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THE INSURGENT CHIEF.

BY

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"QUEEN OF THE SAVANNAH," "INDIAN CHIEF," "RED TRACK," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CALLEJÓN DE LAS CRUCES.

Although the town of San Miguel de Tucuman is not very ancient, and its construction dates scarcely two centuries back, nevertheless—thanks, perhaps, to the calm and studious population which inhabit it—it has a certain middle age odour which is profusely exhaled from the old cloisters of its convents, and from the thick and gloomy walls of its churches. The grass in the low quarters of the town freely grows in the nearly always deserted streets; and here and there some wretched old house crumbling with age, leaning over the river which washes its foundations, incomprehensible miracle of equilibrium—presents to the curious look of the artistic traveller the most picturesque effects.

The Callejón de las Cruces, especially—a narrow and tortuous street, lined with low and sombre houses—which at one end abuts on the river, and at the other on the street de las Mercaderes, is, without doubt, one of the most singularly picturesque in the town.

At the period of our history, and perhaps at the present time, the greater part of the right side of the Callejón de las Cruces was occupied by a high and large house, of a cold and sombre aspect, whose thick walls, and the iron bars with which its windows wore furnished, made it resemble a prison.

However, it was nothing of the sort. This house was a kind of nunnery, such as are often met with even, now in Belgian and Dutch Flanders, so long possessed by the Spaniards, and which served for a retreat for women of all classes of society, who, without having positively taken vows, wished to live sheltered from the storms of the world, and to devote the remainder of their lives to exercises of piety, and works of benevolence.

As the reader has seen, by the description which we gave of the place when it came under notice, this house was thoroughly appropriated to its uses, and there continually reigned around it a peacefulness and a calm which made it rather resemble a vast necropolis than a partially religious community of women.

Every sound died without an echo on the threshold of the door of this gloomy house; sounds of joy, as well as cries of anger—the uproars of *fêtes*, as well as the rumblings on insurrection—nothing could galvanise it, or rouse it from its majestic and sombre indifference.

However, one evening—the very night when the governor of San Miguel had given, at the Cabildo, a ball to celebrate the victory gained by Zeno Cabral over the Spaniards[1]—towards midnight, a troop of armed men, whose measured tread sounded heavily in the darkness, had left the street de las Mercaderes, turned into the Callejón de las Cruces, and, having reached the massive and solidly bolted door of the house of which we have spoken, they stopped.

He who appeared to be the chief of these men had knocked three times with the pommel of his sword on the door, which was immediately opened.

This man had, in a low voice, exchanged a few words with an invisible person; then, on a sign from himself, the ranks of his troop opened, and four women—four spectres, perhaps—draped in long veils, which did not allow any part of their person to be perceived, entered the house silently, and in a line. Some few words further had been exchanged between the chief of the

troop and the invisible doorkeeper of this mysterious house; then the door had been again noiselessly closed, as it had been opened; the soldiers returned by the way they had come, and all was over.

This singular circumstance had transpired without awakening in any way the attention of the poor people who lived in the vicinity. The greater part were assisting at the *fête* in the streets or in the squares of the high quarters of the town; the remainder were sleeping, or Were too indifferent to trouble themselves about any noise whatever at so advanced an hour of the night.

So that, on the morrow, the inhabitants of the Callejón de las Cruces would have been quite unable to give the slightest account of what had passed at midnight in their street, at the gate of the Black House as among themselves they called this gloomy habitation, for which they had a strong dislike, and which was far from enjoying a good reputation among them.

Several days had passed since the *fête*, the town had resumed its calm and peaceful appearance, only the troops had not raised their camp—on the contrary, the *Montonera* of Don Zeno Cabral had installed itself at a short distance from them.

Vague rumours, which circulated in the town, gave rise to the belief that the revolutionists were preparing a great expedition against the Spaniards.

Emile Gagnepain—much annoyed at first at being continually the sport of events, and at seeing his free will completely annihilated for the benefit of others, and especially at being obliged, in spite of himself, to be mixed up with politics, when he would have been so happy to pass his days in wandering about the country, and particularly in dreamily stretching himself on the grass—had finished by making up his mind to these continual quarrels in which he could do nothing. He had, till better times arrived, resigned himself to his fate with that philosophic carelessness which formed the foundation of his character; and this the more readily, as he was not long in perceiving that his position as secretary to the Duc de Mantone was rather nominal than actual, and that, in fact, it was a magnificent sinecure, inasmuch as during the fortnight he had been supposed to fulfil its duties, the diplomatist had not given him a syllable to write.

Although both lived in the same house, the patron and the nominal secretary only saw one another rarely, and, ordinarily, did not meet but at meals, when the same table served them. Two or three days sometimes passed without their seeing each other.

M. Dubois, completely absorbed in the intricate combinations of politics, often passed the day in long and serious conferences with the chiefs of the executive power. He had been charged with a very difficult work on the election of the deputies to the general congress, which was about to be held at San Miguel de Tucuman, and in which the independence of the provinces of the ancient vice-royalty of Buenos Aires was about to be proclaimed.

So that, spite of the lively interest which he had in his young countryman, the diplomatist was obliged to neglect him—of which the latter by no means complained; on the contrary, profiting conscientiously by the agreeable leisure which politics gave to him, he gave himself up with delight to the contemplative life so dear to artists, and lounged whole days about the town and country, in quest of picturesque points of view, and of fine landscapes.

This search was by no means unprofitable in a country such as that in which he was accidently living, where nature, yet but little spoiled or marred by the unintelligent hand of man, possessed that seal of majesty and of grandeur which God alone knows how to impress so royally alike upon the most vast and the meanest works which spring from His all-powerful hands.

The inhabitants, accustomed to see the young man among them, attracted by his handsome and frank countenance, by his gentle manners and his careless air, were, by degrees, familiarised with him; and, notwithstanding that he was a European, and especially a Frenchman—that is to say, a *gringo* or heretic—had at last come to be very friendly to him, and allowed him to go wherever fancy led him, without following him with an uneasy curiosity, or worrying him with indiscreet questions.

Moreover, in the state of political excitement in which the country was at this time, when every passion was in ebullition, and revolutionary ideas turned every head, it appeared so strange to see a man walking about continually with an unconcerned air, carelessly looking about him with a smile on his lips, and his hands in his pockets, without regret for yesterday or care for tomorrow, that this man justly passed for a kind of phenomenon. Everyone envied him, and felt constrained to love him, by reason even of his placid indifference. He alone, perhaps, did not perceive the effect produced by his presence, when he rambled about the square or the most populous streets of the town; and he continued his promenade without even considering that he was for those whose path he crossed a walking enigma, of which they vainly sought the key. Some even, quite astounded by this magnificent indifference, which they could not comprehend, went so far as to believe that if he were not completely mad, at least he had some tendencies that way.

Emile occupied himself neither with one nor the other. He continued his careless open air life, following with his eyes the birds in their flight, listening for hours together to the mysterious murmur of a cascade, or in rapture with a splendid sunset in the Cordillera. Then, in the evening, he philosophically re-entered his lodging, murmuring between his teeth:

"Is not all this admirable! How much better this than politics! *Parbleu!* He must be an idiot who does not see it. Positively, people are absurd, they are asses! They would be so happy if they would only consent to live carelessly, without seeking to free themselves from their masters. As if, when some masters are gone, others will not immediately come! Positively they are animals fit

to eat hay!"

