement, and withdraw in the face of these obstacles raised in his path with unparalleled animosity. Still, up to the present, the Mexicans had never dared to break their engagements so boldly as now: hence they must feel themselves very strong, or at least their precautions were so well taken, and they felt so sure of success, that they raised the mask.

Besides, the count had found no one at the mission to hand him over the stores in the name of the company; and the persons who treated him so unworthily had not deigned to weaken by an excuse the treachery of which they were guilty at this moment. Don Louis foresaw, then, that

after such behaviour, the *dénouement* of the odious farce played by the Mexicans was at hand, and he prepared to face the storm bravely.

The mission was held in military fashion by the company; for they were on the edge of the desert, and it was wise to begin a careful watch. Cannon were planted at each angle of headquarters—sentinels placed at regular distances; in short, this mission, sad and abandoned on the previous day, seemed to have sprung magically into life again; the rubbish was removed, and the old Jesuit church, more than half in ruins, suddenly assumed the appearance of a fortress.

When the count had given the necessary orders for the instalment of the company, and was assured of their perfect execution, he inquired of Colonel Florés how he had performed his duties as temporary chief. The colonel, alone among the French, and feeling himself consequently in the wolf's throat, was too crafty not to act ostensibly with the utmost loyalty; hence on every occasion he offered proofs of goodwill, and acted with a degree of circumspection by which Valentine, that eternal doubter, was nearly duped, although he knew perfectly well the nature of the Mexican character.

Then the count withdrew with the hunter, and the two foster brothers held a conversation, which, to judge by its length, and, above all, Don Louis' thoughtful air when it was ended, must have been very important. In fact, Valentine, accomplishing his pledge to Doña Angela, informed the count of the events of the past night, not only telling him all that had passed between him and the young lady, but also the details of his interview with the general on the river bank.

"You see, then," he said in conclusion, "that the situation is growing more and more critical, and they mean war."

"Yes, it is war; but so long as the least hope is left me, be assured, brother, that I shall not give them the satisfaction of supplying a pretext for a rupture."

"You must play more cautiously than ever, brother. However, unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall speedily know what we have to expect."

"That is my opinion too."

At this moment Don Cornelio appeared, accompanied by Curumilla.

"I beg your pardon," he said to the hunter; "but I should feel obliged by your putting matters right with the chief, who persists in telling me that we are at this moment closely watched by an Indian war party."

"What!" Valentine said, frowning. "What is that you say, Don Cornelio?"

"Look here. While walking in the neighbourhood of the mission with the chief, I picked up this —"

"Let me see," Valentine said.

Don Cornelio handed him a moccasin, which the hunter examined attentively for several minutes.

"Hum!" he then said, "this is serious. Where did you find it?"

"On the river bank."

"What do you think of it, chief?" Valentine said, turning to the Araucano.

"The moccasin is new—it has been lost. Curumilla has seen numerous trails."

"Listen," Don Louis said quickly. "Tell no one about this discovery: we must distrust everything, for treachery is hovering around us, and threatens us from all sides at once. While I strengthen our intrenchments under pretext of a longer stay here, you, brother, will go out to reconnoitre with the chief, and assure yourself of what we have really to fear from the Indians."

"Be quiet, brother: on your side, keep a good watch."

CHAPTER III.

THE SPY.

It was about eight in the morning when Valentine and Curumilla left Don Louis. The hunter had passed the whole night without closing an eye. He felt fatigued: his eyelids, weighed down with sleep, closed involuntarily. Still he prepared to make the researches his foster brother had intrusted to him, when Curumilla, noticing his condition, invited him to take a few hours' rest, remarking that he did not absolutely want him in following up the trail he had noticed in the morning, and that he would give him a good account of all he did.

Valentine placed the most entire confidence in Curumilla. Many times, during the course of their common existence, he had been in a position to appreciate the sagacity, cleverness, and experience of the chief; hence he needed but little pressing to consent to his proposition of going out alone, and after giving him the warmest recommendations, he wrapped himself up in his cloak, and fell off to sleep at once.

He had enjoyed for about two hours a peaceful and refreshing nap when he felt a hand gently laid on his shoulder. So light as the touch was, it was sufficient to arouse the hunter, who, like all men habituated to prairie life, maintained, if we may use the expression, a sense of external

things even during sleep. He opened his eyes, and looked fixedly at the man who had come to disturb the rest he was enjoying, while mentally consigning him to the deuce.

"Well," he said, with the harsh accent of a man aroused at the pleasantest moment of a dream, "what do you want of me, Don Cornelio? Could you not select a more favourable moment to talk with me, for I suppose what you have to say to me is not extremely important?"

Don Cornelio (for it was really that gentleman who awoke Valentine) laid his finger on his mouth, while looking suspiciously around, as if to recommend caution to the hunter; then he leant over his ear.

"Pardon me, Don Valentine," he said; "but I believe that the communication I have to make to you is of the utmost importance."

Valentine sprang up as if moved by a spring, and looked the Spaniard in the face.

"What is the matter, then?" he asked in a low and concentrated voice, which, however, had something imperious about it.

"I will tell you in two words. Colonel Florés (whose face, by the way, does not at all please me) has been doing nothing but prowl round the mission since the morning, inquiring what has been done and left undone, gossiping with one or the other, and trying, above all, to discover the opinion of our men as regards the chief. There was not much harm in that, perhaps, but, so soon as he saw you were asleep, he learnt that the count, who was engaged with his correspondence, had given orders that he should not be disturbed for some hours. Upon this he pretended, to retire to a half-ruined cabin situated at the outskirts of the mission; but a few minutes after, when he supposed that no one was thinking about him, instead of taking a siesta as he had given out, he slipped away from the hut among the trees like a man afraid of being surprised, and disappeared in the forest."

"Ah, ah!" Valentine said thoughtfully, "what interest can that man have in absenting himself so secretly?" Then he added, "Has he been gone long?"

"Hardly ten minutes."

Valentine rose.

"Remain here," he said. "In case the colonel returns during my absence, watch him carefully; but do not let him suspect anything. I thank you for not having hesitated to wake me. The matter is serious."

Then, breaking off the conversation, the hunter quitted Don Cornelio, and gliding along under the shadow of the ruins, so as to attract no attention, entered the forest. In the meanwhile, Colonel Florés, believing Valentine to be asleep, and knowing that the count was writing, felt no apprehension about being followed. He walked rapidly toward the river, not taking any trouble to hide his footsteps—an imprudence by which the hunter profited, and which placed him at once on the track of the man he was watching.

The colonel soon arrived at the river. The most complete calm prevailed around; the alligators were wallowing in the mud; the flamingoes were fishing negligently: all, in a word, evidenced the absence of man. Still, the colonel had scarce appeared on the bank ere an individual, hanging by his arms from the branch of a tree, descended to the ground scarce a couple of paces from him. At this unexpected apparition the colonel recoiled, stifling a cry of surprise and alarm; but he had not the time to recover from his emotion ere a second individual leaped in the same fashion on the sand. Mechanically Don Francisco raised his eyes to the tree.

"Oh, oh!" the first arrival said with a coarse laugh, "you need not take the trouble to look up there, Garrucholo; no one is left there."

At the name of Garrucholo the colonel shuddered, and attentively examined the two men who had presented themselves in so strange a manner, as they stood motionless before him, and looked at him derisively. The first of the two was a white man, as could be easily recognised at the first glance, in spite of his bronzed complexion, which was almost of the colour of brick. The clothes he wore were exactly like those of the Indians. This interesting personage was armed to the teeth, and held a long rifle in his hand. His comrade was a redskin, painted and armed for war.

"Eh?" the first speaker continued. "I fancy you do not recognise me, boy. By God, you have a short memory!"

This oath, and, above all, the strong accent with which the man expressed himself in Spanish, although he spoke that language fluently, were a ray of light for the colonel.

"El Buitre!" he exclaimed, striking his forehead.

"Come," the other said with a laugh, "I felt certain that you had not forgotten me, compañero."

This, unexpected meeting was anything but agreeable to the colonel; still he considered it prudent not to let it be seen.

"By what accident are you here, then?" he asked.

"And you?" the other answered boldly.

"I! My presence is perfectly natural, and easily to be explained."

"And mine too."

"Ah!"

"Hang it! I am here because you are so."

"Hum!" the colonel said, maintaining a reserve. "Explain that to me, will you?"

"I am quite ready to do so, but the spot is badly selected for talking. Come with me."

"I beg your pardon, Buitre, my friend. We are, as you said yourself, old acquaintances."

"Which means?"

"That I doubt you excessively."

The bandit began laughing.

"A confidence that honours me," he said, "and of which I am deserving. Did you find in the mission church the hilt of a dagger with an S engraved on the pommel?"

"Yes."

"Very good. That hilt signified, I think, that you were to take a walk in this quarter?"

"It did."

"Well, the persons with whom you must converse are before you. Do you now understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let us have a talk; but as what we have to say only concerns ourselves, and it is unnecessary to mix up in our business people who have no concern with it, we will proceed to a spot where we shall have nothing to fear from indiscreet ears."

"Who the deuce do you expect will surprise you here?"

"No one, probably; but, my esteemed friend, as prudence is the mother of safety, I have become, since our last parting, extraordinarily prudent."

"I'll go wherever you please."

"Come on."

The three men re-entered the forest.

Valentine followed them pace by pace. They did not go far. On arriving a certain distance from the river they stopped at the entrance of a large clearing, in the centre of which rose an enormous block of green rock. The three men clambered up, and, on reaching the top, lay down at their ease on a species of platform.

"There!" El Buitre said, "I believe we can talk here in perfect surety."

Valentine was for an instant rather disappointed at this precaution on the part of the bandits. Still he did not give in. The hunter was accustomed to see material impossibilities arise before him of the same nature as in the present case. After a few seconds' reflection he looked around him with a malicious glance.

"Now to see who is the most cunning," he muttered.

He lay down on the ground. The grass grew tall, green, and close in the clearing; and Valentine began crawling, with a slow and almost imperceptible motion, in the direction of the rocks, passing through the grass without imparting the slightest oscillation to it. After about a quarter of an hour of this manoeuvre the hunter saw his efforts crowned with success; for he reached a spot where it was possible for him to rise, and whence he was enabled to overhear perfectly all that was said on the platform, while himself remaining invisible.

Unfortunately the time he had employed in gaining his observatory prevented him hearing what were probably very important matters. At the moment he began listening El Buitre was the speaker.

"Bah, bah!" he said with that mocking accent peculiar to him, "I answer for success. Even if the French are devils, each of them is not equal to two men. Hang it all, let me alone!"

"*Canarios!* may I be hanged if I interfere at all in this affair! I have done too much already," the colonel made answer.

"You are always a trembler. How do you expect that men half demoralised, fatigued by a long journey, can resist the combined and well-directed attack of my brother's, this Apache chief's, band, supported as they will be by the eighty scoundrels the Mexican Government has placed at my disposal for this expedition?"

"I do not know what the French will do; but you will, perhaps, learn that they are stout fellows."

"All the better—we shall have the more fun."

"Take care not to have too much," El Garrucholo said with a grin.

"Go to the deuce with your observations! Besides, I have a grudge against their chief, as you know."

"Bah! how can a man like you have a grudge against anyone in particular? He only has a grudge against riches. Who are your men?"

"*Cívicos*—real bandits—regular game for the gallows. My dear fellow, they will perform miracles."

"What! *cívicos*? The idea is glorious—the men whom the hacenderos pay and support for the

purpose of fighting the redskins."

"Good Lord, yes, that is the way of the world. This time they will fight by the side of the redskins against the whites. The idea is original, is it not, especially as, for this affair, they will be disguised as Indians?"

"Better still. And the chief, how many warriors has he with him?"

"I do not know; he will tell you himself."

The chief had remained gloomy and silent during this conversation, and the colonel now turned toward him with an inquiring glance.

"Mixcoatzin is a powerful chief," the redskin said in his guttural voice: "two hundred Apache warriors follow his war plume."

El Garrucholo gave a significant whistle.

"Well," he continued, "I maintain what I said."

"What?"

"You will receive an awful thrashing."

El Buitre repressed with difficulty a gesture of ill-temper.

"Enough," he said; "you do not know the Indians. This chief is one of the bravest sachems of his tribe. His reputation is immense in the prairies. The warriors placed under his orders are all picked men."

"Very good. Do what you please: I wash my hands of it."

"Can we at least reckon on you?"

"I will execute punctually the orders I received from the general."

"I ask no more."

"Then nothing is changed?"

"Nothing. Always the same hour and the same signal."

"In that case it is useless for us to remain longer together. I will return to the mission, for I must try to avoid any suspicion."

"Go, and may the demon continue his protection to you!"

"Thanks."

The colonel left the platform. Valentine hesitated a moment, thinking whether he should follow him; but, after due reflection, he felt persuaded that all was not finished yet, and that he should probably still obtain some precious information. El Buitre shrugged his shoulders, and turning to the Indian chief, who was still impassive, said,—

"Pride has ruined that man. He was a jolly comrade a few years back."

"What will my brother do now?"

"Not much. I shall remain in hiding here until the sun has run two-thirds of its course, and then go and rejoin my comrades."

"The chief will retire. His warriors are still far off."

"Very good. Then we shall not meet again till the appointed moment?"

"No. The paleface will attack on the side of the forest, while the Apaches advance by the river."

"All right! But let us be prudent, for a misunderstanding might prove fatal. I will draw as near as possible to the mission; but I warn you that I shall not budge till I hear your signal."

"Wah! my brother will open his ears, and the miaawling of the tiger-cat will warn him that the Apaches have arrived."

"I understand perfectly. One parting remark, chief."

"I listen to the paleface."

"It is clearly understood that the booty will be shared equally between us?"

The Indian gave a wicked smile.

"Yes," he said.

"No treachery between us, redskin, or, by God! I warn you that I will flay you alive like a mad dog."

"The palefaces have too long a tongue."

"That is possible; but if you do not wish misfortune to fall on you, profit by my words."

The Indian only replied by a gesture of contempt: he wrapped himself in his buffalo robe, and retired slowly.

The bandit looked after him for a moment.

"Miserable dog!" he muttered, "so soon as I can do without you I will settle your account, be assured."

The Indian had disappeared.

"Hum! what shall I be after now?" El Buitre continued.

Suddenly a man bounded like a jaguar, and, before the bandit could even understand what was happening, he was firmly garotted, and reduced to a state of complete powerlessness.

"You do not know what to be after? Well, I will tell you," Valentine remarked, as he sat down quietly by his side.

The first moment of surprise past, the bandit regained all his coolness and audacity, and looked impudently at the hunter.

"By God! I do not know you, comrade," he said; "but I must confess you managed that cleverly."

"You are a connoisseur."

"Slightly so."

"Yes, I am aware of it."

"But you have tied me a little too tightly. Your confounded reata cuts into my flesh."

"Bah! you will grow used to it."

"Hum!" the bandit remarked. "Did you hear all we said?"

"Nearly all."

"Deuce take me if people can now talk in the desert without having listeners!"

"What would you? It is a melancholy fact."

"Well, I must put up with it, I suppose. You were saying——"

"I! I did not say a word."

"Ah! I beg your pardon in that case; but I fancied you were cross-questioning me. You probably did not tie me up like a plug of tobacco for the mere fun of the thing."

"There is some truth in your observation. I had, I allow, another object."

"What is it?"

"To enjoy your conversation for a moment."

"You are a thousand times too kind."

"Opportunities for conversing are so rare in the desert."

"That is true."

"So you are on an expedition?"

"Yes, I am: a man must be doing something."

"That is true also. Be good enough to give me a few details."

"About what?"

"Why, this expedition."

"Ah, ah! I should like to do so, but unfortunately that is impossible."

"Only think of that! Why so?"

"I know very little."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and then I am of a very crooked temper. A person need only ask me to do a thing for me to refuse."

Valentine smiled, and drew his knife, whose dazzling blade emitted a bluish flash.

"Even if convincing reasons are offered you?"

"I do not know any," the bandit answered with a grin.

"Oh, oh!" Valentine remarked. "Still I hope I shall alter your opinion."

"Try it. Stay!" he added, suddenly changing his tone. "Enough of that sort of farce. I am in your power—nothing can save me. Kill me—no matter, I shall not say a word."

The two men exchanged glances of strange expressiveness.

"You are an idiot," Valentine answered coldly; "you understand nothing."

"I understand that you want to know the secrets of the expedition."

"You are a fool, my dear friend. Did I not tell you that I knew all?"

The bandit seemed to reflect for a minute.

"What do you want, then?" he said.

"Merely to buy you."

"Hum! that will be dear."

"You do not say no?"

"I never say no to anything."

"I see you are becoming reasonable."

"Who knows?"

"At how much do you estimate your share of this night's booty?"

El Buitre looked at him as if wishful to read the thoughts in his heart.

"Hang it! that will mount high."

"Yes, especially if you are hung!"

"Oh!"

"Everything must be foreseen in such a business."

"You are right."

"The more so as, if you refuse the bargain I offer you, I will kill you like a dog."

"That's a chance."

"It is very probable. So take my word, let us bargain. Give me your figure."

"Fifteen thousand piastres," the bandit exclaimed; "not an ochavo less."

"Pooh!" Valentine said, "that is little."

"Eh?" he remarked in amazement.

"I will give you twenty thousand."

In spite of the bonds that held him the bandit gave a start.

"Done!" he exclaimed; but in a moment added, "Where is the sum?"

"Do you fancy me such a fool as to pay you beforehand?"

"Hang it! I fancy——"

"Nonsense! You are mad, compadre. Now that we understand one another, let me undo you—that will freshen up your ideas."

He took off the reata. El Buitre rose at once, stamped his foot to restore the circulation, and then turning to the hunter, who stood watching him laughingly, with his hands crossed on the muzzle of his rifle, said,—

"At least you have some security to give me?"

"Yes, and an excellent one."

"What?"

"The word of an honest man."

The bandit made a gesture; but Valentine continued, not seeming to notice it,—

"I am the man whom the whites and Indians have surnamed the 'Trail-hunter.' My name is Valentine Guillois."

"What!" El Buitre exclaimed with strange emotion, "are you really the Trail-hunter?"

"I am," Valentine answered simply.

El Buitre walked up and down the platform hastily, muttering in a low voice broken sentences, and evidently a prey to intense emotion. Suddenly he stopped before the hunter.

"I accept," he said hurriedly.

"Tomorrow you shall receive your money."

"I will none of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Valentine, allow me to remain master of my secret for a few days; I will then explain my conduct to you. Though I am a bandit, every feeling is not yet dead in my heart; there is one which has remained pure, and that is gratitude. Trust to me. Henceforth you will not have a more devoted slave, either for good or evil."

"Your accent is not that of a man who has the intention of deceiving. I trust to you, asking no explanation of your sudden change of feeling."

"At a later date you shall know all, I tell you; and now that we are alone, explain to me your plan in all its details, in order that I may help you effectively."

"Yes," Valentine said, "time presses."

The two men remained alone for about two hours discussing the hunter's plan, and when all was settled they separated—Valentine to return to the mission, and El Buitre to rejoin his companions, who were concealed a short distance off.

THE EXPLOSION.

During Valentine's absence facts of extreme gravity had occurred at the mission. The Count de Prébois Crancé had finished his correspondence, and held in his hand the letters he had just written, while he gave a peon, already mounted, his final instructions. At this moment the advanced posts uttered the cry of "Who goes there?" which was immediately taken up along the whole line. Louis felt his heart contracted by this shout, to which he was, however, accustomed; a cold perspiration beaded on his temples; a mortal pallor covered his face; and he was forced to lean against a wall lest he should fall, so weak did he feel.

"Good heavens!" he stammered in a low voice, "what can be the matter with me?"

Let who can explain the cause of this strange emotion, this inner presentiment which warned the count of a misfortune; for our part, we confess our inability, and content ourselves with recording the fact.

The count, however, wrestled with this extraordinary emotion, for which there was no plausible reason. Owing to a supreme effort of the will, a perfect reaction took place in him, and he became once more cold, calm, and stoical, ready to sustain, without weakness as without bravado, the blow by which he instinctively felt himself menaced.

In the meanwhile an answer had been returned to the sentries' challenge, and words exchanged. Don Cornelio came up to the count, his face quite discomposed by astonishment, and himself a prey to the most lively emotion.

"Señor conde——" he said in a panting voice, and then stopped.

"Well," the count asked, "what is the meaning of those challenges I heard?"

"Señor," Don Cornelio continued with an effort, "General Guerrero, accompanied by his daughter, several other ladies, a dozen officers, and a powerful escort, requests to be introduced to your presence."

"He is welcome. At length, then, he consents to treat directly with me."

Don Cornelio withdrew to carry out the orders he had received, and soon a brilliant cavalcalde, at the head of which was General Guerrero, entered the mission. The general was pale, and frowned: it was easy to see that he with difficulty suppressed a dumb fury that filled his heart. The adventurers, in scattered groups, and haughtily wrapped up in their rags, regarded curiously these smart Mexican officers, so vain and so glittering with gold, who scarce deigned to bestow a glance upon them. The count walked a few paces toward the general, and uncovered with a movement full of singular grace.

"You are welcome, general," he said in his gentle voice; "I am happy to receive your visit."

The general did not even lift his finger to his embroidered hat, but, suddenly stopping his horse when scarce two paces from the count,—

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he exclaimed in an angry voice. "You are guarded as if in a fortress! You have, Heaven pardon me! sentries and patrols round your encampment, as if you were in command of a regular army."

The count bit his lips; but he restrained himself, and replied in a calm, though grave voice,—

"We are on the edge of the *despoblados* (deserts), general, and our safety depends on our vigilance. Although I am not the commander of an army, I answer for the safety of the men I have the honour of leading. But will you not dismount, general, so that we may discuss more at our ease the grave questions which doubtless bring you here?"

"I will not dismount, sir, nor anyone of my suite, before you have explained to me your strange conduct."

Such a flash sparkled in the count's blue eye that, in spite of himself, the general turned his head away. This conversation had taken place under the vault of heaven, in the presence of the Frenchmen, who had collected round the newcomers. The patience of the adventurers was beginning to grow exhausted, and hoarse, mutterings were heard. With a sign the count appeased the storm, and silence was immediately re-established.

"General," Don Louis continued with perfect calmness, "the words you address to me are severe. I was far from expecting them, especially after the way in which I have acted since my landing in Mexico, and the moderation I have constantly displayed."

"All that is trifling," the general said furiously. "You Frenchmen have a honeyed tongue when you wish to deceive us. But, by heavens, I will teach you differently! You are warned once for all."

The count drew himself up, and a feverish flush suffused his cheeks. He put on again the hat he had hitherto held in his hand, and looked the general boldly in the face.

"I would observe, Señor Don Sebastian Guerrero," he said, in a voice broken by emotion, which he attempted in vain to check, "that you have not returned me my salute, and that you employ strange language in addressing a gentleman at least as noble as yourself. Is this the boasted Mexican courtesy? Come to the facts, caballero, without holding language unworthy of yourself or me; explain yourself frankly, that I may know, once for all, what I have to hope or fear from these eternal tergiversations, and the continued treachery of which I am the victim."

The general remained for a moment thoughtful after this rude apostrophe. At length he made up

his mind, removed his hat, saluted the count graciously, and suddenly changed his manner.

"Pardon me, caballero," he said; "I was so far carried away by my temper as to employ expressions which I deeply regret."

The count smiled disdainfully.

"Your apologies are sufficient, sir," he said.

At the word "apologies" the general quivered, but soon regained command of himself.

"Where do you desire that I should communicate to you the orders of my Government?"

"At this spot, sir. I have, thanks to Heaven, nothing to hide from my brave comrades."

The general, though evidently annoyed, dismounted. The ladies and officers who accompanied him did the same. The escort alone remained on horseback, with their ranks closed up. At an order from Don Louis several tables were produced, and instantaneously covered with refreshments, of which the French officers began to do the honours with the grace and gaiety that distinguish their nation. The general and the count seated themselves on butacas, placed in the doorway of the mission church, near a table, on which were pen, ink, and paper.

There was a lengthened silence. It was evident that neither wished to be the first to speak. The general at length opened the conversation.

"Oh, oh!" he said, "you have guns with you?"

"Did you not know it, general?"

"My faith, no!"

And he added, with a sarcastic smile,—

"Do you intend to pursue the Apaches with such weapons?"

"At the present moment less than ever, general," Don Louis answered dryly. "I do not know of what use this artillery will be to me. Still it is good, and I am convinced that it will not betray me in the hour of need."

"Is that a menace, sir?" the general asked significantly.

"What is the use of threatening when you can act?" the count said concisely. "But that is not the question, for the present at least. I am awaiting your pleasure, sir, to explain to me the intentions of your Government with regard to me."

"They are kind and paternal, sir."

"I will wait till you have told me them ere I express any opinion."

"This is the message I am charged to deliver to you."

"Ah! have you a message for me?"

"Yes."

"I am listening, caballero."

"The message is quite paternal."

"I am certain of it. Let us see what your Government's intentions are."

"I should have wished them better, but I consider them acceptable in their present form."

"Be kind enough to communicate them to me, general."

"I was anxious to come myself, señor conde, in order to lessen by my presence any apparent bitterness these proposals might contain."

"Ah!" the count remarked, "propositions are made to me; in other words, and speaking by the card, conditions which it is desired to impose on me. Very good."

"Oh, conde, conde, how badly you take what I say to you!"

"Pardon me, general, you know that I do not speak your magnificent Spanish very well; still I thank you from my heart for your kindness in accepting the harsh mission of communicating these propositions to me."

This was said with an accent of fine raillery which completely discountenanced the general.

"I would observe, general, that we are now only a few leagues from the mine, and the alternative offered me is most painful, especially after the evasive answers constantly made to me and the persons I sent with full powers to treat personally with the authorities of the country."

"That is true; I can comprehend that. Colonel Florés, whom you sent to me a few days back, will have told you how pained I felt at all that is happening. I lose as much as yourself. Unfortunately, you will understand me, my dearest count, I must obey, whether I like it or not."

"I understand perfectly," Louis answered ironically, "how deeply pained you must feel."

"Alas!" the general said, more embarrassed than ever, and who began to regret in his heart that he was not accompanied by a larger force.

"Well, as it is useless to prolong this position indefinitely, as it is so cruel for you, explain yourself without further circumlocution, I beg."

"Hum! Remember that I am in no way responsible."

The fact is the general was afraid.

"Go on—go on!"

"The propositions are as follow:—You are enjoined——"

"Oh! that is a harsh term," Louis observed.

The general shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that he had nothing to do with drawing up the document.

"Well, then," the count said, "we are enjoined——"

"Yes, First. Either to consent to give up your nationality as Frenchmen——"

"Pardon me," the count interrupted, and laid his hand on the general's arm, "an instant, if you please. As I see that what you are commissioned to communicate to me interests all my comrades, it is my duty to invite them to be present at the reading of these propositions; for you have them in writing, I believe?"

"Yes," the general stammered, turning livid.

"Very good. Buglers!" the count shouted in a high and imperative voice, "sound the assembly."

Ten minutes later the whole company was ranged round the table, at which the general and the count were seated. Don Louis looked carefully around, and then noticed the Mexican officers and ladies, who, curious to know what was going on, had also drawn nearer.

"Chairs for these ladies and caballeros," he said. "Pray excuse me, señoras, if I do not pay you all the attention you deserve; but I am only a poor adventurer, and we are in the desert."

Then, when all had taken their seats,—

"Give me a copy of these proposals," he said to the general; "I will read them myself."

The general obeyed mechanically.

"Gentlemen and dear comrades," Don Louis then said in a sharp voice, in which, however, a scarcely suppressed anger could be noticed, "when I enrolled you at San Francisco, I showed you the authentic documents conferring on me the ownership of the mines of the Plancha de Plata, did I not?"

"Yes!" the adventurers shouted with one voice.

"You read at the foot of those documents the names of Don Antonio Pavo, President of the Mexican Republic, and of General Don Sebastian Guerrero, present here at this moment. You then knew on what conditions you enlisted, and also the engagements the Mexican Government entered into with you. Today, after three months' marching and counter-marching; after suffering without a murmur all the annoyances it pleased the Mexican Government to inflict on you; when you have proved, by your good conduct and severe discipline, that you were in every way worthy to fulfil honourably the mission that was intrusted to you; when, finally, in spite of the incessant obstacles continually raised in your path, you have arrived within less than ten leagues of the mines, do you know what the Mexican Government demands of you? Listen: I will tell you, for you are even more interested than myself in the question."

A thrill of curiosity ran through the ranks of the adventurers.

"Speak—speak!" they shouted.

"You have three alternatives:—First. You are enjoined to resign your French nationality, and become Mexicans, and will be permitted to work the mines, without any pay, under the supreme command of General Guerrero, whose aide-de-camp I shall become."

An Homeric burst of laughter greeted this proposition.

"The second—let us have the second!" some shouted.

"*Sapristi!*" others remarked, "these Mexicans are not fools to wish to have us for their countrymen."

"Go on—go on!" the remainder howled.

The count gave a sign, and silence was re-established.

"Secondly. You are ordered to take out cards of surety if you wish to remain Frenchmen. By means of such cards you can go anywhere: still, as foreigners, you will be forbidden any possession—that is to say, working—of the mines. You have quite understood me, I presume?"

"Yes, yes! The last one—the last one!"

"I did not fancy the Mexicans were such funny fellows," a soldier remarked.

"Thirdly. I personally am ordered to reduce the company to fifty men, to hand over my command to a Mexican officer, and on that condition you can at once take possession of the mines."

When the captain had ended his reading there was such an explosion of laughter, shouts, and yells, that for nearly a quarter of an hour it was almost impossible to hear anything. At length the count succeeded in restoring some degree of order and silence, though with considerable difficulty.

"Such are the paternal intentions of the Mexican Government as regards us. What do you think of them, my friends? Still, I implore you, do not allow yourselves to be carried away by your just

indignation, but reflect deeply on what you think it your duty to do for your own interests. As for myself, my resolution is formed—it is immutable; and even if it cost my life, I shall not alter it. But you, my friends, my brethren, your private interests cannot be mine; hence do not sacrifice yourselves through friendship and devotion to me. You know me well enough to put faith in my words. Those among you who wish to leave me will be free to do so: not only will I not oppose their departure, but I shall bear them no ill will. The strange position in which we are placed by the ill faith of the Mexicans imposes on me obligations and a line of conduct to which you can refuse to submit without disgrace. From this moment I release you from every engagement with me. I am no longer your chief, but I will ever be your friend and brother."

These words had scarce been uttered ere the adventurers, through an irresistible impulse, overthrowing all in their way, rushed toward the count, surrounded him with shouts and cries, lifted him in their arms, and showered on him assurances of their complete devotion.

"Long live the count! Long live Louis! Long live our chief! Death to the Mexicans! Down with the traitors!"

Their effervescence assumed proportions which threatened to become dangerous to the Mexicans at the moment in the camp. The exasperation was at its height. Still, owing to the influence the count exerted over his comrades, and the energetic conduct of the officers, the tumult gradually died out, and all returned nearly to the normal condition.

General Guerrero, at first alarmed by the effect produced on the French by the untoward propositions of which he had constituted himself the bearer, soon reassured himself, however, especially on seeing with what abnegation and loyalty the count protected him against the just indignation of his companions. Nearly sure of running no risk, owing to the noble character of the man he had so unjustly deceived, he resolved to strike the final blow.

"Caballeros," he said in that honeyed voice peculiar to the Mexicans, "permit me to address a few words to you."

At this request the tumult was on the point of recommencing: still the count succeeded in producing a stormy silence, if we may be allowed to employ the phrase.

"General, you can speak," he said to him.

"Gentlemen," Don Sebastian went on, "I have only a few words to add. The Count de Prébois Crancé has read you the conditions the Mexican Government imposes, but he was unable to read to you the consequences of a refusal to obey those conditions."

"That is true, sir. Be good enough, therefore, to make them known to us."

"It is a terrible duty for me to fulfil; still I must do so for your benefit, caballeros."

"Come to the point!" the adventurers shouted.

The general unfolded a paper, and after a moment of hesitation he read as follows, with a voice which, spite of all his efforts, slightly trembled:—

"Count Don Louis de Prébois Crancé, and all the men who remain faithful to him, will be regarded as pirates; placed without the pale of the law, and arrested as such; tried by a military commission, and shot within twenty-four hours."

"Is that all, sir?" the count asked coldly.

At a sign from the count the two papers containing the proposals and the proclamation of outlawry were nailed on the trunk of a tree.

"And now, sir, you have fulfilled your mission, I believe? You have nothing further to add?"

"I regret, señor conde——"

"Enough, sir. Were I really a pirate, as you so charitably call me, it would be easy for me to retain you, as well as the persons that accompany you, which would supply me with ample means for the satisfaction of my vengeance; but, whatever you may say, neither I nor the men I have the honour to command are pirates. You will leave here as free as you came: still I fancy you would do well not to delay your departure."

The general did not need to hear this twice. For two hours he had seen death several times too near, or at least he fancied so, to desire to prolong his stay in the camp; and hence he gave the necessary orders for immediate departure. At this moment Doña Angela, suddenly emerged from the group of ladies among whom she had hitherto stood, and walked forward, majestically robed in her *rebozo*, her eye flashing with a sombre fire.

"Stay!" she said with an accent so firm and so imposing that each was silent, and regarded her with astonishment.

"Madam," Don Louis said to her, "I conjure you——"

"Let me speak," she said energetically; "let me speak, señor conde. As no one in this hapless country dares to protest against the odious treachery of which you are a victim, I—a woman, the daughter of your most implacable enemy—declare openly before all, that you, count, are the only man whose genius is powerful enough to regenerate this unhappy country. You are misunderstood—insulted; and the epithet of pirate is attached to your name. Well, pirate—be it so. Don Louis, I love you! Henceforth I am yours—yours alone. Persevere in your noble enterprise. As long as I live there will be a woman in this accursed land who will pray for you. And now, farewell! I leave my heart with you."

The count knelt before the noble woman, kissed her hand respectfully, and raised his eyes to heaven.

"Doña Angela," he said with emotion, "I thank you. I love you, and whatever may happen, I will prove to you that I am worthy of your love."

"Now, my father, let us go," she said to the general, who was half mad with rage, and who yet did not dare give way to his passion; and turning for the last time to the count, she said, "Good-by, Don Louis! My betrothed, we shall soon meet again."

And she left the camp, accompanied by the enthusiastic shouts of the adventurers.

The Mexicans marched out with drooping heads and a blush on their foreheads. In spite of themselves they were ashamed of the infamous treachery they had dealt out to men whom they had earnestly summoned, whom they had deluded during four months with false promises, and whom they were now preparing to rush upon like wild beasts.

Scarce two hours after these events occurred Valentine re-entered the camp.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST POWDER BURNT.

The emotion caused by the general's visit gradually calmed down. The Frenchmen, so long the sport of Mexican bad faith, experienced almost joy at seeing themselves at length liberated from the inextricable web of trickery which had encompassed them. With that carelessness which forms the basis of the national character, they began laughing and jibing at the Mexicans generally, and especially at the authorities of the country, of whom they had to complain so greatly, though without daring to offer the least observation, through respect for their chief. Full of confidence in the count, without calculating that they were only a handful of men abandoned to their own resources, without help or possible protection, more than six thousand leagues from their country, they indulged to the fullest extent of their imagination in the wildest dreams, discussing among themselves the most extraordinary and daring plans, without ever supposing, in their candid filibustering simplicity, that even the least extravagant of their dreams was impossible to realise.

Louis would not allow the ardour of his volunteers to be chilled. After consulting with his officers, to whom he submitted his plans, which they accepted enthusiastically, by Valentine's advice he ordered a general assembly of the company. The bugles at once sounded, and the adventurers collected around headquarters.

"Gentlemen," the count said, "you see in what a position the breach of faith of the Mexican authorities has placed us; but this position, in my opinion, is far from being desperate. Still I must not conceal from you that it is extremely grave, and, from certain information I have from a good source, it threatens to become still more so. We have two modes in which to act. The first is to proceed by forced marches to Guaymas, seize a vessel, and embark ere our enemies have thought about opposing our departure."

A long murmur of dissatisfaction greeted these words.

"Gentlemen," the count continued, "it was my duty to submit this proposition to you, and you will discuss it amongst yourselves. If it does not suit you, no more need be said. And now for the second. Mexico, since its emancipation, has languished in a state of the most scandalous barbarism. It would be grand to regenerate this people, or at least attempt it. The American emigration from the United States is at this moment invading California, leaving other emigrants no means, I will not say of prospering, but even of keeping on a footing of equality with the Yankees. We are here in Sonora, 200 resolute Frenchmen, well armed and disciplined. Let us seize a large town to have a basis of operations; then we will summon to us the French emigrants from California and all America. Let us emancipate Sonora, make it free and strong, civilise it in spite of itself, and not only shall we have created an outlet for French immigration, but have regenerated a people and formed a colony which will advantageously balance American influence on these shores, and oppose a dyke to its incessant encroachments. We shall have acquired a claim to the gratitude of our country, and have avenged ourselves on our enemies in the way Frenchmen revenge themselves; that is to say, by responding to their insults by kindness. Such, gentlemen, are the two sole methods we can select which would be worthy of men like us. Weigh my words carefully; reflect on my propositions; and tomorrow, at sunrise, you will inform me of your intentions through the channel of your officers. Remember one thing before all, comrades, and that is, you must maintain strict discipline among yourselves. Obey me passively, and place unbounded faith in me. If you fail in one of the duties I impose on you at this moment, we are all lost; for the struggle will become impossible, and consequently our enemies will gain an easy victory over us. In conclusion, brethren, accept my word that whatever may be the circumstances in which we find ourselves—however magnificent the offers that may be made me—I will never abandon you. We will perish or succeed together."

This speech was greeted as it deserved to be; that is to say, with an enthusiasm impossible to describe. The count then withdrew with Valentine.

"Alas, brother!" he said to him, with an expression of heart-rending sorrow, "the die is now cast.

I, Count de Prébois Crancé, am a rebel, a pirate: I am at open war with a recognised power, with a constitutional Government. What can I do with the few men I command? I shall perish in the first battle—the combat is senseless. I shall be ere long the laughing stock of the world. Who could have predicted this when I left San Francisco, full of hope, to work those mines which I shall never see? What has become of my fair dreams, my seductive hopes?"

"Do not allow yourself to be downcast, brother," Valentine answered. "At present, above all, you need all your intellect and all your energy to fulfil worthily the task accident imposes on you. Remember that from this intellect and this energy depends the safety of two hundred of your countrymen, whom you have sworn to lead back to the seashore; and you must keep your oath."

"I will die with them. What more can they demand?"

"That you should save them," the hunter replied sternly.

"That is my most anxious desire."

"Your position is a fine one—you are not so alone as you fancy."

"How so?"

"Have you not the French colony of Guetzalli, founded by the Count de Lhorailles?"

"Yes," Louis answered sadly; "but the count is dead."

"He is; but the colony exists, and is prosperous. You will find there fifty to sixty resolute men, who ask no better than to join you, even if merely through the spirit of adventure."

"Fifty men are very few."

"Nonsense! They are more than you need when dealing with Mexicans. Do one thing more: prepare an insurrection among the half savage population, whose alcaldes pine secretly at their secondary position, and the species of vassaldom into which the Mexican Government forces them."

"Oh, oh!" Louis said, "that is a good idea. But where is the man who will undertake to visit this people, and negotiate with the alcaldes of the Pueblos?"

"I will, if you like."

"I did not dare ask it. Thank you. I, for my part, will prepare everything in order to begin with a terrible blow, which will startle the Mexican Government by giving it an idea of our strength."

"Good! Before all, do not forget that, until fresh orders, the war you undertake must be an uninterrupted succession of daring blows."

"Oh! you may be at ease. Now that the Mexicans have lifted the mask, and forced me to defend myself, they will learn to know the men they have so long despised, and whom they fancied cowards because they were good-hearted."

"Has Colonel Florés left?"

"No, not yet."

"Keep him here till tomorrow, no matter by what pretext."

"Why so?"

"Let me alone: you shall know. And now prepare to sustain an attack from the Indians: if my presentiments do not deceive me, it will be warm."

"What makes you suppose that?"

"Certain information I picked up for myself, and other still more important I obtained from Curumilla. So try to prevent the Mexican colonel leaving the camp, but do not let him suspect he is watched."

"It shall be done. You know that I trust to you for the precautions to be taken?"

"Externally, yes; but do you watch that the lines are not forced."

The greatest animation prevailed in the camp. Armories and smiths were busily working with feverish ardour to place weapons, carts, and gun carriages in working condition. On all sides joyous shouts and bursts of laughter could be heard; for these worthy adventurers had regained all their gaiety, now that there was a prospect of fighting; that is, of dealing and receiving blows.

Colonel Florés wandered about rather sadly in the midst of the confusion: his position was becoming difficult, and he felt it. Still he did not know how to prolong his stay among the Frenchmen, now that war was declared, and the interests of the company of which he was the delegate were completely laid aside; and thus the only plausible reason he could allege for remaining was cut away. Since the Frenchmen's arrival in Mexico the double character played by the colonel brought him handsome sums: his profession of spy, rendered easy by the confiding frankness of the adventurers, had been to him a source of enormous profit, and people do not give up without pain a lucrative engagement.