The next day he resumed his walks, and so day after day, without worrying himself about a mode of life so agreeable and happy; and in this he was perfectly right.

The young painter, as we have already said, lived in a house placed at the disposal of M. Dubois by the Buenos Airean Government, and situated on the Plaza Mayor, under the gates. The young man, on stepping out of his house, found himself in face of a wide street, furnished with shops, which led out of the square. This street was the Calle de las Mercaderes. Now, the painter had been in the habit of going straight on, of following the Calle Mercaderes, at the end of which was the Callejón de las Cruces; he then entered the Callejón, and arrived, without any turning, at the river. Thus, twice a day—in the morning in going out, and in the evening in returning from his promenade—Emile Gagnepain passed the entire length of the Callejón de las Cruces.

He stopped sometimes for a considerable time to admire the graceful outline of some gable ends, dating from the earlier years of the conquest, and preferred to traverse this silent and solitary street, where he could freely give himself up to his thoughts without fear of being interrupted, rather than to take the streets of the higher quarters, where it was impossible to take a step without meeting some acquaintance whom he could not have passed without exchanging a few words, or at least without a bow—things which annoyed him much, as they broke the thread of his thoughts.

One morning when, according to custom, Emile Gagnepain had begun his walk, and was pensively traversing the Callejón de las Cruces, at the moment when he was passing the house of which we have spoken, he felt a slight tap on the crown of his hat, as if some light object had struck it, and a flower immediately fell at his feet.

The young man stopped with astonishment. His first movement was to raise his head, but he saw nothing; the old house had still its accustomed mournful and sombre aspect.

"Hum!" murmured he; "What does that mean? This flower, at all events, has not fallen from the sky."

He stooped down, picked it up delicately, and examined it with care.

It was a white rose, scarcely half opened, and still fresh and damp with dew.

Emile remained an instant wrapped in thought.

"Well, that is odd," said he; "this flower has only been gathered a few minutes; is it not to me that it has been thrown? Nay," added he, looking around him, "it would be very difficult to have thrown it to another, for I am alone. This deserves reflection. I must not be carried away by vanity. I'll wait till the evening."

And he continued his walk, after having vainly explored, with an anxious look, all the windows of this solitary house.

This incident, slight as it was, was sufficient to trouble the artist during the remainder of his promenade.

He was young, he believed himself good-looking; and, moreover, he had more than a reasonable share of vanity. His imagination soon carried him away. He called to mind all the love stories he had heard related in relation to Spain; and, putting this and that together, he soon arrived at this conclusion, excessively flattering to his self-love—that a beautiful *Señora*, held prisoner by some jealous husband, had seen him pass under her windows, had felt herself drawn towards him by an irresistible passion, and had thrown him this flower to attract his attention.

This conclusion was absurd, it was true but it immensely pleased the painter, whose self-love, as we have said, it flattered.

During the whole day the young man was burning with anxiety; twenty times he thought of returning, but, happily, reflection came to his aid, and he came to the conclusion that too much haste would compromise the success of his adventure, and that it would be better not again to pass the house till the hour when he was in the habit of returning home.

"In this way," said he, with a knowing air—questioning himself to avoid a disillusion, if, which was possible, he was deceived—"if she expects me, she will throw me another flower; then I will buy a guitar, a mantle the colour of the wall, and I will come like a lover of the time of the Cid Campeador, by starlight, to tell her my love."

But, notwithstanding this mockery, which he addressed to himself as he wandered about, he was much more concerned in the matter than he was ready to confess, and every moment he was consulting his watch to see if the hour for his return was near.

Although we may not be in love—and certainly the painter only felt at this moment a curiosity which he could not explain; for it was impossible for him to entertain any other feeling for a person whom he did not know: nevertheless the unknown—the unforeseen, if you will—has an indefinable charm, and exerts a powerful attraction on certain excitable organisations, which induces them in a moment to build up suppositions which they are not slow to consider as realities, until the truth suddenly comes, as a drop of cold water thrown into a boiling fluid will in a moment stop the evaporation of steam.

When the painter thought the hour had arrived, he turned back towards home. Affecting, perhaps, a little too visibly—if anyone had had an interest in watching his movements and gestures—the manners of a man completely indifferent, he reached the Callejón de las Cruces,

and soon arrived near the house.

Spite of himself, the young man felt that he was flushed; his heart beat rapidly, and he had a buzzing in his ears, as when the blood, suddenly excited, rushes to the head.

All of a sudden, he felt a pretty smart shock to his hat.

He briskly raised his head.

Sudden as had been his movement, he could see nothing; only he heard a slight noise as if a window had been cautiously closed.

Disappointed at this second and unsuccessful attempt to perceive the person who was thus interested in him, he remained for a moment motionless; then, recollecting the ridiculousness of his position in the middle of a street, and under the eyes of people who were, perhaps, watching him from behind a window blind, he resumed his apparent coolness and indifference, and looked on the ground about him for the object which had so suddenly struck him.

He soon perceived it two or three paces from him.

This time it was not a flower. The object, whatever it was—for at first he could not be certain of it—was enveloped in paper, and tied carefully with a purple silk thread several times round the paper.

"Oh, oh!" thought the painter, picking up the little roll of paper, and rapidly hiding it in the pocket of the waistcoat which he wore under his poncho; "This complicates the matter. Are we already to write to one another? The devil! This is making rapid progress, indeed!"

He began to walk rapidly to reach his lodgings; but soon reflecting that this unaccustomed proceeding would astonish people who were in the habit of seeing him, lounging and looking about him, he checked himself, and resumed his ordinary pace.

But his hand was incessantly going to his pocket, to feel the object which he had so carefully deposited there.

"God pardon me," said he, after a time! "I believe it is a ring. Oh, oh! That would be charming! Upon, my word, I return to my first idea—I will buy a guitar, and a mantle the colour of the wall, and in making love to my beautiful unknown—for she is beautiful, I doubt not—I will forget the torments of exile. But," said he, suddenly stopping right in the middle of the square, and throwing up his arms with a desperate air, "if she is ugly! Ugly women have often extraordinary ideas which seize them, they know not why. Ah! That would be frightful! Come! What am I talking about? The devil take me, if I am not becoming stupid! She cannot be ugly, for the very simple, reason that all the Spaniards are pretty."

And reassured by this reasoning, the deduction from which was so pleasant, the young man pursued his journey.

As the reader has been in a position to perceive, Emile Gagnepain loved talking to himself—sometimes even he went to extravagant lengths—but the fault was not his. Thrown by chance in a foreign land, only speaking with difficulty the language of the people among whom he found himself, and not having near him any friend to whom he could confide his joys and his troubles, he was to some extent obliged to make a confidant of himself; so true is it that man is an eminently social animal, and that life in common is indispensable to him, through the incessant want which he experiences in each circumstance of his life, of unburdening his heart, and of sharing with some one of his own species the sweet or painful sentiments which it feels.

While he was still reflecting, the young man arrived at the house which, he occupied in common with M. Dubois.

An attendant seemed to be waiting for his arrival. As soon as he perceived the painter, he quickly approached him, and after having respectfully saluted him—

"I beg your pardon, your lordship," said he to him, "my lord duke has several times asked for you today. He has left orders that as soon as you arrive we should ask you to go to his apartment."

"Very well," he answered, "I will go there immediately."

So saying, instead of turning to the right to enter the part of the house which he occupied, he went towards the great staircase situated at the bottom of the court, and which led to the apartment of M. Dubois.

"Is it not strange," murmured he, mounting the staircase, "that this nuisance of a man, of whom I never know how to speak, should just want me at the very moment when I desire to be alone?"

M. Dubois waited for him in a large room rather richly furnished, in which he was pacing up and down, his head lowered and his arms crossed behind his back, like a man occupied with serious reflections.

As soon as he perceived the young man, he advanced rapidly towards him.

"Oh, you have come!" cried he. "For two hours I have been waiting for you. What has become of you?"

"I! Why, I have been walking. What would you have me do? Life is so short!"

"Always the same!" pursued the duke, laughing.

"I shall take good care not to change; I am too happy as I am."

"Sit down, we have to talk seriously."

"The devil!" said the young man, seating himself on a butaca.

"Why this exclamation?"

"Because your exordium appears to me to be of bad omen."

"Come, you who are so brave!"

"That's possible, but, you know, I have an unconquerable fear of politics, and it is probably of politics that you wish to talk to me."

"You have guessed it at the first trial."

"Then, I was sure of it," said he, with a despairing air.

"This is the matter on hand—"

"Pardon, could you not put off this grave conversation to a later period?"

"Why should I do so?"

"Why, because that would be so much gained for me."

"Impossible!" pursued M. Dubois, laughing; "You must take your part in it."

"Then, since it must be so," said he, with a sigh, "what is the question?"

"Here are the facts in a few words. You know that affairs are becoming more and more serious, and that the Spaniards, who, it was hoped, were conquered, have resumed a vigorous offensive, and have gained some important successes for some time past."

"I! I know nothing at all, I assure you."

"But how do you pass your time, then?"

"I have told you—I walk; I admire the works of God—which, between ourselves, I find much superior to those of men—and I am happy."

"You are a philosopher."

"I do not know."

"In a word, here is the matter in question. The Government, frightened, with reason, at the progress of the Spaniards, wish to put an end to it by uniting against them all the forces of which they can dispose."

"Very sensibly reasoned; but what can I do in all this?"

"You shall see."

"I ask nothing better."

"The Government wishes, then, to concentrate all its forces to strike a great blow. Emissaries have already been dispatched in all directions to inform the generals; but while we attack the enemy in front, it is important, in order to assure their defeat, to place them between two fires."

"That is to reason strategically, like Napoleon."

"Now, our general only is in a position to operate on the rear of the enemy, and to cut off his retreat This general is San Martin, who is now in Chili, at the head of an army of 10,000 men. Unhappily, it is excessively difficult to traverse the Spanish lines; but I have suggested to the council an infallible means of doing so."

"You are full of schemes."

"This means consists in dispatching you to St. Martin. You are a foreigner; they will not distrust you; you will pass in safety, and you will remit to the general the orders of which you will be the bearer—"

"Or I shall be arrested and hanged."

"Oh! That is not probable."

"But it is possible. Well, my dear sir, your project is charming."

"Is it not?"

"Yes, but on thorough reflection it does not please me at all, and I absolutely refuse it. The devil! I do not care to be hanged as a spy for a cause which is foreign to me, and of which I know nothing at all."

"What you say to me annoys me to the last degree, for I interest myself very much in you."

"I thank you for it, but I prefer that you should leave me in my obscurity. I am unambitiously retiring."

"I know it. Unhappily it is absolutely necessary that you charge yourself with this mission."

"Oh, indeed! It will be difficult for you to convince me of that."

"You are in error, my young friend; on the contrary, it will be very easy to me."

"I do not believe it."

"In this way: it appears that two Spanish prisoners, arrested some days ago at the Cabildo, and

whose trial is proceeding at this moment, have charged you in their depositions, asserting that you are perfectly acquainted with their plans—in a word, that you were one of their accomplices."

"I!" cried the young man, starting with rage.

"You!" coolly answered the diplomatist "It was then a question of arresting you; the order was already signed when, not wishing you to be shot, I intervened in the discussion."

"I thank you for it."

"You know how much I love you. I warmly took up your defence, until—forced into my last retrenchments, and seeing that your destruction was resolved upon—I found no other expedient to make your innocence apparent to all, than to propose you as an emissary to General San Martin, asserting that you would be happy to give this pledge of your devotion to the revolution."

"But it is a horrible murder!" cried the young man, with despair; "I am in a fix!"

"Alas; yes, you see me afflicted at it—hanged by the Spaniards, if they take you—but they will not take you—or shot by the Buenos Aireans, if you refuse to serve them as an emissary."

"It is frightful," said the young man, utterly cast down; "never did an honest man find himself in so cruel an alternative."

"On which do you decide?"

"Have I the choice?"

"Why, look—reflect."

"I accept," said he, expressing a strong wish as to the fate of those who had thus entrapped him.

"Come, come, calm yourself. The danger is not so great as you suppose. Your mission, I hope, will terminate well."

"When I dreamed that I had come to America to study art, and to escape politics, what a fine idea I had then!"

M. Dubois could not help laughing.

"Grumble now; later you will relate your adventures."

"The fact is, that if I go on as now, they will be considerably varied. It is necessary that I set out immediately, no doubt?"

"No, we are not going on so rapidly as that. You have all the time necessary to make your preparations. Your journey will be long and difficult."

"How much time can I have to get ready to leave?"

"I have obtained eight days—ten at most. Will that suffice you?"

"Amply. Once more I thank you."

The countenance of the young man suddenly brightened, and it was with a smile on his lips that he added—

"And during this time I shall be free to dispose of myself as I like."

"Absolutely."

"Well," pursued he, grasping heartily the hand of M. Dubois, "I do not know why, but I begin to be of your opinion."

"In what way?" said the diplomatist, surprised at the sudden change manifested by the young man.

"I believe that all will finish better than I at first thought."

And after having ceremoniously saluted the old man, he left the saloon and went to his apartments.

M. Dubois followed him a moment with his eyes.

"He meditates some folly," murmured he, shaking his head several times. "In his own interest I will watch him."

[1] See "The Guide of the Desert."

CHAPTER II.

THE LETTER.

The painter had taken refuge in his apartments, a prey to extreme agitation.

Having reached his bedroom, he doubly locked the door; then, certain that for a time no one would come to thrust him out of this last asylum, he allowed himself to fall heavily on a *butaca*, threw his body backward, leaned his head forward, crossed his arms over his chest, and—an extraordinary thing for an organisation like his—he gave himself up to sad and profound reflections.

At first he called to mind—tormented as he was by the saddest presentiments—all the events which had happened to him since his arrival in America.

The list was long, and by no means pleasant.

At the end of half an hour, the artist arrived at this miserable conclusion—that, from the first moment that he had placed his foot on the New World, Fate had taken a malicious pleasure in falling furiously upon him, and in making him the sport of the most disastrous combinations, spite of the efforts that he had made to remain constantly free from politics, and to live as a true artist, without occupying himself with what was passing around him.