Thus the colonel's brow was anxious, for he racked his brains in vain for a plausible excuse to offer the count. In the height of his diplomatic combinations Valentine came to him, and told him, with the most innocent air possible, that Don Louis was seeking for him, and wished to speak with him. The colonel shuddered at the news: he thanked the hunter, and hastened to the count. Valentine looked after him with an ironical smile; and, certain that Louis would detain him long enough by his side, he commenced the execution of the plan he had prepared.

While all this was occurring night had set in—a gloomy and sad night, without a star in the sky. The clouds shot rapidly across the sickly disc of the moon, and intercepted its rays. The wind lamented sadly as it whistled through the branches of the trees, which dashed against each other with a lugubrious sound. In the mysterious depths of the forest could be heard growls and savage yells, mingled with the dashing of the cascade and the monotonous clashing of the pebbles rolled on the bank by the river. It was one of those nights in which nature seems to associate herself with human sorrows, and lament at the crimes for which her gloomy shadows serve as a veil.

By Valentine's orders the trees had been cut down for a distance of fifty yards round the camp, in order to clear the ground, and deprive the enemy of the chance of creeping up to the intrenchments unseen. On the space thus left free enormous fires were kindled at regular intervals. These fires, whose tall flames illumined the prairie for a considerable distance, formed a brilliant circle round the camp, which was itself plunged in complete obscurity. Not the slightest light flashed in the mission. The intrenchments appeared to be deserted—not a sentry could be seen. The mission had fallen back into the silence of solitude—all was calm and tranquil.

But this calm concealed the tempest. In the shadow palpitated the anxious hearts of the men who, with ear on the watch, and finger on the trigger, awaited motionless the arrival of their enemies. The hours, however, passed away slowly one after the other, and nothing justified the apprehensions expressed by Valentine as to a speedy attack.

The count was walking up and down the church which served as his retreat, listening anxiously to the slightest sounds that interrupted the silence at intervals. At times he turned an angry and impatient look upon the desert country, but nothing stirred—the same calm continued ever to oppress nature. Wearied by this long and enervating delay, he quitted the church, and proceeded toward the intrenchments. The adventurers were at their posts, stretched on the ground, each man with his hand on the trigger.

"Have you seen or heard nothing yet?" the count asked, though he knew beforehand the answer he would receive, and rather for the purpose of deceiving his impatience than with any other object.

"Nothing," Don Cornelio answered coldly, who happened to be close to him.

"Ah! it is you," the count said. "And Colonel Florés, what have you done with him?"

"I followed your instructions, commandant. He is asleep."

"You are sure of it?"

The Spaniard smiled.

"I guarantee that he will sleep at least till sunrise," he said. "I managed matters well."

"Very good; in that case we have nothing to fear from him."

"Nothing at all."

"Has anyone seen Don Valentine or the Indian chief?"

"No; they both went out at sunset, and have not reappeared since."

While speaking thus the two men were looking out, and their eyes attentively examined the plain: hence they made a gesture of surprise, almost of alarm, on suddenly perceiving a man who seemed to emerge from the ground, and rose between them like a phantom.

"*Válgame Dios!*" the superstitious Spaniard said as he crossed himself, "what is this?"

The count quickly drew a revolver from his girdle.

"Do not fire," the newcomer said as he laid his hand on the count's arm.

"Curumilla!" the count exclaimed in surprise.

"Silence!" the Araucano commanded.

"Where is Valentine?"

"He sent me."

"Then the redskins will not attack us this night?"

Curumilla regarded the count with amazement.

"Does not my brother see them?" he said.

"Where?" the count asked in astonishment.

"There!" Curumilla answered, stretching out his arm in the direction of the plain.

Don Louis and Don Cornelio looked out for several instants with the most sustained attention; but, in spite of all their efforts, they perceived nothing. The plain was still just as naked, lighted up by the ruddy glare from the braseros: here and there alone lay the trunks of the trees felled during the day to leave an open prospect.

"No," they said at length, "we see nothing."

"The eyes of the white men are closed at night," the chief muttered sententiously.

"But where are they?" the count asked impatiently. "Why did you not warn us?"

"My brother Koutonepi sends me for that purpose."

The name of Koutonepi—that is to say, the Valiant—had been given to Valentine by the Araucanos on his arrival in America, and Curumilla never called him otherwise.

"Then make haste to teach us, chief, that we may foil the accursed stratagem which these demons have doubtlessly invented."

"Let my brother warn his brothers to be ready to fight."

The word ran immediately along the line from one to the other. Curumilla then tranquilly shouldered his rifle, and aimed at a trunk of a tree rather nearer the intrenchments than the rest.

Never did a shot produce such an effect. A horrible yell rose from the plain, and a swarm of redskins, rising, as if moved by a spring, from behind the stems of trees that sheltered them, rushed toward the intrenchments, bounding like coyotes, uttering fearful yells, and brandishing their weapons furiously.

But the Frenchmen were prepared for this attack: they received the Indians at the bayonet point without recoiling an inch, and answering their ferocious yells with the unanimous shout of "VIVE LA FRANCE!"

From this moment war was, *de facto*, declared. The French had smelled powder, and the Mexicans were about to learn, at their own expense, what rude enemies they had so madly brought on themselves.

Still the redskins, led and animated by their chief, fought with extraordinary obstinacy. The majority of the Frenchmen who composed the company were ignorant of the way of fighting with the Indians, and it was the first time they had come into collision with them. While valiantly resisting them, and inflicting on them terrible losses, they could not refrain from admiring the audacious temerity of these men, who, half naked and wielding wretched weapons, yet rushed upon them with invincible courage, and only fell back when dead.

Suddenly a second band, more numerous than the first, and composed entirely of horsemen, burst on to the battlefield, and sustained the efforts of the assailants. The latter, feeling themselves supported, redoubled their yells and efforts. The medley became terrible: the combatants fought hand to hand, lacerating each other like wild beasts.

The French bugles and drums sounded the charge heartily.

"A sortie—a sortie!" the adventurers shouted, ashamed at being thus held in check by enemies apparently so insignificant.

"Kill, kill!"

The Indians responded with their war cry.

An Indian chief, mounted on a magnificent black horse, and with his body naked to the waist, curveted in the front rank of his men, dropping with his club every man that came within reach of his arm. Twice he had made his steed leap at the barricades, and twice he scaled them, though unable to clear them completely. This chief was Mixcoatzin. His black eye flashed with a sombre fire; his arm seemed indefatigable; and everyone withdrew from this terrible enemy, who was apparently invincible.

The sachem redoubled his boldness, incessantly urging on his men, and insulting the whites by his shouts and ironical gestures.

Suddenly a third troop appeared on the battlefield, which, owing to the braziers, was as light as day. But this troop, composed, like the second, of horsemen, instead of joining the Indians, formed a semicircle, and charged them furiously, shouting,—

"*A muerte—a muerte!*"

Valentine's powerful voice at this moment rose above the tumult of battle, and even reached those he wished to warn.

"Now is the time!" he shouted.

The count heard him. Turning then to fifty of the adventurers who had remained inactive since the beginning of the action, chafing and trailing their arms,—

"It is our turn, comrades!" he shouted as he drew his long sword. Then, opening the wicket, he bounded boldly into the *mêlée*, followed by his party, who rushed after him with shouts of joy. The Indians were caught between two fires—a thing which rarely happens—and compelled to fight in the open. Still they were not discouraged, for Indian bravery surpasses all belief. Finding themselves surrounded, they resolved to die bravely sooner than surrender; and though not nearly so well armed as their enemies, they received their attack with unlesened resolution.

But the Indians, on this occasion, had not to do with Mexicans, and soon discovered the difference. The charge of the Frenchmen was irresistible: they passed like a tornado through the redskins, who, in spite of their resolution, were compelled to give ground. But flight was impossible. Recalled by the voices of their chiefs, who, while themselves fighting bravely, did not cease to urge them to redouble their efforts, they returned to the combat. The struggle then assumed the gigantic proportions of a horrible carnage. It was no longer a battle, but a butchery, in which each sought to kill, caring little about falling himself, so long as he dragged down his foeman with him.

Valentine, the greater part of whose life had been spent in the desert, and who had frequently encountered the Indians, had never before seen them display so great animosity, and, above all,

such obstinacy; for usually, when they suffer a check, far from obstinately continuing a fight without any possible advantageous result for themselves, they retire immediately, and seek safety in a hurried flight; but this time their mode of fighting was completely changed, and it seemed that the more they recognised the impossibility of victory, the more anxious they felt to resist.

The count, ever in front of his comrades, whom he encouraged by his gestures and voice, tried to approach Mixcoatzin, who, still curveting on his black horse, performed prodigies of valour, which electrified his men, and threatened, if not to change the face of the combat, at any rate to prolong it. But each time that chance brought him in front of the chief, and he prepared to rush upon him, a crowd of combatants, driven back by the changing incidents of the fight, came between them, and neutralised his efforts.

For his part, the sachem also strove to approach the count, with whom he burned to measure himself, persuaded that, if he succeeded in killing the chief of the palefaces, the latter would be struck with terror, and abandon the battlefield.

At length, as if by mutual agreement, the white men and Indians fell back a few paces, doubtlessly to prepare for a final contest; and it was then that, for the first time since the combat, the count and the sachem found themselves face to face. The two men exchanged a flashing glance, and rushed upon each other furiously. Neither of the chiefs had firearms: the sachem brandished his terrible club, and the count waved his long sword, which was reddened to the hilt.

"At last!" the count shouted, as he raised his weapon over his head.

"Begging dog of the palefaces," the Indian said with a grin, "you bring me, then, your scalp, that I may attach it to the entrance of my cabin!"

They were only two paces from each other, each awaiting the favourable moment to rush on his enemy. On seeing their chiefs ready to engage, the two parties rushed forward impetuously, in order to separate them and recommence the combat; but Don Louis, with a gesture of supreme command, ordered his companions not to interfere. The adventurers remained motionless. On his side, Mixcoatzin, seeing the noble and gallant courtesy of the count, commanded his comrades to keep back. The redskins obeyed, and the question was left to be decided between Don Louis and the sachem.

CHAPTER VI.

REPRISALS.

The two enemies hesitated for a moment; but suddenly the sachem bounded forward. The count remained motionless; but at the moment the Indian reached him, with a movement rapid as thought, he seized the nostrils of the chief's horse with the left hand, so that it reared with a shriek of pain, and thrust his sword into the Indian's throat: the latter's lifted arm fell down, his eyes opened widely, a jet of blood poured from the gaping wound, and he rolled on the ground, uttering a yell of agony, and writhing like a serpent. The count placed his foot on the chief's chest, and nailed him to the ground. Then he shouted to his comrades in a powerful voice,—

"Forward—forward!"

The adventurers responded by a shout of triumph, and rushed once more on the redskins. But the latter no longer awaited their attack. Terrified by the death of Mixcoatzin, one of their most revered sachems, a panic seized upon them, and they fled in every direction. Then began a real manhunt, with all its hideous and atrocious interludes. As we have said, the Indians were surrounded: flight had become impossible. The adventurers, exasperated by the long contest they had been obliged to sustain, pitilessly massacred their conquered enemies, who would have implored mercy in vain. The distracted Indians ran hither and thither, sabred as they passed, transfixed by bayonets, and trampled underfoot by the horses, which, as cruel as their masters, and intoxicated by the sharp odour of blood, stamped on them frenziedly. The corpses were piled up in the centre of the fatal circle which incessantly closed in around them.

Their courage and strength all exhausted, the wretched redskins had thrown away their arms, and, with their hands crossed on their chests, they gave up any further struggle for life, and awaited death with that gloomy calmness of despair and stoicism which characterises their race.

The count had wished for a long time to arrest this horrible carnage; but, in the intoxication of victory, his orders were not so much disobeyed as unheard. Still the Frenchmen stopped, struck with admiration at the sight of the stoical resignation displayed by their brave enemies, who disdained to ask mercy, and prepared to die worthily, without any weakness or bravado. The Frenchmen hesitated, looked at one another, and then raised their bayonets. The count profited by this truce, and rushed before his men, brandishing in the air his sword, reddened to the hilt.

"Enough, comrades," he shouted, "enough! We are soldiers, not hangmen or butchers. Leave to the Mexicans all cowardly acts, and remain what you have ever been—brave and clement men. Mercy for these poor wretches!"

"Mercy—mercy!" the Frenchmen shouted as they brandished their weapons above their heads.

At this moment the sun rose gloriously in a flood of vapour. It was a scene at once imposing and

full of sublime horror which the battlefield offered—still smoking with the last explosions of the firearms, covered with corpses, and in the midst of which thirty disarmed men appeared to bid defiance to a circle of men stained with blood and powder, and whose features were contracted by passion.

The count then returned his sword to its scabbard, and walked slowly toward the Indians, who watched his approach restlessly; for they understood nothing of what had just occurred. The Indians are implacable, and clemency is unknown to them. In the prairies the only law is *va victis*. The redskins, being pitiless, never implore the mercy of their foes, and endure unmurmuring the harsh law which it may please their conquerors to mete out to them.

The adventurers had piled their arms, and had already forgotten all their rancour: they were laughing and talking gaily together. Valentine and Curumilla had rejoined the count.

"What is your intention?" the hunter asked.

"Have you not guessed it?" Louis replied. "I pardon them."

"All?"

"Of course," he said with surprise.

"Then you will restore them to liberty?"

"Yes."

"Hum!" the hunter said.

"Do you see anything to prevent it?"

"Possibly."

"Explain yourself."

"I see no harm in your forgiving the Indians, for that may produce a good effect among the tribes, especially as the redskins have an excellent memory, and will long remember the severe lesson they received this night."

"Well?"

"But," the hunter went on, "all those men are not Indians."

"What do you mean?"

"That there are disguised Mexicans among them."

"You are certain of that?"

"Yes, the more so because I was warned by the man who commands the horsemen that proved such useful auxiliaries to you."

"But are not those horsemen Apaches?"

"You are mistaken, my dear friend: they are white men, and what is more, *cívicos*; that is to say, men paid and enrolled by the hacenderos to chase the Indians. You see how honourably they carry out their duties; but that must not astonish you, for you are sufficiently well acquainted with the manners of this country to find that perfectly natural, I have no doubt."

Louis stopped thoughtfully.

"What you tell me confounds me," he muttered.

"Why so?" the hunter replied carelessly. "It is, on the contrary, most simple. But we have not to trouble ourselves about the horsemen at present—they are beside the question."

"Certainly. Indeed, I owe them my thanks."

"They will save you the trouble, and I too. Let us only deal with the men down there."

"Then you are sure there are white men among them?"

"Quite sure."

"But how to recognise them?"

"Curumilla will undertake that."

"What you tell me is strange. For what purpose are these men leagued with our enemies?"

"We shall soon know that."

They then went on, and stood by the group. Valentine made a sign to Curumilla: the chief then approached the Indians, and began examining them attentively in turn, the count and Valentine watching him with considerable interest. The Araucano was as cold and gloomy as usual—not a muscle of his face quivered. On seeing him examine them thus, the Indians could not refrain from shuddering: they trembled at the sight of this dumb and unarmed man, whose piercing glance seemed to try and read their hearts; Curumilla laid his finger on an Indian's chest.

"One!" he said, and passed on.

"Come out!" Valentine said to the redskin.

The latter stood apart.

Curumilla pointed out in this way nine in succession, and then rejoined his comrades.

"Is that all?" Valentine asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Disarm those men, and bind them firmly," the count commanded.

His orders being obeyed, Don Louis then walked up to the Apaches.

"My brothers may take their arms and mount their horses again," he said. "They are valiant warriors. The palefaces have appreciated their courage, and esteem them. My brothers will return to their villages, and tell the old men and sages of their nation that the palefaces who have conquered them are not cruel men, like the ferocious Yoris, and that they desire to bury the hatchet so deeply between themselves and the Apaches, that it may never be found again for ten thousand years."

An Indian advanced from the group, and saluted majestically.

"Strong Heart is a terrible warrior: he is a jaguar during the combat, but he becomes an antelope after the victory. The words his breast breathes are inspired in him by the Great Spirit—the Wacondah loves him. My nation was deceived by the Yoris. Strong Heart is generous—he has pardoned. Henceforth there will be friendship between the Apaches and the warriors of Strong Heart."

The redskins, according to their custom, had, with that poesy which distinguishes them, given Don Louis the name of Strong Heart.

After this address on the part of the Indian, who was a celebrated chief, and known as the White Buffalo, there was an interchange of good offices between the adventurers and Apaches. Their horses and arms were returned to them, and the ranks were opened to let them pass. When they had disappeared in the forest, El Buitre ordered his men to wheel, and retired in his turn. Don Louis for a moment had the idea of recalling this auxiliary, who had been so useful to him during the action; but Valentine opposed it.

"Let those men go, brother," he said to him. "You must not have any public relations with them."

Don Louis did not insist.

"Now," Valentine went on, "let us finish what we have so well begun."

"That is right," the count answered.

The order was at once given to bury the dead and attend to the wounded. The Frenchmen had suffered a serious loss: they had ten men killed and twenty odd wounded. It is true that the majority of these wounds were not mortal; still the victory cost dearly: it was a warning for the future.

Two hours later the company, assembled by the bugle call, ranged themselves silently in the mission square, in the centre of which Don Louis, Valentine, and three officers were gravely seated at a table, on which lay sundry papers. Don Cornelio was writing at a smaller table. The count had summoned his comrades, and appointed a court martial, of which he was president, in order to try the prisoners captured during the fight. Don Louis rose amidst a solemn silence.

"Bring forward the prisoners," he said.

The men previously pointed out by Curumilla appeared, led by a detachment of adventurers, and were freed from their bonds. Although they still wore the costume of Apache warriors, they had been compelled to wash themselves, and remove the paint that disguised them. These men appeared not so much to repent of their detected roguery, but merely ashamed of being made a public spectacle.

"Bring in the last prisoner," Don Louis commanded.

At this order the adventurers looked round in surprise, not understanding what the count meant, for the nine Mexicans were all present. But at the expiration of a moment their surprise was changed into anger, and a dull murmur ran along their ranks like an electric current.

Colonel Florés had made his appearance. He was unarmed, and his head bare; but his face, stamped with boldness and defiance, had a gloomily malicious expression, which gave him a most unpleasant appearance. Curumilla accompanied him. The count made a sign, and silence was re-established.

"What is the meaning of this?" the colonel asked in a haughty tone.

Don Louis did not allow him to continue.

"Silence!" he said in a firm voice, turning a flashing glance upon him.

Subdued, in spite of himself, by the count's accent, the colonel blushed and remained silent. Don Louis continued:—

"Brothers and comrades," he said, "unfortunately for us, circumstances have placed us in an exceptional situation. On all sides treachery surrounds us. By falsehood after falsehood, trick upon trick, they have led us onto this desert, where we are abandoned to ourselves, far from all help, and having our courage alone to count upon to save us. Yesterday Don Sebastian Guerrero, believing himself at length sure of the success of his infamous plans, which he has so long been forming against us, decided on raising the mask. He declared us outlaws, and branded us with the disgraceful epithet of pirates. Scarce two hours after his departure we were attacked by Indians. Our enemies' measures were well calculated, and were within an ace of success. But God

was on the watch, and saved us this time again. Now, do you know the man who made himself the generals right arm, and carried into effect the odious treachery of which we were so nearly the victims?

"This man," he said, pointing with his finger with an expression of crushing contempt, "is the villain who, since our departure from Guaymas, has attached himself to us, and never left us. He pretended to love and defend us, that he might surprise our secrets, and sell them to our enemies. It is the wretch whom we treated as a brother—to whom we offered the most delicate and enduring attention. It is the man, lastly, who assumes the title of colonel, and name of Francisco Florés, and who lied in doing so; for he is a nameless half-breed, surnamed El Garrucholo, ex-lieutenant of El Buitre, that ferocious brigand who commands a *cuadrilla* of salteadores that has desolated Upper Mexico for several years. Look at him! Now that he is detected, he trembles—villain that he is; for he knows that the supreme hour of justice has rung for him."

In fact, at this terrible revelation, thus made in the presence of all, the bandit's boldness suddenly gave way, and an expression of hideous terror contracted his features.

"See," the count continued, "the men whom our enemies are not ashamed to employ against us; and yet they treat us as pirates! Well, we accept this brand, brothers; and these bandits who have fallen into our hands shall be judged according to the summary law of pirates."

The adventurers warmly applauded their chief's address. Besides, all recognised the truth and logic of his remarks. In the critical situation in which they found themselves they could forgive nothing: clemency would have been culpable weakness. They could only regain their position by boldness and energy, by terrifying their foes, and compelling them to treat with them. The count sat down again.

"Don Cornelio," he said, "read to the accused the charges brought against him."

The Spaniard rose, and began a long charge against the colonel, supported by numerous letters written by Don Francisco, or received by him from various persons, principally General Guerrero, which clearly and indubitably proved the colonel's guilt. Don Cornelio finished by describing the interview on the previous day between Don Francisco, El Buitre, and the Apache chief. The adventurers listened to this long enumeration of crimes and felonies in the most profound silence. When Don Cornelio had ended the count addressed the colonel.

"Do you recognise the truth of the charge brought against you?"

The bandit raised his head: his mind was made up, and he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Of what use to deny?" he said. "It is all true."

"Then you confess that you have betrayed us since the first moment we met?"

"*Canarios!*" he said, with a mocking smile, "you are mistaken, señor conde. I betrayed you even before I knew you."

At this cynical declaration no one present could repress a start of horror.

"Does what I say astonish you?" the bandit continued boldly. "Why so? I consider my conduct perfectly natural. What are you to us Mexicans but strangers? You are leeches, who come to our country to suck the brightest of our blood; that is to say, to gorge yourselves with our riches, deride our ignorance, turn into ridicule our manners and customs, and impose on us your tastes, and what you call your Western civilisation. By what right do you seize on all that is dear to us? You are only ferocious beasts, to destroy whom all measures are justifiable. If we are not the stronger in the sunshine, well, we have the night. Loyalty and frankness would ruin us, so we employ falsehood and treachery. What next? Who is wrong—who is right? Who will dare to be judge between us? No one. I have fallen into your hands: you are going to kill me. Very good. I shall be assassinated, but not condemned by you, for you have no authority by which to try me. What more do you want? Act as you think proper: it does not trouble me. He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind. I have sown trickery—I have reaped treason. It is but just. I am about to die. Well, you have no right to inflict on me this death which I have deserved. Your verdict will be a murder, I repeat."

After pronouncing these words he folded his arms on his chest, and boldly surveyed his auditors. In spite of themselves the adventurers felt moved by a species of admiration for the savage resolution of this man, with his feline and crafty manner, who had suddenly revealed himself in so different a light from that in which they had hitherto known him. In speaking with such brutal frankness the bandit had, as it were, raised himself in the eyes of all. His roguery appeared less vile; he inspired a sort of sympathy in these brave men, for whom courage and virtue are the first two virtues.

"Then you do not even try to defend yourself?" Don Louis said sorrowfully.

"Defend myself," he said in amazement, "for having acted as I thought it my duty to do, and as I should act again if you were such fools as to pardon me! Come, caballeros, that is not common sense. Besides, if I defended myself, I should to a certain extent recognise the competency of your tribunal, and I absolutely deny it; so, believe me, you had better finish with me—the sooner the better, both for you and me."

The count rose, took off his hat, and, addressing the adventurers, said in a solemn voice,—

"Friends and comrades, on your soul and conscience, is this man guilty?"

"Yes!" the adventurers answered in a hollow voice.

"What punishment has this man merited?" the count continued.

"Death!" the adventurers replied simultaneously.

The count then turned to the colonel.

"Don Francisco Florés, otherwise called El Garrucholo, you are condemned to the penalty of death."

"Thanks!" he said, with a graceful bow.

"But," the count continued, "as you are convicted of treason, and must suffer the death of traitors—that is, be shot in the back—taking into consideration the uniform you wear, which is that of the Mexican army, which we do not wish to disgrace in your person, you will be first degraded: the judgment will be executed immediately after."

The bandit shrugged his shoulders.

"What do I care?" he said.

At a sign from the count a non-commissioned officer stepped from the ranks, and the degradation commenced. El Garrucholo endured this frightful humiliation without turning pale: the bandit had in him completely gained the mastery over the caballero, and, as he said, he cared little about being degraded—that is to say, dishonoured—because honour to him was as nothing. When the subaltern had returned to the ranks the count again addressed the condemned man.

"You have five minutes to commend your soul to God," he said to him. "May He be merciful to you! You have nothing more to expect in this world from men."

The bandit burst into a hoarse laugh.

"You are all fools!" he shouted. "What have I in common with God, if really He exist? I had better recommend myself to the demon, into whose clutches I shall fall, if what the monks say is true."

At this frightful blasphemy the adventurers gave a start of terror; but El Garrucholo did not seem to notice it.

"I have," he continued, "only one favour more to ask of you."

"Speak!" the count replied, suppressing a gesture of disgust.

"I wear round my neck, hanging by a steel chain, a little velvet bag, containing a blessed relic, which my mother gave me, telling me it would bring me good fortune. Since my birth this scapulary has never left me. I desire it to be buried with me. Perhaps it will be of use to me down there where I am bound."

"What you desire shall be done," the count answered.

"Thanks!" he said with evident satisfaction.

Strange anomaly of the Mexican character! This people is credulous and superstitious, without faith and without belief—a childish people, too long enslaved, and too quickly liberated, which has not had the time either to forget or to learn.

"The picket!" the count commanded.

Eight men, commanded by a corporal, stepped from the ranks. The bandit knelt, with his back turned to the executioners.

"Present—fire!"

El Garrucholo fell, shot in the back, not uttering a sigh: he was stark dead. His body was covered with a zarapé.

"Now," the count said coldly, "for the rest."

The nine prisoners were brought up to the table: they were trembling, for the summary justice of the adventurers filled them with terror. A great noise was at this moment heard a short distance off, mingled with shouts and imprecations; and suddenly two females, mounted on magnificent horses, galloped into the middle of the square, when they stopped. They were Doña Angela and her waiting maid, Violanta.

Doña Angela's hair was dishevelled; her features were animated, probably by the speed at which she had come; and her eyes flashed flames. She remained for a moment motionless amid the crowd surprised at her sudden appearance. But, seeming suddenly to form a supreme resolution, she raised her head haughtily, and addressed the attentive adventurers, who were struck with admiration at so much boldness united to such beauty.

"Listen!" she said in a piercing voice. "I, Doña Angela, daughter of the Governor of Sonora, have come here to protest boldly, in the sight of all, against the treachery of which my father makes you the victims. Don Louis, chief of the French pirates, I love you! Will you accept me as your wife?"

A thunder of applause greeted these strange words, which were uttered with extraordinary animation. Don Louis slowly drew nearer the maiden, as if fascinated and attracted by her glance.

"Come," he said to her, "come, as you do not fear to ally yourself to misfortune."

The girl uttered a scream of joy that resembled a yell; and abandoning her reins, she bounded

like a panther, and fell into the arms of the count, who pressed her frenziedly against his manly breast. Then, after a moment, still holding her in his embrace, he proudly raised his head, and looked commandingly around.

"This lady is the wife of the chief of the pirates, my brothers. Love her as a sister: she will be our palladium—our guardian angel."

The intoxication of the adventurers cannot be described: it was madness. This strange scene appeared to them a dream. The count then turned to the prisoners, who awaited their sentence in tremor.

"Begone!" he said to them. "Go and narrate what you have seen. Doña Angela pardons you."

The prisoners left the square, uttering benedictions innumerable. The poor fellows, after all that had passed in their presence, regarded themselves as dead men. Valentine drew near the maiden.

"You are an angel," he said to her in a low voice. "Will you persevere?"

"I am his to the tomb," she answered with a feverish energy.

CHAPTER VII.

GUETZALLI.

Were we writing a romance there are many details we would leave in the shade, many facts we should pass over in silence. Unfortunately we are only historians, and, as such, compelled to the most scrupulous exactitude.

In the first episode of this history we related how the Count de Lhorailles, at the head of 150 Frenchmen, selected from the colony of Guetzalli, which he had founded, let himself be led in pursuit of the Apache Indians into the great Del Norte desert; and how, after wandering about with his party in the midst of this ocean of shifting sand, and seeing his bravest comrades fall around him, he had blown out his brains, while, in a few hours after his death, the few Frenchmen who survived this great disaster succeeded in emerging from the desert and regaining the road to the colony.

The Frenchmen left at Guetzalli beheld the arrival of the relics of the expedition with stupor, and the news of the Count de Lhorailles' death completed their demoralisation. Abandoned without chiefs, so far from their country, in the midst of an enemy's territory, exposed at any moment to the attacks of the Apaches, they gave way to despair, and seriously revolved the question of leaving the colony and returning to the seacoast. The Count de Lhorailles, who founded the settlement, was, in fact, the soul of it. He dead, his companions felt in themselves neither the necessary energy nor strength to continue his work—a work which, indeed, they knew but imperfectly, for the count had no confidants among the men who had joined him. Jealous of his power, and naturally of a reserved temper, he had never confided to anyone his plans or his projects.

The Frenchmen who had followed him—for the most part greedy adventurers, devoured by that inextinguishable thirst for gold which had made them give up everything to go to America—had been cruelly deceived in their hopes, when, on disembarking in Mexico, that classic land of riches, the count, instead of leading them to gold or silver mines, which they would have worked and filled their pockets abundantly, took them to the Mexican frontier, and forced them to, till the soil.

Thus, when the first moment of stupor had passed, each colonist, acting under the impression of his own will, began his preparations for departure, in his heart well pleased at seeing an exile thus terminated which was beset by dangers, while offering none of the advantages of the situation. It was all over with the colony; but fortunately, wherever a number of Frenchmen are assembled, when the indispensable man disappears, another immediately arises, who, impelled by the circumstances, reveals himself suddenly to the great amazement of his comrades, and frequently of himself.

Among the colonists at Guetzalli was a young man scarce thirty years of age, but gifted with an ardent imagination and a far from common intellect. This young man, whose name was Charles de Laville, had left Europe, impelled rather by a certain restlessness of character and secret curiosity than by a desire to acquire the boasted riches of San Francisco. In that city, to which he proceeded with his brother, an older and more earnest man than himself, chance had made him acquainted with the Count de Lhorailles. The count exercised, perhaps unconsciously, an irresistible influence even over those who knew him superficially. When he organised his expedition he had no difficulty in taking with him Charles de Laville, who followed him in spite of his brother's wise recommendations.

The count, who was a connoisseur in his fellow-men, appreciated at its full value the honourable and disinterested character of Charles de Laville. Thus he was the only one of all his companions with whom he at times spoke almost freely, and imparted to him some of his plans. He knew that the young man would never turn this confidence against him, but that, on the contrary, under all circumstances, he would aid him to the utmost of his power. When the count was on the point of starting on that disastrous expedition from which he was fated never to return—an expedition

which de Laville obstinately opposed—it was to the latter gentleman that he intrusted the government and management of the colony during his absence, persuaded that in his hands the affairs of Guetzalli could not but prosper. De Laville accepted the confidential situation against his will. It was a heavy burden for him, so young and inexperienced, to maintain an active surveillance over men to whom any restraint, however slight, was insupportable, and who only obeyed with a secret murmur the will of the count, for whom they experienced a respect mingled with fear.

Still, against his expectations, and perhaps his hopes, Charles de Laville succeeded, in a very short time, not only in securing the unmurmuring obedience of his countrymen, but also in gaining their love. It was owing to this influence which he contrived to gain over the colonists that, when the remnants of the expedition arrived at Guetzalli, he succeeded in restoring some degree of order in the colony, arousing the courage of his comrades, and taking the proper defensive measures in the probable event of an Apache attack.

He gave the first outburst of grief time to calm; he waited the subsidence of the exaggerated anger of one party, and the equally exaggerated fears of another; and when he perceived that, excepting the profound discouragement that had seized on all, and made them desire a speedy retreat, their minds were beginning to regain their ordinary lucidity, he summoned the colonists to a general meeting. The latter eagerly obeyed, and assembled in the large courtyard in front of the main building. When de Laville was assured that all the colonists were assembled, and anxiously awaiting the communication he had to make to them, he claimed a few moments' attention and took the word.

"Gentlemen," he said, with that facility of speech he possessed in an eminent degree, "I am the youngest, and certainly the most inexperienced of all present; hence it would not become me to speak at this moment, when such grave interests, and of such great importance, occupy us. Still, perhaps, the confidence the Count de Lhorailles was kind enough to place in me will authorise me in taking the present step of addressing you."

"Speak, speak—you are worthy of that confidence!" the colonists shouted tumultuously.

Thus encouraged, the young man smiled pleasantly and continued:—

"It is true that a great disaster has fallen on us: many of our companions have perished miserably in the great Del Norte desert. The count who brought us here, our chief, is dead too. I repeat it, it is an immense loss for us generally, and for the welfare of the colony. But is the misfortune, though so terrible, irreparable? Ought we, through this death, to lose all our courage, and abandon a task which is scarce commenced? I do not think so, nor do you."

At these words a few slight murmurs were heard. The young man looked calmly around his audience, and silence was re-established as if by enchantment.

"No," he continued forcibly, "you do not think so yourselves. You are undergoing at this moment the influence of the catastrophe that has overwhelmed us: discouragement has seized upon you. It must be so; but you will soon reflect on the consequences of the act you are meditating, and the chance that will result from it for yourselves. What! two hundred Frenchmen—that is to say, the bravest men in existence—would fly through fear of the lances and arrows of those Apaches whom it is their mission to hold in check? What would the Mexicans think, in whose opinion you have stood so high up to the present day? What would your brethren in California say? In the sight of all you would have lost honour and reputation; for you would have betrayed your duties, and not forced that name and title of Frenchmen, of which you are so proud, to be respected in these savage countries."

At these rude words, uttered with that accent which comes from the heart, so suited to move the masses, the colonists began, in spite of themselves to regard the question under a different light, and feel inwardly ashamed of the flight they meditated. Still they were not yet convinced, the more so as the position remained the same; that is to say, excessively critical. Thus the shouts, murmurs, and objections crossed each other with extreme rapidity, each wishing to offer his advice, and have his opinion accepted, as generally happens in popular meetings. One of the colonists succeeded with great difficulty in gaining the word, and addressed the young man.

"There is truth in what you say to us, M. Charles: still we cannot remain in our present situation—a situation which becomes daily more aggravated, and threatens soon to grow insupportable. What is the remedy for the evil?"

"The remedy is easy to find," the young man answered quickly. "Is it my place to point it out to you?"

"Yes, yes!" all exclaimed.

"Well, then, I consent. Listen to me."

There was immediately profound silence.

"We are two hundred strong—resolute and intelligent men. Can we not find among us, then, a chief worthy of commanding us? We have lost the man who has hitherto guided us; but must we say that, since he is dead, no one can take his place? That supposition would be absurd. The Count de Lhorailles was not immortal. We must have expected to lose him sooner or later, and unfortunately that foreseen catastrophe has occurred ere it was expected. Is that a reason to let ourselves be demoralised and downcast? No; let us raise our heads again, regain our courage, and elect as our chief the man who offers us the best guarantees of intelligence and loyalty. Such a man may be easily found among you. Come, comrades, let us have no delay, but vote on the

spot. When our chief is nominated and recognised by all, we shall no longer fear perils or sufferings, for we shall have a head to guide us, and an arm to support us."

These words raised the joy and enthusiasm of the colonists to the highest pitch. They broke up into groups of three or four, and agitated the question eagerly of the chief they should select.

During this period, de Laville, apparently indifferent to what was passing, re-entered the house, leaving his companions full and entire liberty to act as they pleased. We will observe that the advice given by the young man was disinterested on his part: he had no intention of taking upon himself the heavy responsibility of a command which he did not at all desire. His object in urging the Frenchmen to elect a chief had been to prevent the ruin of the colony, which had been founded scarce a year, which, owing to their combined efforts and toil, was beginning to give good results, and which, if the colonists did not disperse, would soon enter on a career of prosperity, and repay them a hundredfold for their troubles and fatigue.

The discussion among the colonists was lengthy: in all the groups orators were speaking warmly; in short, there seemed no chance of an agreement. Still, by degrees, the effervescence calmed down; the parties drew nearer; and under the influence of a few men more intelligent or better disposed than the rest, the discussion went on more regularly and seriously. At length, after many disputes, the colonists were unanimous, and selected one among them to tell Charles de Laville the result of their deliberations. The man selected entered the house, while the colonists arranged themselves with some degree of order before the gate.

Charles, as we have said, did not trouble himself at all about what was going on outside. The death of the count, to whom, in spite of the latter's eccentric character, he was really attached, had not only saddened him, but broken the last ties that attached him to this forgotten nook of earth, where he believed that there was nothing left for him to do. He therefore only awaited the election of the new chief to bid good-by to the members of the company, and then separate from them. When the man delegated by the colonists entered the room where he was, he raised his head, and looked earnestly at him.

"Well," he asked him, "have we a new chief at last?"

"Yes," the other answered laconically.

"Who is he?" the young man asked with some curiosity.

"Our comrades will tell you, M. Charles," he replied. "They have authorised me to ask you to have the kindness to be present at the election, and thus sanction it."

"That is only right," he said with a smile. "I forgot that, up to the present, I have been your chief, and that I must hand over to the leader you have selected the power the count delegated to me. I follow you."

The other bowed without a word, and both left the house. When they appeared in the gateway, the colonists, hitherto silent, uttered a formidable shout, while waving their hats and handkerchiefs in signs of joy. The young man turned quite surprised to his companion, but the latter merely smiled. After this explosion of shouts of welcome, silence was at once restored. Then the delegate removed his hat, and after bowing respectfully to the young man, who was all confused, and hardly knew which way to look, said in a loud and perfectly distinct voice,—

"Charles de Laville, we, the colonists of Guetzalli, after assembling, in accordance with your advice, to proceed to the election of a new chief, have recognised that you alone combine all the conditions necessary worthily to fill that post to which the confidence of the chief we have lost called you. In consequence, wishing to honour in you the memory of our deceased chief, at the same time as we desire to prove to you our gratitude for the way in which you have governed us since you have been at our head, we unanimously appoint you captain of Guetzalli, persuaded that you will continue to command us with as much nobility, intelligence, and justice as you have hitherto displayed."

Then, taking from one of the colonists the charter which united all the members of the colony, and which the count had made them all sign when he enlisted them, he unfolded it.

"Captain," he said, "this charter-party, read in a loud voice by me, will be immediately sworn to by all. Will you swear on your side to protect us, to defend us, and give us good and loyal justice toward and against all?"

The young man took off his hat, extended his arm toward the crowd, and said in a firm voice,—

"I swear it."

"Long live the captain!" the colonists shouted enthusiastically. "The charter—the charter!"

The reading commenced. After each article the colonists answered in one voice,—

"I swear it."

There was something imposing in the aspect of this scene. These men, with their energetic features and bronzed faces, thus assembled in the heart of the desert, surrounded by the grand scenery, swearing in the face of heaven unbounded devotion and obedience, bore a striking likeness to the famous filibusters of the sixteenth century preparing to attempt one of their bold expeditions, and swearing on the charter in the hands of Montbars the exterminator, or any other renowned chief of Tortoise Island.

When the reading was completed a fresh outbreak of shouts closed this simple ceremony of the election of a chief of adventurers in the deserts of the New World. This time—accidentally,

perchance—the choice of all had fallen on the most worthy. Charles de Laville was really the only man capable of repairing the disasters of the late expedition, and leading the colony back to that prosperous path on which it was progressing previously to the death of Lhorailles.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENVOY.

The election over, all, in appearance, returned to the old routine, or at least seemed to re-assume its normal condition. Still it was not so. The Count de Lhorailles, in dying, had borne with him the hopes of the adventurers, whom he had only kept together through his resolute and enterprising character. With his fall, matters began to change, and difficulties spring up.

The Mexican authorities, in whom the indomitable will of the count had alone inspired an apparent kindness toward the colonists, whom they had never liked to see establish themselves on the territory of the Republic, no longer apprehending the vengeance of the man they had learned to fear while learning to know him, very gently and craftily inaugurated a system of minor annoyances, which was already beginning to render the position of the French difficult, and would soon cause it to be intolerable, unless the latter employed an energetic remedy for this state of things, which grew hourly worse. On the other hand, though the colony was so remote from the seaboard, rumours of what was going on in the rest of the world reached it at intervals. Emigrants in troops passed through Guetzalli: all were proceeding to California, for that was the promised land at the moment.

All these emigrants—gambusinos, or Mexican adventurers—only dreamed of inexhaustible placers and mines of immense wealth. The gold fever—that horrible malady which the English so well stigmatised by energetically calling it the "metallic gold fever"—was at its height. From all corners of the world, Europeans, Asiatics, Africans, Americans, Polynesians, adventurers of every description, settled like swarms of ill-omened locusts on this country, which was destined to prove fatal to them, and swallow them up after unheard-of sufferings.