"*Pardieu!*" he cried, angrily striking with his hand the arm of his chair, "it must be confessed that I have no chance! In conditions like these, life becomes literally impossible. Better a hundred times would it have been for me to remain in France, where at least I should have been allowed to live quietly, and in my own fashion! A pretty situation is this of mine—placed here, without knowing why, between the gun and the gallows! Why, it is absurd, it is unheard-of! The devil take these Americans and Spaniards! As if they could not quarrel with one another without bringing into the dispute a poor painter, who has nothing to do with it, and who is travelling as an amateur in their country! They have, indeed, a singular manner of rendering hospitality, these pretty fellows! I compliment them sincerely upon it. And I, who was persuaded, on the faith of travellers, that America was, *par excellence*, the land of hospitality—the country of simple and patriarchal manners. Trust to narratives of travel—those who take such pleasure in leading the public into error, ought to be burnt alive! What is to be done? What is to become of me? I have eight days before me, says that old lynx of a diplomatist, to whom, however, I shall preserve eternal gratitude for his proceedings in my behalf. What a charming compatriot I have met there. How fortunate I have been with him. Well, no matter, I must make up my mind what to do. But what? I see nothing but flight! Hum! flight—that's not easy; I shall be closely watched. Unhappily, I have no choice; come, let me study a plan of escape. Away with the wretched fate which obstinately makes of my life a melodrama, when I employ all my powers to make it a vaudeville!"

Upon this the young man, whose gaiety of disposition gained the victory over the anxiety which agitated him, set himself—half laughing, half seriously—to reflect anew.

He remained thus for more than an hour, without stirring from his *butaca*, and without making the least movement.

It cannot be denied that at the end of that time he was as far advanced as before; that is to say, that he had hit upon nothing.

"Well, I give it up for the present," he cried, rising suddenly; "my imagination absolutely refuses me its aid! It is always so. Well, I, who wanted sensation, cannot complain; it is to be hoped that for some time past I have had enough of it, and of the most poignant sensation too!"

Then he began to stride about his room, to stretch his legs, mechanically rolled up a cigarette, and felt in his pocket for his *mechero* to light it.

In the movement which he made in searching for it, he felt in his waistcoat pocket something which he did not remember to have placed there; he looked at it.

"*Pardieu!*" said he, striking his forehead, "I had completely forgotten my mysterious unknown; but that's accounted for by my vexation! If this lasts only for eight days, I am convinced I shall completely go out of my mind. Let me see what it is that she has so adroitly dropped on my hat."

While he soliloquised, the painter had drawn from his pocket the little roll of paper, and attentively considered it.

"It is extraordinary," continued he, "the influence which women exert, perhaps unknown to ourselves, on the organisation of us men, and how the most trivial thing which comes to us from one of them, who is utterly unknown, immediately interests us."

He remained several moments turning about the paper in his hand, without coming to the resolution to break the silk, which alone prevented him from satisfying his curiosity, all the while continuing in *petto* his speculations on the probable contents of the packet.

At last, with a sudden resolution, he put an end to his hesitation, and broke with his teeth the delicate silk thread, and then unrolled the paper carefully. This paper, which—as the young man had conjectured —served for an envelope, contained another, folded carefully, and covered on every page with fine close writing.

Spite of himself, the young man felt a nervous trembling as he unfolded this paper, in which a ring was enclosed.

This ring was but a simple gold ring, in which was set a Balas ruby, of great value.

"What does this mean?" murmured the young man, admiring the ring, and trying it mechanically on all his fingers.

But although the artist had a very beautiful hand—thing of which, in parenthesis, he was very proud—this ring was so small, that it was only on the little finger that he could succeed in putting it on, and this with some difficulty.

"This person is evidently deceived," pursued the painter; "I cannot keep this ring; I will return it, come what may. But to do that I must know the individual, and I have no other means of obtaining this information except by reading her letter. I'll read it, then."

The artist was at this moment in the singular position of a man who feels himself gliding down a

rapid decline, at the foot of which is a precipice, and who, perceiving that he has not the power successfully to resist the impulse which controls him, endeavours to prove to himself that he does right to abandon himself to it.

But before opening the paper, which he apparently held with such a careless hand, and on which he looked so disdainfully—so much, say what we may, is man (that being said to be made in the image of his Maker) always a comedian, even to himself, when no one can see him, because even then he tries to impose upon his self-love—the artist went to try the lock, to see if the door was firmly fastened, and that no one could surprise him; then he slowly returned, sat himself on the *butaca*, and unfolded the paper.

It was, indeed, a letter, written in a fine close hand, but nervous and agitated, which convinced him in a moment that it was a woman's writing.

The young man at first cursorily read it, and feigning to take but moderate interest in it; but soon, spite of himself, he felt himself influenced by what he learned. As he proceeded in his reading, he found his interest increase; and when he had reached the last word, he remained with his eyes fixed on the thin paper which was being crushed in his convulsive fingers; and a considerable time elapsed before he could succeed in conquering the strong emotion that this strange letter had excited.

The following are the contents of this letter, the original of which has for a long time remained in our hands, and which we translate without comment:—

> "As an important preliminary, let me, Señor, claim, from your courtesy a formal promise—a promise in which you will not fail, I am convinced, if, as I have the presentiment, you are a true *caballero*. I demand that you read this letter without interruption from beginning to end, before passing any judgment whatever on her who addresses it to you."
>
> "You have sworn, have you not? Well, I thank you for the proof of confidence, and I begin without further preamble."
>
> "You are, Señor—if, as I believe, I am not deceived in my observation—a Frenchman from Europe: that is to say, the son of a country where gallantry and devotion to women reign supreme, and are so far traditional, that these characteristics form the most salient feature in the men."
>
> "I also am—not a French woman, but born in Europe; that is to say, although unknown to you, your friend, almost your sister on that far-off land; and as such, I have a right to your protection, and I now boldly claim it from your honour."
>
> "As I do not wish that you should at once take me for an adventuress, from the mode, somewhat beyond the rules of society, in which I enter on relations with you, I must first tell you, in a few words, not my history—that would cause you unreasonably to lose precious time—but who I am, and by what motives I am compelled for a time to put aside that timid modesty which never abandons women worthy of the name; and then I will tell you what is the service I ask of you."
>
> "My husband, the Marquis de Castelmelhor, commands a division of the Brazilian army, which, they say, has some days since entered Buenos Airean territory."
>
> "Coming from Peru with my daughter and some servants, with the intention of joining my husband in Brazil—for I knew nothing of the events which had just previously occurred—I have been surprised, carried away, and declared a prisoner of war, by a Buenos Airean *Montonero;* and I and my daughter are now imprisoned in the house which you pass twice a day."
>
> "If it were but a question of a detention more or less protracted, I would resign myself to submit to it, confiding myself to the power and goodness of God."
>
> "But, unhappily, a terrible fate threatens me—a frightful danger hangs not only over my own head, but over that of my daughter—my innocent and pure Eva."
>
> "An implacable enemy has sworn our ruin; he has boldly accused us of being spies, and in a few days—perhaps tomorrow, for this man is thought very highly of by the members of his Government—we shall be brought before a tribunal assembled to judge us, and the verdict of which cannot be doubtful—the death of traitors, dishonour! The Marchioness of Castelmelhor cannot submit to such infamy."
>
> "God, who never abandons the innocent who trust in Him in their distress, has inspired me with the thought of addressing you, Señor, for you alone can save me."
>
> "Will you do it? I believe you will."
>
> "A stranger in this country—sharing neither the prejudices, the narrow ideas, nor the hatred of its inhabitants against Europeans—you ought to make common cause with us, and try to save us, even if it be at the peril of your life."
>
> "I have long hesitated before writing this letter. Although your manners were those of a respectable man—although the frank expression of your countenance, and even your youth, prepossessed me in your favour—I feared to trust myself to you; but when I learned that you were a Frenchman, my fears vanished, to give place to entire confidence."