In this impious crusade of the vilest appetites the watchword was "Gold—gold!" These men, who abandoned country, family, everything, in a word, had only one desire—to amass gold. It was a hideous sight. And these bands succeeded each other at the colony, with their eyes obstinately fixed on the horizon, and only replying two words to the questions asked them: "California—placers." In order to conquer this metal king all means would be good to them: nothing would check them. They were ready for anything—to commit the most odious crimes, the most infamous treachery, the most ignoble acts of cowardice.

Unfortunately for the colonists, the adventurers who passed near their abode all belonged to the most ignorant, corrupted, and ferocious classes of Mexico. In spite of themselves, the Frenchmen, whose object had been, at the outset, to work the mines, felt the desire aroused in them to return to the Eldorado they had left, and demand their share of the spoil. A man, however strong he may be, cannot with impunity hear the word "gold" constantly buzzing in his ears. In the strange connection of these four letters there is an immense attractive power, which sharpens up avarice, and arouses all the evil instincts.

The colonists of Guetzalli were honest and frank adventurers. The majority had quitted Europe with the desire of enriching themselves rapidly in that mysterious country about which they heard such marvels. Subdued by the ascendancy the count had managed to acquire over them, they had tacitly accepted the position made for them, and, by the aid of habit, had gradually come, not to forget their past desires, but to consider them as mocking chimeras and unrealisable dreams. The events which afterwards happened in the colony, and the golden halo suddenly spread abroad by California, gave a body to these dreams, and enkindled their covetousness to the highest pitch.

Charles de Laville followed with a shudder the progress of this moral disorganisation of the colony. He understood in his heart that the enemy he must conquer, in order to become once more master of his companions, was that old adventurous leaven which still fomented in their hearts, and caused them to hate the calm and peaceful life they led, instead of that agitated existence, with its strange interludes, to which they secretly aspired, perhaps without suspecting it themselves. For it is a singular anomaly in the human heart that these men, who wished for gold at any price, who coveted it with unequalled frenzy, and who, to possess it, braved the most terrible perils, and suffered the most horrible misery, did not care for it when they possessed it, but regarded it with disdain, and threw it uncounted on the tables of the gambling houses, or of places still more infamous. It might be said that the gold so painfully amassed burned their fingers, and they were anxious to get rid of it. And that was true, especially in the case of the French. Gold with them had no value except in proportion to the difficulties they met with in acquiring it. True adventurers in the fullest sense of the term, what they loved was not the gold for itself, but the struggles it cost them, and the energy and courage they must expend in its research.

Charles was thoroughly acquainted with the character of the men he commanded. He knew that, in order to keep them with him, it would be sufficient to supply an outlet for this superabundance of sap, this vivacity of imagination, which filled the hearts and heads of these extraordinary men. But how to obtain this result? What means should he employ? Charles racked his brains in vain:

the spark did not strike—there was no light he could throw on the matter.

About this time two Frenchmen, who had formed part of the count's last expedition, and who were believed long ago dead, reappeared at Guetzalli. Great was the amazement of all on seeing them, although so haggard, half naked, and scarce able to stand; but still greater grew that amazement when, two days after their return, on finding themselves slightly recovered, owing to the kind attentions shown them, and able to speak, they commenced the incredible narrative of their adventures.

What had happened to them may be told in fewer words than the men employed. The frightful hurricane that assailed the count's band had surprised them some distance from the spot where their companions had taken refuge, and rendered it impossible to rejoin them. They sheltered themselves as well as they could during the tempest; but when it was over, they perceived, to their horror, that every trace, every footmark, had disappeared.

Before them, behind them, and around them extended the desert, gloomy, naked, and desolate. As far as their eye could reach they perceived on all sides sand—sand everywhere and always. Then they believed themselves lost; despair took possession of them; and they fell back on the ground, resolved to await death, which would doubtless soon arrive to put an end to their misery. They remained thus side by side, with drooping heads and lacklustre eyes, in that state of complete apathy which seizes on the strongest men after great catastrophes, suspends in them the inward feeling of self, and interrupts their thoughts.

How long did they remain in this condition? They were unable to tell. They no longer lived, they no longer felt—they vegetated. They were suddenly aroused from this extraordinary listlessness by the appearance of a band of Apache Indians, who galloped round them, uttering ferocious yells, and brandishing their long lances with an air of defiance and menace. The Indians seized them, as they were incapable of offering the slightest resistance, and led them to one of their villages, where they kept them in a state of the most disgraceful and humiliating slavery.

But the energy of the two adventurers, for an instant crushed, soon gained the mastery again over their hearts. With extreme patience, skill, and dissimulation they made the preparations for their flight. We will not enter into any details as to the manner in which they succeeded in escaping from the watchfulness of their guardians, and managed at length to reach the colony by a roundabout road, crushed with fatigue, and half dead with hunger, but arrive at once at the most important point in their narrative.

These men declared to the colonists that the village to which the Apaches led them was built within gunshot of a placer of incalculable value—that this placer was extremely easy to work, as the gold was on the surface. As a proof of their veracity they showed several nuggets of the finest gold, which they had managed to secure, and pledged themselves to lead to this placer, which was not more than ten days' journey from the colony, any of the adventurers who would consent to take them as guides, assuring them that they would be amply rewarded for their toil and fatigue by the rich harvest they would obtain.

This recital greatly interested the colonists. Charles de Laville, in particular, lent a lively attention to it. He made the men repeat their story several times, and they did not once vary from their original statement. The captain had at length found the means he had been vainly searching so long. Now he was certain not only that his comrades would not abandon him, but that they would obey him blindly in all that he thought proper to order them. The same day he informed the colonists that he was preparing an expedition to go in search of the placer, dislodge the Indians, and work it for the profit of all the paction.

The news was received with transports of joy, and de Laville immediately began carrying out his plan. Although the number of colonists had greatly diminished (for frequent desertions had taken place), still Guetzalli counted nearly two hundred colonists. It was of the utmost importance to the gold-seekers to keep up the colony, as the only place whence they could obtain provisions when at the mine; for, as we have said, Guetzalli, as the advanced post of civilisation, had been founded on the extreme limit of the desert. This position, chosen originally in order to oppose the Indians more effectually, and stop their periodical incursions upon the Mexican territory, became precious in the present instance, through the facility it afforded the adventurers for supplying themselves with all they needed without having recourse to strangers; and this enabled them also to keep the discovery of the placer secret, at any rate long enough, owing to the distance of the *pueblos* from the frontier, to render it impossible for the Mexican Government to interpose and demand the lion's share, according to its usual custom.

The captain did not wish to strip the colony thoroughly, for he must leave it in a respectable position, and safe from a sudden attack on the part of the Apaches and Comanches, those implacable foes of the white men, ever on the watch, and ready to profit by their slightest oversight. De Laville therefore decided that the expedition should be composed of eighty well-mounted and well-armed men, and that the others should remain behind to protect the colony. Still, to avoid any dissension or jealousy among his comrades, the captain declared that lots should decide who were to go in search of the placer.

This expedient, which rendered everybody equal, was warmly approved, and they proceeded to draw lots. The process was extremely simple: the name of each adventurer was written on a roll of paper and thrown into a vessel, whence a boy drew them one by one. Of course the eighty names that came out first would be the members of the expedition. Thus, as the arrangement was most simple, and at the same time perfectly fair, no one had a right to complain.

All was done as was agreed. Chance, as so frequently happens, favoured the captain by selecting

the most energetic and enterprising men. Then all eagerly prepared for the departure; that is to say, they collected provisions of every description, got together mules, and made the tools required for working the mine. Still, in spite of all the activity displayed by the captain, nearly a month elapsed ere all was in readiness.

The frightful catastrophe to which the Count de Lhorailles had fallen a victim in the great Del Norte desert, which the adventurers would have to cross in going to the placer, was a serious warning to de Laville to act with the utmost prudence, and leave nothing to chance. Hence, without listening in the slightest degree to the impatient insinuations of his comrades, who urged him to press on the departure of the expedition, he watched with the most scrupulous attention the construction of the carts intended to convey the provisions, and allowed no detail, however trifling, to escape his careful eye; for he knew that the loss of an hour in the desert, produced by the breaking of a screw, a tire, or a trace, might cause the death of the men placed under his orders.

At last all was ready, and the day for starting settled. Within forty-eight hours the expedition would leave Guetzalli, when, at about five in the evening, just as the captain, after giving a final glance at the wagons already loaded and arranged in the courtyard, was about to re-enter his house, the sentry on the isthmus announced the arrival of a stranger. As soon as the captain felt assured that it was a white man, and that he wore the uniform of a Mexican field officer, he ordered his admission to the colony. The barrier was at once raised, and the colonel (for he wore the insignia of that rank) entered Guetzalli, followed by two lanceros, who served as his escort, and a mule bearing his baggage.

The captain advanced to meet him. The colonel dismounted, threw the reins to a lancero, and bowed politely to the captain, who returned the salute with equal courtesy.

"With whom have I the honour of speaking?" he asked the stranger.

"I am," the latter answered, "Colonel Vicente Suarez, aide-de-camp to General Don Sebastian Guerrero, Governor-General of the province of Sonora."

"I am delighted, Señor Don Vicente, at the chance afforded me of making your acquaintance. You must be fatigued with the long journey you have had to this place, so I trust you will not refuse to accept some modest refreshment."

"I accept most gladly, caballero," the colonel answered with a bow; "the more so because I have ridden so fast that I have scarce rested a minute since leaving Pitic."

"Ah! you come from Pitic?"

"As the bird flies. I have been only four days covering the ground."

"Hum! you must be terribly fatigued in that case, for it is a long distance, and, as you did me the honour to inform me, you have travelled very rapidly. Be kind enough to follow me."

The colonel bowed in reply, and the captain introduced him into a room where refreshments of every description had been prepared.

"Sit down, Don Vicente," the captain said as he drew forward a chair.

The colonel fell back into the butaca offered him with a sigh of satisfaction, whose meaning only those who have ridden thirty leagues at a stretch can understand. For some minutes the conversation between the captain and his guest was interrupted, for the colonel ate and drank with an avidity which, judging from the well-known sobriety of the Mexicans, proved that he had fasted a long time. De Laville examined him thoughtfully, asking himself mentally what reason was so important as to induce Don Guerrero to send a colonel to Guetzalli, and spite of himself he felt a vague uneasiness weighing on his heart. At length Don Vicente drank a glass of water, wiped his mouth, and turned to the captain.

"A thousand pardons," he said, "for having behaved so unceremoniously to you; but now I will confess to you that I was almost dead of inanition, having eaten nothing since eight o'clock last evening."

The captain bowed.

"You do not, of course, intend to return this evening?" he asked him.

"Pardon me, caballero, if it be possible, I shall start again in an hour."

"So soon?"

"The general ordered me to make the greatest speed."

"But your horses are half dead."

"I count on your kindness to supply me with fresh ones."

Horses were plentiful at the colony: there were more than the colonists could use, and hence de Laville would have found no difficulty in granting the colonel's request. Still his guest's manner seemed so little natural, and he fancied he detected something so mysterious about him, that he felt his alarm increased, and said,—

"I do not know, colonel, whether, in spite of my lively desire to be agreeable to you, it will be possible for me to fulfil your request; for horses are extremely scarce here at this moment."

The colonel made a sign of annoyance.

"*Caramba!*" he said, "that would vex me greatly."

At this moment a peon discreetly opened the door, and handed the captain a paper, on which a few words were written in pencil. The young man, after apologising, opened the paper and quickly read it.

"Oh!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he crumpled the paper in his hands with considerable agitation, "he here! What can be the matter?"

"Eh?" the colonel said curiously, who had not understood the meaning of this sentence spoken in French.

"Nothing," the other answered; "a mere personal matter." Then turning to the peon, he said, "I am coming."

The peon bowed and left the room.

"Colonel," de Laville continued, addressing his guest, "permit me to leave you for an instant."

And without waiting for a reply he left the room hurriedly, closing the door carefully after him. This brusque departure totally discountenanced the colonel.

"Oh!" he muttered, repeating in Spanish, though unconsciously, what the captain had said in French. "What can be the matter?"

As he was a true Mexican, fond of knowing everything, and, above all, of discovering anything people wished to keep secret from him, he rose gently, walked to the window, pulled the mosquito curtain aside, and looked out curiously into the yard. But it was labour in vain: the courtyard was deserted. He then returned on tiptoe to his seat, and began carelessly rolling a papelito, while muttering half aloud,—

"Patience! The man who knows how to wait always gains his end. I shall obtain the clue to this mystery sooner or later."

This aside having doubtlessly consoled him for the disappointment he had experienced, he philosophically lit his cigarette, and soon disappeared in the midst of a dense cloud of smoke which issued from his mouth and nostrils simultaneously. We will leave the worthy colonel enjoying this amusement at his ease, and follow de Laville, in order to explain to the reader the meaning of the exclamation that escaped from him on reading the paper which the peon so unexpectedly handed to him.

CHAPTER IX.

DOÑA ANGELA.

Before relating, however, what took place at Guetzalli between de Laville and the colonel, we must return to the adventurers' encampment.

Louis, still holding the maiden pressed to his breast, carried her to the interior of the hut of branches which his comrades had built for him at the entrance of the church. On arriving there he laid her in a chair, and seated himself on a stool. There was a long silence, during which both reflected deeply. A strange phenomenon took place in Louis' heart. In spite of himself he felt hope returning to his soul: he inhaled life through every pore—a desire to live came back to him. He thought of the future—that future he had wished to destroy in himself, by choosing as his mode of suicide the mad and rash expedition at the head of which he had placed himself.

The heart of man is made up of strange contrasts. The count had wrapped himself up in his grief; he had, as it were, settled it in his mind, living with it and through it, making it in his own eyes an excuse for justifying the line of conduct he had traced for himself, or rather which his foster brother had made him adopt, only desiring and accepting the bitterness of life, and disdainfully rejecting the joy and happiness it contains. Now, though unable to account for the extraordinary revolution that had taken place in him, he instinctively felt that grief he had so nurtured and petted growing: less, and ready to disappear, to make room for a gentle and dreamy melancholy, which, before he thought of wrestling with it and tearing it from his heart, had put forth such powerful roots that he felt it had seized on his whole being.

This new feeling was love. All passions are in the extreme, and, above all, illogical. Were they not so, they would no longer be passions. Don Louis loved Doña Angela. He loved her with the love of a man who has reached the confines which separate youth from age; that is, furiously and frenziedly. He loved her and hated her at the same time; for he was angry with this new love, which caused him to forget the old, and revealed to him that the heart of man may at times slumber, but never die. The empire the maiden held over him was the stronger and more powerful, because physically and morally she afforded the most striking contrast to Doña Rosaria, the gentle creature with angel's wings, the count's first love. Doña Angela's majestic and severe beauty, her impetuous and ardent character—all in her had seduced and subjugated the count. Hence he was angry at the power he had unconsciously allowed her to gain over his will, and blamed as a weakness unworthy of his character the reaction which this love had effected in his heart, by obliging him to recognise that it was still possible for him to be happy.

Louis was far from forming an exception in the great human family. All men are alike. When they have arranged their existence under the influence of any feeling, either of joy or grief, they take pleasure in the continual development of that feeling, convert it into a portion of their being, and

intrench themselves behind it as in an impregnable fortress; and when, by some sudden blow, the edifice they have taken such pains to construct falls in ruins, they feel angry with themselves for not having known how to defend it, and, as a natural consequence, blame the innocent cause of this great overthrow.

While reflecting, the count had let his head sink on his breast, isolating himself in his thoughts, and plunging deeper and deeper into his sombre reverie, following instinctively the incline on which his mind was at the moment gliding. He raised his eyes, and fixed on Doña Angela a glance in which all the feelings that agitated him were reflected. The maiden was lying back, with her face buried in her hands: the tears were slowly dropping between her fingers, and resembled a dew of pearls. She was weeping gently and noiselessly: her breast heaved convulsively, and she seemed a prey to intense grief. The count turned pale. He rose hurriedly, and walked toward her.

At this sudden movement Doña Angela let her hands sink, and regarded Don Louis with such a gentle expression of resigned grief and true love, that the count felt a thrill of happiness flush through his body. Exhausted, overcome, he fell on his knees, murmuring in a panting and broken voice,—

"Oh! I love you—I love you!"

The maiden half rose from her seat, bent over him, and regarded him for a long time pensively. Suddenly she fell into his arms, laid her head on his shoulder, and began sobbing. The count, alarmed by this grief, the cause of which it was impossible for him to discover, gently put her back on her chair, sat down by her side, and took her hand, which he held between his own.

"Why these tears?" he asked her tenderly. "Whence comes this grief that oppresses you?"

"No, I am not weeping. Look!" she replied, trying to smile through her tears.

"Child, you conceal something from me—you have a secret!"

"A secret! That of my love. Did I not tell you that I love you, Louis?"

"Alas! and I, too, love you," he replied sorrowfully. "And yet I cannot think of that love without alarm."

"Why so if you love me?"

"If I love you, child! For you and your love I would sacrifice everything."

"Well?" she said.

"Alas, child! I am an accursed man. My love is deadly, and I tremble."

"What greater joy than to die for the man I love?"

"I am proscribed—a pirate, an outlaw."

She drew herself up proudly and haughtily, with frowning brow, dilated nostrils, and flashing eye.

"You are truly noble, Don Louis!" she almost shrieked in her excitement. "You have dreamed of the regeneration of an enslaved people. What do I care for the names given you, my friend? The day will come when brilliant justice will be done you." Then growing gradually calmer, she smiled tenderly. "You are proscribed, my poor darling," she said gently; "and is it not woman's mission in this world to support and console? The struggle you are about to undertake will be terrible. Your project is almost a madman's for grandeur and boldness: perhaps you will succumb in this struggle. You need, not a counsellor or a brother, but a woman friend whose soul understands yours; from whose heart your heart keeps no secrets; who consoles you, and cries 'Courage!' when you allow despair to master you, and when, like a vanquished Titan, you feel ready to retire. That faithful, devoted friend, ever watchful over you and for you, I will be, Don Louis—I who will never leave you, and who, if you fall, will fall by your side, struck by the same blow that crushed you."

"Thanks, child; but I am not worthy of such sublime devotion. Think of the painful existence you create for yourself—think of the pleasant calm and peaceful life you leave behind you, to affiancé yourself to grief, perchance to death."

"What do I care for that? Death will be welcome if it come by your side. I love you!"

Don Louis hesitated.

"Think," he said presently, "of the immense grief of your father, whom you abandon—your father who loves you so dearly, and has only you—"

She laid her hand quickly on his lips.

"Be silent—be silent!" she screamed in a heart-rending accent. "Do not speak of my father. Why do you say that to me? Why augment my despair? I love you, Don Louis—I love you! Henceforth you are everything to me—fortune, parents, friends—all, I tell you. From the day when I first saw you, powerful and terrible as the exterminating angel, my heart fled toward yours. Something, a presentiment perhaps, revealed to me that our two destinies were for ever enchained to each other. When I saw you again my heart had divined you, but I remained in the shadow, for you did not need me; but now times are changed. You are betrayed, tracked, abandoned, by those whose interest it would have been to support you. The country you have come to deliver renounces you. My father, whose life you saved, has become your most implacable foe, because you spurned his offers, and would not serve his paltry and shameful ambition. Well, I, intrenching myself in my heart as in a fortress, have in my turn renounced my country, abandoned my father, and, like a true daughter of the Mexican volcanoes, feeling lava instead of blood coursing in my veins,

bounding with indignation at the numberless acts of treachery which have begirt you on all sides—I have forgotten everything, even that modesty innate in maidens, and defying that world which I abhor and despise, because it rejects you, I have come to you to love you—to render sweeter the few days which are perhaps still left you to live; for I do not deceive myself as to the future any more than you do, Don Louis. And when the fatal hour arrives, when the hurricane bursts above your head, I shall be there to support you by my presence, to encourage you by my boundless love, and to die in your arms!"

There is in the woman who really loves, and whom passion masters, so grand a magnetic attraction, a poesy so powerful, that the man with the greatest self-restraint feels, in spite of himself, a species of voluptuous dizziness, and suddenly finds his reason desert him, only to see that love he inspires, and of which he is proud.

"But you wept, Angela," the count said. "Your tears are still flowing."

"Yes," she continued energetically, "I wept—I still weep. Well, cannot you guess why, Don Louis? It is because I am a woman, after all; because I am weak, and, in spite of all my will and all my love, my rebellious nature is struggling with my heart; and because, in order to follow you, and give myself up to you, I despise all that a woman ought to remember under such circumstances, confined as she is by the miserable claims of a puny civilisation, a slave to stupid proprieties, and compelled constantly to hide her feelings in order to play an infamous comedy. That is why I wept—why I still weep. But what matter these tears, my well-beloved? There is as much joy as shame in them, and they prove to you the triumph you have gained over me."

"Angela," the count answered nobly, "I will deceive neither your love nor your confidence. Your happiness will not depend on me."

She gave him a glance of sublime abnegation.

"Nothing but your love!" she said gently. "I want nothing but that. What do I care for aught else?"

"But I care that the woman who has given up all for me should not sink in public opinion, and be scandalised."

"What will you do?"

"Give you my name, my child—the only property left me. At any rate, if you are the companion of a pirate," he said bitterly, "no one shall reproach you with being his mistress. In the eyes of the world, I swear it to you, you shall be his wedded wife."

"Oh!" she said, clasping her hands in mad delight.

"Good, brother!" Valentine said as he entered the hut. "I will take on myself to have your union blessed by a simple-hearted priest, to whom the Gospel is not a dead letter, and who understands Christianity in all its gentle and touching grandeur."

"Thanks, Don Valentine."

"Call me brother, madam; for I am so to you, as I am his brother. You are a noble creature, and I thank you for the love you bear Don Louis. And now," he added, with a smile, "there will be a struggle between us: there are two of us to love him."

The count, his eyes filled with tears, but not finding words to express all he felt, held out his hands to these two beings, who were so good and so devoted, with an emotion that came from the heart.

"Now," Valentine said gaily, to change the conversation, "let us talk about business."

"Business!"

"By Jove!" the hunter said with a laugh, "it seems to me that, for the moment, what we have on hand is sufficiently important for us to trouble ourselves about it."

"That is true," Louis answered; "but can we, in the presence of this lady——"

"That is true: I did not think of that. I am so little accustomed to society, I trust the lady will pardon me."

"Permit me, gentlemen," she said with a smile: "a woman is often a good counsellor, and under present circumstances I believe I can be of some use to you."

"I do not doubt it," the hunter said politely; "but——"

"But you do not believe a word of it," she laughingly interrupted, her petulant character gaining the upper hand again. "However, you shall judge for yourselves."

"We are listening," the count said.

"My father is at this moment making great preparations: his object is to crush you before you are prepared to undertake a campaign. All the Indios Mansos capable of bearing arms are called out, and an extraordinary levy of troops is ordered through the whole of Sonora."

"Ah, indeed!" Louis observed. "Those are tremendous preparations."

"That is not all. Is there not somewhere near here a French colony?"

"Yes, there is," the count said, suddenly becoming serious; "the colony of Guetzalli."

"My father intends to send there, if he has not done so already, his aide-de-camp, Colonel Suarez."

"For what purpose?"

"I suppose to neutralise, by the brilliant promises made to the colonists, the assistance you might expect from them."

Louis became pensive.

"We must make up our minds," Valentine said sharply, "while the company is preparing, to open the campaign speedily. We must send some safe person to Guetzalli. As the colonists are French it is impossible for them not to make common cause with us in a quarrel like that which compels us to take up arms, and which concerns them as much as ourselves."

"You are right, brother. No more delay; but let us act vigorously. You will accompany me to Guetzalli."

"What do you mean?"

"It is only two days' journey at the most from here. It is always best to manage one's own business; and besides, nobody can obtain from the colonists so much as I can."

"How so?"

"That is too long a story to tell you now. It is enough for you to know that, on a recent occasion, I rendered rather a great service to the colony, which I hope they have not yet had time to forget."
[1]

"Oh, oh! if that be the case, I no longer object. In truth, no one can have a better hope of succeeding in the negotiation than yourself. Let us go, then; and may Heaven aid us!"

"Let us go," Louis answered.

"Well," Doña Angela said with a smile, "did I not say I should be a good counsellor?"

"I never doubted it, madam," the hunter replied gallantly. "Besides, it could not be otherwise, as my brother assured us that you would be our guardian angel."

Don Louis, after handing the command over to the first lieutenant, and recommending the greatest activity and vigilance, announced to his comrades his temporary absence, though he did not reveal to them the object of his journey, in order not to discourage them in case his negotiation failed; and at sunset, followed only by Valentine, and after saying farewell to Doña Angela once more, he left the mission, and started at a gallop on the road to Guetzalli.

[1] See "The Tiger Slayer." Same publishers.

CHAPTER X.

THE AMBASSADORS.

The paper which the peon handed to Captain de Laville, and which caused him to feel such emotion, only contained one name; but it was a name well known at Guetzalli—that of the Count de Prébois Crancé. The Guetzallians had heard vague rumours of the French expedition formed at San Francisco for the purpose of working the inexhaustible mines of the Plancha de Plata. They knew, too, of the company's arrival at Guaymas; but since then they had received no news, and were completely ignorant of the events that had occurred.

The captain had not the remotest idea that the Count de Prébois was the leader of that expedition; but, from several words Louis had let fall during his stay at the hacienda, he suspected him of fostering certain projects against the Mexican Government. This was the reason why, on receiving the paper, his first impulse was to exclaim, "He here! What can be the matter?"

He proceeded at once to the count, persuaded that the latter, outlawed for some reason by the Mexican Government, had come to demand an asylum from him. Colonel Suarez' unexpected visit coincided strangely with the count's arrival, and confirmed him in his notion; for he supposed, with some appearance of truth, that the colonel was ordered to enforce on him not to receive the exile, or, if he received him into the colony, to hand him over at once to the Mexican authorities. Fearing lest he might commit some error prejudicial to the count, he had hurriedly left the colonel alone, in order to come to an understanding with his compatriot, as from the first moment he had resolved not only not to surrender him, but not to abandon him if he claimed his aid.

The reader sees that, although the captain's hypothesis was false, it bordered on the truth in several points.

Don Louis and Valentine, seated on butacas, were smoking and talking together, while drinking, to refresh themselves, a decoction of tamarinds, when the door opened, and the captain appeared. The three men shook hands affectionately, and then de Laville, making the others a sign to sit down again, began the conversation at once.

"What good wind brings you to Guetzalli, my dear count?" he said.

"Hum!" the latter said. "If you asked what *cordónazo*, you would be nearer the truth, my dear De Laville; for never has a more terrible hurricane assailed me than threatens at this moment."

"Oh, oh! do tell me about it I need hardly say, I suppose, I am quite at your service."

"Thank you; but, before all, one word. Who has taken the Count de Lhorailles' place in the government of the colony?"

"Myself," the young man modestly replied.

"By Jove! I am delighted to hear that," the count said frankly, "for no one was more worthy than you to succeed him."

"My dear sir!" he said in confusion.

"On my word, captain, I tell you honestly what I think: all the worse if it wounds you."

"Far from that," the young man remarked with a smile.

"Then all is for the best. I see that my interests will not be imperilled in your hands."

"You may feel assured of it."

"Permit me to introduce to you my most intimate friend, my foster brother, whose name you must often have heard, and with whom I should be glad for you to be better acquainted: in one word, he is the French scout whom the Indians and Mexicans have surnamed the 'Trail-hunter.'"

The captain rose hurriedly, and held out his hand to the hunter.

"What!" he said with considerable emotion, "Are you Valentine Guillois?"

"Yes, sir," the hunter replied with a modest bow.

"Oh, sir!" the young man exclaimed warmly, "I am delighted to form your personal acquaintance. Everybody respects and cherishes you here, because you maintain that title of Frenchman, of which we are all so proud. Thanks, count, thanks; and now, by heavens, ask of me anything you please, and I shall not know how to repay the pleasure you have caused me."

"Good heavens!" the count replied; "for the present I will only ask you a very simple matter. You will soon be visited, if he has not already arrived, by an aide-de-camp of General Guerrero."

"Colonel Suarez?"

"Yes."

"He is here."

"Already?"

"He has only been here an hour."

"He has told you nothing?"

"Not yet: we have not spoken together."

"All the better. Would you mind placing us where it would be possible for us to overhear your conversation, and not be seen?"

"That is very simple. Adjoining the room where he is waiting for me is a recess, only covered by a curtain; but we can manage it better still."

"How?"

"Does he know you?"

"Me?"

"Yes. Does he know you by sight?"

"No."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite."

"Nor this gentleman either?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Very good: let me manage it. I will arrange it all; and now to talk of yourself."

"It is unnecessary."

"Why so?"

"Because it is probable the colonel will tell you more than I could."

"Ah, ah! then you fancy he has come on your account?"

"I am certain of it."

"Very good. Now, do not trouble yourself about anything, but let me arrange it all."

"Agreed."

"I will be with you again directly."

And he left the room.

The colonel was still in the same position as when we left him. He had lighted a considerable number of husk cigarettes, and the nicotine was beginning to act gently on his brain; his eyelids were drooping; in short, he was just on the point of going to sleep. The sudden entrance of the captain aroused him from this state of torpor, and he raised his head.

"Pray pardon my having left you alone so long," the young man said; "but an unforeseen event —"

"You are quite excused," the colonel answered politely. "Still I should have been charmed had you thought of advising the Count de Lhorailles of my arrival, for the affair that brought me here admits of no delay."

The captain regarded the Mexican with surprise.

"How!" he said, "the Count de Lhorailles?"

"Certainly: it is to him alone that I must communicate the dispatches of which I am bearer."

"But the Count de Lhorailles has been dead for nearly a year. Were you not aware of the fact?"

"My word, no, sir, I confess."

"That is extraordinary; yet I remember having sent a courier express to the Governor of Sonora to inform him of this death, and announce to him at the same time that the choice of my countrymen had fallen on me to take his place."

"It is probable, then, either that your courier did not obey his orders, or was assassinated on the road."

"I fear it."

"So that you, sir, are now captain of the colony of Guetzalli?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are very young to occupy so difficult a post."

"Colonel," de Laville answered with a slight hauteur, "we Frenchmen do not measure men by age or height."

"It is frequently wrong; but no matter, that does not concern me. With whom have I the honour of speaking?"

"With Don Carlos de Laville."

The colonel bowed.

"I will, then, with your permission, caballero, communicate my dispatches to you."

"A moment, sir," the captain said quickly. "I cannot listen to you unless I have by my side two of the principal men in the colony."

"For what object?"

"That is the law."

"Do so, then."

The captain struck a bell, and a peon entered.

"Ask the two gentlemen waiting in the green room to come here," he said.

The peon went out.

"What! the two persons who are waiting?" the colonel said suspiciously.

"Yes. As I presumed, colonel, that you were the bearer of dispatches, I warned these two persons in order to detain you as short a time as possible."

"In that case permit me to return you my thanks, for I am really terribly pressed for time."

At this moment the door opened, and the count and Valentine came in. The colonel bent a piercing glance upon them, to try to discover with what sort of men he would have to deal; but it was impossible to read anything in their cold and rigid countenances, which seemed hewn out of marble.

"Gentlemen," the captain said, "Colonel Don Suarez, aide-de-camp to General Don Sebastian Guerrero, military governor of the State of Sonora. Colonel Suarez, two of my countrymen."

The three men bowed stiffly.

"Now, gentlemen," the captain continued, "pray be seated. The colonel is the bearer of dispatches he wishes to communicate to us, and they are probably important, as the colonel has not stopped even between Pitic and this place. We are ready to listen to you, colonel."

Like all men accustomed to double dealing and underhand schemes, the colonel possessed an infallible instinct for scenting treachery. In the present case, although all was being done ostensibly with the greatest frankness, and he was a thousand leagues from suspecting the truth, he guessed that he was being cheated, although it was impossible to perceive the secret object they had in view. Still he had no subterfuges he could employ: he must obey his instructions, and he decided on doing so, much against the grain, after bending on the two strangers a second glance, by which he sought to read their very hearts' thoughts, but which had no better result than the first.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have doubtlessly not forgotten the numberless acts of kindness with which the Mexican Government has overwhelmed you."

"Overwhelmed is the word," de Laville interrupted him with a smile. "Go on, colonel."

"The Government is ready to make still greater sacrifices for you, if necessary."

"*Caspita!*" the young man again interrupted him, "we will spare it the trouble. The kindnesses of the Mexican Government generally cost us very dearly."

A discussion commenced in this tone of raillery had not the slightest chance of resulting in an amicable arrangement. Still the colonel did not break down, his mind was made up. He cared little for the result, for he knew perfectly well that those who sent him would not hesitate to disavow him according to circumstances.

"Hum!" he said, "the following proposal is made you."

"I beg your pardon, colonel, but before telling us the proposals, perhaps it would be better to explain to us the reasons that induce the Government to offer them," de Laville observed.

"Good heavens, sir! you must know the reasons as well as I do."

"Pardon me, but we are completely ignorant of them, and would feel greatly obliged by your telling them to us."

The count and Valentine were as motionless as statues, and these two gloomy faces disturbed the colonel in an extraordinary manner.

"The reasons are very simple," he stammered.

"I do not doubt it, but be good enough to mention them."

"This letter," he said, handing a sealed paper to the captain, "will explain the matter fully."

De Laville took the paper, read it through hurriedly, and then crumpled it up passionately in his hand.

"Colonel," he then said in a firm voice, "the Government of Sonora forgets that the colony of Guetzalli only contains Frenchmen; that is to say, no traitors. We have retained our nationality, although established in this country; and if the Mexican laws will not protect us we will appeal to our minister at Mexico, and, if necessary, contrive to protect ourselves."

"These threats, sir——" the colonel interrupted.

"They are not threats," the young man continued energetically. "General Guerrero insults us by inviting us not merely to abandon one of our countrymen, who is in every respect worthy of our support, through his loyalty, courage, and nobility of character, but also by proposing to us to hunt him down like a wild beast, and deliver him over. The general menaces us with outlawry if we assist the count, whom he brands as a pirate and a rebel. Let him do so if he please. This letter you have handed me will be carried by a sure man to Mexico, and handed to our minister, with a detail of all the annoyances we have suffered from the Mexican authorities ever since our settlement here."

"You are wrong, sir," the colonel answered, "to take the proposal made you in this way. The general is very well disposed toward you. I doubt not that he will consent to grant you great advantages if you will only obey him. What do you peaceful colonists care for this rebellious count, whom I dare say you never heard of? Your own interests demand that you should turn against him. This man is a villain, to whom nothing is sacred. Since his arrival in our country he has committed the most odious crimes. Take my advice, sir; do not obstinately choose a wrong path, but prove to the Government all your gratitude for the favours you have received by abandoning this villain."

The captain had listened calmly and coldly to the Mexican's long diatribe, holding in check by a glance the count and his companion, who found it very difficult not to burst out and treat this man in the way he deserved. When the colonel at length ceased, the captain looked at him with sovereign contempt.

"Have you finished?" he said dryly.

"Yes," the other answered in confusion.

"Very good. Now, thanks to Heaven, we have nothing more in common. Be good enough to mount your horse and leave the colony immediately. As for General Guerrero, tell him that I will give him an answer myself."

"I will retire, sir. Do you intend to give this answer soon?"

"Within twenty-four hours. Begone!"

"I will report our conversation word for word to the general."

"I shall be glad of it. Good-by till we meet again, sir."

"What! do you intend to take your answer personally?"

"Perhaps so," de Laville answered mockingly.

The colonel went out all abashed by his reception, and followed by the three men, who did not let him out of sight, and walked by his side, so as to prevent him communicating with anyone. His horse was waiting in the courtyard, held by one of the orderlies. The colonel mounted and rode off rapidly, for he was anxious to leave the colony. On reaching the isthmus gate he, however, turned round, and looked back for some time.

"Who can those two men be?" he muttered.

And he dug his spurs in his horse's sides. When he had disappeared in the windings of the road the captain seized Don Louis' hand, and pressed it affectionately.

"And now, my dear count," he said to him, "speak. What can I do for you?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLAN OF THE CAMPAIGN.

The count returned the young man's affectionate pressure, but shook his head sorrowfully and remained silent.

"Why do you not answer me?" the captain asked him. "Do you doubt my willingness to be of service to you?"

"It is not that," the count said sadly. "I know that your heart is noble and generous, and that you will not hesitate to come to my aid."

"Whence arises this hesitation, then?"

"Friend," the count answered with a melancholy smile, "I reproach myself at this moment for having come to find you."

"For what reason?"

"Need I tell you? This land you cultivate, only a few years back, was a virgin forest, serving as a lurking place for wild beasts: now, thanks to your labour and intelligence, it has been metamorphosed into a fertile and cultivated plain; numerous flocks feed in your prairies; the desolation and neglect of this frontier have disappeared to make room for the incessant toil of civilisation. This colony of Guetzalli, founded with so much trouble, bedewed with so much blood, prospers, and is beginning to repay amply the toil and perspiration it cost you. The day is at hand when, stimulated by your example, other colonists will come to join you, and, by aiding you to repulse the Indios Bravos into their impenetrable deserts, will for ever protect the Mexican frontiers from the depredations of the savages, and restore to this magnificent country its pristine splendour.

"Well?" the captain remarked.

"Well," the count continued, "is it fitting for me, a stranger, a man to whom you owe nothing, to drag you into a contest without any probable issue—to mix you up in a quarrel which does not concern you, and in which you have everything to lose, so that tomorrow the land you have, after so many efforts, torn from desolation, should fall back into its primitive barbarism? In a word, my friend, I ask myself by what title and by what right I should drag you down in my fall."

"By what title and right? I will tell you," the young captain said nobly. "We are here six thousand leagues from our country, on the extreme limits of the desert, having no protection to hope, or help to seek, other than from ourselves. At such a distance from their country all Frenchmen must consider each other as brothers, and be responsible for each other. All must resent an insult offered to a Frenchman. It is because we are few in number, and consequently exposed to the insults of our enemies, that we ought to defend one another, and demand that justice should be done us. By acting thus we not only protect our own honour, but defend our country, and guard from any insult that title of Frenchmen of which we are justly proud."

"You speak well, captain," Valentine interrupted him. "Your words are those of a man of heart. It is abroad that patriotism must be strong and inflexible. We have no right to allow wretched enemies to lower that national honour which our brothers in France have intrusted to us; for each of us here represents our beloved country, and must at his risk and peril make it be respected by all, no matter under what circumstances."

"Yes," the captain answered quickly, "the Mexican Government, by insulting the Count de Prébois Crancé, by breaking all its engagements with him, and betraying him in so cowardly a fashion, has not insulted a Frenchman, an individual, or nameless adventurer, but the whole of France. Well, France must reply to it, and, by heavens! we will pick up the glove thrown to us. We will fight to avenge our honour; and if we succumb, we shall have fallen nobly in the arena, and believe me, gentlemen, our blood will not have been shed in vain: our country will pity while admiring us, and our fall will create us avengers. Besides, my dear count," he added, "you are in no way a stranger to the colony of Guetzalli; for did you not lend us the support of your arm and your counsels under critical circumstances? It is our turn now, and we shall only pay our debts after all."

The count could not refrain from smiling.

"Well," he said with emotion, "be it so: I accept your generous devotion. Any further resistance would not only be ridiculous, but might appear in your eyes ungrateful."

"Very good," the captain said gaily; "we are now beginning to understand each other. I was certain that I should end by convincing you."

"You are a charming companion," the count retorted; "it is impossible to resist you."

"By Jove! you arrive at the very moment to obtain speedy help."

"How so?"

"Just imagine that two days later you would not have found me at home."

"Impossible!"

"Did you not notice, on your arrival, the wagons and carts arranged in one of the courts you crossed?"

"I did."

"I was on the point of starting, at the head of eighty picked men, to go and work certain mines we have heard about."

"Ah, ah!"

"Yes; but for the present the expedition will remain *in statu quo*, for the band I intended to lead into the desert will join you, or at least I presume so."

"What! you presume so?"

"Yes, because I cannot dispose of the band, or change the object of the expedition, without the general assent."

"That is true," said the count; and his features grew solemn.

"But do not feel alarmed," the captain continued; "we shall easily obtain that assent when the colonists know what interests I propose to serve."

"May Heaven grant it!"

"I guarantee success. You have, I suppose, all the stores necessary for entering on a campaign?"

"Nearly so; but I regret to say that all my arrieros have deserted me, and left my camp furtively."

"The deuce! and naturally they took their mules with them?"

"All, without exception; and this renders it very embarrassing to move my baggage and draw my guns."

"Good, good! We will provide for all that. I have here, as you saw, excellent wagons; I am also well supplied with mules; and there are in the colony men perfectly capable of leading them."

"You will render me no slight service."

"I hope to render you others far greater than that."

The three men had returned to the room in which the conference with Colonel Suarez had taken place. The captain struck the bell, and a peon entered.

"This evening, after *oración*, at the end of the day's labour, the colonists will assemble in the patio to hear an important communication I have to make to them," he said.

The domestic bowed.

"Bring the dinner," the captain added. Then, turning to his guests, he said, "I presume you will dine with me, for you cannot start again before tomorrow?"