"Tomorrow, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning, present yourself boldly at the door of the Black House, and knock. When the door is opened, say that you have heard that a professor of the piano is wanted in the convent, and that you have come to offer your services."

"But be very careful. We are watched with the greatest care. Perhaps it would be better if you were to disguise yourself, to avoid being recognised, in case your proceedings are watched."

"Remember that you are the only hope of two innocent women, who, if you refuse them your help, will die cursing you; for their safety depends on you."

"Tomorrow, between ten and eleven in the morning."

"The most unfortunate of women,"

"Marquise LEONA DE CASTELMELHOR."

No pen could describe the expression of astonishment, mingled with fright, which was painted on the countenance of the young man, when he had finished the reading of this singular letter, which had reached him in so extraordinary a way.

As we have said, he remained a long time with his eyes fixed on the paper, probably without seeing the characters which were written there, his body leaning forward, his hands clenched, a prey to reflections which could not be at all pleasant.

To say nothing of the check to his self-love—a check always disagreeable to a man who for several hours had given his imagination free play in the pleasant land of chimeras, and who had thought himself the object of a sudden and irresistible passion, caused by his good looks and his Don Juan-like appearance—the service which the unknown lady demanded of him could not but considerably embarrass him, especially in the exceptional position in which he found himself at the time.

"Decidedly," murmured he, in a low voice, dashing his hand on the chair with rage, "Fate too furiously pursues me. This is absurd! Here am I asked to be a protector—I, who so much want protection myself! Heaven is not just to permit, without rhyme or reason, a good fellow, who only sighs for quiet, to be thus tormented in every possible circumstance."

He rose, and began to stride about his room.

"However," added he, after a pause, "these ladies are in a frightful position; I cannot abandon them thus, without trying to come to their aid; my honour is engaged in it; a Frenchman, spite of himself, represents France in a foreign country. But what is to be done?"

He sat down again, and appeared to be lost in a deep reverie. At last, in about a quarter of an hour, he again rose.

"That is it," said he; "I see no other means that. If I do not succeed, I shall have nothing to reproach myself with, for I shall have done even more than my actual position, and especially prudence, should permit me to attempt."

Emile had evidently made a resolve.

He opened the door, and went down into the *patio*.

It was almost night; the attendants, freed from their labours, more or less properly accomplished, were resting themselves, reclining on palm-mats, smoking, laughing, and chatting together.

The painter had not long to search for his domestics in the midst of the twenty or five-and-twenty individuals grouped pell-mell on the ground.

He made a sign to one of them to come to him, and he immediately went up again into his room.

The Indian, at the call of his master, immediately rose, in order to obey him.

He Was an Indian Guaraní, still very young; he appeared to be at the most twenty-four or twenty-five, With fine, bold, and intelligent features, a tall figure, of a robust appearance, and with free and unconstrained manners.

He wore the costume of the gauchos of the Pampa, and was named Tyro.

At the call of his master he had thrown away his cigarette, picked up his hat, gathered his poncho round him, and had darted towards the staircase with an alacrity which spoke well for him.

The painter much liked this young man, who, although of rather a taciturn disposition, like all his people, appeared, nevertheless, to entertain some affection for him.

Having reached the sleeping room, he did not pass the door, but, stopping on the threshold, he respectfully bowed, and waited till his master might be pleased to address him.

"Enter, and close the door behind you," said the painter to him, in a friendly tone; "we have some important things to talk about."

"Secrets, master?" asked the Indian.

"Yes."

"Then, with your permission, master, I will leave the door open."

"What is that caprice for?"

"It is not a caprice, master; all these places are rendered noiseless by the mats which cover the

ground; a spy can, without being heard, come and put his ear to the door and hear all that we may say, so much the more easily as we, absorbed in our own conversation, should not be aware of his presence; whereas, if all the doors remain open, no one will enter without our seeing him, and we shall not risk being watched."

"What you remark is very sensible, my good Tyro; leave the doors open, then. The precaution cannot do any harm, although I do not believe in spies."

"Does not the master believe in the night?" answered the Indian, with an emphatic gesture. "The spy is like the night; he likes to glide about in the darkness."

"Be it so; I will not discuss the matter with you. Let us come to the reason for which I have called you."

"I am listening, master."

"Tyro, first answer me, frankly, the question which I am about to ask you."

"Let the master speak."

"Bear in mind, that I wish you to speak candidly; but pay particular attention to the form of my question, so as to answer, fully understanding it. Are you towards me only a good domestic, strictly performing your duties; or a devoted servant, on whom I have the right to reckon at all times."

"A devoted servant, master—a brother, a son, a friend. You cured my mother of a disease which appeared incurable. When you bought the rancho, instead of sending her and me away, you preserved to the old woman her *cuarto*, her garden, and her flock. As to me, you have treated me as a man, never commanding me with rudeness, and never obliging me to do shameful or dishonourable things, though I am an Indian. You have always considered me an intelligent being, and not an animal possessed of instinct merely. I repeat, master, I am devoted to you in everything, and forever."

"Thank you, Tyro," answered the painter, with slight emotion; "I half thought what you have just told me, but I was resolved to make you confirm it; for I have need of your services."

"I am ready; but what is to be done?"

Notwithstanding the candour of this avowal, the French painter—little acquainted yet with the character of these primitive races—by no means intended to put the Indian completely in the confidence of his secrets.

Too much civilisation renders us mistrustful.

The Guaraní readily perceived the hesitation of the artist, who, unaccustomed to dissimulation, allowed his countenance to reflect his emotions, as in a mirror.

"The master has nothing to teach Tyro," said he, with a smile; "the Indian knows all."

"What!" cried the young man, with a start of surprise; "You know all!"

"Yes," he merely said.

"*Pardieu!*" pursued the artist; "For the curiosity of the thing, I would not be sorry if you were to inform me how far extends that 'all' of which you so confidently speak."

"That is easy; let the master listen."

Then, to the extreme astonishment of the young man, Tyro related to him, without omitting the least detail, all that he had done since his arrival at San Miguel de Tucuman.

However, by degrees Emile, by a great effort, succeeded in regaining his coolness, reflecting with inward satisfaction that this recital, so complete in other respects, had one omission—an important omission for him; it stopped at that very morning. Tyro knew nothing of the adventure of the Callejón de las Cruces.

But fearing that this omission merely arose from forgetfulness, he resolved to assure himself of it.

"Well," said he, "all that you relate is correct, but you forget to speak about my walks through the town."

"Oh, as to that," answered the Indian, with a smile, "it is useless to occupy myself with that. The master passes all his time in a reverie, looking up at the sky and gesticulating as he walks. At the end of two days it was found that it was not worthwhile to follow him."

"The devil! I have been followed then! I did not know I had friends who took such an interest in me."

An equivocal smile played on the expressive lips of the Indian, but he did not answer.

"You, no doubt, know the person who has thus played the spy?"

"Yes, I know him, master."

"You will tell me his name, then?"

"I will tell you, when the time arrives to do so; but he is but an instrument; besides, if this person spies you at the command of another, I watch him, master, for your sake; and what he has been able to discover is of little importance. I alone possess your secrets, so you may be easy."

"What! You know my secrets!" cried the painter, again provoked at the moment when he least expected it; "What secrets?"

"The white rose and the letter of the Callejón de las Cruces; but I repeat that I alone know it."

"This is too much!" murmured the young man.

"A devoted servant," seriously remarked the Indian, who had heard the "aside" of the painter, "ought to know all, so that when the time comes that his assistance may be necessary, he may be in a position to come to his master's aid."

The artist then decided on doing what most men would have decided on doing, under similar circumstances. Seeing that there was no means of doing otherwise, he determined on giving his entire confidence to the Indian, and he avowed all with the greatest candour—a candour which the Guaraní would have little valued had he known the true reason for it. Though he did not fully admit it to himself, the painter only acted under the pressure of necessity, and, feeling the uselessness of concealing the least thing from so far-seeing a servant, he preferred freely placing himself entirely in the Indian's hands, hoping that this mode of acting would engage him not to betray him. For a moment, the thought crossed his mind to blow the man's brains out; but, reflecting what a ticklish thing this would be, especially in his position, he preferred trying a milder course and a feigned open-heartedness.

Happily for him, the painter had to do with an honest and really devoted man, who with any other person would probably have ruined him, rather than have saved him.

Tyro had for a long time led the life of the gauchos, hunted the Pampa, and explored the desert in all directions. He was thoroughly acquainted with all the Indian schemes. Nothing would have been easier for him than to have acted as a guide to his master, and have conducted him either to Peru, Buenos Aires, Chili, or even to Brazil.

When confidence was thoroughly established between the two men, though the Frenchman had at first acted with but feigned candour, he was not long in displaying all the artless honesty of his character, happy in meeting in a country, where everybody was hostile to him, a man who manifested sympathy with him, even if this sympathy were more apparent than real. He at once seriously asked the advice of his servant.

"This is what must be done," said the latter. "In this house everything is suspicious; it is filled with spies. Pretend to put yourself in a rage with me, and dismiss me. Tomorrow, at the time of your usual walk, I will meet you, and we will settle everything. Our conversation has lasted too long already, master. Suspicions are awakened. I will go down as if I had been scolded by you. Follow me to the door of the room, speaking in a loud tone, and finding fault with me; then, in a little while, you will come down and dismiss me before everybody. Above all, master," added he, laying stress on these last words, "say nothing till tomorrow to the occupants of the house; do not let them suspect our arrangement: if you do, believe me, you are lost."

Having so said, the Indian withdrew, his finger on his lips.

All was done as had been arranged between master and servant.

Tyro was immediately sent from the house, which he left grumbling, and Emile again went up to his apartment, leaving all the attendants astounded at a scene which they never expected from a man whom they were accustomed to see ordinarily so gentle and tolerant.

The next day, at the same hour as usual, the painter went out for his accustomed walk, taking care, while he feigned the utmost indifference, to return every now and then, to assure himself that he was not followed. But this precaution was needless; no one cared to watch his promenade, so inoffensive was it known to be.

Arrived on the bank of the river, at about a hundred paces from the town, a man, concealed behind a rock, suddenly presented himself to him.

The young man smothered a cry of surprise. He recognised Tyro, the Guaraní servant dismissed by him the previous evening, according to mutual arrangement.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECLUSES.

Almost at the moment when the half hour after ten in the morning had sounded from the clock of the Cabildo of San Miguel de Tucuman, a man knocked at the door of the mysterious house of the Callejón de las Cruces.

This individual, dressed somewhat like the well to-do artisans of the town, was a man of middle height, slightly bent by age; some few grey hairs escaped from under his straw hat, he wore large spectacles with iron frame, and supported himself on a stick. His appearance, on the whole, was very respectable; his well-made olive-green cloth trousers, and his poncho of Chilian make, left nothing to desire.

In a minute or two, a little slide moved in a groove, and the head of an old woman appeared behind.

"Who are you? And what do you want here, Señor?" said a voice.

"Señora," answered the old man, slightly coughing, "excuse my boldness; but I have heard that a professor of music is required in this establishment. If I am deceived, it only remains for me to withdraw, begging you once more to accept my apologies."

While the old man said these few words in the most natural tone, and with the most careless manner, the woman behind the grating examined him with earnestness.

"Wait," answered she, after a slight pause.

The slide was again put back.

"Hum!" murmured the professor, in a low voice, "The place is well guarded."

A noise of drawing bolts and of detaching chains was heard, and the gate was half-opened—just enough to admit one person.

"Enter, then," said, in a surly tone, the woman who had at first shown herself at the grating, and who appeared to be the portress of this convent-like house.

The old man entered slowly, his hat in his hand, and bowing low.

The sight of his bald head, with but here and there a few hairs of reddish grey, appeared to give confidence to the old woman.

"Follow me," said she to him, in a peevish tone, "and replace your hat, these corridors are cold and damp."

The old man bowed, replaced his hat on his head, and, leaning on his stick, he followed the nun with that somewhat trembling step which is characteristic of persons who have considerably passed middle age.

The nun led him through long corridors, which appeared to turn back upon themselves, and which at last opened into a rather spacious cloister, the centre of which was occupied by a mass of rose bushes and orange trees, in the middle of which burst forth a stream of water, which fell with a loud sound into a white marble basin.

The walls of this cloister, towards which opened the doors of some thirty little chambers, were garnished with a number of pictures of a mediocre character, representing various episodes in the life of Our Lady of Solitude, or of Tucuman.

The old man merely threw a disdainful look upon these paintings, half effaced by time and weather, and continued to follow the nun, who trotted on before him, causing at every step a jingling of the heavy bunch of keys suspended to her girdle.

At the end of this cloister there was another, on the whole like the first, only the pictures represented different subjects—the life, I believe, of St. Rosa of Lima.

Arrived nearly halfway through this cloister, the nun stopped, and after having fetched her breath for a minute or two, she cautiously gave too slight taps at a black oak door, curiously sculptured.

Almost immediately a gentle and musical voice pronounced from the interior of the little chamber this single word:

"*Adelante*."

The nun opened the outer door and disappeared, after having with a sign requested the old man to wait for her.

Some minutes passed, and then the inner door opened, and the nun reappeared.

"Come in," said she, making a sign for him to approach.

"Come, she is not very loquacious, at least," grumbled the old man to himself, as he obeyed; "she is accommodating."

The nun stood on one side to give him passage, and he entered the little room, whither she followed him, closing the door after her.