"That is true. Still we expect to be off before sunrise."

"Where is your camp?"

"At the mission of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles."

"That is close by."

"Oh! some thirty leagues at the most."

"Yes, and the position is very strong. You do not intend, though, to stay there long?"

"No; I mean to strike a heavy blow."

"You are right: you must cause the terror of your name to precede you."

At this moment the peons brought in the dinner.

"To table, gentlemen," the captain said.

The meal was, as might be expected in this extreme frontier, excessively frugal. It was only composed of venison, maize tortillas, red beans, and pimienta, the whole washed down with pulque, mezcal, and Catalonian refino, the strongest spirit in the known world. The guests had a true hunter's appetite; that is to say, they were nearly dead of hunger, for the count and Valentine had eaten nothing for thirty hours. Hence they vigorously attacked the provisions placed before them.

The peons had retired immediately after bringing in the dinner, so as to leave the party full liberty for conversation. Hence, so soon as the rough edge was taken off their appetite, the discussion was begun again exactly where it left off, which always occurs with men whose minds are preoccupied by any difficult project.

"So," the captain asked, "war is decidedly declared between you and the Mexican Government?"

"Without remedy."

"Although the cause you sustain is just, as you are fighting for the maintenance of a right, still you will inscribe something on the banner you display?"

"Of course. I inscribe the only thing which can guarantee me the protection of the people through whom I pass, and make the oppressed and the malcontents flock to me."

"Hum! what is it?"

"Only four words."

"And they are?"

"*Independencia de la Sonora.*"

"Yes, the idea is a happy one. If a particle of nobility and generosity is left in the hearts of the inhabitants of this unhappy country (which, however, I confess to you I greatly doubt), those four words will suffice to produce a revolution."

"I hope so, without daring to count on it. You know, like myself, the Mexican character—a strange composite of all good and bad instincts, about which it is impossible to form a decided opinion."

"Why, my dear count, the Mexicans are like every people that has been for a long time enslaved. After remaining children for ages, they grew too fast, and had the pretension of being men, when they scarcely began to comprehend their emancipation, or were in a position to derive any benefit from it."

"Still we will attempt to galvanise them. The revolutionary race is, perhaps, not completely extinct in this country, and what remains will be sufficient to enkindle the sacred flame in the hearts of all."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Hasten onwards, so as not to let myself be attacked, which always implies inferiority, if not timidity."

"That is true."

"How many men do you expect to be able to give me?"

"Eighty horsemen, commanded by myself, as I told you."

"Thanks! But when will these horsemen (who, by the way, will be very useful to me, as I possess so few at the moment) be able to join me?"

"This evening they will be granted you, and in two days they will reach the mission."

"Could you send off the mules, wagons, and muleteers tomorrow with me?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. I will set out at once for Magdalena: it is a large pueblo, commanding the two roads from Ures and Hermosillo."

"I know it."

"Proceed there direct, for that will save a loss of time."

"Agreed. I shall arrive there at the same time as yourself, which will be the more easy as I shall send off my baggage to your head quarters."

"Very good."

"You intend, then, to act energetically?"

"Yes; I mean to try a grand stroke. If I succeed in taking one of the three capitals of Sonora I shall have gained the campaign."

"Such an enterprise is surely rash."

"I know it; but in my position I dare not calculate consequences—boldness alone can and must save me."

"You are right, and I will not add a word. But now let us proceed to the meeting, for our men are assembled. In their present temper I am certain that the request I am about to make of them will be granted without difficulty."

They went out. As the captain had announced, all the colonists were assembled in the courtyard, broken up into scattered groups, eagerly discussing the reasons which caused their assemblage. When the captain appeared, accompanied by his two friends, silence was immediately established, curiosity closing the mouths of the most talkative.

The Count de Prébois Crancé was known to most of the colonists: his appearance was consequently hailed with sympathetic greetings, for each retained in his memory the recollection of the services he had rendered when Guetzalli was so rudely assailed by the Apaches. The captain cleverly availed himself of this goodwill, on which he had, indeed, built, in order to explain his request clearly to the colonists, while accounting for the causes which obliged the count to come and seek allies at Guetzalli.

The men would not have been the hearty adventurers they really were, had they received such a request coldly. Seduced, as was natural, by the strangeness and even the temerity of the enterprise proposed to them, they consented to range themselves under the count's banner with enthusiastic shouts and delight. The first expedition projected, and for which all the preparations had been made, was completely forgotten, and the only question was the enfranchisement of Sonora. Had the count asked for two hundred men, he would certainly have obtained them on the spot without the slightest difficulty.

Captain de Laville, delighted at the prodigious success he had achieved, warmly thanked his comrades, both in the count's name and his own, and immediately began getting ready to start.

The wagons were carefully inspected to see that they were all in order, and were then laden with all the articles requisite for the coming campaign. At about an hour before sunrise all was ready for starting; the wagons were loaded, and horses attached; the mules, carefully selected, were intrusted to steady men.

Louis and Valentine mounted; the captain accompanied them about a league from the company; and then they parted, agreeing to meet again three days later at La Magdalena.

Mules and wagons progress very slowly in Mexico, where there are in reality no roads, and where you are generally forced to cut a path with the axe. Louis and his foster brother, whose presence was imperatively demanded at the mission, felt in despair at this slowness. In this extremity the count resolved to leave the caravan, and push on ahead. In consequence they left the arrieros, after recommending the greatest diligence to them, and burying their spurs in their horses' flanks, set out at full speed for the mission.

The American horses, descended from the old Arabs of the conquerors of New Spain, have several incontestable advantages over ours. In the first place they are temperate: a little alfalfa in the morning, after washing their mouths out, enables them to go a whole day without food, drink, or rest. These horses seem indefatigable, and, indeed, they have only one pace—the gallop; and at the end of the day, after going twenty leagues at that pace, they have not turned a hair, and do not display the slightest fatigue.

As our two horsemen were mounted on crack steeds, they reached the mission in a comparatively very short period. At the first barricade a man was waiting for them: it was Curumilla.

"Someone is waiting for you," he said. "Come."

They followed him, asking each other with a glance what reason could be so important as to draw such a long sentence from Curumilla.

CHAPTER XII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The adventurers' camp had completely changed its character: it had lost the peaceful appearance of the early days, and assumed a warlike air, perfectly in accordance with the present aspect of affairs. At each issue from the mission, a gun, guarded by a detachment, was pointed at the open country, while piled muskets formed a long row, in front of which a guard walked up and down. Sentries posted at regular distances watched the approaches, while advanced posts, established in sure positions, prevented any attempt at a surprise.

In the interior of the camp the greatest activity prevailed; the camp forges smoked, and echoed the hasty blows of the smiths; further on, carpenters were cutting into shape whole trees; the armorers were inspecting and repairing arms; in short, everybody was working eagerly, in order to get everything prepared with the least possible delay.

The count and Curumilla, preceded by Valentine, rapidly crossed the camp, greeted in their passage by the affectionate salutes of the adventurers, who were delighted to see them returned. As they approached headquarters, the shrill sounds of a jarana, with which were mingled the melancholy notes of a voice singing the romance *del Rey Rodrigo*, smote their ears.

"Perhaps it would be better, before going further," the count said, "to ask some information from Don Cornelio."

"Yes, especially as it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain it from Curumilla."

"I am going to him," the latter remarked, having overheard the few words exchanged by the friends.

"Then it is all for the best," Valentine said with a smile.

Curumilla turned a little to the left, and guided the two men to a *jacal* of branches which served as the Spaniard's abode, and before which the noble hidalgo was at this moment seated on a stool, strumming his jarana furiously, and singing his eternal romance, while rolling his eyes in a most sentimental way. On seeing the two friends he uttered a shout of joy, threw his guitar far from him, and ran toward them.

"*Capa de Dios!*" he shouted as he seized their hands, "you are welcome, caballeros. I was impatiently expecting you."

"Is there anything new, then?" Don Louis asked anxiously.

"Hum! a good deal; but I suppose you are not going to remain on horseback?"

"No, no, we will join you."

And they dismounted. During the few sentences exchanged between the count and the Spaniard, Valentine had bent down to the Indian chief's ear, and whispered a few words, to which Curumilla replied by nodding his head in affirmation. The two Frenchmen then entered the *jacal* at the heels of Don Cornelio, while the Araucano led away the horses.

"Sit down, gentlemen," the Spaniard said, pointing to several stools scattered about.

"Do you know that you have puzzled me considerably, Don Cornelio?" the count said to him. "What has happened, then, during my absence?"

"Nothing very important in a general point of view: our spies have brought in most reassuring news as to the movements of the enemy. As, however, the acting commandant will make his report to you, I do not wish to talk with you about those matters."

"Has anything else occurred peculiarly interesting to me?"

"You shall judge. You remember that, before your departure, you ordered me to watch over Doña Angela—a singular commission enough for me."

"How so?"

"It is enough that I know why. However, I performed my delicate task, I dare to say, with all the gallantry of a true caballero."

"I thank you for it."

"Yesterday an Indian arrived at the mission, bearer of a letter for the commandant."

"Ah, ah! And you know the contents of the letter?"

"It was simply a request for a safe-conduct to remain in the camp."

"Ah! and who was it signed by?"

"Father Seraphin."

"What!" Valentine exclaimed quickly, "Father Seraphin, the French missionary, the sainted man whom the Indians themselves have christened the 'Apostle of the Prairies?'"

"Himself."

"That is strange," the hunter muttered.

"Is it not?"

"But," said the count, "Father Seraphin does not need a safe-conduct to stay with us as long as he pleases."

"Of course," Valentine confirmed him, "we shall always be happy, myself in particular, to profit by his advice."

"The worthy father did not request the safe-conduct for himself: he is very well aware that his visit could only be agreeable to us."

"Ah! For whom, then?"

"For a person for whom he would be bail during the period of his stay among us, but whose name he kept secret."

"Hum! that is not clear."

"That is what I thought, so I urged the commandant to refuse."

"Well?"

"He granted the safe-conduct, alleging a reason which, by the way, is not so illogical—that the man for whom the safe-conduct is requested is evidently a friend or an enemy, and in either case it is good to know him, so as eventually to treat him as he deserves."

The two Frenchmen could not refrain from laughing at this singular logic.

"Well, and what is the result of all this?" the count continued.

"The result is that Father Seraphin arrived this morning at the mission, accompanied by a person carefully wrapped up in a large cloak."

"Ah, ah! And this person?"

"You can guess a thousand times before finding out."

"I think it would be better for you to tell me at once."

"I believe so too. Well, prepare yourself to hear something incredible. This person is no one less than Don Sebastian Guerrero."

"The general!" the count exclaimed as he bounded in his chair.

"Do not confound persons. I did not say General, but Don Sebastian Guerrero."

"A truce with nonsense, Don Cornelio! Let us talk seriously, for what you say deserves it."

"I am serious, Don Louis. The general has come here in his private capacity. In a word, it is the father of Doña Angela who is at this moment in our camp, and not the Governor of Sonora."

"I am beginning to understand," the count said in a hollow voice, as he walked in agitation up and down the jacal. "And what took place between father and daughter? Do not be afraid to tell me everything. I will keep the mastery over myself."

"Nothing at all has passed, Don Louis, thanks to Heaven!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, for the simple reason that Doña Angela, by my advice, refused to receive her father's visit during your absence."

"She had the strength to do that?" the count said, as he stopped and fixed a piercing glance on the Spaniard.

"By my advice, yes."

"Thanks, Don Cornelio. Then Father Seraphin and the general——"

"Are awaiting your return in a jacal built expressly for them, where, though apparently free, the general is under such strict surveillance that I defy him to make the slightest movement without my knowledge."

"You were right in acting as you have done, my friend. In these difficult circumstances you have displayed great prudence, and, above all, great perspicacity."

Don Cornelio, on hearing this compliment, blushed like a girl, and let his eyes fall modestly.

"What do you intend doing?" Valentine asked the count.

"Leave Doña Angela mistress of her will. Go and advise her of my return, dear Don Cornelio: you will at the same time lead her father and the missionary to her. Go: I follow you."

The Spaniard went out at once to fulfil his orders.

"When do you expect to start?" Valentine said, so soon as he found himself alone with the count.

"In two days."

"And you march?"

"On La Magdalena."

"Good! I will now ask your leave to go away, accompanied by Curumilla."

"What! you wish to leave me?" the count exclaimed with regret.

The hunter smiled.

"You do not understand me, brother," he answered. "The Indian chief and myself are almost useless here. How could we serve you? In no way; while I am convinced we can make excellent scouts. Leave us to explore the road, at the same time as we try to destroy, or at least lessen, the prejudices which the calumnies so sedulously spread about you have produced against everybody who bears the name of Frenchman."

"I did not dare ask you to render me that service; but now, as you offer it so frankly, I will not be so foolish as to refuse it. Go, brother. Act as you please: all you do will be right."

"Then farewell! I shall start immediately."

"Without taking a moment's rest?"

"You know that I never feel fatigue. Come, courage! We shall meet again at La Magdalena."

The two friends embraced, and then quitted the jacal. On the threshold they separated, after a last pressure of the hand, Valentine going to the right, the count to the left.

A guard of ten men defended the approaches to headquarters, and a sentinel was pacing, with shouldered musket, before the door of the mission church, the count's temporary residence. On arriving at his house Don Louis saw Don Cornelio, accompanied by two persons, one of whom wore a clerical garb. They had stopped, and were apparently waiting. The count hurried on. Although he had never, till this moment, seen Father Seraphin, he recognised him by the portraits Valentine had drawn.

He was still the man with the angelic glance, the delicate and marked features, the intelligently gentle countenance, whom we have presented to our readers in another work; but the apostolate is severe in America. Years count there as triple for missionaries really worthy of the title; and Father Seraphin, though hardly thirty years of age, already bore on his body and face traces of that precocious decrepitude to which those men fall victims who sacrifice themselves, without any thought of self, to the welfare of humanity. His back was beginning to bend, his hair was turning white on his temples, and two deep wrinkles furrowed his brow. Still the vivacity of his glance seemed to contradict this apparent weakness, and prove that if his body had grown enfeebled in the contest, the soul had ever remained equally young and powerful.

The three men bowed politely. The count and the missionary, after exchanging an earnest glance, shook hands with a smile. They had understood each other.

"You are welcome, sir," the count said, addressing the general, "although I am surprised that you place such confidence in *pirates*, as you call us, as to confide yourself so entirely to our honour."

"The law of nations, sir," the general replied, "has certain recognised rules which are respected by all men."

"Excepting by those who are placed without the pale of society and the common law of humanity," Don Louis remarked dryly.

The missionary interposed.

"Gentlemen," he said in his sympathetic voice, "between you there is no enmity at this moment: there is only a father who claims his daughter from a gentleman who, I feel convinced, will not refuse to restore her to him."

"Heaven forbid, my father," the count said quickly, "that I should attempt to retain this man's daughter against her will, even were he a thousandfold a greater enemy than he is."

"You see, general," the missionary observed, "that I was not mistaken as to the count's character."

"Doña Angela came alone, impelled by her own will, into my camp: she is respected and treated with all the attention she merits. Doña Angela is free to act as she pleases, and I recognise no right to influence her. As I did not carry her off from her father, as I did nothing to attract her hither, I cannot restore her, as this gentleman appears to demand. If Doña Angela is willing to return to her friends, nobody will oppose it; but if, on the contrary, she prefers to remain here under the protection of my brave comrades and myself, no human power will succeed in tearing her from me."

These words were pronounced in a peremptory tone, which produced a marked impression on the two hearers.

"However, gentlemen," the count continued, "what we say between ourselves has no value so long as Doña Angela has not pronounced herself in one way or the other. I will have the honour of leading you to her. You will have an explanation with her, and she will tell you her determination. Still, permit me to warn you that, whatever that decision may be, both yourselves and myself are bound to submit to it."

"Be it so, sir," the general said dryly: "perhaps it is as well that way as any other."

"Come, then," the count continued.

And he preceded them to the hut which served as the maiden's private residence.

Doña Angela, seated on a butaca, and having Violanta at her feet, was engaged with her needlework. On seeing her father and the persons who accompanied him enter, a vivid blush purpled her cheeks, but almost immediately she turned pale as death. Still she contrived to subdue the emotion she felt, rose, bowed silently, and sat down again. The general regarded her for a moment with a mingled expression of tenderness and anger; then turning suddenly to the missionary, he said in a stifled voice,—

"Speak to her, my father; I do not feel the strength to do so."

The maiden smiled sadly.

"My good padre," she said to the missionary, "I thank you for the useless attempt you are making on me today. My resolution is formed: nothing will alter it—it is impossible. I will never return to my family."

"Unhappy child!" the general exclaimed with sorrow, "what reason urged you to abandon me thus?"

"I do all justice to your kindness and tenderness toward me, father," she answered with a melancholy air. "Alas! that unbounded tenderness and the liberty you ever allowed me to enjoy are perhaps the cause of what happens today. I do not wish to reproach you. My destiny has taken possession of me: I will endure the consequences of the fault I have committed."

The general frowned and stamped his foot on the ground passionately.

"Angela, my well-beloved child!" he continued bitterly, "reflect that the scandal occasioned by your flight will dishonour you for ever."

A contemptuous smile played round the maidens pallid lips.

"What do I care?" she said. "The world in which you live is no longer mine. All my joy and sorrow will be henceforth concentrated here."

"But I, your father—you forget me, then, and I am no longer anything to you?"

The girl hesitated: she remained silent, with downcast eyes.

"Doña," the missionary said gently, "God curses children who abandon their father: return to yours. There is still time: he holds out his arms to you—he calls you. Return, my child. A parent's heart is an inexhaustible well of indulgence. Your father will forgive you: he has already done so."

Doña Angela shook her head, but made no further reply. The general and the missionary regarded each other with disappointment, while Don Louis stood a little in the rear, his arms folded on his breast, with sunken head and thoughtful air.

"Oh!" the general muttered with concentrated passion, "ours is an accursed race!"

At this moment Don Louis drew himself up, and walked a few paces forward.

"Doña Angela," he said with marked significance, "was it really your own will that brought you here?"

"Yes," she answered resolutely.

"And you have really decided on obeying neither the orders nor entreaties of your father?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Then you renounce for ever your position in society, and your fortune?"

"Yes."

"You also renounce the protection of your father, who is your natural guardian, and has every human and divine claim on you—you renounce his affection?"

"Yes," she murmured in a low voice.

"Then it is now my turn;" and bowing to the general, he continued, "Sir, whatever may be the hatred that sunders us—whatever may happen at a later date—the honour of your daughter must remain pure and unspotted."

"In order to secure that result," the general said bitterly, "someone must consent to marry her."

"Yes. Well, I, the Count de Prébois Crancé, have the honour of asking you for her hand."

The general fell back in amazement.

"Do you really ask that seriously?" he said.

"Yes."

"Reflect that, while thanking you for your request, I consider it a fresh aggrievance."

"Be it so."

"That this marriage will in nowise prevent the measures I intend taking against you."

"What do I care?"

"And you still consent to give her your hand?"

"Yes."

"Very good. You shall have my answer in four days."

"At La Magdalena, then."

"Be it so." The general turned to his daughter. "I do not curse you," he said, "for God himself cannot free a child from its father's malediction. Farewell! Be happy."

And he rushed out, followed by the missionary.

"My father," the count said, "I shall expect you at La Magdalena."

"I shall be there, sir," Father Seraphin replied sadly, "for I foresee that there will be tears to dry up."

"Good-by, sir," the general said.

"Good-by till we meet again," the count answered with a bow.

The general and the missionary then mounted and set out, escorted by a strong detachment of adventurers, who were to accompany them through the outposts and pickets of the French company. The count looked after them for a long time, and then walked back slowly to his room.

CHAPTER XIII.

LA MAGDALENA.

The village of La Magdalena occupies an important military position, for it commands the three roads that lead to Ures, Hermosillo, and Sonora, the chief cities of the State, and is nearly at an equal distance from all three. This pueblo, in itself of but slight consideration, enjoys, however, a certain reputation in the country, owing to the beauty of its situation and the purity of the air breathed there.

La Magdalena forms a species of parallelogram, one side of which carelessly mirrors its white houses in the limpid waters of the Rio San Pedro, a confluent of the Gila. Dense woods of palma Christi, styrax, Peru trees, and mahogany form an insurmountable barrier against the burning winds of the desert, while refreshing and perfuming the atmosphere, and serve as a refuge for thousands of blue jays, cardinals, and loros, which chatter gaily under the foliage, and enliven the enchanting landscape—this ravishing oasis, placed there by the hand of nature, as if to make the traveller returning from the prairie forget the sufferings and fatigues of the desert.

The festivities in honour of the patron saint at La Magdalena are the most frequented and joyful of all Sonora. As they last several days, the hacenderos and campesinos flock in for a hundred miles round. During this *fête*, at which rivers of pulque and mezcal flow, there is one succession of jaranas, montes, and bull baits; in a word, amusements of every description, which no crime ever saddens, in spite of the great concourse of strangers. The Mexicans are not wicked; they are only badly educated, headstrong, and passionate children, but nothing more.

Three days after the events we narrated in our previous chapter, the Pueblo de la Magdalena, at the most animated period of its annual festival, was in a state of more than ordinary agitation and excitement, evidently not produced by the festival; for the people had suddenly broken off their sports, and rushed, laughing and pressing, to one of the ends of the pueblo, where, according to the few words whispered by the gossips, something out of the way was taking place.

In fact, bugles soon sounded a call, and a band of armed men debouched on the pueblo, marching in good order, and to military tunes. First came an advanced guard of a dozen well-mounted men; then came a company of men formed in squads of about thirty each, bearing among them a large banner, on which was inscribed, "Independencia de la Sonora." Behind this band came two guns drawn by mules, then a squadron of cavalry, immediately followed by a long file of wagons and carts. The march was closed by a rearguard of twenty horsemen.

This small *army*, about three hundred strong, marched through the pueblo with heads raised and bold glances, passed the double row of spectators, and stopped, at a signal from the chief, about one hundred yards in front of the village, at a triangle formed by the meeting of three roads. Here the troops were ordered to bivouac.

It is almost needless to tell the reader that this *army* was the Atrevida Company. The good conduct of the band, and its martial air, had gained the favour of the population of the pueblo through which they marched so boldly. During the passage handkerchiefs and sombreros were waved, and cries of "Bravo!" were heard. The count, on horseback a few paces ahead of the main body, had not ceased for a moment bowing gracefully to the right and left, and these salutes had been returned with usury all along the village.

So soon as the order to bivouac was given, each set to work, and in less than two hours the adventurers, skilfully employing all within their reach, had established the most graceful and picturesque encampment that can be imagined. Still, as the count regarded himself as being in an enemy's country, nothing was neglected not only to protect the camp from a surprise, but also to place it in a respectable state of defence. By the aid of the wagons and carts, reinforced by palisades, the adventurers formed a barricade, still further defended by a ditch, the earth from which was thrown up on the other side as a breastwork. In the centre of the camp, on a small mound, rose the chiefs tent, before which the guns were planted; and from its summit floated the flag to which we have already alluded.

The arrival of the French was a piece of good fortune for the Sonorians whom the festival had attracted to La Magdalena. Indeed, for several days they had been expected hourly; and the inhabitants, in spite of the proclamations of the Mexican Government, which represented the French as plunderers and bandits, had taken no further precautions against them than to go and meet them, and receive them with shouts of welcome—a characteristic fact which clearly proved that public opinion was not at all deceived as to the meaning of the French pronunciamiento, and that each knew perfectly well on which side were right and justice.

When the camp was formed the authorities of the pueblo presented themselves at the gate, asking, in the name of their fellow citizens, permission to visit the Frenchmen. The count, delighted with this measure, which was of good augury for the relations he hoped presently to establish with the inhabitants, at once gave the requisite permission with the best grace possible.

De Laville had joined the count at about ten miles from the pueblo, at the head of eighty horsemen, which supplied the army with a respectable body of cavalry. Don Louis, having long been acquainted with the captain of Guetzalli, appointed him Chief of the Staff, and intrusted to him the annoying details of duty. De Laville eagerly accepted this mark of confidence; and the count, thenceforward free to occupy himself with the political portion of the expedition, retired to his tent, in order to reflect on the means to be employed by which to bring over to his side the population among which he now was.

Since the day General Guerrero presented himself at the mission, accompanied by Father Seraphin, the count, through a feeling of propriety, had not seen Doña Angela again, over whom he watched, however, with the utmost solicitude. The young lady appreciated this delicacy, and, for her part, had not attempted to see him. She had journeyed from the mission to La Magdalena in a closed palanquin, and a tent had been erected for her at no great distance from the count's.

The permission requested by the authorities had scarce been granted ere the adventurers' camp was visited by all the inhabitants. The mob, eager to see more nearly these bold men who, though in such small number, did not fear to declare war openly against the Government of Mexico, rushed in a body to the place occupied by them. The adventurers received their guests with that gaiety which distinguishes Frenchmen, and in a few hours gained the goodwill of the Sonorians, who, the more they saw of them, the more they wished to see, and who never grew weary of admiring their recklessness, and, above all, their imperturbable conviction of the success of the expedition. Night was setting in, the sun was rapidly sinking on the horizon, when Don Cornelio, who performed the duties of aide-de-camp to the count, raised the curtain of his tent, and announced to him that a field officer, who stated he had a message for him, asked to speak with him. Don Louis gave the order for his introduction. The envoy entered, and the count at once recognised in him Colonel Suarez. On his side, the colonel made a gesture of surprise at seeing the man he had met at Guetzalli, though he had not succeeded in finding out who he was. Don Louis smiled at the colonel's astonishment, bowed politely, and begged him to be seated.

"I am requested, sir, by General Guerrero," the colonel said after the usual compliments, "to deliver a letter to you."

"I have already been told so, colonel," the count answered. "I presume that you are acquainted with the contents of the letter?"

"Nearly so, sir; for I have several words to add to it in the course of conversation."

"I am ready to hear you."

"I will not waste your time, sir. In the first place here is the letter."

"Very good," the count said, taking it and laying it on the table.

"General Don Sebastian Guerrero," the colonel continued, "accepts the offer you did him the honour of making him for the hand of his daughter: still he desires that the nuptial ceremony should take place as soon as possible."

"I see nothing to prevent it."

"He desires also that this ceremony, at which he hopes to be present with a large party of his relations and friends, should be celebrated at La Magdalena by Father Seraphin."

"I have a few observations to make on that subject, colonel."

"I am listening to you, caballero."

"I willingly consent that Father Seraphin should marry us; but the ceremony will not take place at La Magdalena, but here in my camp, which I cannot and will not leave."

The colonel knit his brows. The count continued without seeming to notice it:—

"The general can be present at the ceremony, with as many relations and friends as he pleases; but as, unfortunately, we do not stand on such good terms to each other as I should wish, and as I must take care of my own safety, as much as he does of his, the general will be good enough to send me ten hostages selected among the most influential persons in the State. These hostages will be treated by me with the greatest honour, and restored to the general one hour after the nuptial blessing and the departure of the guests from the camp. But I must warn your general that, if the slightest treachery is attempted against myself or one of the men I have the honour of commanding, these hostages will be immediately shot."

"Oh!" the colonel exclaimed, "you distrust General Guerrero, sir, and put no faith in his honour as a caballero."

"Unfortunately, sir," the count replied dryly, "I have learned at my own expense what the value is of the honour of certain Mexicans. I will, therefore, enter into no discussion on that subject. Such are my conditions. The general is at liberty to accept or refuse them; but I pledge you my word of honour that I shall make no change."

"Very well, sir," the colonel answered, intimidated in spite of himself by the count's resolute accent, "I will have the honour of transmitting these harsh conditions to the general."

Don Louis bowed.

"I doubt whether he will accept them," the colonel continued.

"He can do as he pleases."

"But is there no other way of settling the difference?"

"I do not see any."

"Well, in the event of the general accepting, how shall I let you know it, so as to lose as little time as possible?"

"In a very simple mode, sir—by the arrival of Father Seraphin and the delivery of the hostages."

"And, in that case, when will the ceremony take place?"

"Two hours after the hostages have reached my camp."

"I will retire, sir, and submit your reply to my superior officer."

"Do so, sir."

The colonel retired, and the count, who fancied himself sure of the acceptance of his ultimatum, immediately gave the necessary orders for the construction of the cabin intended to serve as a chapel. After this he wrote a note, which was handed to Doña Angela through the medium of Don Cornelio. This note, which was very laconic, contained the following lines:—

"MADAM,

"I have received your father's answer: it is favourable. Tomorrow, in all probability, the ceremony of our marriage will take place. I watch over you and myself.

"The Count de PRÉBOIS CRANCÉ."

After sending off this note the count wrapped himself in a cloak, and went out to visit the posts, and assure himself that the sentries were keeping good guard. The night was bright and clear; the sky studded with an infinite number of brilliant stars; the atmosphere perfumed with a thousand sweet odours; at intervals the strains of the guitars, borne on the breeze, rose from the pueblo, and died out at the count's ear. The camp was silent and gloomy; the adventurers, who had retired under their leafy jacales, were enjoying that rest so necessary after a day's march; the horses, hobbled pell-mell with the mules, were devouring their alfalfa; the sentries, with shouldered muskets, were walking slowly around the intrenchments with their eyes fixed on the plain.

The count, after walking about for some time, and convincing himself that everything was in the most perfect order, was induced by the melancholy and mysterious softness of the night, to lean on the breastwork; and, with his eye fixed on vacancy, not looking at or probably seeing anything, he gradually gave way to his dreams, yielding unconsciously to the mysterious influence of the objects that surrounded him. From time to time, as the sentries called to each other, he mechanically raised his head; then he would yield again to the flood of thought that fell on him, and was so absorbed in himself that he seemed to be asleep; but it was not so.

For several hours he had been thus leaning over the breastwork, without a thought of retiring, when he suddenly felt a hand lightly laid on his shoulder. This touch, light as it was, sufficed to recall him from the ideal worlds in which his imagination was galloping, and to a consciousness of his present situation. The count stifled a cry of surprise and turned round. A man was holding

on to the outside of the breastwork, his head scarce emerging over the top. It was Curumilla.

The chief had a finger laid on his lips, as if to recommend prudence to the count. The latter made a sign of pleasure on recognising the Indian, and quickly bent down to him.

"Well?" he said with his mouth to his ear.

"You will be attacked tomorrow."

"You are sure of it?"

The Indian smiled.

"Yes," he said.

"When?"

"At night."

"What hour?"

"An hour before moonrise."

"By whom?"

"Palefaces."

"Oh, oh!"

"Good-by."

"Are you off again?"

"Yes."

"Shall I see you again?"

"Perhaps."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"And Valentine?"

"He will come."

The Indian, doubtlessly fatigued with having talked so much, contrary to his habits, although the sentences he uttered were of no extraordinary length, slipped down the breastwork again, and said no more. Louis looked after him, and saw him crawl away on his knees, and disappear without producing the slightest sound. The scene had taken place so rapidly, the Indian's flight had been so silent, that the count was on the point of regarding it as an hallucination; but suddenly the hoot of the owl, twice repeated, rose in the air.

This signal had long been agreed on between Valentine and the count. He understood that Curumilla, while warning him that he was safe, sent him from a distance a last recommendation to silence. He tossed his head sadly, and returned to his tent pensively, muttering in a low voice,

"Another piece of treachery!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COCK-FIGHT.

In marching on La Magdalena the count had a double object: in the first place, that of meeting the rich hacenderos and alcaldes of the pueblos dissatisfied with the Mexican Government, and try to draw them over to his side by the brilliant prospects of independence he offered them; secondly, by his strategic position at the village, to alarm General Guerrero, and keep him constantly on the alert by a simultaneous feint of aggressive movements on each of the three Sonorian capitals.

The general, so soon as war was declared, had appealed to the population with that pompous and verbose Mexican eloquence which only deceives the foolish. The inhabitants, who were perfectly indifferent about the Government, and cared but little to interfere in the general's private quarrels, which he tried in vain to metamorphose into a national question, had remained quietly at home, and had in no way responded to their chiefs so-called patriotic appeal, the more so because, during the four months since the French landed in Sonora, and had been traversing the country, their conduct toward the population had been ever exemplary, and not the smallest complaint had been made against them.

The general, disappointed at the ill success of his machinations, then changed his batteries. He proceeded to forced enlistments: next, not satisfied with that, he treated with the Hiaquis and Opatas Indians, in order to increase his army. He also wished, at the outset, to enrol the Apaches; but the rude lesson the French had read the latter had disgusted them with war, and they retired to their deserts without listening to any new proposition.

Still General Guerrero had succeeded in collecting an imposing force. His army amounted to

nearly 12,000 men—an enormous number, if we think of the few combatants his enemy could draw up in time. The general, we must do him the justice to say, in spite of his incessant braggadocio, and the continual marches and countermarches he performed, had an instinctive respect for his enemy, or, if you like it better, a perfectly reasonable fear, which incited him to prudence, and prevented him ever coming too close to the French outposts. He contented himself with actively watching the count's movements, and holding the three roads in such a way as to be able easily to concentrate his troops on the point menaced by the adventurers.

It is a singular fact that the Americans of the South have never been able, after so many centuries, and though they are nearly descended from the Spaniards, to dispel that superstitious terror with which the European conquerors inspired them on their landing. The deeds of those heroic adventurers are still in every mouth, and during the war of independence it frequently happened that a handful of Spaniards put to flight, merely by showing themselves, masses of Mexican insurgents. The most convincing proof of our assertion we can produce is that, at this very moment, three hundred French adventurers, isolated in the centre of a country they did not know, and the majority of whom did not even speak the language, held in check an army of 12,000 men, commanded by chiefs who were esteemed good soldiers, and not only made Sonora tremble, but even the Federal Government in Mexico itself.

The boldness and temerity of the enterprise attempted by the count increased, were that possible, the terror he inspired. This expedition was so mad, that sensible men could not imagine that the count was not backed up by secret, though powerful allies, who only awaited an opportunity to declare themselves. This terror was carefully kept up by the count's spies and scouts. The boldness of his movements, the decision with which he acted, and finally, the occupation of La Magdalena without a blow being struck, heightened the apprehensions of the Government, and increased its indecision as to the intentions of the chief, or, as they called him, the *Cabecilla*.

It was about five in the morning when the curtain that closed the count's tent was raised from the outside, and a man entered. Don Louis, startled by this sudden apparition, rubbed his eyes and seized his pistols, saying in a firm voice,—

"Who is there?"

"I, of course," the new arriver said. "Who would dare enter in this way except me?"

"Valentine!" the count exclaimed with a shout of joy, and throwing down his pistols. "You are welcome, brother: I have been expecting you impatiently."

"Thank you," the hunter said. "Did not Curumilla announce my return this very night?"

"Yes," the count said with a laugh; "but you know how easy it is to talk with the chief."

"That is true. Well, I have brought you the information he omitted to give you, and perhaps it is all for the best."

The count had dressed himself; that is to say, he put on his coat and zarapé, for he had thrown himself on his bed in his clothes.

"Take a stool," he said, "and let us talk."

"I prefer going out."

"As you please," Don Louis answered, suspecting that his friend had peculiar reasons for acting thus. They left the tent together.

"Captain de Laville," the hunter said, addressing the young man, who was walking up and down before the tent, "an escort of ten horsemen, a horse for myself, and another for the chief, if you please."

"At once?"

"Yes, if it be possible."

"Of course it is."

"We are going to leave the camp, then?" Louis said when they were alone.

"We are going to La Magdalena," the hunter made answer.

"The moment is a most unfortunate one."

"Why so?"

"Because I am expecting the general's answer."

"In that case you can come," the hunter said with a malicious smile, "for you will not receive that reply. The colonel's mission was only a bait to lull your vigilance to sleep."

"Oh, oh! are you certain of what you assert?"

"By Jove!"

At this moment the escort appeared. Louis and Valentine mounted. It was hardly six in the morning; the country was deserted; at each puff of wind the trees shook their branches, which were damp with the abundant bright dew, and caused a gentle shower which rustled on the bushes; the sun sucked up the dense vapour that rose from the ground; and the birds, hidden in the foliage, woke up singing. The two friends, slightly in advance of their escort, rode pensively side by side, with the bridle on their horses' necks, and gazing vacantly at the magnificent

landscape which lay expanded before them. The first houses of the pueblo, gaily enframed in clumps of floripondios and vines, were visible from a turning in the road. Don Louis raised his head.

"Well," he said, as if answering his own thoughts, "I swear this shall be the last time that General Guerrero mocks me thus. It is plain that Colonel Suarez only came to my camp to see for himself in what condition we were."

"For nothing else."

"Where are we going now?"

"To a cockfight."

"A cockfight!" the count said in surprise.

The hunter looked at him significantly.

"Yes," he said to him, "you know, perhaps—or, if you do not, I will tell you—that the finest cockfights take place annually at La Magdalena at the period of the festival."

"Ah!" Louis said indifferently.

"I am certain that it will interest you," Valentine continued with a cunning air.

The count perfectly well understood that his friend only spoke to him in this way in order to foil any eavesdroppers who might be about, and was silent, for he felt certain that all would be cleared up ere long. Besides, the little party were at this moment entering the pueblo, the houses of which were beginning to open, in which the dwellers, hardly awake, saluted them as they passed with joyous and friendly smiles. After passing slowly through two or three streets, at a sign from Valentine the detachment stopped before a house of rather mean appearance, and which had nothing about it to recommend it to the attention of strangers.

"It is here," the hunter said.

They stopped and dismounted. Valentine then gave the leader of the escort strict orders to remain mounted with his men, and not stir till the count's return; then he tapped discreetly at the door, which was immediately opened. They entered, and the door was closed without their seeing anybody. They were scarcely in the house ere the hunter led his companion into a cuarto, the door of which he opened with a key he drew from his pocket.

"Follow my example," he said as he took off his vicuna hat and zarapé, which he exchanged for a cloak and a broad-brimmed straw hat. The count imitated him.

"Now come."

They wrapped themselves carefully in their cloaks, pulled their hats over their eyes, and left the house by a door cleverly hidden in the wall, which communicated with the adjoining house, through which they passed without meeting anybody, and found themselves once more in the street. But during the few minutes they remained in the house the appearance of the pueblo had completely changed. The streets were now thronged with people coming and going: at each step children and leperos were letting off fireworks with shouts of delight and bursts of laughter. Through the whole of Spanish America, and especially in Mexico, no at all respectable festival goes off without crackers and fireworks: letting off squibs is the acme of joy. We will repeat on this head a rather characteristic anecdote.

Some time after the Spaniards had been definitively expelled from Mexico, King Ferdinand one morning asked a rich Mexican who had sought refuge at the court of Spain,—

"What do you imagine your countrymen are doing at this moment, Don Luis de Cerda?"

"Sire," the Mexican replied gravely, as he bowed to the king, "they are letting off squibs."

"Ah!" the king said, and passed on.

A few hours later the king accosted the gentleman again: it was two in the afternoon.

"And now," he asked him gaily, "what are they engaged in?"

"Sire," the Mexican said with no less gravity than on the first occasion, "they continue to let off squibs."

The king smiled, but made no reply. At nightfall, however, he again addressed the same question to the gentleman, who answered with his imperturbable coolness,—

"May it please your Majesty, they are letting off more squibs than ever."

This time the king could not contain himself, but burst into a fit of laughter—a very remarkable circumstance, for this prince was never renowned for the jollity of his character.

The Mexicans have three passions;—playing at monte, witnessing cockfights, and letting off squibs. We believe that the third is the most deeply rooted in them; and the quantity of powder consumed in Mexico in the shape of squibs is incalculable. Hence squibs were being let off in all the streets and on all the squares of La Magdalena. At each step crackers exploded beneath the feet of our two friends, who, however, long accustomed to Mexican habits, did not attach the slightest importance to the fireworks, but continued their progress in perfect coolness, clearing a way as well as they could through the dense crowd of Indians, half-breeds, Negroes, Zambos, Spaniards, Mexicans, and North Americans. At length they turned into a lane about half way down the Calle San Pedro.

"Halloh!" Louis said, "are we really going to see a cockfight?"

"Of course," Valentine said with a smile. "Let me alone. I told you it would interest you."

"Go on, then," the count said with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "Deuce take you and your absurd ideas!"

"Good, good!" Valentine replied with a laugh. "We shall see; but we have arrived."

And without any more words they entered the house.

There is no amusement in Mexico, save perhaps monte or fireworks, which excites interest to such a degree as a cockfight; and this interest is not confined merely to a certain class of society. In this respect there is no difference between the President of the Republic and the most humble citizen, between the generalissimo and the lowest leper, between the highest dignitary of the Church and the most obscure sacristan: whites, blacks, half-castes, and Indians the whole population rushes with unequalled frenzy to this bloody spectacle which is so full of interest to them.