This little room, with very comfortable furniture in old black carved oak, and the walls of which were covered, in the Spanish fashion, with thin Cordova leather, was divided into two, which was indicated by a door placed in a corner.

Three persons were, at the time, in the room, sitting on high-backed carved chairs.

These three persons were women.

The first, still young and very beautiful, wore the complete costume of a nun; the diamond cross, suspended by a large silk ribbon from her neck, and falling on her breast, at once pointed her out as the superior of the house, which, notwithstanding the simple and sombre appearance of its exterior, was, in reality, occupied by Carmelite nuns.

The two other ladies, seated pretty close to the abbess, wore ordinary costume.

The one was the Marchioness de Castelmelhor, and the other Doña Eva, her daughter.

On the entrance of the old man, who bowed respectfully to them, the abbess made a slight sign of welcome with her head, while the two other ladies, as they bowed to him ceremoniously, furtively cast curious looks at the visitor.

"My dear sister," said the abbess, addressing the old woman, in that harmonious voice which had already agreeably struck the ear of the old man, "bring, I beg you, a chair for this gentleman."

The nun obeyed, and the stranger seated himself with an apology.

"So," continued the abbess, this time addressing herself to the old man, "you are a professor of music?"

"Yes, Señora," answered he, bowing.

"Are you of our country?"

"No, Señora, I am a foreigner."

"Ah!" said she, "You are not a heretic—an Englishman."

"No, Señora; I am an Italian professor."

"Very good. Have you lived long in our dear country?"

"Two years, Señora."

"And before that you were in Europe?"

"Pardon me, Señora; I lived in Chili, where I have for a long time resided at Valparaíso, Santiago, and subsequently at Aconchagua."

"Do you intend to remain among us?"

"I, at least, wish to do so, Señora; unhappily, the times are not favourable for a poor artist like me."

"That is true," pursued she, with interest. "Well, we will try to procure you some pupils."

"A thousand thanks for so much goodness, Señora," he humbly answered.

"You really interest me, and to prove how much I desire to assist you, this young lady will be pleased, for my sake, to take this very day her lesson with you," said she, pointing towards Doña Eva.

"I am at the orders of the young lady, as I am at yours, Señora," answered the old man, with a respectful bow.

"Well, that is agreed," said the abbess; and turning towards the portress, still motionless in the middle of the room, "My dear sister," added she, with a gracious smile, "be so good, I beg you, as to bring in some refreshments. You will return in an hour to accompany this gentleman to the door of the convent."

The portress bowed with a crabbed air, suddenly turned round, and left the room, casting a sour look around her.

There was a silence of two or three minutes, at the expiration of which the abbess gently rose, advanced on tiptoe towards the door, and opened it so suddenly, that the portress, whose eye was placed at the keyhole, stood confused and blushing at being thus surprised in the very act of a spy.

"Ah! You are still there, my dear sister!" said the abbess, without appearing to remark the confusion of the old portress; "I am glad of it. I had forgotten to beg you to bring me, when you return to reconduct this gentleman, my Book of Hours, that I left through forgetfulness this morning in the choir in my stall."

The portress bowed, grumbling between her teeth some incomprehensible excuses, and she went away almost with a run.

The abbess followed her a moment with her eyes, and then she returned, re-closed the door, over which she had let fall a heavy curtain in tapestry, and turning towards the old professor, who scarcely knew what countenance to assume:

"Respectable old man," said she to him, laughing, "cover up the locks of your fair hair, which are indiscreetly escaping from under your grey peruke."

"The devil!" cried the professor, quite taken aback, suddenly putting his two hands to his head, and at the same time letting his cane and his hat fall, the latter rolling several paces from him.

At this unorthodox exclamation, uttered in good French, the three ladies laughed afresh, whilst the disconcerted professor looked at them with fright, not understanding anything which had passed, and arguing nothing favourable to him from this railing and unexpected gaiety.

"Hush!" said the abbess, placing a delicate finger on her rosy lips. "Someone is coming."

They were silent.

She withdrew the curtain. Almost immediately the door opened, after a slight tap had been given to ask permission to enter.

It was two lay sisters, who brought sweets and refreshments, as the abbess had desired.

They placed the whole on a table, and then withdrew with a respectful bow.

The curtain was immediately dropped behind them.

"Do you now believe, my dear marchioness," said the superior, "that I was right in mistrusting our sister, the portress?"

"Oh yes, Madame; this woman, sold to our enemies, is wicked, and I dread for you the consequences of the rude lesson, although merited, that you have given her."

A brilliant flash darted from the black eyes of the young woman.

"It is for her to tremble, Madame," said she, "now that I have in my hand the proofs of her treason; but do not let us care for that," said she, resuming her cheerful countenance; "time presses, let us take our places at the table; and you, Señor, taste our preserves. I doubt whether, in the convents of your country, the nuns make such good ones."

The marchioness, remarking the embarrassed position and the piteous air of the stranger, quickly approached him, and said with a gracious smile—

"It is useless to keep up any further disguise," said she to him; "it is I, Señor, who have written to you; speak, then, without fear before Madame, she is my best friend, and my only protectress."

The painter breathed heavily.

"Madame," answered he, "you remove an immense weight from my breast. I humbly confess that I did not know what countenance to assume in seeing myself recognised so unawares. God be praised, who permits that this may come to a better termination than I feared a little while ago."

"You are an admirable actor, Señor," pursued the abbess; "your hair does not at all come out from under your peruke; I only wished to tease you a little, that is all. Now, drink, eat, and do not worry yourself about anything."

The collation was then attacked by the four persons, between whom the ice was now broken, and who talked gaily to each other. The abbess especially, young and merry, was charmed at this trick she was playing on the revolutionary authorities of Tucuman, in trying to carry away from them two persons to whom they seemed to attach so much importance.

"Now," said she, when the repast was finished, "let us talk seriously."

"Talk seriously—I should like nothing better," pursued the painter; "*apropos* of that, I shall permit myself to recall the phrase that you have yourself uttered—time presses."

"That is true; you are no doubt astonished to see me—the superior of a house which is almost a convent onto whom has been confided the care of two prisoners of importance—enter into a plot, the design of which is to permit them to escape."

"Indeed," murmured the painter, bowing; "that does appear rather strange to me."

"I have several motives for it, and your astonishment will cease when you know that I am a Spaniard, and have no sympathy with the revolution made by the inhabitants of this country, to drive my fellow countrymen out of it, to whom it belongs by every divine and human law."

"That appears to me logical enough."

"Moreover, in my opinion, a convent is not—and cannot, under any pretext, be metamorphosed into a prison. Again, women ought to be always placed out of the region of politics, and be left free to act in their own fashion. In fact, to sum up, the Marchioness de Castelmelhor is an old friend of my family; I love her daughter as a sister, and I wish to save them at all hazards, even if my life is paid for theirs."

The two ladies threw themselves into the arms of the abbess, loading her with caresses and thanks.

"Good, good," pursued she, gently motioning them aside, "let me continue; I have sworn to save you, and I will save you, come what may, my dear creatures. It would be marvellous, indeed," added she, smiling, "if three women, aided by a Frenchman, could not be clever enough to deceive these yellow men, who have made this disastrous revolution, and who believe themselves eagles of intelligence, and the thunderbolts of war."