The pit is arranged in the following way:—Behind a house a large yard is selected, in the centre of which rises a circular amphitheatre, from fifty to sixty feet in diameter. The wall of this amphitheatre is never less than twenty feet high: it is built with brick, and carefully covered with hard stucco inside and out. Five rows of seats rising above each other complete the interior of the building. Until the opening of the doors no one knows what birds are entered; but, so soon as the public are admitted, the cocks are brought in. The bettors bring one each, which are then intrusted to the care of the trainer who makes the preliminary arrangements. These, however, are very simple. The cocks are armed with artificial spurs made of polished steel, about four inches in length, by half an inch wide at the base, slightly curved at the end, and terminating in a sharp point, while the upper side of the spur is sharpened. These spurs are firmly attached to the legs of the cocks by straps. When thus prepared for the contest, the cocks are taken into the pit by the trainers, who hold them up in the air, and submit them to the inspection of the spectators, who then make their bets. The money thus risked on the life of a bird is incredible, and men often ruin themselves by betting.

At the moment when the Frenchmen entered, the amusement had long before begun, so that all the best places were taken, and the pit filled with spectators pressing against each other. As, however, our friends had by no means come to take an active part in the amusement, they modestly seated themselves on the wall of the arena, where a band of ragged leperos had taken refuge, too poor to bet, but who regarded with envious eye and scarce-suppressed passion the happy favourites of fortune who were moving about beneath them with shouts and exclamations. The tumult was at its height, and all eyes were fixed on the pit, where—an extraordinary circumstance—one cock had defeated nine others in succession.

The Frenchmen cleverly profited by the effervescence of the spectators to pass on unnoticed, and reach the places they had selected. After a minute Valentine lit a maize pajilla, and bent over to his foster brother's ear.

"Wait for me here," he said; "I shall return in a moment."

Louis bowed in assent. Valentine rose with a nonchalant air, leaped carelessly over the benches, and, with cigar in mouth, mingled among the spectators who crowded the approaches to the pit. The count looked after him for a few moments, but then lost him in the crowd. His eyes then turned to the pit; and so great is the attraction offered by this singular and cruel spectacle, that the count involuntarily grew interested in what was going on before him, and even took a certain pleasure in it.

The combats followed in rapid succession, each offering different but exciting incidents. The count began to find his foster brother's absence protracted, for he had left him for nearly an hour, when all at once he saw himself standing before him.

"Well?" he asked him.

"Well," Valentine answered in Castilian, "it appears that I was right, and that Señor Rodrigo's cocks are achieving marvels. Come and see it more closely. I assure you that it is curious."

The count rose without replying, and followed him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INTERVIEW.

Owing to their disguise, but, above all, the interest everybody took in the cockfight, the Frenchmen succeeded in leaving the amphitheatre as they had entered it; that is to say, without attracting any attention. When they reached a sort of dark passage leading to the interior of the house, Valentine stopped.

"Listen, to me, Louis," he said, gluing his mouth, as it were, to his friend's ear. "The moment has arrived for you to learn why I brought you hither."

"I am listening."

"Since I left you at the mission, as you may suppose, I have not been inactive. I have gone about the country, have entered into relations with all the richest and most respected inhabitants, and have succeeded in making them comprehend how important it was for them to join and support you. The festival of La Magdalena offered us a favourable opportunity for meeting without attracting the attention of the Mexican Government, and arousing its apprehension. The only house in which a large body of persons can meet without exciting notice is indubitably that in which there is a cockpit. I therefore made an appointment here for this moment with the malcontents, who are numerous. They are all men who, by their fortunes or position, enjoy a high degree of consideration in the State which we wish to revolutionise, and possess great influence. I will introduce you to them: they are awaiting your arrival. You will explain to them your intentions, and they will tell you on what conditions they will consent to join you. Remember, however, brother, that you are dealing with Mexicans. Set no more confidence in their words or promises than they deserve. Be sure that success alone will gain them; that if you fail they will abandon you remorselessly, and be ready to deliver you up if they fancy they can derive any advantage from such an act of infamy. Now, if what I tell you does not suit you, you can retire, and I will undertake to dismiss them without compromising you in any way."

"No!" the count answered resolutely, "it is too late now: to hesitate or recoil would be cowardly. I must go on at all risks. Announce me to our new friends."

"Come on, then."

They walked to the end of the passage, where a closed door checked their progress. Valentine tapped thrice at equal intervals with the hilt of his machete.

"Who is there?" a voice asked from inside.

"The man expected a long time, though you did not dare hope that he would come," Valentine answered.

"He is welcome," the voice added.

At this moment the door opened, the two men entered, and it closed again on them immediately. They then found themselves in a large room with whitewashed walls, and the floor of beaten earth. The furniture consisted of benches, on which were seated some fifty men, some of whom wore an ecclesiastical garb. Curtains of red serge placed before the windows took off the glare, while at the same time preventing anyone outside seeing what was going on. On the entrance of the count and Valentine, all rose and uncovered themselves respectfully.

"Caballeros," Valentine said, "according to my promise, I have the honour to present to you the Count de Prébois Crancé, who has consented to accompany me in order to hear the propositions you have to make to him."

All bowed ceremoniously to the count, and he returned their bows with that grace and amenity peculiar to him. A man of a certain age, with an elegant and intelligent face, and dressed in the magnificent costume of the rich hacenderos, advanced and addressed the hunter.

"Pardon me, sir," he said with a slightly ironical accent, "I believe you have made a small mistake."

"Be good enough to explain, Señor Don Anastasio," the hunter replied. "I do not understand the words you have done me the honour to address to me."

"You said, sir, that the count had done us the honour of coming to hear the propositions we had to make to him."

"Well, sir?"

"That is just where the mistake lies, Don Valentine."

"How so, Señor Anastasio?"

"It appears to me that we have no propositions to make to the count, but that we, on the contrary, should listen to his."

A murmur of assent ran through the audience. Don Louis saw it was time to interfere.

"Gentlemen," he said, bowing gracefully to the hacenderos, "will you allow me to have a frank explanation with you? I am convinced that when I have done so any misunderstanding will be removed, and we shall comprehend each other perfectly."

"Speak, speak, señor!" they said.

"Gentlemen," he went on, "will not here enter into any personal details. I will not tell you how or why I arrived at Guaymas—in what way the Government of Mexico, after breaking all the promises it made me, ended by declaring me an enemy of the country, placed me without the pale of society, and carried its impudence so far as to treat me as a pirate, and set a price on my head, as if I were a bandit or wretched assassin; for that would cause the loss of precious moments, and be a gratuitous abuse of your patience, as you all know thoroughly what has occurred."

"Yes, señor conde," the hacendero who had already spoken interrupted him, "we know the facts to which you allude: we deplore them, and blush for the honour of our country."

"I thank you, gentlemen, for these marks, of sympathy: they are very sweet to me, as they prove that you are not mistaken as to my character. I will come to facts without further circumlocution."

"Hear, hear!" the audience murmured.

The count waited a few moments, and when silence was completely restored he continued:—

"Gentlemen, Sonora is the most fertile and richest country not only of Mexico, but of the whole universe. By its position at the extremity of the centre of the Confederation, from which it is divided by lofty mountains and vast despoblados, Sonora is a country apart, destined, in a speedy future, to separate itself from the Mexican Confederation. Sonora is sufficient for itself. The other provinces supply it with nothing; on the contrary, Sonora supports and enriches them with the surplus of its produce. But Sonora, owing to the system of oppression under which it groans, is, properly speaking, only a vast desert. The greater part of its territory is uncultivated, for the Government of Mexico, which knows so well how to squeeze it, and seize the productions of its soil, and the gold and silver of its mines, is impotent to protect it against the enemies that surround it—the Indios Bravos, whose incursions, annually becoming more insolent, threaten to grow even more so, unless a speedy remedy is applied, and the evil uprooted. I said, at the outset, that within a short period Sonora would be separated from the Mexican Confederation. Let me explain myself. This will happen inevitably, but in two different ways, according to the advantage the inhabitants will derive from it. Sonora is menaced by powerful enemies other than the Indians. These enemies are the North Americans, those Wandering Jews of civilisation, whose axes you may hear felling the trees of the last forests that separate you, and who will soon invade and occupy your country, unless you take care; and it will be impossible for you to offer the slightest resistance to this unjust conquest, for you have no support to expect from your Government, which consumes all its energies in the purposeless and universal contests of the cabecillas, who seize on the power in turn."

"Yes, yes," several persons exclaimed, "that is true; the count is right."

"This conquest with which you are menaced is imminent—it is inevitable; and then what will happen, gentlemen? What has happened wherever the Yankees have succeeded in planting themselves. You will be absorbed by them: your language, customs, even your religion, all will be submerged in this flood. See what has occurred in Texas, and shudder at the thought of what awaits you soon!"

A thrill of anger ran through the assembly at these words, of which each recognised the justice in his heart. The count went on:—

"You have a means to escape this frightful evil; it is in your hands—it depends on you alone."

"Speak, speak!" was shouted on every side.

"Declare your independence loudly, frankly, and energetically. Separate yourselves boldly from Mexico, form the Sonorian Confederation, and call to your aid the French emigrants in California. They will not remain deaf to your appeal: they will come to help you not only in conquering, but also in maintaining your independence against your enemies within and without. The Frenchmen whom you adopt will become your brothers: they have the same religion, almost the same habits as yourselves; in a word, you belong to the same race. You will easily understand each other. They will erect an impassable barrier against North American invasion, make the Indians respect your frontiers, and compel the Mexicans to recognise the right you have proclaimed of being free."

"But," one of the company objected, "if we call the French to our aid, what will they ask of us in return?"

"The right of cultivating your lands which lie fallow," the count answered energetically; "of bringing to you progress, the arts, and industry; in one word, of peopling your deserts, enriching your towns, and civilising your villages: that is what the French will ask. Is it too much?"

"No, certainly, it is not," Don Anastasio said amid a murmur of assent.

"But," another objected, "who guarantees us that, when the moment arrives to settle our accounts with the colonists we have summoned to our aid, they will faithfully fulfil the promises they have made us, and not insist, in their turn, on dictating laws to us, by taking advantage of their number and strength?"

"I, caballeros, I, who in their name will treat with you, and assume the responsibility of everything."

"Yes, the prospective of which you allow us a glimpse is seductive, caballero," Don Anastasio answered in the name of all. "We recognise the truth of the facts you tell us. We know only too well how precarious our position is, and what great dangers menace us; but a scruple causes us to refrain at this moment. Have we the right to plunge our unhappy country, already half ruined, in the horrors of a civil war, when in this unfortunate land nothing is prepared for an energetic resistance? The Government of Mexico, so weak for good, is powerful for evil, and it will manage to find troops to reduce us if we revolt. General Guerrero is an experienced officer—a cold and cruel man, who will recoil before no extremity, however terrible its nature, to stifle in blood any attempt at insurrection. In a few days he has succeeded in collecting a powerful army to conquer us: each of your soldiers, in the coming contest, will have to fight against ten. However brave the French may be, it is impossible for them to resist such an imposing force. A battle lost, and all is over with you. Any armed opposition will become impossible, and you will drag us down in your fall if we help you; and we have the more to fear, because our position is not like yours. We are sons of the country: we have in it our families and fortunes. We have, therefore, everything to lose; while you, on the other hand, supposing you are beaten, and your enterprise completely fails, have a means of safety we cannot employ, in flight. These considerations are serious. They

oblige us to act with the greatest prudence, and reflect deeply, before determining to shake off the detested yoke of Mexico. Do not believe, caballero, that we speak thus through cowardice or weakness. No, it is solely through the fear of failure, and the loss, in the shipwreck, of the few shreds of liberty which, through policy, they have not yet dared to tear from us, and which they possibly only need a pretext to assail."

"Gentlemen," the count answered, "I appreciate at their full value the motives you have been good enough to lay before me. Still, permit me to observe that, however serious the objections may be you do me the honour of laying before me, we are not here to discuss them. The object of our meeting is an offensive and defensive alliance between yourselves and me, is it not?"

"Certainly," most of the audience exclaimed, surprised by the count's sudden change of position, and led to speak, perhaps involuntarily, more hurriedly than they had intended.

"Well," the count continued, "let us not waste our time, like those tradesmen who boast to each other about the quality of their wares. Let us go straight to our object, frankly, clearly, and like men of honour. Tell me, without any concealment, on what conditions you consent to form an alliance with me and give me your support, and the number of men I can count on when the right moment arrives."

"That is the right way to speak, señor conde," Don Anastasio replied. "Well, to a question so clearly asked, we will answer no less clearly. We do not doubt (Heaven forbid we should!) either the courage or strategic skill of your soldiers: we know that the French are brave. Still your band is not large: up to the present it has no support, and only possesses the patch of ground on which it is encamped. Establish a solid base of operations—seize, for instance, one of the three chief cities of Sonora—then you will no longer be adventurers, but really soldiers; and we shall no longer fear to treat with you, because your expedition will have gained consistency—in one word, have become earnest."

"Very good, gentlemen; I understand you," the count answered coldly. "And, in case I succeed in carrying one of the cities you mention, I can count on you?"

"Body and soul."

"And how many men will you place at my disposal?"

"Six thousand in four days—the whole of Sonora in a week."

"You promise it?"

"We all swear it!" they exclaimed enthusiastically.

But this enthusiasm could not produce a flash or smile on the count's face.

"Gentlemen," he said, "within a fortnight I give you the meeting in one of the three chief cities of Sonora; and then, as I shall have accomplished my obligations, I shall call on you to keep yours."

The Mexicans could not restrain a gesture of astonishment and admiration at these noble words. The count, though no longer young, was still handsome, and gifted with that fascination which improvises kingdoms. Each of his phrases left a memory. All present came in turn to press his hand, and renew individually their protestations of devotion, after which they left the room. The count and Valentine remained alone.

"Are you satisfied, brother?" the hunter asked him.

"Who could be strong enough to galvanise this people?" the count muttered with a mournful shrug of his shoulders, and rather answering his own thoughts than the question his friend had addressed to him. The two men went to fetch their zarapés. They found their escort where they had left it, and retired slowly through the crowd, who saluted them as they passed with shouts of "*Vivan los Franceses!*"

"If I come to be shot some day," the count said bitterly, "they will only have to alter one word."

Valentine sighed, but made no reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER SERAPHIN.

Doña Angela had just awakened: a sportive sunbeam, passing indiscreetly over her charming face, had made her open her eyes. She was lying half extended in her hammock, with her head supported on her right arm, and was pensively looking at the swan's-down slipper which she was idly balancing on her dainty little foot. Violanta, seated at her foot on a stool, was busily arranging the various articles of her mistress's toilette. At length Doña Angela shook off her careless languor, and a smile played on her coral lips.

"Today," she said, as she raised her head coquettishly.

This one word contained the maiden's thoughts, her joy, love, happiness—her whole life, in fact. She fell back in a reverie, yielding herself up unconsciously to the delicate and busy services of her waiting-maid. The sound of a footstep was heard outside, and Doña Angela raised her head quickly.

"Someone is coming," she said.

Violanta went out, but returned almost immediately.

"Well?"

"Don Cornelio requests permission to say two words to the señorita," the camarista answered.

The maiden frowned with an air of vexation.

"What can he want again?" she said.

"I do not know."

"That man displeases me singularly."

"I will tell him that you cannot receive him."

"No," she said quickly, "let him enter."

"Why, if he displeases you?"

"I prefer seeing him. I do not know why, but that man almost terrifies me."

The waiting maid blushed and turned her head away, but recovered almost immediately.

"Still he is entirely devoted to Don Louis and yourself, señorita."

"Do you think so?" she said, fixing a piercing glance on her.

"Well, I suppose so; his conduct up to the present has been most honourable."

"Yes," she murmured dreamily. "Still there is something at the bottom of my heart which tells me that this man hates me. I experience, on seeing him, an insurmountable feeling of repulsion. This is something inexplicable to me; but, though everything seems to prove to me that I am wrong, still, whether right or wrong, there is at times an expression in his glance which makes me shudder. The only thing a man cannot disguise is his look, for it is the reflex of his soul, and God has decreed it so, in order that we may put ourselves on our guard, and recognise our enemies. But he is doubtlessly tired of waiting. Let him come in."

Violanta hastened to execute her mistress's orders. Don Cornelio entered with a smile on his lips.

"Señorita," he said, after a graceful bow, which the maiden returned without leaving her hammock, "pardon me for daring to trouble your solitude; but a worthy priest, a French missionary, desires that you will grant him the favour of a few minutes' interview."

"What is the missionary's name, Señor Don Cornelio?"

"Father Seraphin, I believe, señorita."

"Why does he not address himself to Don Louis?"

"He intended to do so in the first instance."

"Well?"

"But," Don Cornelio continued, "at sunrise Don Louis left the camp, accompanied by Don Valentine; and though it is now near midday, he has not yet returned."

"Ah! Where did Don Louis go to at so early an hour?"

"I cannot tell you, señorita. All that I know for certain is, that he proceeded in the direction of La Magdalena."

"Has anything new occurred?"

"Nothing I am aware of, señorita."

There were a few moments of silence, during which Doña Angela was reflecting. At length she continued:

"And do you not suspect what this missionary wishes to say to me, Don Cornelio?"

"In no way, señorita."

"Beg him to come in. I shall be happy to see and converse with him."

Violanta, without giving Don Cornelio time to reply, raised the curtain that closed the entrance of the jacal.

"Come in, my father," she said.

The missionary appeared. Doña Angela greeted him respectfully, and pointed to a chair.

"You wish to speak with me, my father?" she said.

"Yes, madam," he replied with a bow.

"I am ready to listen to you."

The missionary looked round in a way that Don Cornelio and the waiting maid understood, for they went out at once.

"Cannot what you have to say to me be heard by that girl, who is devoted to me?"

"Heaven forbid, madam, that I should try to lessen the confidence you place in that person, but allow me to give you a little piece of advice."

"Pray do so."

"It is often dangerous to confide your secret thoughts to persons in a lower station than yourself."

"Yes, that may be true in theory, my father, but I will not discuss it. Be kind enough to explain to me the reason of your visit."

"I am grieved, madam, at having hurt your feelings without wishing it. Pardon an observation which you considered indiscreet, and may Heaven grant that I am deceived!"

"No, my father, no; I did not consider your remark indiscreet. But I am a spoiled child, and it is my place to ask your forgiveness."

At this moment the sound of horses was heard in the camp. Violanta raised the curtain.

"Don Louis has arrived," she said.

"Let him come hither at once," Doña Angela exclaimed.

The missionary gazed on her with an expression of gentle pity. A few minutes later Don Louis and Valentine entered the jacal. The hunter walked up to the missionary, and pressed his hand affectionately.

"Have you come from the general, my father?" the count asked him quickly.

"Alas, no!" he answered. "The general is unaware of my coming; for had he known of it, he would probably have tried to oppose it."

"What do you mean? Speak, in Heaven's name!"

"Alas! I am about to redouble your agony and your sorrow. General Guerrero never intended to bestow on you this lady's hand. I cannot tell you what I have seen or heard, for my office forbids it; but I am a Frenchman, sir—that is to say, your fellow countryman—and I believe my duty orders me to warn you that treachery surrounds you on all sides, and that the general is trying to lull your vigilance by fallacious promises, in order to surprise you and finish with you."

Don Louis let his head sink on his chest.

"In that case, sir," he said presently, "with what object have you come here?"

"I will tell you. The general wishes to get back his daughter, and, to effect that, all means will be good. Permit me to draw your attention to the fact that, under present circumstances, the lady's presence here is not only a danger for you, but also an ineffaceable stain on her honour."

"Sir!" the count exclaimed.

"Deign to listen to me," the missionary continued coldly. "I do not doubt either your honour or the lady's; but you have no power, to my knowledge, to impose silence on your enemies, and stop the immense flood of calumny they pour out on you and her. Unhappily your conduct seems to justify them."

"But what is to be done? What means shall I employ?"

"There is one."

"Speak, my father."

"This is what I propose. You intend to marry this lady?"

"Certainly; you know that is my dearest wish."

"Let me finish. The marriage must not be celebrated here; for such a ceremony, performed in the midst of a camp of adventurers, without witnesses, would seem a mockery."

"But——"

"It must take place in a city, in the presence of the entire population, in the broad sunshine, to the sound of the bells and cannon, which, traversing the air, will tell all that the marriage has really taken place."

"Yes," Valentine remarked, "Father Seraphin is right; for then Doña Angela will no longer marry a pirate, but a conqueror, with whom terms must be made. She will not be the wife of an adventurer, but of the liberator of Sonora, and those who blame her today will be the first to sing her praises."

"Yes, yes, that is true!" the maiden cried with fire. "I thank you, my father, for coming. My duty is laid down: I will accomplish it. Who will dare to attack the reputation of her who has married the saviour of her country?"

"Still," the count remarked, "this is only a palliative, after all. The marriage cannot take place yet. A fortnight, perhaps a month, will elapse ere I have rendered myself master of a city. Till then Doña Angela must remain in the camp where she has hitherto been."

All eyes were anxiously turned to the missionary.

"No," he said, "if the young lady will allow me to offer her a shelter."

"A shelter!" she said with an inquiring glance.

"Very simple and most unworthy to receive her, doubtlessly," he continued, "but where at least she will be in safety, in the midst of a family of honourable and good persons, to whom it will be a delight to receive her."

"Is the shelter you offer me, my father, very far from here?" the maiden asked quickly.

"Twenty-five leagues at the most, in the direction in which the French expedition must proceed on its march into Sonora."

Doña Angela gave a cunning smile at having been so well understood by the good priest.

"Listen, my father," she said with that resolution which was one of the principal features of her character. "Your reputation reached me long ago, and I know that you are a holy man. Even if I did not know you, the friendship and respect Don Valentine professes for you would be to me a sufficient guarantee. I trust myself in your hands. I understand how unsuitable my presence in the camp now, at any rate, is. Take me wherever you please. I am ready to follow you."

"My child," the missionary said with charming unction, "it is God who inspires this determination. The grief you will feel at a separation of a few days at the most will double the happiness of a reunion which no one will dare any longer to oppose—which will not only raise you again in the public opinion, which it is always precious to preserve, but also give your reputation a lustre which it will be hopeless to try and tarnish."

"Go, then, as it must be so, Doña Angela," the count said. "I intrust you to this good padre; but I swear that a fortnight shall not elapse ere we are again together."

"I hold your promise, Don Louis; it will help me to endure with greater courage the agony of absence."

"When do you expect to start?" Valentine asked.

"Now," the maiden exclaimed. "As the separation is inevitable, let us get over it at once."

"Well spoken," Valentine said. "By Jove! I return to what I said before, Doña Angela—you are a strong and nobly courageous woman; and, by heavens, I love you as a sister!"

Doña Angela could not refrain from smiling at the hunter's enthusiasm. The latter continued:—

"Hang it! But we did not think of that; you will need an escort——"

"For what?" the priest asked simply.

"By Jove! you are really delightful. Why, to protect you against the enemy's marauders."

"My friend, the respect of everybody we meet will be worth more to us than an escort, which is often compromising."

"For you, I grant but, my father, you do not remember that you will travel with two females who must be immediately recognised."

"That is true," he said simply; "I did not think of it."

"What is to be done, then?"

Doña Angela began laughing.

"Gentlemen, you are really troubled by a very trifling matter. The good father said an instant back, that the gown is the best safeguard, for friend and foe will respect it under all circumstances."

"That is true," the missionary said in confirmation.

"Well, it is extremely simple. If Father Seraphin has no objection, my waiting maid and myself will put on novices' robes, under which it will be easy for us to disguise ourselves so cleverly that no one can recognise us."

Father Seraphin seemed to be reflecting profoundly for a few moments.

"I see no serious obstacles to this disguisement," he at length observed: "under the circumstances it is permissible, as it will serve a good object."

"But where shall we find monks' robes?" the count objected, half seriously, half laughing. "I must confess that my camp is completely out of them."

"I will take that on myself," Valentine said. "I will send to La Magdalena a safe man, who can bring them back within an hour: during that time Doña Angela will complete her preparations for departure."

No one made any objection, and the maiden was left alone. Less than an hour after, Doña Angela and Violanta, dressed in monks' robes which Don Cornelio had purchased in the village, and with their faces concealed under broad-brimmed hats, mounted their horses, and, after bidding a warm farewell to their companions, they left the camp, accompanied by Father Seraphin. On separating, Violanta and Don Cornelio exchanged a secret glance, which would have given the count and Valentine matter for serious thought, could they have seen it.

"I am not easy in my mind," Don Louis muttered, shaking his head sadly. "A priest is a very weak escort in the present times."

"Reassure yourself," Valentine answered; "I have provided for that."

"Oh! you always think of everything, brother."

"Is it not my duty? Now let us attend to ourselves. The night will soon fall, and we must take our precautions not to let ourselves be surprised."

"You know that, with the exception of the few words you told me through Curumilla, I am completely ignorant of the details of this affair."

"They would be too long to give you at the present moment, brother, for we have hardly the requisite time for action."

"Have you any plan?"

"Certainly. If it succeed, the people who hope to surprise us will be awfully taken in."

"On my word, I trust to you with the greater pleasure because we have been a long time already at La Magdalena, and I wish to begin my forward march seriously."

"Very good. Can you spare me fifty adventurers?"

"Take as many as you like."

"I only want fifty resolute men accustomed to desert warfare. For that purpose I shall take Captain de Laville, and recommend him to select from among the men he brought with him from Guetzalli the boldest and most clever."

"Do so, my friend. As for myself, I will carefully watch over the camp, and double the patrols."

"That precaution can do no harm. So now good-by till tomorrow."

"Farewell!"

They separated, and Don Louis returned to his tent.

At the moment Valentine reached Captain de Laville's jacal he saw Don Cornelio quitting the camp with an indifferent air, and mechanically looked after him. In a moment he lost him out of sight behind a clump of trees, but all at once saw him reappear but mounted this time, and setting off full gallop in the direction of the pueblo.

"Eh, eh?" Valentine muttered with a thoughtful air. "What can Don Cornelio have to do in such haste at La Magdalena? I will ask him."

And he entered the jacal, where he found the captain, with whom he immediately began discussing the plan he had formed to foil the intended surprise on the part of the Mexicans. As we shall see this plan carried out presently, we will say nothing about it here, but go and rejoin Father Seraphin and Doña Angela.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE QUEBRADA DEL COYOTE.

It is especially at night, about two hours after sunset, that American scenery assumes grand proportions. Under the influence of the first night shadows the trees seem to put on majestic forms; the animated silence of the desert becomes more mysterious; and man experiences involuntarily a feeling of undefinable respect, which contracts his heart, and fills him with superstitious dread. At that hour the waters of the rivers flow with hoarse murmurings; the heavy and sinister flight of the birds of night agitates the air with a fluttering of evil augury; and the wild beasts, aroused in their hidden dens, salute the darkness with long howlings of joy, for at night they are incontestably the kings of the desert, for man is deprived of his greatest strength—the power of the eye.

Father Seraphin was riding by the side of the two females along the foot of a lofty mountain, whose wooded slopes were lost in the black depths of the Barrancas. Since leaving the camp they had not stopped once. They were following at this moment a narrow path traced by mules, which wound with countless turnings along the sides of the mountain. This path was so narrow that two horses could scarce go along side by side; but the steeds on which our travellers were mounted were so sure-footed, that the latter proceeded without any hesitation along a road on which no other animal would have ventured in the darkness.

The moon had not yet risen; not a star glistened in the cloud-laden sky; the darkness was dense; and, under the circumstances, this was almost fortunate; for had the travellers been able to see the spot where they were, and the way in which they were suspended, as it were, in space at a prodigious height, possibly their courage would have failed them, and their heads grown dizzy. Father Seraphin and Doña Angela were riding side by side: Violanta was a few paces behind.

"My father," the young lady said, "we have now been travelling for nearly six hours, and I am beginning to feel fatigued. Shall we not halt soon?"

"Yes, my child, in an hour at the most. In a few moments we shall leave this path, and cross a defile called the Quebrada del Coyote: at the end of that pass we shall spend the night in a poor house, which is now not more than two miles off."

"You say we are going to pass through the Coyote defile. We are, then, on the road to Hermosillo?"

"Quite true, my child."

"Is it not imprudent for us to venture on this road, which my father's troops command?"

"My child," the missionary said gently, "in good policy we must often risk a great deal in order to secure greater tranquillity. We are not only on the road to Hermosillo, but we are going to that very city."

"What! to Hermosillo?"

"Yes, my child. In my opinion it is the only spot where you will be completely safe from your father's search, as he will never think of looking for you there, and cannot imagine that you are so near him."

"That is true," she said after a moment's reflection.

"The plan is a bold one, and hence must succeed. I believe, in truth, that Hermosillo is the only spot where I can be safe from the pursuit of those who have an interest in finding me."

"I will take care, besides, to recommend you to the persons to whom I shall intrust you; and, for greater security, I will leave you as little as possible."

"I shall be greatly obliged to you, my father, for I shall feel very sad and lonely."

"Courage, my child! I have faith in Don Louis. Heaven must protect his expedition, for the work he has undertaken is grand and noble, as it has for its object the emancipation of an entire country."

"Believe me, my father, I am happy to hear you speak thus. The count may fail; but in that case he will fall like a hero, and his death will be that of a martyr."

"Yes, the count is a chosen vessel. I believe, like yourself, my child, that if his contemporaries do not do him the justice which is his due, posterity at least will not confound him with those filibusters and shameless adventurers for whom gold alone is everything, and who, whatever may be the title they assume, are in reality no more than highway robbers. But the road is growing wider—we are about to enter the pass. This spot does not enjoy a very good reputation, so keep by my side. Although I believe that we have nothing to fear, it is always well to be prudent."

In fact, as the missionary stated, the path had suddenly widened out: the two sides of the mountain, which had, for some distance, been gradually drawing together, now formed two parallel walls, at the most only forty yards apart. It was this narrow gorge which was known as the Quebrada del Coyote. It was about half a mile in length; but then it suddenly grew wider, and opened on a vast *chaparral*, covered with thickets and fields of dahlias; while the mountains separated to the right and left, not to meet again till eighty leagues further on.

At the moment when the travellers entered the pass the moon broke out from the clouds in which it floated, and lighted up this dangerous pass with its mournful and sickly light. This gleam, weak as it was, could not fail to be agreeable to the travellers, as it allowed them to look around and see where they were. They pressed on their wearied steeds, in order to arrive more speedily at the end of the gloomy gorge in which they were. They had gone on for about ten minutes, and had nearly reached the centre of the pass, when the neighing of a horse smote their ears.

"We have travellers behind us," the missionary said with a frown.

"And in a hurry, as it seems," Doña Angela added. "Hark!"

They stopped to listen. The noise of hurried galloping reached their ears.

"Who can these men be?" the missionary murmured, speaking to himself.

"Travellers like ourselves, probably."

"No," Father Seraphin remarked, "travellers would not go at such a pace: they are doubtlessly persons in pursuit of us."

"That is not probable, my father: no one is aware of our journey."

"Treachery has the eye of the lynx and the ear of the opossum, my dear child. It is incessantly on the watch: everything is known—a secret is no longer one when two persons know it. But time presses: we must make up our minds."

"We are lost if they are enemies!" Doña Angela exclaimed with terror. "We have no help to expect from any one."

"Providence is on the watch, child. Place confidence in her: she will not abandon us."

The noise of horses rapidly approaching came nearer, and resembled the grumbling of thunder. The missionary drew himself up: his face suddenly assumed an expression of indomitable energy which would have been thought impossible for such gentle features; his voice, usually so pleasant and sonorous, became quick, and almost harsh.

"Place yourselves behind me, and pray," he said; "for, if I am not greatly mistaken, the meeting will be dangerous."

The two females obeyed mechanically. Doña Angela believed herself lost: alone with this poor priest, any resistance must be impossible. The missionary collected the reins in his left hand, attached them to the pommel of his saddle, and awaited the shock with his face turned to the newcomers. He had not long to wait: within scarce five minutes ten horsemen appeared at full gallop. When twenty paces from the travellers they halted as firmly as if their horses' hoofs were suddenly fixed in the ground.

These men, as far as it was possible to distinguish in the doubtful and tremorous light of the moon, were dressed in the Mexican garb, and their faces were covered with black crape. Doubt was no longer possible: these sinister horsemen were really in pursuit of our travellers. There was an instant of supreme silence—a silence which the missionary at length resolved to break.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" he said in a loud and firm voice. "Why are you pursuing us?"

"Oh, oh!" a mocking voice said, "the dove assumes the accent of the gamecock. Señor padre, we have no intention to injure you; we only wish to do you a service by saving you the trouble of guarding the two pretty girls you so cleverly have with you."

"Go your way, sirs," the priest continued, "and do not trouble yourselves about what does not concern you."

"Come, come, señor padre," the first speaker went on, "surrender with a good grace: we should not like to fail in the respect due to you. Resistance is impossible—we are ten against you alone: besides, you are a man of peace."

"You are cowards!" the missionary shouted. "Retire! A truce to mockery, and let me continue my journey in peace."

"Not so, señor padre, unless you consent to leave us your two companions."

"Ah, ah! that is it? Well, then, we must fight, gentlemen. It seems to me that you are strangely mistaken about me. Yes, I am a missionary, a man of peace; but I am also a Frenchman, and you appear to have forgotten that. You must understand that I will not suffer the slightest insult to the persons, whoever they may be, whom Heaven has placed under my protection."

"And with what will you defend them, Mr. Frenchman?" the stranger asked with a grin.

"With these," the missionary coldly replied as he drew a brace of pistols from his holsters, and set the hammers with a resolute air.

The bandits hesitated involuntarily. The missionary's action was so clear, his voice so firm, his presence so intrepid, that they felt themselves tremble; for they understood that they had a brave-hearted man before them, who would sooner die than yield an inch. The Mexicans do not respect much; but we must do them the justice of saying that they have an unbounded reverence for the priest's gown. The missionary was not a man like some who may be unfortunately met with, especially among the clergy of North and South America. His reputation for virtue and goodness was immense along the whole Mexican frontier: it was a serious matter to insult him, much more to threaten him with death. Still the strangers had advanced too far to give way.

"Come, padre," the man who had hitherto been spokesman said, "do not attempt any useless resistance. At all risks we will carry off these women."

And he made a movement as if to advance.

"Stop! One step further, and you are a dead man. I hold in my hands the life of two."

"And I of two others," a rough voice exclaimed; and a man, suddenly emerging from a thicket, bounded forward like a jaguar, and placed himself intrepidly by the missionary's side.

"Curumilla!" the latter exclaimed.

"Yes," the chief answered, "it is I. Courage! Our friends are coming up."

In fact a dull and continued sound could be heard rapidly increasing. The strangers had not yet paid attention to it, as they were so engaged by their discussion with the missionary. Still the situation was growing complicated. Father Seraphin saw that, so long as a pistol was not fired, he should remain almost master of the situation, certain, from Curumilla's words, as he was of seeing speedy help arrive. His resolution was at once formed: all he wanted was to gain time, and he attempted it.

"Come, gentlemen," he said, "you see that I am no longer alone: God has sent me a brave auxiliary; hence my position is no longer so desperate. Will you parley?"

"Parley!"

"Yes."

"Be quick."

"I will try to be so, as I presume, from the way in which you stopped me, you are salteadores. Well, look you. You have me almost in your power, or at least you think so. Remember that I am only a poor missionary, and that what I possess belongs to the unhappy. How much do you want for my ransom? Answer. I am ready to make any sacrifice compatible with my position."

Father Seraphin might have spoken thus for a long time, for the strangers were no longer listening: they had noticed the approaching sound, and were beginning to grow nervous.

"Maldición!" the man who had hitherto spoken said, "that demon has mocked us."

He dug his spurs into his horses flanks; but the noble animal, instead of bounding forward, reared up almost straight with a snort of pain, and then fell in a heap. Curumilla had cut its back sinews with a blow of his machete. After this exploit the Indian uttered a loud cry for help, which was answered by a formidable hurrah.

Still the impulse had been given, and the bandits rushed forward with a ferocious yell. The missionary discharged his pistols, rather for the purpose of hastening the advent of his unknown friends than of wounding his enemies, which was easy to see; for no one fell, and the two parties were so close that it was almost impossible to miss the mark.

At the same instant five or six horsemen rushed on the strangers like a whirlwind. A frightful medley began, and the bullets whistled in every direction. The missionary had dismounted, and, compelling the two females to do the same, he led them a few paces in the rear, in order to protect them from the shots. But the struggle was not a long one: within five minutes the bandits

fled at full speed, pursued by nearly all the newcomers, and leaving four of their men stretched on the ground.

After a chase of a few minutes, however, the horsemen giving up a pursuit which they saw was useless, returned and joined the missionary. The latter, forgetting the unjust aggression he had just escaped, was already seeking to succour the unhappy men who had fallen victims to the trap they had laid for him: he went piously from one to the other, in order to offer them assistance if there were still time. Three were dead: the fourth was gasping and rolling on the ground in convulsions of death. The missionary raised the veil that concealed his face, and uttered a cry of surprise on recognising him. At this cry the dying man opened his eyes, and fixed a haggard glance on Father Seraphin.

"Yes, it is I," he said in an expiring voice. "I have only what I deserve."

"Unhappy man!" the missionary replied, "Is that what you swore to me?"

"I tried to do it," he continued. "A few days back I saved the man you recommended to me, father."

"And I," the missionary said sorrowfully, "you owe your life to me, and yet tried to kill me?"

The dying man made a gesture of energetic denial.

"No," he exclaimed, "never! Look you, my father: there are accursed natures in the world. El Buitre was a wretched bandit. Well, he dies as he lived: that is just. Good-by, father! Well, I saved your friend, the hunter. Ah, ah!"

While saying this the wretch had sat up. Suddenly he was seized with a convulsion, and rolled on the ground: he was dead. The missionary knelt down by his side and prayed. All present, moved involuntarily, took off their hats piously, and remained silent by his side. All at once shouts and firing were heard, and a numerous band of horsemen galloped down the pass.

"To arms!" the men shouted, leaping into their saddles hurriedly.

"Stay," Curumilla said; "they are friends."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SURPRISE.

Employing our privilege as romancers, we will go back a little way, and return to Don Cornelio, whom Valentine looked after with such astonishment when he saw him leave the camp in such an unusual manner.

In the first place we will say a few words about Don Cornelio, that joyous and careless gentleman whom, in the first part of this history, we saw so impassioned for music generally, and the romance del Rey Rodrigo in particular. At the present time he was greatly changed: he no longer sang—the chords of his jarana no longer vibrated under his agile fingers; a deep wrinkle crossed his brow; his cheeks had grown pale; and he frowned incessantly under the pressure of gloomy thoughts. What could have happened? What powerful cause had thus changed the Spaniard's character?

This cause might be easily guessed. Don Cornelio loved Doña Angela. He loved her with all his strength—we will not say with a true and sincere love, for it was not love at all that he felt for her: another sentiment, less noble, but perhaps more lively, had craftily entered the gentleman's heart by the side of love.

This sentiment was avarice. We previously stated that Don Cornelio was under the influence of a fixed idea. This idea had led the Spaniard to America. The hidalgo wished to make his fortune by a marriage with a lady young, rich, and fair, but, before all, rich. A fixed idea is more than a passion, more than a monomania: it is the first stage of madness. Many times had Don Cornelio been deceived in his attempts on rich American women, whom he sought to dazzle, not by his luxury (for he was poor as Job, of lamentable memory), but by his personal advantages; that is to say, his beauty and wit. His meeting with Doña Angela decided his fate. Persuaded that the young lady loved him, he began to love her, for his part, with the frenzy of the drowning man, for whom such a love was the only chance of salvation.

When he perceived his error it was too late. We will do him the justice of conceding that the poor gentleman had struggled valiantly to tear from his heart this insensate passion. Unfortunately all his efforts were futile, and, as ever happens under such circumstances, forgetting all he owed to Don Louis, who had saved him not only from misery, but also from death, he felt for the count an intense hatred, the more tenacious because it was dumb and concentrated; and, by a natural feeling, he turned one half of that hatred on Doña Angela, although the young lady and the count had only been the instruments, throughout the affair, of that fatality which was so bitter against him.

Thus, with extreme patience and unexampled hypocrisy, Don Cornelio prepared his vengeance against these two beings, who had never done him aught but kindness, and watched with the perfidy of a wild beast the opportunity to destroy them. This opportunity would not be difficult to find in a country where treachery is the order of the day, and forms the basis of all combinations

and transactions, of whatever nature they may be.

Don Cornelio had entered into relations with the enemies of the count, and surrendered to them the secrets the latter allowed to let slip in his presence. He had so arranged as to make his two foes fall into a trap from which they could not escape, and in wreathing round them a net from which extrication would be impossible. And now that we have explained Don Cornelio's feelings to the reader we will proceed with our narrative.

The Spaniard had succeeded in drawing over to his side Doña Angela's waiting maid. Thus Violanta betrayed her mistress to the profit of Don Cornelio, by whom she believed herself beloved, and who, had led her to fancy that he would marry her some day. From the camarista, who had remained on the listen, the Spaniard learned all that was said in the jacal between Father Seraphin, the count, and the young lady: the order he afterwards received to go to La Magdalena and purchase the gowns dissipated all his doubts, and he resolved to act without loss of time.

It was by his advice that the Mexicans were to attempt to attack the camp that very night: hence he knew where to find them. Taking advantage, therefore, of a moment when everybody was too busy with his own affairs to think about what others were doing, he glided silently out of the camp, like a man taking a morning's walk, gained a clump of trees behind which a horse was hidden, and rode off at full speed across country, after taking a scrutinising glance around to assure himself that he was not watched.

He galloped thus for several hours, not seeming to follow any regular road, dashing straight on, and paying no attention to obstacles, or not checking the speed of his horse. Still, gradually his thoughts, at first gloomy and sad, assumed a different direction: he attached the bridle to his saddle-bow, and for the first time for many a day his fingers began straying mechanically over the resonant strings of his jarana, which he always wore in a sling, and brought with him; then, yielding unconsciously to the influence of the surrounding scenery, he began singing in a loud voice that couplet of the romance which bore a certain degree of reference to his present position:—

"Amada enemiga mia,
De España segunda Elena,
O ¡si yo naciera ciego!
O ¡tú sin beldad nacieras!
Maldito sea el punto y hora
Que al mundo me dio mi estrella:
Pechos que me dieron leche
Mejor sepulcro me dieran
Pagará—"^[1]

"Deuce take the owl singing at this hour!" a rough voice said, harshly interrupting the virtuoso. "Who ever heard such an infernal row?"

Don Cornelio looked around. The darkness was profound. A tall man with crafty air, and mustachios turned up, was examining him impudently while tapping the hilt of a long rapier.

"Eh, eh!" the Spaniard said with great composure, "Is that you, captain? What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you, Cristo."

"Well, here I am."

"That is fortunate. When do we start?"

"All is changed."

"Eh?"

"Lead me first to your encampment, where I will explain it all to you."

"Come."

Don Cornelio followed him. This captain, whom the reader has doubtless recognised, was the old soldier of the war of independence whom we had the honour of presenting to him under the name of Don Isidro Vargas, the confidential tool of General Guerrero, to whom he was attached like the blade to the hilt.

The Spaniard, drawing his horse after him by the bridle, entered a large clearing lighted up by a dozen fires, round which were crouched a hundred men with sinister faces and irregular accoutrements, but all armed to the teeth. These bandits, whose ferocious appearance would have delighted a painter, illumined as they were by the fantastic flames of the braseros, were gambling, drinking, and quarrelling, and did not seem to notice Don Cornelio's arrival. The latter made a gesture of disgust on seeing them, but hobbled his horse near theirs, and rejoined the captain, who had already seated himself by a fire evidently made specially for him, as not one of the worthy people he had the honour of commanding came near it.

"Now I will hear you," the captain said so soon as he saw his comrade stretched out comfortably at his side.

"What I have to say will not take long."

"Let me hear it, at any rate."

"In two words, this is the matter: our expedition of this evening is useless—the bird has flown."

The captain, according to his habit in any moment of nervous excitement, rapped out a frightful oath.

"Patience!" the Spaniard went on. "This is what has happened."

And he described the way in which Father Seraphin had left the camp, accompanied by the young lady. On hearing it the worthy captain's face brightened.

"Come," he said, "all is for the best. What will you do?"

"Give me El Buitre and ten resolute men. The priest must pass through the Quebrada del Coyote: on arriving there I promise to strip him."

"And what shall I do during that time?"

"Whatever you like."

"*Mil rayos!* since I am here, I will remain; but I shall quit this encampment at daybreak, and after leaving a party to beat up the country, I will join the general at Ures."

"Then he is at Ures at this moment?"

"Yes, temporarily."

"Very good; then you will see me there with my prisoners."

"Agreed."

"And now make haste; I must start at once."

The captain rose, and while Don Cornelio was drawing his horse's girths tighter, he gave orders to ten of his men to prepare for an expedition. Within five minutes the little party left the clearing under the orders of the Spaniard, and took up the missionary's trail. The reader knows already what took place in the pass, which was not more than two leagues from the spot where the bandits lay in ambush. We will, therefore, leave Don Cornelio, and confine our attention to Captain Vargas.

"On my word," the captain said to himself when the Spaniard had left him, "I prefer that matters should end thus. There are only blows to be gained from those confounded Frenchmen, deuce take them! Now we shall be quiet for the whole night, so we will go to sleep."

The captain was not so safe as he imagined, though, and the night was not destined to be so quiet as far as he was concerned. On leaving the camp Valentine explained to his comrades the nature of the expedition they were going on, and recommended them to play Indian; that is to say, employ craft. On entering the forest in which Captain Vargas was hidden, the Frenchmen had heard the sound of horses, and seen the bandits under the Spaniard's command flash past in the darkness like a band of black shadows. Not wishing to defer the execution of his plans, and possibly surrender the substance for the shadow, the hunter contented himself with sending an intelligent man after the party, in order to know what became of it; and the Frenchmen, after dismounting, crept into the forests like reptiles.

Nothing was more easy than to surprise the Mexicans. The latter believed themselves so safe that they had not even taken the precaution to post sentries round their bivouac, who might warn them in case of danger. Huddled pell-mell round the fires, the greater part were asleep, or already, plunged in that seeming lethargy which precedes sleep. As for the captain, he was wrapped up carefully in his cloak, and, with his feet to the fire and his head on a saddle, was fast asleep.

The adventurers reached the centre of the clearing without the slightest sound betraying their approach. Then, in accordance with the orders they had received, they seized the firelocks and sabres placed near each of the sleepers, formed a pile of them, and then cut the picket ropes of the horses, which they drove off with blows of the chicote. At the terrible noise produced by the headlong course of the horses, which spread in every direction, snorting and neighing, the Mexicans awoke. They remained for an instant as if petrified at the sight of the adventurers, who surrounded them on all sides with levelled muskets. By an instinctive movement they felt for their arms, but they had been removed.

"*Con mil rayos y mil demonios!*" the captain shouted, as he stamped his foot furiously, "we are taken like rats in a trap."

"Hilloh!" Valentine said with an ironical laugh, "you are no longer majordomo, then, Señor Don Isidro Vargas?"

"And you," he answered with a grin of rage, "as it seems, are no longer a dealer in novillos, Señor Don Valentine?"

"What would you?" he said cunningly. "Trade is so very bad."

"Hum! not very bad with you, it seems."

"Hang it! you know men do what they can;" and turning to de Laville, he said, "My dear captain, all these caballeros have reatas: be good enough to employ them in binding them tightly."

"Eh, Señor Don Valentine?" the ex-majordomo shouted. "You are not merciful to us."

"I! What an error, Don Isidro! Still, as you know, war has certain necessities. I am taking my precautions—that is all."

"What do you intend to do with us?"

"You shall see, for I do not wish to deprive you of the pleasure of a surprise; and, by the way, how do you find what I have just done to you? It is as good as what you were preparing for us, I think?"

Captain Vargas could find no reply: he contented himself with gnawing his fingernails, after assuring himself, by a glance all around, that flight was as impossible as resistance. At this moment the man whom Valentine sent off to watch the scouting party returned, and whispered a few words in his ear. The hunter turned pale: he looked at the Mexican captain in a way that made him shudder, and then addressed his party.

"Tell off ten men to mount at once," he said sharply. "Captain de Laville, you will answer to me on your head for these bandits, whom I leave in your hands. Return to the camp quietly. I will join you, probably, on the road. The first who attempts to escape, blow out his brains pitilessly. You understand me?"

"You may be at ease: it shall be done. But what has happened?"

"The bandits we saw going off on our arrival intend to attack Father Seraphin."

"Death and the devil! you must make haste."

"I intend to do so. Good-by! Woe to you scoundrels! If a hair falls from the missionary's head you shall be all shot," he added, turning to his terrified prisoners.

And with this fearful promise he went off, followed by the few adventurers chosen to accompany him. On entering the pass the hunter met the fugitives, on whom he rushed. Unfortunately the latter had seen them first; and they succeeded in escaping by abandoning their horses, and clambering like cats up the almost perpendicular sides of the mountain. Valentine, without losing time in a futile pursuit, hastened to join the missionary.

"Ah!" the latter exclaimed on seeing him, "my friend, my dear Valentine, had it not been for Curumilla, we were lost."

"And Doña Angela?"

"Thanks be to Heaven, she is saved."

"Yes," she said, "thanks to Heaven and to these caballeros, who arrived just in time to protect us."

One of the strangers approached.

"Pardon me, sir," he said in excellent French, "but you are the French hunter of whom so much is said—Valentine Guillois, I think?"

"Yes, sir," Valentine answered with surprise.

"My name, sir, is Belhumeur."

"I know you, sir: my foster brother has often mentioned you as his best friend."

"I am delighted that he has kept me in such pleasant memory. Allow me to present to you Don Rafaël Garillas de Saavedra."

The two men bowed and shook hands.

"We have formed acquaintance like men of honour," Valentine remarked.

"Is not that the best form of introduction?"

"We cannot remain any longer here," Father Seraphin observed.

"I will myself return with you, señor padre," Don Rafaël said. "I intended to proceed to the count's camp; but I have found a better way of seeing him and securing his friendship."

"And what is that way?"

"By offering a shelter to Doña Angela at the Hacienda del Milagro, which belongs to me."

"Yes," the missionary said; "pardon me, Don Rafaël, for not having thought of that: it is the refuge best suited for this lady."

"I accept gratefully," the young lady murmured; and bending down to the hunter's ear, she whispered, smiling and blushing at the same time, "Don Valentine, will you undertake to say one word for me to Don Louis?"

"One!" he said. "What is it?"

"For ever!"

"Come, I will not recall my word," he said with a good-humoured laugh. "You are an angel: I shall end by loving you madly."

"Let us go!" she exclaimed.

"Will you not join our party, Belhumeur?" Valentine asked.

"Certainly; for I wish to speak with Don Louis."

"That is it," Don Rafaël observed. "I will escort the padre with Black Elk and Eagle-head. Señor Don Valentine, Belhumeur will serve as your guide to the Hacienda del Milagro."

"By Jove!" Valentine said with a laugh, "you will probably see me before you expect."

"Come whenever you please: you will ever be welcome."

After exchanging affectionate farewells the two parties turned their back on each other, and left the gorge by opposite roads.

- [1] Enemy whom I adore, of Spain the second Helen, oh that I were born blind, or you born without beauty! Accursed be the day and hour when my star caused me to be born! Breasts that nourished me, better to have given me death. You will pay——

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FORWARD MARCH.

The sun had risen nearly an hour when Valentine, and the band he commanded, joined Captain de Laville and the prisoners again at about two leagues from La Magdalena. The Mexicans were marching with bowed heads, and hands fastened behind their backs, between two files of French horsemen, with their rifles on the thigh, and finger on the trigger. The captain was slightly in advance of his men, conversing with the old Mexican officer, whose legs had been tied under his horse's belly, owing to an attempt at escape he had made.

In the rear came the prisoners' horses, easily recaught by the adventurers, and loaded with the muskets, sabres, and lances of their ex-masters. When the two bands united they went on more rapidly. Valentine, had he wished it, could have reached the camp before sunrise; but it was important for the success of the expedition, at the head of which the count had placed himself, that the population of La Magdalena, at this moment increased tenfold by the strangers who, owing to the festival, had flocked in from all parts of Sonora, should understand that the French had not undertaken an expedition so feather-brained as was supposed, or at least as the Mexican Government wished it to be supposed, and therefore the prisoners would march into camp in broad daylight.

The count, warned by Curumilla, whom the hunter sent on in advance, determined to give great importance to this affair, and display a certain degree of ostentation: consequently the whole army was under arms; and the flag, planted in front of the count's tent to the sound of bugles and drums, was saluted by the shouts of the adventurers. As the count had foreseen, the inhabitants of La Magdalena rushed to the camp to witness the sight the count prepared for them; and the road was soon covered by curious persons on horse and on foot, hurrying to be the first to arrive. When the head of the detachment reached the camp gates it stopped at a signal from Valentine, and a bugler sounded a call. At this summons an officer came out.

"Who goes there?" he shouted.

"France!" Captain de Laville, who had advanced a few paces, replied.

"What corps?" the officer continued.

"The liberating army of Sonora!"

An immense shout, raised by the populace, drowned the words.

"Enter," the officer said.

The barrier was raised, the drums began beating, the bugles sounding, and the marching past began. There was something really grand in this scene, so simple in itself, but which made the heart beat more rapidly when you examined the resolute air of this handful of men, left to themselves without succour, six thousand leagues from their country, who so proudly sustained the name of France, and who, at the beginning of the campaign, without firing a shot, returned with a hundred prisoners captured at the moment they were preparing to surprise the camp.

The Sonorians, under an involuntary emotion, regarded the Frenchmen with a respectful timidity, mingled with admiration, and, far from pitying the fate of their compatriots, they overwhelmed them with yells and jests. So great is the influence of courage and energy on these primitive races! When the prisoners were collected in the middle of the camp square the count approached them, surrounded by his staff and some of the chief inhabitants of La Magdalena, who followed him instinctively, carried away by their enthusiasm. It was really a holiday. Floods of light inundated the landscape; a gentle breeze refreshed the atmosphere; the bugles played merry tunes; the drums rattled; and the assembled populace uttered shouts of joy, while waving handkerchiefs and hats. The count smiled, for he was momentarily happy. The future appeared to him less gloomy and sad. He examined the prisoners for a moment with a pensive eye.

"I have come to Sonora," he at length said in a piercing voice, "to give liberty to the people of this country. I have been represented to you as a cruel and faithless man. Begone! You are free! Go and tell your countrymen how the chief of the pirates avenges the calumnies spread abroad about him. I do not even ask of you the promise not to bear arms against me again. I have on my side something which is stronger than all the soldiers who can be opposed to me—the hand of God, which guides me; for He wishes that this country should be at length free and regenerated. Unfasten those men, and restore them their horses."

The order was immediately obeyed, and the people greeted this generous resolution with shouts and ebullitions of joy. The prisoners hastened to quit the camp, though not before they had displayed by energetic protestations, their gratitude for the count's generosity. Don Louis then

turned to Captain Isidro.

"As for you, captain," he said gravely, "you are one of the few lions left from that war of independence which overthrew the Spanish power. We are brothers, for we both serve the same cause. Take back your sword: a brave man like you must always wear it at his side."

The captain looked at him gloomily.

"Why can I no longer hate you?" he replied. "I should have preferred an insult to your generosity. Now I am no longer free."

"You are so, captain. I ask from you neither friendship nor gratitude. I have acted as I thought it my duty to do. Let us each follow our own road, but let us try not to meet again."

"Your hand, caballero; and now a word."

"Speak."

"Take care of the persons in whom you place confidence."

"Explain yourself."

"I can say no more, or I should be a traitor myself."

"Oh, ever, ever the same treachery!" the count muttered, growing thoughtful.

"And now farewell, caballero. If I am forbidden to wish the success of your plans, at least I will do nothing against them; and if you do not see me among the ranks of your friends, I shall not be in those of your enemies."

The old captain bounded into his seat, made his horse perform a few graceful curvets, and after bowing to the company, started at a gallop.

The remainder of the day was one continued festival. The count had succeeded: his generous conduct to the prisoners bore its fruits. The French adventurers had risen enormously in the opinion of the Sonorians. The count had already acquired a great influence in the country, and several persons began to prognosticate a successful issue for the expedition.

At nightfall Don Louis convoked all the chiefs of the army to a secret council of war. By a providential accident, the count, who would doubtlessly have permitted Don Cornelio to be present at the council, owing to the confidence he placed in him, had sent that gentleman to La Magdalena to buy several horses he required. This commission, by preventing the Spaniard's presence at the council, insured its secrecy.

Don Cornelio had succeeded by a miracle in escaping the hunter's pursuit, and had re-entered the camp unnoticed about two hours before the arrival of the prisoners. He had killed his horse, but was this time at least safe himself, for no one dreamed of suspecting him; and even had it been the case, nothing would have been easier for him than to establish an *alibi*.

At eight in the evening the roll call sounded, the camp gates were closed, and the officers proceeded to head quarters; that is to say, the jacal inhabited by the count. A row of sentries, set about ten paces distant from the hut, so as to be themselves out of hearing distance, had orders to fire on the first person who attempted to enter the place of meeting without orders.

The count was seated at a table, on which a road map of Sonora was laid out. The assembly was composed of some fifteen persons, among whom were Valentine, Curumilla, Captain de Lavelle, and Belhumeur, who was too intimate a friend of the count to be excluded from a conference of such an important nature. When all had arrived the door was shut, and the count rose.

"Comrades," he said in a firm voice, though suppressed, lest he should be heard outside, "our expedition is about to commence in reality: what we have done up to the present is nothing. I have several times sounded, either myself or through my spies, the intentions of the richest hacenderos or campesinos of this State. They seem very well disposed toward us; but let us not be deceived by fallacious promises. These people will do nothing as long as our expedition does not rest on a solid base of operations; in other words, we must seize on a city. If we succeed, our cause is gained, for the whole country will rise for us. I have led you to this place because La Magdalena forms the extremity of an angle at which three roads debouch, each leading to one of the chief cities of Sonora; and it is one of those cities we must carry. But which shall it be? That is the question. All three are crammed with troops: in addition, General Guerrero holds the roads leading to them, and he has sworn," the count added with a smile, "to make only one mouthful of us, if we dare to take one step in advance. But that disquiets you but very slightly, I suppose: let us, therefore, return to the important question. Captain de Lavelle, be good enough to give us your opinion."

The captain bowed.

"I am inclined for Sonora," he said. "It is a new city, I grant, but it bears the name of the country we propose to deliver, and that is an important consideration."

Several officers spoke in turn, and the majority ranged themselves on the side of Captain de Lavelle. The count then turned to Valentine.

"And what is your opinion, brother?"

"Hum!" the hunter said, "I am no great hand at talking, as you know, brother," he answered. "Still I have a certain knowledge of warfare, which may perhaps inspire me rightly. You want a rich and manufacturing city, in order to protect the opulent inhabitants of the country from any sudden attack, and whence you can effect your retreat without danger, if too numerous forces try

to crush you. Is it not so?"

"Indeed, the city we seize must combine these three conditions as far as possible."

"There is only one which combines them."

"It is Hermosillo," Belhumeur said.

"That is true," Valentine went on. "That city is inclosed with walls. It is the *entrepôt* of all the trade of Sonora, and consequently very rich; and, which is of the last importance to us, it is only fifteen leagues from Guaymas, the port where reinforcements will land coming from California, if we require them, and where we can seek a refuge if we are compelled to fight our retreat."

The truth of these words was immediately recognised by the hearers.

"I am also inclined for Hermosillo," the count said; "but I must not conceal from you that General Guerrero, who, after all, is an experienced soldier, has so well comprehended the advantages which would result to us from the occupation of that city, that he has concentrated imposing forces there."

"All the better, count!" de Laville exclaimed. "In that way the Mexicans will learn to know us at the first blow."

All applauded these words, and it was definitively settled that the *army* should march on Hermosillo.

"Another objection," the count said: "the Mexicans are masters of the three roads. We must put them off the scent."

"That is my business," Valentine said with a laugh. "Good! we will make demonstrations on three sides at once, so as to keep the enemy on the move, and we will advance by forced marches on Hermosillo. Still I am afraid we shall lose a heavy number of men."

Curumilla rose. Up to this moment the Araucano had remained silently on a stool, smoking his Indian calumet, and not seeming to hear what was said around him.

"Let the chief speak," Valentine said; "his words are worth their weight in gold."

Everyone was silent.

"Curumilla," the chief said, "knows a crossroad which abridges the distance, and of which the Mexican general is ignorant. Curumilla will guide his friends."

The chief then took up his calumet again, and sat down once more as if it were nothing. From this moment the discussion was at an end. Curumilla, according to his custom, had cut the knot by removing the most dangerous obstacle.

"Comrades," the count said, "the wagons and guns are horsed. Wake up your men, and break up the camp silently. The inhabitants of La Magdalena, on getting up tomorrow morning, must not know what has become of us."

Then taking Captain de Laville and Valentine one side,—

"While I am going along the crossroad under the chiefs guidance, you, captain, will proceed in the direction of Ures; and you, brother, will march on Sonora. Get near enough to be seen, but do not engage in any skirmish; fall back, and join me again at once. We can only conquer our enemies by the rapidity of our movements."

"But in case we cannot join you on the road," Valentine objected, "what place will you appoint for our meeting?"

"The Hacienda del Milagro, four leagues from Hermosillo," Belhumeur said. "Headquarters will be there."

"Yes," the count said, furtively pressing the Canadian's hand.

The meeting broke up, and each went to execute the orders he had received. The camp was broken up in the utmost silence, and the most minute precautions were taken to allow none of the movements to transpire outside. The bivouac fires were left lighted; in short, nothing was touched which could cause any suspicion of a hurried departure.

At about eleven in the night the two parties, under Valentine and Captain de Laville, set out in different directions: the count soon followed them with the main body and the baggage, so that by midnight the camp was entirely deserted. Curumilla had not deceived the count. After about two hours' march he made the troops wheel to the right, and entered a narrow path, in which there was just room for the vehicles, and the whole company disappeared in the infinite windings of a true wild beast's track, in which it was impossible to suppose that an armed body, accompanied by numerous and heavy wagons and field pieces, would ever venture.

Still, when the first obstacles were overcome, this road, which appeared so difficult, offered no serious causes for delay, and the Frenchmen pushed on rapidly. Two days after they were rejoined by the detachments which had operated on their flank. Captain de Laville and Valentine had been completely successful in deceiving the general, whose advanced post still continued to guard the roads, little suspecting that they had been turned.

This march lasted nine days, through numberless difficulties, over shifting sand which fled beneath the feet, under a parching heat with no water, and, during the last two days, with no provisions or forage. But nothing could lessen the courage of the men, or destroy their inexhaustible gaiety: they went on bravely, keeping their eyes fixed on their chief, who went on

foot before them, consoling and encouraging them. On the evening of the ninth day they saw in the distance, in the centre of a well-wooded landscape, the outlines of a considerable hacienda. It was the first house they had come across since leaving La Magdalena.

"What hacienda is that?" Don Louis asked Belhumeur, who walked by his side.

"The Hacienda del Milagro," the Canadian answered.

The Frenchmen uttered a shout of joy: they had arrived. They had marched sixty leagues in nine days, along almost impracticable roads.

Curumilla had kept his promise. Thanks to him, the column had not been molested.

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE THE ATTACK.

When within gunshot of the hacienda the count commanded a halt.

"De Lville," he said to the captain, "push on ahead, and occupy the hacienda in force: we shall have our headquarters there."

"What is the use of that?" Belhumeur asked. "Did you not put faith in my words, then? Don Rafaël and his family will be delighted to receive you and greet you with open arms."

The count smiled, and bent down to the Canadian's ear.

"My friend Belhumeur," he said to him in a low voice, "you are a child who will understand nothing. I take these precautions which grieve you so much, not for my own sake, but on behalf of our friends. Supposing, as may be unfortunately the case, that we are beaten by the Mexicans—what will happen then? That Don Rafaël will inevitably fall a victim to the sympathy he has evinced for us; while, by acting as I do, he bows to force, and the Mexican authorities will be unable, in spite of all their desire, to render him responsible for our stay at his house."

"That is true," the Canadian answered, struck by the logic of this reasoning.

"Still," Don Louis continued, "in order to avoid any misunderstanding, you will accompany the captain, and while he is talking loudly you can whisper to our friends what the reason is."

Five minutes later the detachment started at a gallop, followed presently by the rest of the column. All took place as the count had arranged. Warned by Belhumeur, Don Rafaël protested energetically against the forced occupation of the hacienda, and feigned only to yield to superior force. The estate was definitively occupied, and Don Rafaël mounted with some of his servants, in order to go and meet the column; but, by the count's orders, it did not stop at the hacienda, but pushed on and camped about two leagues from Hermosillo.

The count and Rafaël met, not like strangers to each other, but as old friends delighted at meeting again, and entered the hacienda, conversing in a low voice. Before dismounting, the count sent off couriers and scouts in every direction, in order to have certain news about the enemy; and only keeping with him an escort of eight men, he sent the others to the bivouac, and entered the hacienda.

Don Ramon, Don Rafaël's father, and Doña Luz, that amiable woman whose touching history we told in a previous story,^[1] were waiting, surrounded by their servants, the arrival of the Frenchmen at the door of the hacienda.

"You are welcome, valiant combatants for the independence of Sonora," General Don Ramon said as he held out his hand to the count.

The latter leaped from his horse.

"May God grant that I may be as fortunate as you have been, general!" he replied with a bow. Then, turning to Doña Luz, "Pardon me, madam," he said to her, "for having come to trouble your peaceful retreat: your husband is alone to blame for the indiscretion I am committing at this moment."

"Señor conde," she answered with a smile, "do not make such excuses: this house and all it contains belong to you. We see your arrival with joy—we shall witness your departure with sorrow."

The count offered his arm to Doña Luz, and they entered the hacienda. But the count was restless—his glance wandered incessantly.

"Patience!" Don Rafaël said to him with a meaning smile; "you will see her. It would have been imprudent for her to appear sooner, so we prevented her."

"Thanks!" the count said; and the cloud which obscured his noble face disappeared at once.

The interview of the two lovers was as it should be; that is to say, calm, affectionate, and deeply felt. The count warmly thanked Father Seraphin for the protection he had accorded the maiden.

"Ere long," Doña Luz said, "all your torments will be ended, and you will be able to yield to the passionate emotions of your heart without constraint."

"Yes," the count answered pensively, "tomorrow will probably decide my fate, and that of the

woman I love."

"What do you mean?" Don Rafaël exclaimed.

The count looked anxiously around him: he saw that he could speak, and that those who pressed toward him were sincere friends.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I shall attack Hermosillo and take it, or fall dead in the breach."

All present were in a state of stupor. Don Rafaël made Black Elk a sign to stand outside the door to keep off all comers, and then returned to the count.

"Have you really that idea?" he asked him.

"Were it not so, should I be here?" he said simply.

"But," Don Rafaël continued urgently, "Hermosillo is an inclosed town with strong walls."

"I will force them."

"It has a garrison of 1200 men."

"Ah!" he said indifferently.

"For two months the militia have been exercised daily."

"Militia!" he replied with a disdainful air. "I suppose, at any rate, they are numerous?"

"About 3000 men."

"All the better."

"General Guerrero, who has at length discovered that his flank was turned, has thrown himself into the city with 6000 Indians, and is awaiting other reinforcements."

"That is the reason, my friend, why I must attack at once. I have already, according to your calculation, opposed to me 11,000 men, intrenched behind good walls. The longer I wait, the more numerous they will grow; and if I do not take care," he added with a laugh, "that army will end by growing so considerable that it will be impossible for me to destroy it."

"You are perhaps unaware, my friend, that Hermosillo is surrounded by market gardens, which render the approaches almost impracticable?"

"Believe me, my good friend," the count replied carelessly, "I shall enter by the gates."

The company gazed on the count with an amazement akin to terror. They looked at each other, and seemed to be asking whether they had not to deal with a maniac.

"Pardon me, my friend," Don Rafaël continued, "but I think you said that you intended to attack tomorrow?"

"Certainly."

"But supposing your troops have not arrived?"

"What! my troops not arrived? Did not you see them march past the hacienda an hour ago?"

"Yes, I saw a small detachment pass—your vanguard, of course."

"My vanguard!" the count exclaimed with a laugh. "No, my good friend, that small detachment forms my entire *army*."

Don Rafaël, Don Ramon, and the other persons present were men of recognised courage. On several occasions they had sustained giant combats against enemies tenfold in number; in short, they had furnished proof of the most extravagant courage and most insane temerity. But the count's eccentric proposition of going coolly with a handful of adventurers to take a city defended by 10,000 men seemed to them so extraordinary and so incredible, that they remained dumb for a moment, hardly knowing whether they were awake or suffering from a frightful nightmare.

"Tell me, my friend," Don Rafaël exclaimed, his arguments quite exhausted, "how many men can you deploy in line?"

"Hang it! not many," the count said with a smile, "I have invalids: still I can dispose of about two hundred and fifty, and I hope they will be sufficient."

"Yes," Doña Angela said enthusiastically, "they will be sufficient, for the cause these men defend is holy, and God will protect them."

"Don Rafaël," the count said simply, "have you ever heard of what is called the *furia Francese*?"

"Yes, but I confess to you that I do not exactly understand what it is."

"Well," he added, "wait till tomorrow, and when you have seen this formidable army crushed, destroyed, and dispersed like autumn leaves by the wind; when you have been present at the capture of Hermosillo, you will know what *furia Francese* is, and understand the prodigies of valour which history has recorded, and Frenchmen perform almost in sport."

The conversation ended here, and they proceeded to the dining room, where the refreshments, of which the count stood in such need, had been prepared. So soon as they rose from table the count asked leave to retire to the apartment prepared for him, and begged Father Seraphin to follow him. They remained for a long time shut up, talking ear to ear. When the missionary came out his eyes were red, and traces of tears furrowed his pale cheeks. The count pressed his hand.

"So, then," he said, "in case of a mishap——"

"I will be there, count, trust me;" and he retired slowly.

During the evening, and, indeed, far into the night, the count listened to the reports of his scouts and spies: the news they brought coincided in every respect with the information imparted by Don Rafaël. General Guerrero had hurried to Hermosillo, where he was securely intrenched.

Valentine and Curumilla were the last to arrive; but they were not the bearers of bad news. Valentine, at the head of a party of foragers, had, by Curumilla's advice, advanced along the Guaymas road, and surprised a convoy of provisions and ammunition intended for the Mexicans. This had been taken to the camp by the hunter's care, and was warmly welcomed by the Frenchmen, whose stock of food, as we have seen, was entirely exhausted. Captain de Laville, for his part, had surprised three or four of the enemy's patrols, which had imprudently advanced too far. The count sent Curumilla to the captain with orders to take advantage of the darkness of the night to advance, and push on his advanced posts to within a gun-shot and a half of the town.

When alone with Valentine he spread out a plan of Hermosillo on the table, and both bending over it, began studying it attentively. We have already described Hermosillo several times: we will limit ourselves to saying that the market gardens by which that city is surrounded are inclosed with walls, behind which it is easy to place *tirailleurs*, whom the nature of the ground enables to fall back from post to post, constantly protected by the walls, which are about three feet in thickness, and built of *adobas*. In addition, on the side on which the count was marching, a wide and deep ditch, which could only be traversed by means of a bridge, at the end of which a strong body of troops was doubtless posted, formed an almost impregnable defence.

As may be seen from our description, Hermosillo is far from being an open town, which can be seized without striking a blow; and, in attempting to carry it at the head of 250 men, the Count de Prébois Crancé, if he succeeded, might justly flatter himself on having accomplished one of the greatest exploits of modern times.

General Guerrero, according to the reports of the scouts, and the Mexican officers under his command, affected a superb contempt for these naked-footed Frenchmen, as they called them, and promised to give them so rough a lesson that they would not feel disposed to begin again. Curumilla, however, had brought back a piece of news which could not fail to give the count hopes. In spite of the immense preparations he had made, against the company, General Guerrero had been so surprised by the news of its hurried march on Hermosillo, and the daring manner in which it had turned its advanced posts, that, in his hurry to go to the aid of the menaced city, he had been constrained to leave behind him the greater part of his forces, and the city, in reality, only contained twelve or fifteen hundred defenders, doubtlessly a very large number, but much less than the count had expected to find.

Curumilla had peacefully entered the city. His being an Indian served as his safeguard, and he had seen, visited, and examined everything. This news the Araucano brought back on reporting to the count the execution of the orders sent through him to Captain de Laville. The count and the hunter rubbed their hands, and hastened to make their final arrangements.

Among the hacenderos present at the conference of La Magdalena was one whose influence was immense upon the pueblos. It was the man who, in the name of his countrymen, had assured the count that, so soon as an important town had fallen into the hands of the French, the signal for revolt should be given, and the country roused in a few days, in order to effect a decisive diversion. Don Louis, not wishing to lose a moment, and in the certainty of success, wrote him a letter in which, after announcing to him the fall of Hermosillo, he urged him to be ready to support him, and give the signal for insurrection.

We mention this fact to prove not only that the count believed himself sure of succeeding, but also foresaw everything with that sublime intuition only possessed by men of genius.

The letter written, and the last arrangements made, the count and Valentine left the room. It was about two in the morning: the sky was gloomy, and warm gusts coming from the desert bowed down the leafy crowns of the trees.

The two foster brothers went down into the patio, where all the inhabitants of the hacienda had assembled to salute the count on his departure. Doña Angela, wrapped up in a long white dressing gown, with pallid face and eyes filled with tears, looked like a phantom in the glare of the torches shaken by the peons. The escort had mounted and sat motionless. Curumilla held the horses of the two Frenchmen. When they appeared, all raised their hats and saluted with a deep and respectful bow.

"Farewell, Don Louis," Don Rafaël said to him. "May Heaven grant you the victory!"

"May Heaven grant you the victory," Don Ramon repeated, "for you are fighting for the independence of a people!"

"Never were more fervent prayers offered up than we shall make for you, Don Louis," Doña Luz then said.

The count felt his heart contract.

"I thank you all," he said with much emotion. "Your wishes do me good: they prove to me that among the Sonorians there are some who comprehend my noble object. Thanks once again."

Doña Angela came up to the count.

"Don Louis," she said to him, "I love you. Do your duty."

The count bent down to her, and imprinted a kiss on her pale forehead.

"Doña Angela, my affianced!" he said with a tenderness impossible to render, "you will see me again either a conqueror or a corpse."

And he made a move as if to depart. At this moment Father Seraphin came to his side.

"What!" he said with surprise, "do you accompany me, my father?"

"I am going where duty calls me, sir," the missionary replied with that angelic simplicity which was so characteristic of him—"where I shall find pain to console, misfortunes to alleviate. Let me follow you."

Louis pressed his hand silently, and after bowing once again to the friends he was leaving, perhaps for ever, he gave the signal for departure, and the cavalcade soon disappeared in the darkness.

Doña Angela remained cold and motionless in the doorway so long as she could hear the horses' hoofs echoing on the road. When every sound had died away in the distance a long-restrained sob burst from her.

"Heavens, heavens!" she exclaimed in despair, and stretching out her hands to the sky. Then she fell back in a fainting fit. Doña Luz and Don Rafaël hastened to her aid, and carried her into the hacienda, where they eagerly tried to restore her to consciousness. Belhumeur tossed his head several times, and prepared to shut the gate of the hacienda.

"Not yet," a voice said to him; "let us go out first."

"Eh, what?" he said. "Where the deuce do you want to go at this hour, Black Elk?"

"To tell you the truth," the hunter answered, "I am almost a Frenchman, since I am a Canadian, and so I am going to help my countrymen."

"Halloh!" Belhumeur exclaimed, struck by these words, "that's not a bad idea. By Jove! you shall not go alone; I will accompany you."

"All the better; then there will be three of us."

"How three? Who else is coming with us?"

"Eagle-head, by Jove! The chief says there are down there some Indians, enemies of his nation, whom he should like to have a set-to with."

"Let us be off, then. I believe that the count will be pleased to have three fighting men more, like us, in his company."

"By Jove! I should think so," Belhumeur said.

"I do not care," Black Elk remarked, "whatever you may say, he is a fine fellow. What do you think about him, you who know him, eh?"

"Tough as hickory," the Canadian answered intrepidly.

Without further commentary the three bold hunters mounted and proceeded in the track of the count.

[1] See "The Trappers of Arkansas."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAPTURE OF HERMOSILLO.

Although the horses ridden by the count's escort were good, the hunters were mounted on such fast mustangs that they caught up Don Louis within twenty minutes of his leaving the hacienda. On hearing hurried footfalls behind them, the Frenchmen, not knowing who could be coming like a tornado after them, bravely wheeled round; but Belhumeur prevented any misunderstanding by making himself known.

"You are welcome, you and your companions, Belhumeur," the count said to him. "But what urgent reason compels you to gallop so late along the roads?"

"A service I want to ask of you, Don Louis," the Canadian frankly replied.

"A service! Speak, my friend: whatever it may be, if it depends on me, it is granted before asking."

"What I want *does* depend on you."

"What is it?"

"My comrades and myself wish to have the honour of fighting by your side tomorrow."

"Is that the service you had to ask of me, Belhumeur?"

"Yes, and no other."

"Then you are mistaken, my friend: you mean to say a service to render me. I heartily accept your proposition, and thank you for it cordially."

"Then that is arranged. You admit us into your ranks?"

"By Jove! I should be mad not to do so."

Belhumeur informed his friends of the success of his negotiation, and they rejoiced at it as if they had received the handsomest possible present. After this slight incident, the party, increased by the three new recruits, went onwards. The Frenchmen trotted on in the darkness like a troop of silent phantoms, bending over the necks of their horses, eagerly questioning the sounds that rose from the desert, and sounding the gloom in order to obtain some sign that they were approaching their comrades.

Captain Charles de Laville, though still very young, seemed predestined for the part he was playing at this moment. His glance was infallible, both as superior chief and as a subordinate leader: he not only understood with extreme rapidity the orders he received, but seized their meaning and carried them out with rare intelligence.^[1] The count had not been in error for a moment about de Laville's brilliant qualities. Hence he had made him a favourite, and, whenever he had a difficult duty to intrust to anyone, he gave it to him, certain that he would perform it with honour. The success surpassed his hopes on this occasion; for De Laville executed the advance movement with such precision and in such profound silence that the count almost found himself up with the rear before he suspected he was anywhere near it.

In order to march more rapidly, and not be in any way detained, the captain had left his wagons and baggage at a deserted rancho about a league from the city, under the guard of the invalids, who, although too weak to fight in the ranks of the company, could yet, behind intrenchments, offer a sufficiently lengthened resistance to allow their comrades to come to their assistance.

The count passed through the ranks, saluted in an affectionate voice by his men, and placed himself at the head of the column. For two months past the fatigue Don Louis had endured, and the constant state of excitement in which events kept him, had seriously injured his health; and it was only by his energy and will that he succeeded in conquering his illness and keeping upright. He understood that if he gave way all was lost: hence he wrestled with his sufferings, and though a fever devoured him, his face remained calm, and nothing revealed to his comrades the sufferings he endured with the courage of a stoic. Still he suddenly felt himself attacked by such a feeling of weakness, that had not Valentine, who guessed his condition, and watched over him like a mother, held him in his arms, he must have fallen from his horse.

"What is the matter, brother?" the hunter asked him affectionately.

"Nothing," he answered, as he passed his hand over his forehead, which was dank with icy perspiration and fatigue; "but," he added, "it has gone off now."

"Take care, brother," he said to him with a sad shrug of his shoulders: "you do not nurse yourself enough."

"Eh? Can I do it? But be not alarmed. I know what I want: the smell of powder will restore me. Look, look! we have reached our destination at last."

In fact, by the first rays of the sun, which rose majestically above the horizon, Hermosillo, with its white houses glistening, now was visible about a cannon shot off. An immense shout of joy from the whole company greeted the so-ardently-desired appearance of the city. The order to halt was given. The city was silent—it seemed deserted: not a sound was heard within its walls. So calm, quiet, and dumb was it, that you might have fancied that you had before you that city in the Arabian Nights which a wicked enchanter struck with his wand and plunged into eternal sleep.

The country was deserted. Only here and there the fragments of arms, uniforms, sandals, the footsteps of horses, and the furrows of carts indicated the recent passage of General Guerrero's troops. The count examined the city for a while with the utmost attention, in order to make his final arrangements, when suddenly two horsemen appeared on the bridge to which we have already alluded, and galloped toward the company, waving a flag of truce.

"Let us see what these persons want," the count said.

And he galloped up to them.

"What do you want, gentlemen, and who are you?" he said when he came up to them.

"We wish," one of them said, "to speak with the Count de Prébois Crancé."

"I am the count. Be good enough to tell me what brings you here."

"Monsieur le comte, I am a Frenchman," the first speaker said.

"I recognise you, sir. Your name is Thollus, I believe, and you are a merchant at Hermosillo."

"Quite correct, monsieur le comte. My companion is Señor ——"

"Don Jacinto Jabalí,^[2] a *juez de letras*, I suppose, or something of that sort, a great friend of General Guerrero. Well, gentlemen, I do not exactly see what we can have in common."

"Pardon me, sir, we are sent to you by Señor Don Flavio Agustado, Prefect of Hermosillo, in order to make certain propositions to you."

"Ah, ah!" the count said, champing his moustache. "Are you really?"

"Yes, sir, and very advantageous propositions too," the merchant said in an insinuating tone.

"For you possibly, sir, who sell calico and false jewellery, but I hardly think so for me."

"Still, if you would permit me to fulfil my mission, and tell you these conditions, it is possible——"

"What do you say? Why, my good sir, I want nothing better. Acquit yourself of your mission—that is only too proper; still, make haste, for I am pressed for time."

M. Thollus drew himself up, and after consulting for a moment with his companion, he continued his speech, Don Louis standing coldly and like a rock of granite before him.

"Monsieur le comte, Don Flavio Agustado, Prefect of Hermosillo, whom I have the honour to represent——"

"That is all settled. Come to the fact," Don Louis interrupted him impatiently.

"Offers you, if you consent to retire with your army without making an attempt on the city," the negotiator continued—"offers you, I say, the sum of——"

"Enough, sir!" the count exclaimed, red with indignation; "a word more would be an insult which, in spite of your quality as a flag of truce, I might not have the patience to let pass unpunished. And it is you, sir, a man who calls himself a Frenchman, who dares to become the bearer of such dishonouring conditions? You lie, you are not my countryman—I disown you as such."

"Still, monsieur le comte——" the poor fellow stammered, completely taken aback by this galling reprimand, and not knowing how to look.

"Enough!" the count interrupted him; and drawing his watch from his pocket, he said in a peremptory tone, which admitted of no reply, and terrified the negotiators. "It is now eight o'clock. Go and tell your prefect that in two hours I shall attack the city, and at eleven shall be master of it. Begone!"

And with a gesture of supreme contempt he ordered them to retire. The unlucky envoys did not wait to hear the order repeated; they turned back at once, and regained the city with hanging heads. The count galloped up to the head of the column, where the officers were assembled slightly in advance of the ranks, impatiently awaiting the result of the conference.

"Gentlemen," the count said to them on coming up, "get ready to fight."

The news was greeted with a shout of joy, which had the effect of increasing the speed of the negotiators, in whose ears it echoed like a death knell. After this the count, with extreme simplicity and clearness, pointed out to each officer the post he must occupy during the action. He placed the whole of the cavalry under the orders of Captain de Laville; selected Don Cornelio, who had only rejoined the company on the previous evening, as his aide-de-camp; and, at Valentine's request, he placed under the latter's orders the Canadian hunters and the Indians, with authority to act as he thought proper, and in whatever way he considered most advantageous to the common welfare.

De Laville, sent forward with a dozen horsemen to reconnoitre, soon returned, announcing that the city appeared to be in a complete state of defence, that the roofs of the houses were covered with soldiers, that the tocsin was pealing from all the churches, and the drums making a frightful disturbance. At this moment a spy announced that a body of two to three hundred Indians was apparently threatening the baggage, and the count at once sent off ten men to reinforce the small garrison he had left in the rear. This final duty accomplished, he ordered the company to form a circle, and placed himself in the centre. Then he spoke in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Comrades," he said, "the hour to avenge ourselves for all the villainy practised on us during the last four months, and the atrocious calumnies spread about us, has at length struck. But let us not forget that we are Frenchmen; and if we have been patient under insults, let us be magnanimous after victory. We did not desire war; it was forced upon us, and we accept it. But remember that we are fighting for the liberty of a people, and that our enemies of today will be our brothers tomorrow. Let us be terrible during the combat, merciful after the battle. One last word, or rather a final prayer. Leave the Mexicans the responsibility of firing the first shot, so that it may be evident that up to the last moment we desired peace. Now, brothers, long live France!"

"Long live France!" the adventurers shouted as they brandished their weapons.

"Each to his post!" the count commanded.

The order was executed with marvellous precision. Don Louis drew out his watch: it was ten o'clock. Then he unsheathed his sabre, wielded it round his head, and turning to the company, every man in which had his eyes fixed on the leader, he shouted in a sonorous voice,—

"Forward!"

"Forward!" the officers repeated.

The column started in good order, marching at quick step, with trailed arms.

We have mentioned the bridge which alone gave admission to the city: this bridge was barricaded, and at the other end was a house crowded with soldiers from the cellars to the *azotea*. A silence of death brooded over the plain. The Frenchmen marched on coolly, as if on parade, with heads raised and flashing eyes. On arriving within musket shot the walls were begirt with a line of fire, and a frightful discharge scattered death among the Frenchmen. The company at once broke into skirmishing order, and rushed onwards.

At this moment an unheard-of, incredible thing was seen—a city of 10,000 souls, surrounded by walls, and defended by a numerous garrison, attacked by 250 men fighting in the Indian way; that is, in skirmishing order. The artillery, dragged by its gunners, advanced at the same speed, and only stopped to load and fire.

Even before the Mexicans had time to look round the Frenchmen were on them like a whirlwind, attacked them at the bayonet's point, drove back the defenders of the bridge, and entered without a check the city, sweeping before them, in their irresistible attack, all that opposed their passage. Then the real battle began. The Frenchmen found themselves opposite four guns loaded with grape, which swept the whole length of the street at the end of which they were; while to the right and left, from windows and roofs, a shower of bullets pattered on them. The position was becoming critical. The count dismounted, and turning to his soldiers with the shout, "Who'll take the guns?" he rushed forward.

"We, we!" the Frenchmen yelled, as they chased after him with unexampled frenzy.

The artillerymen were sabred at their guns, the muzzles of which were immediately turned on the Mexicans. At this moment the count perceived, as in a cloud, Valentine and his hunters, who were fighting like demons, and massacring the Indians pitilessly, who tried in vain to resist them.

"Good heavens!" Black Elk said with beatitude at every blow he dealt, "it was a lucky idea of mine to come."

"It really was," Belhumeur replied; and he redoubled his blows.

Valentine had turned the city, and taking advantage of a forgotten ladder, escalated the wall, and, without striking a blow, made prisoners the post stationed there, which was commanded by an officer.

"Thanks for the ladder, comrade," he said to the latter with a grin; and opening the gate of the city, he allowed the cavalry to enter.

Still the Mexicans fought with the energy of despair. General Guerrero, who flattered himself with the hope of giving the French a severe lesson, surprised and terrified by their fury, no longer knew what measures to take in order to resist these invincible demons, as he called them, whom nothing could arrest, and who, without deigning to reply to their enemies' fire, had only fought with the bayonet since their first discharge.

Driven in on all sides, the general concentrated his troops on the Alameda, and protected the approaches by guns loaded with canister. In spite of the enormous losses they had suffered, the Mexicans were still more than six hundred combatants, resolved to defend themselves to the death. The count sent Don Cornelio to Captain de Laville with orders to charge and sabre the last defenders of the city, while he made a flank movement with the infantry. The captain started immediately at a gallop, overthrowing with his horse's chest all obstacles. His pace was so hurried that he arrived alone in front of the enemy.

The Mexicans, terrified at the extraordinary audacity of this man, hesitated for a moment; but at the repeated orders of their chiefs they opened their fire on de Laville, who seemed to mock them, and the balls began whistling like hail past the ears of the intrepid Frenchman, who remained calm and motionless in the midst of this shower of lead. Valentine, frightened by the captain's boldness, doubled his speed, and brought up all the cavalry.

"Hang it, de Laville!" he exclaimed with admiration, "what are you doing there?"

"You see, my friend," the latter answered with charming simplicity, "I am waiting for you."^[3]

Electrified by these noble words, the French dashed on the Alameda, and charged to the other end with shouts of "Long live France!" a shout to which the count's infantry responded from the other side of the Alameda, while attacking the Mexicans at the bayonet's point.

There were a few moments of deadly struggling and a horrible carnage. The count, in the height of the medley, fought like the meanest of his soldiers, exciting them incessantly, and urging them forward. At last, in spite of their desperate resistance, the Mexicans, pitilessly sabred by the French, no longer able to organise any effectual defence, and frightened by the ardour and invincible courage of their adversaries, whom they regarded as demons, began to break and fly in every direction. In spite of the fatigue of the horses, de Laville started in pursuit with his cavalry.

Hermosillo was taken—the Count de Prébois Crancé was victorious. Stopping in the midst of the pile of corpses which surrounded him, he drew his watch coldly, and consulted it. It was eleven o'clock, as the count had told the envoys in the morning: he had become master of the city at eleven o'clock exactly. The battle had lasted an hour.

"Now, brothers," the count said, as he returned his sabre to the scabbard, "the city is ours! Enough blood has been shed: let us think of aiding the wounded. Long live France!"

"Long live France!" the adventurers shouted with maddening delight.

[1] We must be pardoned for laying such stress on the character of the young chieftain of Guetzalli, who has doubtless been already recognised, and whose name we are now authorised, to our great delight, to reveal. After the hapless end of the Marquis de Pindray the colony of Cocospera unanimously chose as his successor Monsieur O. de la Chapelle, a young man whom his eminent qualifications recommended for all suffrages. It is he who figures in our story under the pseudonym of de Laville. Monsieur O. de la Chapelle died at an early age. This premature end was deeply felt by all his friends, among whom the author, though he knew him but very slightly, is happy to call himself, and to testify it by showing the heroic part he played in the glorious expedition which forms the subject matter of this work.—G.A.

[2] Wild boar.

[3] Fact.

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER THE VICTORY.

Never before had a more brilliant victory been gained by troops numerically so weak, and under conditions apparently so unfavourable. The Mexican array evacuated Hermosillo in the utmost disorder, abandoning three hundred dead and wounded, baggage of every description, guns, ammunition, and flags. The rout was complete.

General Guerrero, shame on his brow and rage in his heart, fled at full speed along the Ures road, pursued closely by the French cavalry. The count had made a large number of prisoners, among whom were several Mexican officers.

The joy of the adventurers bordered on madness. Still the brilliant advantages had not been gained without a sensible loss, regard being had to the numerical strength of the army. It had lost twenty-two men—an enormous amount, which evidenced the obstinacy of the fight, and the courage with which the Mexicans had fought. Among the dead the count had to regret several of his best-beloved officers, brave young fellows, who had fallen at the head of their sections while urging their men on.

The count, although his clothes were riddled with bullets, had not received a scratch: it seemed as if a charm protected him, for no one had spared his life less than himself during the fight. He had ever been in the thickest of the action, in advance of his comrades, encouraging them by word and deed, and only employing his sabre to ward off blows that came too near him.

So soon as the battle was over the count proceeded to the Cabildo, whither the Mexican authorities were convened, in order to settle with him as to the safety of the city. Don Cornelio had not left him during the fight: he had done his duty bravely by his side.

"Don Cornelio," he said to him, "I am pleased with you; you behaved most bravely. I wish to reward you by intrusting to you a mission of the highest importance. Are you too tired to get on horseback?"

"No, señor conde. Besides, you know that I am a thorough *jinete*."

"That is true. Here are two letters, one for Don Rafaël, which you will deliver in passing the Hacienda del Milagro: when you get in sight of La Magdalena you will tear the envelope off the other, and carry it to the address you will read on it; but in the event of your being stopped or taken prisoner on the road, that letter must not be found on you, and no one must know its contents. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, señor conde, and if necessary it shall be destroyed."

"Very good. Now get a fresh horse and start without the loss of a moment: it is a question of life and death."

"I start, Don Louis; you will hear of me again."

These words were accompanied by a sinister smile, which passed unnoticed by the count. Don Cornelio left the room, and five minutes later his horse's hoofs could be heard echoing on the pavement.

At this moment Valentine entered. The hunter's features, usually so calm, were convulsed, and he seemed suffering from extreme agitation. He looked around him on entering.

"What are you looking for?" the count asked him; "and what is the meaning of the state in which I see you?"

"It means——" Valentine answered. "But stay, better so. Take a glance at these papers which I seized in the house of General Guerrero."

He handed the count a bundle of letters and other papers, which the other rapidly read through.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, stamping his foot passionately, "such great ingratitude after so many acts of kindness! A thousand devils! this land is, then, accursed, that treason should spring up under every blade of grass."

"Fortunately we have the proofs to hand. I will take on myself to arrest the villain."

"It is too late."

"How too late?" the hunter exclaimed. "Where is he, then?"

"He has set out on a mission of the highest importance, which I intrusted to him for the leaders of the malcontents."

"Confusion!" the hunter said; "what is to be done? It is plain that the scoundrel will sell our secrets to the enemy."

"Wait. I gave him a letter for Don Rafaël, which he cannot fail to deliver."

"That is true: if only to lull suspicion to sleep, he will do so. I will be off to the hacienda at once."

"Go, my friend: unfortunately I cannot accompany you."

"It is unnecessary. I swear that if this devil's own Don Cornelio falls into my hands, I will crush him like the viper he is. Good-by."

The hunter hurriedly left the Cabildo, and a few minutes later, followed by Belhumeur, Black Elk, Curumilla, and Eagle-head, he was galloping at full speed along the road to the hacienda.

The count then occupied himself, before taking a moment's rest, in organising the tranquillity and security of the city. As most of the Mexican authorities had taken flight, he appointed others, had the dead buried, and arranged an hospital for the sick, the direction of which he gave to Father Seraphin, whose evangelic devotion was beyond all praise.

Posts and main guards were established, and patrols received orders to march about the city in order to maintain tranquillity—a useless measure of precaution, for the inhabitants appeared as joyful as the French. The streets were hung with flags, and on all sides could be heard shouts of "Long live France! long live Sonora!" repeated with an expression of indescribable satisfaction.

When the count had discharged these imperious duties, his mind being no longer over-excited by the necessity of the moment, nature, conquered for an instant, gained the upper hand with an extreme of reaction, and Don Louis fell back almost fainting into the chair where he had been working without relaxation for nearly eight hours. He remained thus without help until a late hour of the night, for he had not the strength to call for assistance.

At length Captain de Laville entered to make his chief a report about the result of the pursuit of the Mexicans. He was terrified at the state in which he found Don Louis; for the count was suffering from a violent fever, attended by delirium. The captain immediately summoned the company's surgeon, and the count was laid in a hastily-prepared bed.

The surgeon could not be found, and a Mexican doctor came in his stead. This man declared that the count was suffering from an attack of dysentery, and made him drink a potion which he prepared at once. The count fell into a species of lethargic sleep which lasted ten hours. Fortunately the company's surgeon at length arrived. After a glance at the count, and examining the few drops of the potion left in the glass, the doctor immediately had eggs beaten in milk administered to the count, and ordered all his limbs to be rubbed with hot napkins.

"Why, doctor," the captain remarked to him, "what sort of treatment is this? The physician assured me that the count had the dysentery."

The doctor smiled sorrowfully.

"Yes," he said, "he has a dysentery; but do you know what the physician gave him?"

"No."

"Belladonna; that is to say, poison."

"Oh!" the captain said in horror.

"Silence!" the surgeon continued. "Let this remain a secret between us two."

At this moment the physician entered. He was a plump little man, with the look of a frightened cat. The captain seized him by the collar, and dragged him into a corner of the room.

"Look here!" he said to him, pointing to the glass the surgeon still held in his hand. "Of what was that potion composed you gave the count?"

The Mexican turned pale.

"Why?" he stammered.

"Poison, you villain!" the captain shouted violently.

"Poison!" he exclaimed, raising his eyes and arms to heaven. "Could it be possible? Oh, let us see!"

He examined the glass with feigned attention.

"It is true," he said after a moment. "*Por Dios*, what inadvertence!"

The word appeared so precious to the Frenchmen that, in spite of their anger and alarm, they could not prevent it, but burst into a loud laugh. The little doctor took advantage of this attack of gaiety to escape very quietly, and could never be found again, though carefully sought for: he had probably left the city.

Thanks to the intelligent and affectionate care of the surgeon, however, the effects of the poison were neutralised. The count felt a little better, and gave orders that the company should assemble at once in the patio of the Cabildo. The command was rapidly obeyed, and within an hour the company was drawn up under arms in the courtyard. The count came down, leaning on the arm of Captain de Laville.

"My comrades," he said, "I am ill, as you can see. Still I have called you together to inform you of an engagement I have made in your name with the inhabitants of Hermosillo. I declared that even if you walked over piles of piastres and ounces, you would not stoop down to pick them up. Was I wrong?"

"No," they all exclaimed; "you were quite right."

"We are no pirates, whatever they may say," the count continued, "and the hour has arrived to prove it."

"We will do so."

"Thank you, comrades."

The company was dismissed, and carefully kept its promise: not a waist-buckle was stolen by

these half-naked men, who for four months had been suffering the most horrible privations.

The count's condition, however, instead of becoming better, grew worse daily, in spite of the anxious attentions of the doctor and Father Seraphin, who had posted himself by his bed, and never left him. In Don Louis the mind wore out the body. Since Don Cornelio's departure he had received no news either of the Spaniard or Valentine. Two faithful men, sent to the Hacienda del Milagro, had not returned, and neither Don Rafaël nor Doña Angela gave a sign of life.

This silence became incomprehensible. On the other hand, the situation of the company was growing daily more serious. The count, master of a powerful city, found himself more isolated than before; the pueblos that should have risen did not stir; the man to whom the count had written, and who had pledged himself to give the signal for revolt, gave no reply to the appeal, and remained indifferent to the repeated entreaties Don Louis made him.

Unfortunately dysentery is one of those frightful diseases which completely annihilate a man's faculties, and for a very long period the count was incapable of attending to anything. Señor Pavo had come at full speed from Guaymas to Hermosillo, ostensibly to felicitate the count on his gallant exploit, but in reality to be able to betray him with greater facility.

Don Louis was alone, without friends in whom he could trust, lying on a bed of pain, internally devoured by a mortal restlessness, and a prey to a profound despair at seeing himself reduced to a state of powerlessness, and losing the fruits of his toil and fatigues.

Captain de Laville, the only man in whom he could have trusted at the moment, was attacked by the same illness as his chief, and, like him, was incapable of acting. Señor Pavo skilfully profited by this state of affairs to sow seeds of disaffection among the Frenchmen. The count was the soul of the company—the only tie that rendered it compact and united: in his absence from his duties all went wrong.

A system was then organised in the shade by Don Pavo. This system consisted in continual demonstrations on the part of the adventurers, who at every hour of the day came one after the other to lay before the count the most absurd grievances, and threaten to leave him. At last matters reached such a pitch that it was necessary to come to some decision.

Two courses offered themselves: the first, to give up the results of the victory of Hermosillo, and retreat on Guaymas. This was suggested to the count by the French representative, Señor Don Antonio Mendez Pavo. The second was to await at Hermosillo, while holding their ground by force and risking a siege, the succours which must speedily arrive from California, where they were being rapidly organised. So greatly had the news of the brilliant victory gained by the count electrified the minds of the adventurers, and inflamed their imagination.

These two courses were equally repugnant to the count. The first seemed to him shameful; the second impracticable. Still the situation was growing every day more and more intolerable, when at this moment a strange event occurred, which, had we been writing a romance instead of a history, would have seemed to us too startling for credibility.

The company, incessantly excited by the hypocritical pity of Señor Pavo, and the dark intrigues he set at work, had fallen into a state of perfect insubordination towards the count, and almost open revolt. Seeing that Don Louis was too ill to act vigorously, and incapable of opposing anything they pleased to do, the men let him know that, unless he consented to give the order for retreat, they would leave Hermosillo and abandon him.

The count was forced to yield. General Guerrero had pledged his word that the retreat should not be disquieted, Don Louis succeeded in obtaining hostages who responded for the safety of the sick he was compelled to leave behind, and with a breaking heart, no strength or courage left, he was borne away in a litter. A reaction took place among the volunteers at the sight of their well-beloved chief, reduced to this miserable state, and almost dead of sorrow. They pressed round him, swearing obedience and fidelity, and promising him to fall to the last man for him. A melancholy smile played round the pallid lips of the dying man, for these proofs of devotion came too late. The count, crushed by a succession of insults, had drunk the cup to the dregs: he no longer put faith in his comrades.

The retreat commenced. In spite of the general's solemn pledge, it was an uninterrupted succession of skirmishes; but a final ray of glory was reflected on the French. The adventurers, aroused by the smell of powder, found all their courage once more to victoriously repulse the attacks of the Mexicans, whom they compelled to retreat pitifully, and give up any further annoyances.

The company camped about three leagues from Guaymas, resolved to force a passage, and enter that port the next day in spite of any opposition. The count, slightly revived by the prospect of an approaching combat, had fallen asleep after making all his preparations, when toward midnight he was aroused by the arrival of a flag of truce.

The envoys were Señor Pavo and a merchant of Guaymas, who came on behalf of General Guerrero. They were bearers of an armistice for forty-eight hours; and a letter from the general, who earnestly begged the count to come to him in order to arrange the terms of peace.

"I consent to the armistice," the count replied. "Let the general send me an escort, and I will go to him."

His companions objected.

"Why not take your cavalry?" one of them said to him.

"For what use?" he said with discouragement. "I am the only person they care for: if a trap is set for me, I will fall into it alone."

The adventurers insisted, but he remained inflexible.

"We no longer understand one another," he said to them.

Then he turned to the negotiators.

"Return to Guaymas, gentlemen, and be good enough to tell General Guerrero that I thank him, and am awaiting his escort."

The escort arrived at daybreak, and the count set out, after a last and melancholy glance at his comrades, who witnessed his departure with aching hearts and tears in their eyes. Henceforth the divorce between the count and the adventurers was accomplished.

General Guerrero, on the count's entrance to Guaymas, ordered the honours due to a commander-in-chief to be paid him. Don Louis smiled with disdain. What did he care for these empty ceremonies?

The count and the general had a lengthened conversation together. The general had not yet given up his projects of seduction; but this time, like the first, the count answered with a positive refusal.

The company was henceforth surrendered defencelessly to the machinations of Señor Pavo. This man lost no time, and by his advice the adventurers sent as a deputation to the count two ignorant sailors, with orders to come to a settlement with him at any price. These two emissaries were selected by Señor Pavo, for the worthy man knew perfectly well what he was about. The two sailors presented themselves at the count's house, who sent out a message to them that he was engaged at the moment, and begged them to wait a little while. The ambassadors, ruffled in their self-esteem, and puffed up with the importance of the mission intrusted to them, left the count's house immediately, swearing at his insolence, and went straight to the palace of General Guerrero.

The latter, advised beforehand, knew what would happen, and was impatiently awaiting them. He ordered them to be admitted at once so soon as they sent in their names, and received them most graciously: then, when he had sufficiently intoxicated them with flattery, he made them sign—that is to say, make a cross at the foot of—a treaty, in which they recognised that, having been *deceived and abandoned in a cowardly manner* by their chief, they pledged themselves to lay down their arms and quit the country for a sum of *eleven thousand piastres*.^[1] We must confess that General Guerrero made a capital bargain, for the arms came into his possession. Oh! the Mexicans are famous negotiators, and, above all, most crafty diplomatists.

Unable to vanquish the company, the Mexicans bought it of two scoundrels, by the intervention of a third, whose duty it was to defend it.

Thus the Atrevida Company had committed suicide. It effected its own dissolution without even attempting to see once again that chief who had been its idol, and whom it abandoned writhing on a bed of suffering.

We must mention, to the honour of the French plenipotentiaries that, in the treaty they signed, the liberty of the count was formally guaranteed.

Now let us see by what extraordinary concurrence of circumstances the count, when in such a critical position, was thus abandoned by all his friends. How was it that General Guerrero, his obstinate foe, had shown himself so kind and almost generous toward Don Louis during the last events we have narrated?

We will proceed to explain this; but, in order to do so, we must take up events further back, and return to Valentine and his comrades, whom we left galloping at full speed along the road to the hacienda.

[1] A little over £2000.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HACIENDA DEL MILAGRO.

The road from Hermosillo to the Hacienda del Milagro is perfectly well traced, straight and wide along the entire distance. Although the night was gloomy and unlit by the moon, as the five horsemen galloped on side by side, it would have been impossible for them to pass Don Cornelio without seeing him, had they caught him up; but they reached the hacienda without receiving any tidings of him.

The road had been so trampled in every direction during the last few days, both by French and Mexicans, that it was impossible for these experienced hunters to distinguish or take up any imprint which could serve to guide them in their researches. The traces of horses, wagons, and men were so interlaced in each other, that they were completely illegible, even to the most practised eye. Several times Valentine tried, though in vain, to read this book of the desert. Hence, the nearer the hunters drew to their destination, the more alarmed and anxious they became.

It was about eight in the morning when they reached the hacienda: they had travelled the whole night through without stopping, save to search for traces of the man they were pursuing. The hacienda was tranquil; the peons were engaged in their ordinary labours; the ganado was grazing at liberty on the prairies. When the hunters entered, Don Rafaël was preparing to mount on horse, seemingly to take a ride round his farm. A peon was holding a magnificent mustang, which champed its bit and snorted impatiently at being held so long. When the hacendero perceived the newcomers he ran toward them, playfully menacing them with his chicote.

"Ah!" he said with a laugh, "here are my deserters returned. Good morning, gentlemen."

The latter, astonished at this merry reception, which they did not at all comprehend, remained dumb. Don Rafaël then noticed their gloomy and embarrassed air.

"Hilloh! what is the matter with you?" he asked seriously. "Are you the bearers of ill news?"

"Perhaps so," Valentine answered sadly. "May Heaven grant that I am mistaken!"

"Speak—explain yourself. I was mounting to go and obtain news about you; but as you are here, it is unnecessary."

The hunters exchanged an intelligent glance.

"Of course we will furnish you with all the details you may wish for."

"All the better. In the first place, then, dismount and come into the house, where we shall converse more at our ease."

The hunters obeyed, and followed Don Rafaël into a vast apartment which served as the hacendero's business room. When they entered Valentine opposed the closing of the door.

"In that way," he said, "we shall not have to fear listeners."

"Why such precautions?"

"I will tell you. Where are Doña Angela and Doña Luz at this moment?"

"They are probably still asleep."

"Very good. Tell me, Loyal Heart, have you received any visitor during the last twenty-four hours?"

"I have not seen a living soul since the departure of the Count de Prébois Crancé."

"Ah!" the hunter said, "then a courier did not arrive last night?"

"None."

"So that you are ignorant of the deeds accomplished yesterday?"

"Utterly."

"You are not aware that the count fought a battle yesterday?"

"No."

"That he took Hermosillo by assault?"

"No."

"And that General Guerrero's army is utterly routed?"

"No. Is what you tell me really the truth?"

"The most perfect truth."

"In that case the count is victor?"

"Yes, and is now installed at Hermosillo."

"It is almost incredible. And now, my friend, as I have answered all your questions frankly and without comment, will you do me the kindness to tell me why you asked them?"

"Yesterday, so soon as the count was master of Hermosillo, he thought of you, perhaps of somebody else, and he sent off a courier ordered to give you a letter."

"Me! That is strange. The courier was doubtlessly a native, an Indian?"

"No, he was Don Cornelio Mendoza, a Spanish gentleman, whom you probably remember."

"Certainly—a jolly, excellent companion, who was continually strumming the vihuela."

"The same man," Valentine said ironically. "Well, this jolly, excellent companion, who was continually strumming the vihuela, my dear Loyal Heart, is simply a traitor who sold all our secrets to the enemy."

"Oh, Valentine! you must be very sure ere you bring such an accusation against a caballero."

"Unfortunately," the hunter said sadly, "the slightest doubt on the subject is impossible; the count holds in his hands all the fellow's correspondence with General Guerrero."

"*Cuerpo de Cristo!*" Don Rafaël exclaimed, "do you know, my friend, this is very serious?"

"I am so fully of your opinion that, in spite of the fatigue that overpowered me, I begged these gentlemen to accompany me, and started at full gallop, hoping to surprise him on the road and seize him; for, beside the letter he had to deliver to you, he had others of a most compromising nature, addressed to several influential persons in the province."

"That is an awkward affair," Loyal Heart said with a pensive air: "it is evident that the scoundrel, instead of coming here, has gone straight to hand the papers to the general."

"There is not, unfortunately, the least doubt of that."

"What is to be done?" Don Rafaël muttered mechanically.

There was a moment's silence: each reflected on the means to be employed in order to neutralise the effects of this treachery. Curumilla and Eagle-head rose, and prepared to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" Valentine asked them.

"While our brothers are consulting," the Araucano replied, "the Indian chiefs will go on the discovery."

"You are right, chief: go, go," the hunter said. "I do not know why," he added mournfully, "but I have a foreboding of misfortune."

The two Indians went out.

"Do you know the contents of the letter the count wrote me?" Don Rafaël asked presently.

"On my faith, no; but it is probable that he told you of the victory, and begged you to conduct Doña Angela to Hermosillo. In any case the letter was most compromising."

"As for that, I am very slightly alarmed, for General Guerrero will think twice before he attacks me.

"What is the use of this long deliberation, and such a loss of precious time? We have only one thing to do, and that is to go to Hermosillo as escort to Doña Angela," Belhumeur said.

"In truth, that is the most simple," Valentine said in confirmation.

"Yes," Don Rafaël remarked; "the count can only be pleased with that course."

"Come, let us carry out the plan without further delay," Belhumeur continued. "While Black Elk and myself make all the preparations for the journey, do you, Loyal Heart, go and inform Doña Angela of the determination we have come to."

"Do so, and, above all, make haste," Valentine said. "I do not know why, but I should have liked to be off already."

Without further words they separated, and the hunter remained alone. In spite of himself Valentine was a prey to the most poignant uneasiness. He walked in agitation up and down the room, stopping at times to listen or look out of the windows, as if he expected to see an enemy rise. At length, no longer able to endure the uncertainty, he went out.

The two hunters were busily engaged in lassoing horses and saddling them, while the peons were bringing in mules to carry the baggage. Valentine felt his disquietude augmented with every moment. He helped his comrades with feverish impatience, and urged each to make haste. An hour passed away. All was then ready, and they only awaited Doña Angela, who arrived, accompanied by Doña Luz and Don Rafaël.

"At last!" Valentine exclaimed. "To horse, to horse! Let us start at once!"

"Let us go," his friends repeated.

Each mounted; but suddenly a great noise was heard outside, and Curumilla appeared with agitated features, and panting violently.

"Fly, fly!" he shouted; "they are coming."

"Forward!" Valentine exclaimed.

But an insurmountable obstacle rose before them. At the moment they were passing through the gate of the hacienda it was suddenly blocked up by the cattle the peons were driving back from the fields, probably to prevent them being carried off by marauders. The poor beasts pressed into the gateway, each anxious to be first, while uttering lamentable moans, and goaded behind by the peons. It was useless to hope getting out before the ganado had entered, and there was no chance of clearing the gateway by driving it back. Hence the fugitives were compelled to wait, whether they would or not. Valentine was half mad with anger.

"I knew it, I knew it," he muttered in a hoarse voice, and clenching his fists in rage.

At length, after nearly an hour (for Don Rafaël possessed numerous herds), the gate was free.

"Let us be off in Heaven's name!" Valentine shouted.

"It is too late," Eagle-head said, appearing suddenly in the gateway.

"Maldición!" the hunter yelled as he rushed forward.

Valentine looked around him, and uttered a cry of alarm. The hacienda was completely surrounded by nearly five hundred Mexican cavalry, in the midst of whom General Guerrero could be distinguished.

"Ah, the wretched traitor!" the hunter exclaimed.

"Come, let us not be discouraged," Loyal Heart said. "*Cuerpo de Cristo!* it is not so long since I gave up desert life that I should have forgotten all its stratagems. We will not give these troops time to look about them. Let us charge, and make a hole through them."

"No," Valentine said authoritatively; "close and bar the gate, Belhumeur."

The Canadian hastened to obey.

"Stay," Don Rafaël said.

"Loyal Heart," Valentine continued, "you are no longer the master to act as you please, and throw yourself headlong into desperate enterprises. You must live for your wife and your children; besides, can we expose Doña Angela to the risk of being killed among us?"

"That is true," he answered. "Pardon me; I was mad."

"Oh!" Doña Angela exclaimed, "what do I care about death if I am not to see again the man I love?"

"Señorita," the hunter said sententiously, "allow events to follow their course. Who knows if things are not better so? For the present return to the house, and leave us to manage this affair."

"Come, my child, come," Doña Luz said to her affectionately; "your presence is useless here, and perhaps it may soon become injurious."

"I obey you, señora," the maiden said sadly; and she retired slowly, leaning on the arm of Doña Luz, who lavished on her all the consolations her heart dictated. Don Rafaël had given all his servants orders to arm, and hold themselves in readiness to offer a vigorous resistance in case the hacienda was attacked, an event which, from the orders given by the general to his troops, might be expected at any moment. The peons of the hacienda were numerous, and devoted to their master; hence the struggle threatened to be serious.

Suddenly repeated blows were struck on the gate. Valentine, who had been thinking deeply for several moments, bent down to Don Rafaël's ear, and whispered a few words.

"Oh!" the latter replied, "that is almost cowardice, Don Valentine."

"You must," the hunter said obstinately.

And while Loyal Heart proceeded very unwillingly to the gate, he quickly entered the house. Don Rafaël opened a trap door in the gate, and asked who was there, and what was wanted; then, to the great surprise of all, after negotiating for a few moments with the men who demanded entrance in so peremptory a manner, he ordered the gate to be unbarred. In an instant it was thrown open, and the general appeared, accompanied by several officers, with whom he rode boldly in.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting, general, but I did not know it was you," Don Rafaël said to him.

"Caramba! amigo," the general remarked with a smile as he looked round, "you have a numerous garrison here, as far as I can judge."

"After the late events that have taken place in Sonora the roads are infested with marauders," Don Rafaël replied: "it is wise to take precautions."

The general shrugged his shoulders.

"Very good, caballero," he replied dryly; "but it does not please me to see so many men armed without any legal motive. Lay down your arms, gentlemen."

The peons looked at their master; the latter bit his lips, but made them a sign to obey. All the weapons were then thrown on the ground.

"I am very vexed, Don Rafaël, but I am about to leave a garrison in your hacienda. You and all the persons present are my prisoners. Get ready to follow me to Guaymas."

"Is that the reward for allowing you to enter my house?" Don Rafaël said bitterly.

"I should have entered in any case," the general replied sternly. "And now send my daughter here at once."

"Here I am, my father," the young lady said as she appeared at the head of the steps.

Doña Angela came down slowly into the courtyard, walked toward her father, and stopped two paces from him.

"What would you of me?" she said to him.

"Give you the order to follow me," he answered dryly.

"I can do no other than obey you. Still you know me, father: my resolution is inflexible. I have in my hands the means to liberate myself from your tyranny when it appears to me too heavy for endurance. Your conduct will regulate mine. Now let us start."

The only affection that remained warm and pure in the heart of the ambitious man was his love for his daughter; but that love was immense and unbounded. This man, who recoiled before no deed, however cruel it might be, to attain the object he proposed to himself, trembled at a frown from this child of sixteen, who, knowing the tyrannical power she exercised over her father, abused it unscrupulously. On his side, Don Sebastian knew the iron will and untamable character of his daughter. Hence he trembled in his heart on listening to her cold declaration, although he allowed nothing to be seen. He turned away with an air of disdain, and gave orders for departure.

A quarter of an hour later all the prisoners were *en route* for Guaymas, and no one was left at the hacienda but General Don Ramon and Doña Luz, who were watched by a garrison of fifty men, commanded by an officer, who had orders not to let them communicate with anybody.

Valentine, on seeing the general so speedily recovered from his defeat, judged the position of

affairs at a glance. With his usual perspicuity he understood that, owing to Don Cornelio's treachery, the pueblos would not rise, that the hacenderos who had pledged their word would keep aloof, that the revolt would prove abortive, and that the count, ill and abandoned by everybody, would probably soon be reduced to treat with the man he had conquered. This was the reason why he urged Don Rafaël not to attempt a useless resistance, which could only have compromised him; and, at the same time, he persuaded Doña Angela to feign acceptance of her father's conditions, and return with him.

We see that the hunter had reasoned well, and that his previsions were correct. Still he was mistaken in supposing that he would manage to advise his foster-brother of all that had occurred. The orders given by the general in reference to the prisoners were executed with such extreme precision, that it was impossible even to tell the count of his whereabouts. And now that we have recounted the events that took place at the hacienda, we will approach the conclusion of this long drama.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BOAR AT BAY.

We must beg the reader to follow us to Guaymas, about a year after the events described in the last chapter.

A man dressed in a military garb, bearing considerable resemblance to the Mexican uniform, was walking, with his arms behind his back, up and down the sumptuously furnished room. This man appeared to be deep in thought; his brows were drawn together; and at times he turned an impatient glance toward a clock placed on a bracket. This man was evidently expecting somebody who did not arrive, for his impatience and ill-temper increased with every moment. He took up his hat, which he had thrown on a sofa, probably with the intention of withdrawing, when a door opened, and a servant announced,—

"His Excellency Don Sebastian Guerrero."

"At last," the visitor growled between his teeth.

The general appeared. He was in full uniform.

"Pardon me, my dear count," he said in an affectionate tone, "pardon me for having kept you waiting so long, I had infinite difficulty in getting rid of the troublesome people who bored me. At length I am quite at your service, and ready to listen with proper attention to the communications it may please you to make to me.

"General," the count answered, "two motives bring me here today: in the first place, the desire to obtain from you a clear and categorical answer on the subject of the propositions I had the honour of making to you a few days back; and next the complaints I have to make to you on the matter of certain very grave facts which have occurred to the prejudice of the French battalion, and of which I have not the least doubt," he added with a certain tinge of irony in his voice, "you were ignorant."

"This is the first I hear of them, sir. Believe me that I am resolved to do good and ample justice to the French battalion, of which I have had only to speak in terms of praise since its organisation, not only through the good conduct of the men without distinction, but also for the services it has not ceased to render."

"Those are handsome words, general. Why must they be so barren?"

"You are mistaken, count, and I hope soon to prove to you the contrary. But let this be for the present, and come to the grievances of which you have to complain. Explain yourself."

The two persons who were talking in this friendly manner and lavishing smiles were General Guerrero and Count Louis de Prébois Crancé, the two men we have seen in such bitter enmity. What had happened, then, since the treaty of Guaymas? What reason was sufficiently powerful to make them forget their hatred? What community of ideas could have existed between them to produce a change so extraordinary and inexplicable?

We will ask our readers' permission to explain this before going further, the more so as the events we have to narrate throw a perfect light on the Mexican character.

The general, after the success of the treaty of Guaymas, and the way in which, thanks to the treachery of Don Cornelio, the insurrection of the pueblos was prevented, thought he had completely gained his cause, and believed that he had got rid of the count for ever. The latter, sick almost unto death, and incapable of connecting two ideas, had received orders to leave Guaymas immediately. His friends, who were restored to liberty after the signature of the treaty, hastened to join him. Valentine had him carried to Mazatlan, where he gradually recovered; then both set out for San Francisco, leaving Curumilla in Sonora, who was ordered to keep them acquainted with the progress of events.

The general had held up before his daughter as a merit the generosity with which he had treated the count; then he had left her ostensibly free to act as she pleased, hoping that with time she would forget her love, and consent to second certain projects he did not as yet let her see, but which consisted in marrying to one of the most influential persons in Mexico. Still months had

slipped away. The general, who built on the count's absence, and, before all, the want of news about him, to cure his daughter of what he called her mad passion, was greatly astonished, when he one day began talking to her about his plans and the marriage he had projected, to hear her answer,—

"My father, I have told you that I will marry the Count de Prébois Crancé: no other will obtain my hand. You yourself consented to that union: hence I consider myself bound to him, and, so long as he lives, I will remain faithful to him."

The general was at first greatly taken aback by this answer; for, although he was well aware of his daughter's firmness of character, he was far from expecting such pertinacity. Still, after a moment, he regained his presence of mind, and bending over to her, kissed her on the forehead, saying, with pretended kindness,—

"Come, you naughty child, I see I must do what you please, though I confess it is a heavy sacrifice. Well, I will try. It will not depend on me whether you see the man you love again."

"Oh, father! can it be possible?" she exclaimed with a joy she could not restrain. "Are you speaking seriously?"

"Most seriously, wicked one; so dry your tears—re-assume your gaiety and your bright colour of former days."

"Then I shall see him again?"

"I swear it to you."

"Here?"

"Yes, here, at Guaymas."

"Oh!" she exclaimed impetuously, as she threw her arms round his neck and embraced him tenderly, at the same time melting into tears. "Oh, how kind you are, my father, and how I will love you if you do that!"

"I will do it, I tell you," he said, affected, in spite of himself, by this love so true and so passionate.

The general had already arranged his scheme in his head—the scheme which we shall soon see unfolded in all its hideousness. Of the reply his daughter had made him Don Sebastian only remembered one sentence: "*So long as the count lives I will remain faithful to him.*"

Poor Doña Angela had, without suspecting it, germinated in her father's brain the most horrible project that can be imagined. Two days later Curumilla started for San Francisco, bearer of a letter from the young lady for the count—a letter destined to have an immense influence on Don Louis' ulterior determination.

The Mexicans had been so magnificently beaten by the French at Hermosillo that they had kept up a most touching and respectful recollection of them. General Guerrero, who, as the reader has been in a position to see, was a man of imagination, had made a reflection full of logic and good sense on this subject. He said to himself that if the French had so thoroughly thrashed the Mexicans, who are very terrible soldiers as we know, *a fortiori*, they would defeat the Indians, and, if necessary, the Yankees, those gringos, as the Americans of the South call them, whom they hold in mortal terror, and expect at any moment to see invade Mexico. In consequence of this reasoning, General Guerrero had formed at Guaymas a battalion entirely composed of French volunteers, commanded by their own officers, and whose services were for the present limited to acting as police of the port, and maintaining order in the town.

Unfortunately the commandant of the battalion, though an upright officer and good soldier, was not exactly the man to be placed at the head of these volunteers. His ideas, rather narrow and paltry, were not up to the position he occupied, and grave misunderstandings soon broke out between the Mexicans and the foreigners—misunderstandings probably encouraged in an underhand manner by certain influential persons, but which placed the battalion, in spite of the conciliatory temper of its chief, and the attempts he made to restore harmony, in a very difficult position, which naturally became more aggravated with each day.

Two parties were formed in the battalion: one, hostile to the commandant, spoke affectionately of the count, the memory of whom was still maintained in Sonora, regretted his absence, and formed vows for his return; the other, though not devoted to the commandant, yet remained attached to the honour of the flag. But the devotion was lukewarm, and there was no doubt, if any unforeseen event occurred, that these men would let themselves be led away by circumstances.

In this state of affairs General Alvarez *pronounced* against Santa Anna, President of the Republic, and summoned the chiefs of all the corps scattered through the provinces to revolt. General Guerrero hesitated, or pretended to hesitate, ere declaring himself. Suddenly it was heard with amazement, almost with stupor, that the Count de Prébois Crancé had landed at Guaymas. This is what had occurred.

Immediately after that conversation with his daughter, of which we have quoted a part, the general paid a visit to Señor Don Antonio Mendez Pavo. This visit was a long one. The two gentlemen conversed secretly together, after which the general returned to his house rubbing his hands.

In the meanwhile Don Louis was at San Francisco, sorrowful and gloomy, ashamed of the result of an expedition so well begun, furious with the traitors who had caused its failure, and burning—

shall we confess it?—in spite of Valentine's wise exhortations, to take his revenge. From several quarters simultaneously influential persons invited the count to undertake a second expedition. The money requisite for the purchase of arms and enrolment of volunteers was offered him. Louis had also had secret interviews with two bold adventurers, Colonel Walker and Colonel Fremont, who at a later date was a candidate for the presidency of the United States. These two men made him advantageous offers; but the count declined them, owing to the omnipotent intervention of the hunter.

Still the count had fallen into a black melancholy. The man once so gentle and benevolent had become harsh and sardonic. He doubted himself and others. The treachery to which he had been a victim embittered his character to such a degree that his best friends began to be seriously apprehensive.

He never spoke of Doña Angela—her name never rose from his heart to his lips; but his hand frequently sought on his breast the relic she gave him on their first meeting, and when he was alone he kissed it fondly with many a tear. The arrival of Curumilla at San Francisco produced a complete change; the count appeared to have suddenly recovered all his hopes and all his illusions; the smile reappeared on his lips, and fugitive rays of gaiety illumined his brow.

Two men arrived soon after Curumilla, whose names we will not mention, lest we should sully the pages of this book. In a few days these men, doubtlessly following the instructions they had received, took complete possession of the count's mind, and hurled him back into the torrent from which his foster-brother had found such difficulty in drawing him.

One evening the two were seated in a room of the house they occupied in common, and smoking a pipe after dinner.

"You will come with me, my brother, I trust?" the count said, turning to Valentine.

"Then you really mean to go?" the latter said with a sigh.

"What are we doing here?"

"Nothing, it is true. My life is a burden to me, as yours is to you; but we have before us the boundless desert, the immense horizon of the prairies. Why not recommence our happy life of hunting and liberty, instead of trusting to the fallacious promises of these heartless Mexicans, who have already made you suffer so deeply, and whose infamous treachery brought you to your present condition?"

"I must," the count said with resolution.

"Listen," Valentine went on. "You no longer possess that ardent enthusiasm which sustained you on your first expedition. You lack faith. You do not yourself believe in success."

"You are mistaken, brother. I am more certain of, success now than I was then; for I have as my allies the men who were formerly my most obstinate foes."

Valentine burst into a mocking laugh.

"Do you still believe in that?" he said to him.

The count blushed.

"Well, no," he said. "I will conceal nothing from you. My destiny drags me on. I know that I am proceeding, not to conquest, but to death. But no matter; I must, I will see her again. Here, read!"

The count drew from his breast the letter Curumilla brought him, and handed it to Valentine; the latter read it.

"Well," he said, "I prefer your being frank with me. I will follow you."

"Thanks! Good heavens!" he added sadly, "I do not deceive myself: I know the old Latin proverb which says *Non bis in idem*: what is once missed is so for ever. I do not allow myself to be deceived by the hypocritical protestations of General Guerrero and his worthy acolyte, Señor Pavo. I know perfectly well that both will betray me on the first opportunity. Well, be it so. I shall have seen again the woman who expects me, who summons me, who is all in all to me. If I fall I shall have a tomb worthy of me. The road I have traced others happier than I will follow, and bear civilisation to those countries which you and I once dreamed of emancipating."

Valentine could not restrain a sad smile at these words, which completely revealed the count's character—a strange composite of the most varying elements, and in which passion, pride, and enthusiasm waged an unceasing contest.

The next day Louis opened a recruiting office, and a week later embarked on board a schooner with his volunteers. The voyage commenced with an evil augury, for the adventurers were wrecked. Had it not been for Curumilla, who saved him at the risk of his life, it would have been all over with the count. The adventurers remained twelve days abandoned on a rock.

"The Romans would have seen a foreboding in our shipwreck," the count said with a sigh, "and would have given up an expedition so inauspiciously begun."

"We should do wisely in following their example," Valentine said sadly: "there is yet time."

The count shrugged his shoulders in reply. A few days later they arrived at Guaymas. Señor Pavo received the count most kindly, and proposed, himself, to present him to the general.

"I wish to make your peace," he said to him.

Don Louis allowed him to do so. His heart beat at the thought that he was possibly about to see Doña Angela again, but nothing of the sort took place. The general was extremely gracious to the count, spoke to him with feigned candour, and appeared ready to accept his propositions. Don Louis brought with him two hundred men and arms, and placed his sword at his disposal, if he intended to join the Governor-General Alvarez. Don Sebastian, while not replying absolutely to these advances, still allowed it to be seen that they were not displeasing to him; he even went further, for he almost promised the count to give him the command of the French battalion—a promise which, on his side, the count feigned to hear with the greatest pleasure.

This interview was followed by several others, in which, always excepting the numberless protestations the general lavished on the count, the latter could obtain nothing except a species of tacit permission to take the command of the volunteers, in concert with the chief of the battalion. This permission was more injurious than useful to the count, however, as it rendered a great part of the Frenchmen indisposed toward him, for they were angry at the general appointing them a new leader.

During the week the count had been at Guaymas the general had not said a word to him about Doña Angela, and it had been impossible for him to see her. On the day when we find him again at Don Sebastian's house, matters had reached such a pitch between the inhabitants and the French, that immediate repression was urgent in order to prevent great calamities. Several Frenchmen had been insulted—two had even been stabbed in the public streets; the *cívicos* and inhabitants made growling threats against the volunteers; and there was in the air that something which forebodes a great catastrophe, which no one, however, can explain.

The general pretended to feel deeply the insults offered the French. He promised the count that prompt and full justice should be done, and the assassins arrested. The truth was that the general, before striking the great blow he was meditating, wished for the arrival of the powerful reinforcements he expected from Hermosillo in order to crush the French, and he only sought to gain time.

The count withdrew.

The next day the insults began again, and the French saw the assassins, whom the general had promised to punish, walking impudently about the streets. The battalion began to grow fearfully excited, and a fresh deputation, at the head of which the count was placed, was sent to the general. The count peremptorily demanded that justice should be done, two cannon given to the battalion for its security, and that the *cívicos* should be at once disarmed; for these men, drawn from the dregs of the populace, occasioned all the disorders.

Once again the general protested his kindly feeling toward the French, and promised to deliver to them two guns; but he would not hear a word about disarming the *cívicos*, alleging as his reason that such a step might irritate the population and produce an ill effect. While accompanying the Frenchmen to the very door of the saloon he told them that, in order to prove the confidence he placed in them, he would himself come without an escort to their barracks, and hear their complaints.

The step the general took was a bold one, and therefore sure to succeed, especially with Frenchmen, who are good judges of bravery, and correct appreciators of everything that is daring. The general kept his promise; he really proceeded alone to the French quarters, in spite of the recommendations of his officers; he even answered them in a way which proves how thoroughly he was acquainted with the character of Frenchmen.

A colonel, among others, demonstrated to him the imprudence of thus placing himself defencelessly in the hands of men exasperated by the vexations of every description from which they had suffered so long.

"You do not know what you are saying, colonel. The Gauls in no way resemble the Mexicans: with them the point of honour is everything. I know very well that the question will be discussed of keeping me prisoner; but there is one man who will never consent, and who will defend me if necessary: that man is the Count de Prébois Crancé."

The general judged correctly: all happened as he said. It was the count who energetically opposed his arrest, which was already almost resolved. The general left the barracks in the same way as he entered them. No one dared to utter a word of reproach in his presence. On the contrary, thanks to the honeyed eloquence with which he was gifted, he succeeded so well in turning opinions in his favour, that every one overwhelmed him with protestations of devotion, and an ovation was almost offered him.

The result of this audacious visit was immense for the general; for, through the effect he had contrived to produce on the mass of volunteers, a division commenced among them almost immediately after his departure, and they no longer agreed. One party wished for peace at any price; the others demanded war with loud shouts, insisting that he was deceiving them, and that they would be once again the dupes of the Mexicans.

The latter were right, for they saw clearly; but, as ever happens, they were not listened to, and in conclusion they came to a compromise, which is always bad in such circumstances; that is to say, a committee was appointed to come to an understanding with the government, and regulate the affairs of the battalion.

As may be seen, the mine was charged: a spark would be sufficient to enkindle an immense fire.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

It was night. In a small house at Guaymas, Louis and Valentine were conversing by the light of a meagre candle, which only spread a smoking and trembling illumination. They were discussing the measures by which to expedite the finale of the gloomy machinations in which General Guerrero had managed to enfold them with diabolical cunning, while Curumilla was peacefully sleeping in a corner of the room.

"I foresaw it," Valentine said. "Now it is too late to draw back. We must act energetically: if not, you are lost."

"Eh, my friend? I am so in every way."

"What! will you really break down when the hour of danger has pealed?"

"I do not fear it: it will be welcome. I should wish to die, brother."

"Come, be a man. Regain your courage, but make haste. Have you noticed the arms and ammunition continually arriving? Believe me, we must make an end of it, one way or other, as speedily as possible."

"Yes, I know as well as you that the general is deceiving us; but these volunteers are not the men I had at Hermosillo. These fellows hesitate and are afraid. Their commandant is incapable of acting: he is a vacillating, irresolute man. With such people we can achieve nothing."

"I am afraid so: still it is better to know at once on what you have to depend than to remain any longer in this state of uncertainty."

"Tomorrow the delegates will go and see the general."

"Let them go to the deuce: they will be at least certain of obtaining a categorical answer from him," Valentine said impatiently.

At this moment two light taps were heard at the street door.

"Who can arrive so late?" the count said. "I expect nobody."

"No matter; let us see," Valentine said. "It is often the case that the people we least expect are the most agreeable visitors."

And he went to open the door. It was scarce ajar ere a woman rushed into the house, crying to the hunter in a voice rendered hoarse by terror,—

"Look, look! I am pursued!"

Valentine rushed out.

Although this woman was *tapada*—that is to say, her features were completely hidden by a rebozo—the count recognised her at once. What other woman but Doña Angela could come to see him in this way? It was, in reality, the general's daughter. The count received her half fainting into his arms, laid her on a butaca, and began lavishing on her all those attentions which her condition demanded.

"In Heaven's name, speak! What is the matter with you?" he exclaimed. "What has happened?"

In a little while the young lady recovered, passed her hand over her forehead several times, and gazed at the count with an expression of intense happiness.

"At length I see you again, my love!" she exclaimed as she burst into tears, and threw herself headlong into his arms.

Don Louis returned her caresses, and tried to calm her. The maiden was suffering from a strange nervous excitement, her large black eyes were haggard, her face pallid as that of a corpse, and her whole body was agitated by a convulsive tremor.

"Tell me, my child, what is the matter with you? In Heaven's name, explain! I implore you, speak. Angela, speak, if you love me."

"If I love you, poor cherished one of my heart!" she said with a sigh as she laid her hand in his. "If I love you! Alas! I love you to death, Don Louis; and this love will kill me."

"Speak not so, my well-beloved angel! Dispel these gloomy thoughts: let us only think of our love."

"No, Don Louis, I have not come to you to speak of love: I have come to save you."

"To save me!" he said with feigned gaiety. "Do you believe me, then, to be in great peril?"

"Don Louis, you are running an immense risk. Take heed of my words. Do not look at me so with a smile: tomorrow you will be a lost man. All the measures are taken. I heard all: it is horrible! And that is the way I learnt your return to Guaymas, of which I was ignorant. Then I ran off madly, wildly to you, in order to say to you, 'Fly, fly, Don Louis!'"

"Fly!" he repeated thoughtfully. "And you, Angela, must I lose you again this time and for ever? No, I prefer death."

"I will go with you; for am I not your affianced, your wife in the sight of Heaven? Come, come, Don Louis, let us go—not lose a minute, a second. Your black horse will carry us beyond pursuit

in two hours. But take your weapons, for I was followed by a man as I came here from my father's house."

She spoke with strange volubility, like a person talking in a fever. The count knew not what resolution to follow, when suddenly a loud noise was heard in the street, and the door, which was only leant to, flew wide open.

"Save me, save me!" the poor child exclaimed, a prey to indescribable terror.

Don Louis bounded on his pistols, and placed himself resolutely before her.

"Oh, you shall come, you villain!" Valentine's voice was heard outside. "You shall not escape me this time. Come, walk in, or I'll quicken your motions with my dagger."

And with a vigorous effort the hunter entered the room, dragging after him a man who made futile efforts to escape.

"Shut the door, Louis," Valentine continued. "And now, my worthy spy, show me your treacherous face, that I may be able to recognise you again."

Curumilla had left the corner in which he had hitherto been sleeping. Without uttering a syllable he drew Doña Angela behind a mosquito net, which completely concealed her, and then rejoined his friends, candle in hand. All this while the prisoner offered an obstinate resistance to prevent his features being seen; but he did not say a word, contenting himself with uttering hoarse and indistinct exclamations of rage. At length, after a long struggle, the stranger seemed to comprehend that all his efforts would be in vain: he drew himself up, took off his cloak, and crossed his arms on his chest.

"Well, look at me, as you insist on doing so," he said with a sarcastic accent.

"Don Cornelio!" the Frenchmen exclaimed.

"Myself, gentlemen. How have you been since I last had the pleasure of seeing you?" he continued with serpent coolness.

"Miserable traitor!" Valentine yelled as he rushed on him.

But the count checked him.

"Wait," he said.

"I betrayed you, it is true," Don Cornelio replied. "What next? I had probably a motive in doing so. I know you are going to say that you did me many services. What does that prove, if you did me in a single day more injury than all the good you did me during the course of our relations?"

"I did you an injury! You lie, you scoundrel!"

"Señor conde," Don Cornelio said with a haughty air, "I would remind you that I am a gentleman, and will not allow you to address me in the way you are now doing."

"This wretch is mad, on my soul!" the count said with a smile of pity. "Let him go, brother; he is unworthy of our anger: he only merits our contempt."

"Not so," Valentine sharply objected. "This man is the general's tool: we cannot let him go thus."

"What shall we do with him? Sooner or later we must release him."

"That is possible, but for the present we will hand him over to the care of Curumilla."

The Indian gave a nod of assent, and seizing Don Cornelio, led him away. The latter allowed him to do so without offering the slightest resistance.

"We shall meet again, gentlemen," he said with a mocking smile.

The Indian looked at him in a very peculiar manner, and drew him into another room. Doña Angela then emerged from behind the curtain.

"I am waiting for you, Don Louis," she said.

The latter shook his head sadly.

"Alas!" he said, "I cannot fly: my life is not my own. I have sworn to my comrades not to abandon them. Were I to fly, I should be a traitor."

Doña Angela went up to him and bent gracefully over him.

"Farewell, Don Louis," she said. "You are acting as a caballero. Follow your destiny. Your honour is as dear to me as to yourself. I wish it to be unspotted. I no longer insist. Farewell! Give me a kiss on the forehead: we shall not meet again till the day of our death."

All at once a cry was heard in the street, so horrible that the three persons shuddered with terror. The door opened, and Curumilla stalked in: his face was calm, and his step as measured as usual.

"You went out by the door of the corral then, chief?" Valentine asked him.

"Yes."

"But what have you done with Don Cornelio?"

"Free," the Indian said.

"What! free?" Don Louis exclaimed.

"There must be something in the background," the hunter remarked. "Why did you give him his

liberty?"

Curumilla drew his knife from his waist belt, and the blade was red with blood.

"You need no longer fear him," he said.

"You have not killed him?" the three exclaimed simultaneously.

"No," he said. "He is dumb and blind."

"Oh!" they said with a gesture of horror.

Curumilla had simply scooped out Don Cornelio's eyes with his scalping knife, and torn out his tongue; then he led him to the other end of the town, and abandoned him to his fate. Valentine and Don Louis considered it useless to address any reproaches to the chief, which could not repair the evil, and which, indeed, the Araucano would not have understood; consequently they refrained from any observation.

Doña Angela, in spite of the count's entreaties, would not consent to him accompanying her on her return home. She withdrew, after whispering in his ear the parting recommendation,—

"Take heed of tomorrow, Don Louis."

The count smiled, and she flew away like a bird, leaving behind her very sad and naked the little room which she had illumined for a short time with her presence.

"Come," the count said, as he fell back in a butaca so soon as she was gone, "it seems that tomorrow will bring the finale: all the better. Still the man that takes me will have to pay dearly for it."

The next day, as had been arranged, the delegates of the volunteers waited on the general, who received them in his usual way, lavishing protestations and promises on them. The delegates pressed for a settlement, on which Don Sebastian, who was doubtlessly ready to deal the blow he had so long meditated, changed his tone and dismissed them, bidding them await his good pleasure. The delegates withdrew, exasperated by the roguery of the man in whom they had been so weak as to place confidence, and who now proved to them that he had been deceiving them from the beginning.

The volunteers were anxiously expecting the answer their delegates were to bring them. When the latter described what had taken place their exasperation reached its height: the cry "To arms!" was raised, and everyone prepared for fighting. The chief of the battalion completely lost his head.

"Bid them form a square," the count said to him. The order was obeyed. The count placed himself in the centre of the square, and raised his hand to command silence.

All were still: the moment was a solemn one, and all perceived it. In spite of himself, a certain degree of hesitation was depicted on the count's handsome face: not that he feared for himself personally, but he felt that he was about to risk his last stake, and it would be decisive. Everyone had his eyes fixed upon him.

"You hesitate, count," an officer said to him. "Why did you join us, then? Are you no longer the man of Hermosillo?"

At this sharp remark a vivid blush suffused the count's cheek, and he trembled with suppressed passion.

"No," he exclaimed, "no, by heavens! I do not hesitate. My friends, reflect: there is yet time. Remember that, the sword once drawn, we become outlaws. What will you do?"

"Fight—fight!" the volunteers shouted, waving their weapons enthusiastically.

The count drew himself up, unsheathed his sword, and brandished it over his head.

"You wish it?" he shouted.

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, then, forwards! Long live France!"

"Long live France!" the volunteers replied.

The battalion, formed in four companies, resolutely left its quarters, and proceeded at a quick step toward the Mexican barracks. Unfortunately, as we have said, a dissension had sprung up among the French. Many of them marched very unwillingly, being forced on by their comrades. The chief of the battalion, too, though personally very brave, was not the man suited to attempt a *coup de main* like the present one; and the count, through excess of delicacy, and in order to maintain unity of action, committed the fault of declining the command when offered to him by the officers and men.

The battalion proceeded toward the Mexican barracks by three different roads. But General Guerrero had made his arrangements long before. He had shut himself up in these barracks with three hundred troops of the line. The neighbouring houses were crammed with *cívicos*, while four guns commanded the only approaches. The Frenchmen only amounted to three hundred men, one half of them discouraged, while the Mexicans were nearly two thousand.

Still the action began vigorously on all sides at once. The first charge was admirable. The Mexican guns swept down the attacking party, and effected a frightful carnage. Still the French held their ground, and continued to advance, supported by the example of the count, who walked

fifteen paces in advance of the column, with a rifle in one hand and a sword in the other, amid a hail-storm of bullets, shouting in his powerful voice,—

"Forward! forward!"

All at once, the chief of the battalion, who ought to have supported the attack on the right, seeing his company decimated by canister, lost his head completely, and fell back in disorder on the French quarters. The count tried in vain to rally the volunteers; disorder was beginning to spread among them, and all his efforts were powerless.

It was at this moment the count understood the fault he had committed by not accepting the chief command. Still the Mexican guns no longer fired, for the artillerymen were dead.

"Forward! Charge with the bayonet!" the count shouted; and he rushed onward, followed by Valentine and Curumilla, who did not remain an inch behind. Some twenty volunteers dashed after him. The count rushed up to the wall of the barracks, which he succeeded in scaling, and stood upright on the summit, exposed to the whole of the enemy's fire.

"Forward! forward!" he repeated.

His hat, pierced by balls, was blown off his head, and several bayonet-thrusts tore his clothes. A terrible hand-to-hand contest commenced. Unfortunately there were only fifteen Frenchmen altogether. After a heroic attempt to hold their ground they were compelled to give way; but they fell back like lions, pace by pace, with their faces turned to the foe, and not ceasing to fight. The count howled with rage: tears of passion poured down his cheeks at seeing himself thus abandoned. He wished to die. But in vain did he throw himself into the thickest of the fight: his friends protected him, in spite of himself, against the blows dealt at him. At length the route commenced. The count broke his sword, after a glance of powerless fury at his enemies, whom, had he been bravely supported, he would have conquered, and who thus escaped him.

Valentine and Curumilla dragged him down to the port; but the vessel which brought him had set sail during the combat. Flight was impossible. In this extremity only one house could offer a refuge to the conquered: it was that of the French agent, and the volunteers flocked to it.

Señor Pavo promised that all those who delivered their arms up to him should be placed under the protection of the French flag. The count had entered the house and thrown himself into a chair, insensible to all that was said and done around him; but Valentine was watching.

"A moment," he said. "Señor Pavo, will the life of Count de Prébois Crancé be saved?"

The Mexican looked craftily at the hunter, but made no answer.

"No shuffling, sir," Valentine continued. "We want a distinct answer, or we shall renew the engagement."

As it was no longer possible to hesitate Señor Pavo spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said in a clear and distinct voice, "on my honour I swear to you that the life of Count Louis de Prébois Crancé shall be spared."

"We shall remember your words, sir," Valentine said sternly.

Don Antonio Pavo hoisted a white flag as a signal of peace. Nearly the whole battalion of volunteers had sought refuge at his house. The battle was over; it had lasted three hours. The French had thirty-eight men killed, and sixty-three wounded, out of three hundred combatants. The Mexicans lost thirty-five men during the action, and had one hundred and forty-seven wounded, out of about two thousand soldiers. The battle had been warmly contested, and the conquerors paid dearly for a victory which was the result of treachery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

Immediately after the combat a delicious comedy, began between Don Antonio Pavo and General Guerrero. The latter would not listen to any proposition tending to obtain for the French a written capitulation. He confined himself to giving his word of honour as a general officer, that if the arms were surrendered to him at once, *all* the rebels should have their lives granted them. Don Antonio was constrained to yield to the general's orders. The arms were surrendered, the French made prisoners of war, and locked up.

So soon as night fell, Colonel Suarez, accompanied by four other officers, presented himself at the house of Don Antonio Pavo, demanding, in the name of General Guerrero, that the Count de Prébois Crancé should be immediately handed over to him. Don Antonio hastened to obey by giving the count orders to quit his house. The latter, without replying, contented himself with darting a glance of sovereign contempt at him, and surrendered to the colonel. A quarter of an hour later he was in solitary confinement. Of all the combatants only two had escaped, Valentine and Curumilla, and that was only at the count's peremptory order.

We repeat it here, although the names are changed, and certain facts have, been expressly altered, we are not writing a romance, but the history of a man whose noble character must be dear to all his fellow countrymen. There are, then, certain things which we cannot and ought not

to pass over in silence, though frequently in the course of this long narrative we have softened down facts which we felt a repugnance to display in all their horror.

Despite the solemn promise made by Don Antonio Pavo in the presence of all the volunteers, a few days after his illegal arrest the count was told to prepare for trial. The Europeans were aroused by this disloyal act, and several of them went to Don Antonio to remind him of his promise, and incite him to keep it. Then Don Antonio asserted that he never made any promise, and that the affair in no way concerned him.

In the meanwhile the preparations for the count's trial were actively pushed on. All the officers of the battalion, including the commandant, were interrogated, and all, with one exception, were compelled to confess, sought to throw the whole blame of their conduct on the count. Not a single witness for the defence was examined; for what was the use of it? The accused was condemned beforehand.

When the count was arrested he still had in his waist belt the pistols with which he marched into action. General Guerrero ordered that they should be left him. He doubtless hoped that Louis, impelled by despair, would, in a moment of terror, blow out his brains, and thus spare himself the shame of signing the death warrant. But he was not acquainted with the character of his enemy. The count possessed a mind too strongly tried by that touchstone called misfortune to have recourse to suicide, and tarnish the end of his career.

In the meanwhile Valentine had not been inactive. If he had consented to preserve his liberty, it was only in the hope of saving his foster-brother. Two or three days before the count's secret imprisonment was altered, toward evening, the door of his cell opened. He turned his head mechanically to see who entered, uttered a cry of joy, and rushed toward him. The newcomer was Valentine.

"You—you here!" he said to him. "Oh, thanks for coming!"

"Did you not expect me, brother?" the hunter asked.

"I expected your visit, though I did not dare count on it. You must be exposed to a thousand annoyances, and compelled to conceal yourself?"

"I! Not a bit of it."

"All the better; you cannot imagine how happy I am at seeing you. But who is the person accompanying you?"

In truth, Valentine was not alone; another person had entered the cell with him, and was standing motionless against the door, which the jailer locked again, after introducing the visitors.

"Do not trouble yourself about that person at present," Valentine said; "let us talk about business."

"Be it so: speak."

"You know that you will be condemned to death. I suppose?"

"I presume so."

"Good! Now listen to me, and, above all, do not interrupt me; for time is precious, and we must profit by it. You understand that if I obeyed you when you ordered me to escape, I did so because I suspected in what way affairs would turn. Now the moment for action has arrived. All is prepared for your flight; the jailers are bought—they will not see you quit the prison. I have freighted a vessel. Take your hat, and come. In ten minutes we shall be aboard, in half an hour under sail, and we will leave Mexican justice to deal with you in your absence. Come, I have managed capitally, I think, brother. You see that I have lost no time, and all this is very simple."

"Extremely simple indeed," the count replied with the utmost calmness. "I thank you for what you have done for me."

"Indeed, brother, it is not worth thanking for."

The count laid his hand on his arm to interrupt him.

"But," he continued, "I cannot accept your offer."

"What!" Valentine exclaimed with a start of surprise. "What do you say, brother? You must be jesting."

"Not at all, brother. What I say is the truth. It is my inflexible will to leave to the Mexican people the iniquity of my condemnation, the indelible stain of my death. I will not fly: I cannot—I ought not; for it would be an act of cowardice on my part. A soldier does not abandon his post. A gentleman does not sully his escutcheon. A Frenchman has not the right to dishonour his name. I die for a noble and grand idea—the emancipation and regeneration of a people. That idea required a baptism of blood to make it prosper and bear fruit at a later date. I give it mine without regret—without a thought of self, gladly—I will say almost with happiness. Brother, in a prison thoughts ripen quickly: it is probably because a man is nearer the tomb there, and life appears to him what it really is—a dream. I have thought much. I have reflected deeply. I have weighed with the utmost impartiality the for and against of the two questions, and I prefer death. I knew what you would attempt for me. Your life has been one long devotion; but that devotion must this night accomplish its greatest sacrifice in letting me die, and not attempting to save me. A man like I am must not secure his life by trickery. I pledged my head as the stake in the game I played. I lost, and I pay my debt."

"Brother, brother, do not speak so!" Valentine exclaimed with despair; "you break my heart."

"Reflect, my good Valentine, on the position in which I now stand. I am tried contrary to the law of nations. Hence my position is a fine one; my judges will endure all the disgrace of my condemnation. If I fly, I shall be nothing more than any common adventurer—a pirate, as they call me, prodigal of his companions' blood, and chary of his own. Must I not acquit the debt I have contracted with all my friends, who died to defend my cause? Come, brother, do not try to convince me, for it would be useless. I repeat to you, my resolution cannot be shaken."

"Ah!" Valentine exclaimed again, with an outburst of passion he could not repress, "you are determined to die. But do you reflect that, in dying, you drag down with you to the grave another person? Do you believe that she will consent to live when—"

"Silence!" the count interrupted him in great agitation. "Do not speak to me of her. Poor Angela! Alas! why did she love me?"

"Why!" the person who accompanied Valentine, and had hitherto remained motionless, exclaimed. "Because you are great, Louis; because your heart is immense."

"Oh!" he said with grief, "Angela! Brother, brother, what have you done?"

The hunter made no reply, for he was weeping. His iron nature was broken; the strong man wept like a child.

"Do not reproach him for having brought me, Don Louis. I wished to come—I insisted on accompanying him."

"Alas!" the count replied with an ineffable sadness, "you break my heart, poor darling child. In your presence all my resolution and courage abandon me. Oh! why have you come to revive, by your presence, regrets which nothing will be able to calm again?"

"You are mistaken, Don Louis," she said with febrile energy. "You believe me to be a weak woman, without courage. My love for you is too true and too pure for me ever to advise you to do anything against your honour or your glory. Just now, concealed in that obscure corner, I listened eagerly to your words. I was happy at hearing you speak as you did. I love you, Don Louis, oh, as man never was loved in this world! But I love you for yourself, and not for myself. Your glory is as dear to me as you are. Your memory must remain without a stain, as your life has been unsullied. Don Louis, I, to whom you are all in all, the man for whom I would sacrifice my life if necessary, I have come to say to you, 'Dear count, die nobly, with head erect: fall like a hero! Your memory will be revered as that of a martyr.'"

"Yes, thanks, thanks for saying that to me, Angela," the count said as he pressed her in his arms with passionate energy; "you restore me all my energy."

"And now farewell, count, to meet again soon."

The count went up to Valentine.

"Your hand, brother," he said to him. "Forgive me for not desiring to live."

The hunter threw himself into his brother's arms, and the two remained thus enfolded for several minutes. At length the count liberated himself from this loving prison by a heroic effort. Valentine left the cell, not having the strength to utter a word, and supporting Doña Angela, who, in spite of the courage she had displayed, felt on the point of fainting.

The door closed again, and the count remained alone. He fell back in his chair, leaned his elbows on the table, buried his face in his hands, and remained in this position the whole night through. The next morning, at an early hour, Don Louis was fetched to go to the court. The interrogatory was over, and the pleading was about to begin.

The count had chosen as his defender a young captain of the name of Borunda, who during the siege of Hermosillo had been taken prisoner by the French at the attack on the bridge head. Borunda had remembered the generous manner in which the count had treated him at that period. His pleading was what might be expected from the young and noble officer, simple, pathetic, and imprinted with that eloquence which comes from the heart, and nothing can equal. Assuredly the count would have been acquitted, had not his death been decided beforehand.

Don Louis, who during the entire discussion remained calm and apathetic, listening to the false statements and calumnious imputations of the witnesses without quivering, or addressing a reproach to those ingrates who sacrificed him in this cowardly way, felt affected by his defender's glowing language. He rose and held out his hand to him with inimitable grace.

"Thank you, sir," he said to him. "I am happy at having found a man like yourself among so many enemies. Your pleading was as it should be, and money will not repay such words."

Then, drawing from his finger the ring bearing his coat of arms, which he had always worn since leaving France, he passed it on to the captain's finger, adding,—

"Accept this ring, and keep it in remembrance of me."

The captain pressed his hand, but could not reply.^[1]

The judges retired to deliberate. They returned at the expiration of five minutes. Count Louis de Prébois Crancé, unanimously found guilty, was condemned to be shot. The sworn interpreter of the court was then called on by the president to translate the sentence to the condemned; but then a strange incident occurred. This interpreter rose and addressed the court.

"No, gentlemen," he said resolutely; "I will not translate this unjust sentence, which you will soon regret having pronounced."

This energetic protest abashed the judges for an instant. The interpreter was discharged on the spot. He was a Spaniard.

"Gentlemen," the count then said with the greatest coolness, "I understand your language sufficiently well to know that you have condemned me to death. May Heaven pardon you, as I do!"

He bowed to the judges with a smile, and withdrew as calm as he entered.

The count was immediately placed in *capilla*. It is the fashion in Spain and all Southern America for men condemned to death to be placed in a room, at one end of which is an altar. Near the bed stands the coffin in which the body of the condemned will be laid after the execution. The walls are hung with black cloth, on which silver tears and mournful inscriptions are sewn. This custom, which is very cruel in our opinion, and is evidently a relic of the barbarous medieval times, is probably intended to imbue the condemned with religious ideas.

The count was in no way influenced by these mournful trappings, but employed himself with the utmost tranquillity in setting his affairs in order. The very day he was put in *capilla* Valentine entered his cell, followed by Father Seraphin. He was the priest he would most certainly have sent for to console him in his last moments, had he known where to find him; but Valentine thought of everything. By his orders Curumilla went on the search, and the worthy Indian soon discovered the missionary, who, on learning the nature of the case, hastened to follow him.

Still the condemnation of the count had produced an extraordinary emotion. While the *cívicos* and other bandits of the town indulged in indecent joy, parading the streets with bands of music at their head, the upper classes and sound portion of the population displayed extreme sorrow. They spoke of nothing less than preventing the execution of the sentence, and for some hours General Guerrero trembled lest his victim should escape him.

The Vice-Consul of the United States, indignant at this unjust sentence, but not having the power to act officially, proceeded to Don Antonio Pavo with the hope of inducing him to act energetically, and save the count. Don Antonio refused. While protesting the sorrow he felt, nothing could make him recall his refusal.

Still Don Antonio understood that he could not refrain from paying a visit to the count. Valentine was with him, as well as Father Seraphin. The hunter had obtained leave to remain with his foster brother till the last moment. The count received Don Antonio with an icy face. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders in contempt when the latter tried to exculpate himself, and alleviate all that was reprehensible in his conduct. The count handed him several papers, and, interrupting him roughly in the midst of a very involved sentence, in which he was trying to prove how innocent he was of all imputed to him, said dryly,—

"Listen to me, sir. I am willing, if it is of any use to you, to give you a letter, in which I acknowledge that your conduct toward me was always irreproachable; but on one condition——"

"What is it, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"I do not wish to be shot on my knees, and with my eyes bandaged. You understand me, sir? I want to look death in the face. Go and arrange that with the governor."

"That favour shall be granted you, I can assure you, sir," he answered, delighted at having been let off so easily.

He went out and kept his word. What did the count's enemies care whether he fell standing or on his knees, with eyes bandaged or not? Their great object was that he should be dead. Still General Guerrero profited by this opportunity to appear generous at a small cost.

The next day but one Valentine brought Doña Angela with him: the maiden had donned that monk's robe which she had already worn under critical circumstances.

"Is it for today?" the count asked.

"Yes," Valentine answered.

Louis took his foster-brother on one side.

"Swear to me to protect that child when I am no longer here to do so."

"I swear it!" Valentine said in a broken voice.

Doña Angela heard the words. She smiled sadly as she wiped away a tear.

"Now, brother, there is another oath I must obtain from you."

"Speak, brother."

"Swear to do what I ask you, whatever it may be."

Valentine looked at his foster-brother: he saw such anxiety depicted on his face that he let his eyes fall.

"I swear it!" he said in a hollow voice.

He had guessed what Don Louis was about to demand of him.

"I do not wish you to avenge me. Believe me, brother, God will take that vengeance on Himself, and sooner or later punish my enemies in a more terrible manner than you can do. Do you

promise to obey me?"

"You have my word, brother," the hunter answered.

"Thanks! Now let me say good-by to this poor girl."

And he walked toward Doña Angela, who advanced to meet him. We will not describe their conversation. They forgot everything during an hour to live an age of joy by isolating themselves, and speaking heart to heart. Suddenly a loud noise was heard outside, the door of the capilla opened, and Colonel Suarez appeared.

"I am at your orders, colonel," the count said, not giving the other time to speak.

He passed his fingers for the last time through his moustache, smoothed his hair, took up his Panama straw hat, which he held in his hand, and after taking a melancholy glance around, went out.

Father Seraphin walked on his right; Doña Angela, with the hood over her head, on his left. Valentine came next, tottering like a drunken man, in spite of all the efforts he made, with haggard eyes, and face bathed in tears. There was something heart-rending in the aspect of this man, with the energetic features and bronzed face, a prey to such grief, which was the more profound because it was silent.

It was six in the morning, the sun had just risen, the dawn was magnificent, the atmosphere was filled with perfume, nature seemed rejoicing, and a man full of life, health, and intellect was about to die—die brutally, struck by unworthy foemen.

An immense crowd covered the place of execution, and the troops were drawn up in battle array. General Guerrero, in full uniform, glistening with precious stones, appeared at the head of the troops.

The count walked slowly, talking with the missionary, and from time to time addressing a word to the heroic girl, who refused to abandon him at this supreme hour. He held his hat before his face to protect him from the sunbeams, and fanned himself carelessly. On reaching the execution ground he stopped, went in the direction of the firing party, threw his hat on the ground, and waited.

An officer read his sentence. When this was over, the count affectionately embraced the missionary, did the same to Valentine, and whispered in his ear,—

"Remember!"

"Yes," the latter said in an inarticulate voice.

Then came the turn of Doña Angela. They remained for a long time in a close embrace, and then separated as if by mutual agreement.

"Though separated on the earth, we shall soon be united in heaven. Courage, my beloved!" she said with exaltation.

He replied to her with a smile which had nothing earthly about it.

Father Seraphin and Valentine fell back about fifteen paces, knelt down on the ground, and folded their hands in prayer. Doña Angela, with the cowl still over her face, placed herself only a few paces from the general, who watched all the preparations for the execution with a triumphant smile.

The count looked around him to assure himself that his friends had retired, took a step forward nearer the firing party, from which he was only eight yards, and laying his hands behind his back, with head erect, a smile on his lips, and a resolute glance, he called out in a clear, impressive voice,—

"Come, my brave fellows, do your duty! Aim at the heart!"

Then a strange event occurred. The officer stammered as he gave the order to fire; and the soldiers, firing one after the other, did not hit the sufferer.

"Enough of this, caray!" the general shouted.

The soldiers reloaded their muskets, and the order to fire was given once more. A discharge burst forth like thunder, and the count fell with his face to the earth.

He was dead: progress counted one martyr more!

"Farewell, father," a voice cried in the general's ear. "I keep my promise."

Don Sebastian turned in terror, for he had recognised his daughter's voice.

Doña Angela had fallen to the ground. Her father rushed toward her. It was too late; he only pressed a corpse in his arms. His punishment had already commenced.

The count had scarce fallen ere Valentine rushed toward him, followed by the missionary.

"Let no one approach the body!" he said in a voice which made the bravest recoil, and kneeling on his right, while the missionary placed himself on the left, he prayed.

Curumilla had disappeared.

Those who tell us that the Count de Prébois Crancé was an adventurer, I will merely ask what Hernando Cortez was on the day before the fall of Mexico?

In politics, as in everything else, the end justifies the means, and success is only the consecration

of genius.

- [1] We are delighted to be able to state that Captain Borunda, in spite of the brilliant offers afterwards made him, would not consent to part with this ring.—G.A.

NOTE.

Several of our friends have remarked to us with truth that the work of justice we have attempted in this work would be incomplete if we insisted on concealing our characters under their pseudonyms. We will, therefore, obey our friends' wishes. Who does not remember the heroic episode of Count Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon's life? The incident that terminated it was, in spite of the political preoccupations of the moment, considered a public calamity.

It is the expedition of this great soldier, who only lacked a lever to overturn a world, that we have attempted to describe. Don Louis is the count. By the side of Consul Calvo, General Yanès, and the Commandant Lebourgeois-Desmarets, a sinister trinity fatal to the count, the first two through a mean hatred, the third through jealousy, also grin the ignoble and gloomy faces of Colonel Campusano and Cubillas, those subaltern agents, the buzzards who were less hideously ferocious than the men who urged them to action. Now let us mention hap-hazard the names of the few men who remained faithful to the count at all risks. In the first rank we will name Monsieur A. de la Chapelle, editor in chief of the *Messenger de San Francisco*, a private friend of Raousset, who left him at his death the duty of avenging his memory, and whom friendship inspired to write so fine a book; then Lenoir, Gamier, Fayolle, and Lefranc, of whom the last three fell bravely before Hermosillo; O. de la Chapelle, brother of the journalist, that chivalrous chief of the Cocosperians; lastly, the Mexican captain, Borunda, whose chivalrous pleading would have saved the count, had not his death been resolved on.

Twelve years have passed over the drama of Guaymas, and the hour has arrived to do proper justice to the heroic victim of that unjustifiable assassination. We, one of his obscurest friends, will be pleased if our book, so incomplete as it may be, aids to any extent, however slight, in effecting this rehabilitation so eagerly expected by all honest hearts. We will add in conclusion, that the narrative has been undertaken without any notes being prepared beforehand, and written under the impression of ineffaceable memories, rather with the heart than with the pen.

GUSTAVE AIMARD.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INDIAN CHIEF: THE STORY OF A
REVOLUTION ***

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