"The more I reflect on this enterprise, the more I fear the consequences of it for you; I tremble, for these men are without pity," sadly murmured the marchioness.

"Poltroon!" gaily cried the superior; "Have we not the *caballero* with us?"

"With you, ladies, until the last gasp!" cried he, carried away by emotion.

The truth is, that the beauty of Doña Eva, joined to the romance of the situation, had completely subjugated the artist. He had forgotten everything, and only experienced one desire—that of sacrificing himself for the safety of these women, so beautiful and so unfortunate.

"I knew well that I could not be deceived!" cried the abbess, holding out to him her hand, which the painter respectfully raised to his lips.

"Yes, ladies," pursued he, "God is my witness, that all that is humanly possible to do to assure your flight, I will attempt; but, doubtless you have not addressed yourselves to me without concerting a plan. This plan it is indispensable that you make me acquainted with."

"*Mon dieu*, Sir!" answered the marchioness, "This plan is very simple, one such as women alone are capable of concocting."

"I am all attention, Madame."

"We have no acquaintance in this town, where we are strangers, and where, without our knowing why, it appears we have many enemies, without reckoning one single friend."

"That is pretty well my position also," said the young man, shaking his head.

"Yours, Sir!" said she, with surprise.

"Yes, yes, mine, Madame; but continue, I beg."

"Our good superior can do but one single thing for us, but that is immense—it is to open for us the gates of the convent."

"That is much, indeed!"

"Unhappily, on the other side of this gate her power ceases completely, and she is constrained to leave us to ourselves."

"Alas! Yes," said the superior.

"Hum!" murmured the painter, like an echo.

"You understand how critical would be our position, wandering alone at hazard in a town which is completely unknown to us."

"Then you thought of me!"

"Yes, Sir," she simply answered.

"And you have done well, Madame," answered the painter, with animation. "I am, perhaps, the only man incapable of betraying you in the whole town."

"Thank you for my mother and myself, Sir," gently said the young girl, who, up to that moment, had kept silence.

The painter was half dazed; the sweet and plaintive accents of that harmonious voice had made his heart beat rapidly.

"Unhappily, I am very weak myself to protect you, ladies," he resumed; "I am alone, a foreigner, suspected—more than suspected even, since I am threatened with being shortly placed on my trial."

"Oh!" said they, joining their hands in their grief, "We are lost then."

"*Mon dieu!*" cried the abbess, "We have placed all our hope in you."

"Wait," pursued he; "all is perhaps not so desperate as we suppose. As for me, I am preparing a plan of escape; I can only offer you one thing."

"What?" cried they, eagerly.

"To share my flight."

"Oh, willingly!" cried the young girl, clapping her hands with joy.

Then, ashamed at having allowed herself to give way to a thoughtless movement, she lowered her eyes, and concealed in the bosom of her mother her charming face, suffused with tears.

"My daughter has answered you for herself and for me, Sir," said the marchioness, proudly.

"I thank you for this confidence, of which I shall try to prove myself worthy, Madame; only I want a few days to prepare everything. I have only with me one man on whom I can rely, and I must act with the greatest prudence."

"That is right, Sir; but what do you mean by a few days?"

"Three at the least—four at the most."

"Well, we will wait. Now, can you explain to us what is the plan you have adopted?"

"I do not know it myself, Madame. I find myself in a country which is totally unknown to me, and in which I naturally want the commonest experience. I must trust to the direction of the servant of whom I have had the honour to speak to you."

"Are you quite sure of this man, Sir? Pardon me for saying this, but you know one word might ruin us."

"I am as sure of the person in question as one man can be of another. It is he who has furnished me with the means of appearing before you without awakening suspicion. I rely not only on his devotion, but also on his skill, on his courage, and especially on his experience."

"Is he a Spaniard, a foreigner, or a half-caste?"

"He does not come in any of the categories you have mentioned, Madame; he is simply an Indian Guaraní, to whom I have been fortunate enough to render some slight services, and who has vowed an eternal gratitude."

"You are right, Sir; you can no doubt reckon on this man. The Indians are brave and faithful; when they are devoted, it is to the death. Pardon me all these questions, which, without doubt, must appear very extraordinary on my part; but you know this affair does not only concern myself —it concerns also my daughter, my poor dear child."

"I think it is very natural, Madame, that you should desire to be completely informed as to my plans for our common safety. Be thoroughly persuaded that when I shall positively know what must be done, I will hasten to inform you of it, in order that if the plan formed by my servant and myself should appear to you to be defective, I may modify it according to your advice."

"Thank you, Sir; will you permit me to ask you one question more?"

"Speak, Madame. In coming here, I place myself entirely at your orders."

"Are you rich?"

The painter blushed; his eyebrows knitted.

The marchioness perceived it.

"Oh, you do not understand me, Sir," she eagerly cried; "far from me be the thought of offering you a reward. The service that you consent to render us is one of those that no treasure could pay for, and the heart alone can requite."

"Madame—" he murmured.

"Permit me to finish. We are associates now," said she, with a charming smile. "Now, in an association each one ought to take a share of the common expenses. A project like ours must be conducted with skill and celerity; a miserable question of money might mar its success or retard its execution. It is in that sense that I have spoken to you, and in which I repeat my words—are you rich?"

"In any other position but that in which fate has temporarily placed me, I should answer you—yes, Madame, for I am an artist—my tastes are simple, and I live almost on nothing, only finding joys and happiness in the ever-fresh surprises that the art which I cultivate procures me, and which I madly love. But at this moment, in the perilous position in which you and I find ourselves—when it is necessary to undertake a desperate struggle against a whole population—I must be frank with you, and admit that money, the sinews of war, almost wholly fails me. I must assure you, in a word, that I am poor."

"So much the better!" cried the marchioness, with a movement of joy.

"Upon my word," pursued he, gaily, "I never complain; it is only now that I begin to regret those riches for which I have always so little cared, for they would have facilitated the means of being useful to you; but we must try and do without them."

"Do not distress yourself about that, Sir. In this affair you bring courage and devotion; leave me to bring that money which you have not."

"On my word, Madame," answered the artist, "since you so frankly put the question, I do not see why I should give way, in refusing you, to a ridiculous susceptibility perfectly out of place, since it is your interests that are at stake in this matter. I accept, then, the money that you shall consider fitting to place at my disposal; but, of course, I shall render you an account of it."

"Pardon, Sir; it is not a loan that I offer to make you; it is my part in the association that I bring—that is all."

"I understand it so, Madame; only if I spend your money, will it not be necessary that you should know in what way?"

"Well and good!" exclaimed the marchioness, going to a piece of furniture, of which she opened a drawer, from whence she took a rather long purse, through the meshes of which glittered a considerable quantity of *onces*.

After having carefully closed the drawer, she presented the purse to the young man.

"There are there two hundred and fifty *onces*[1] in gold," said she; "I hope that that sum will suffice; but if it is insufficient, let me know, and I will immediately place a larger sum at your disposal."

"Oh, oh! Madame, I hope not only that it will suffice, but that I shall have to give you back a part of this sum," answered he, respectfully taking the purse, and placing it carefully in his girdle. "I have now a restitution to make you."

"To me, Sir?"

"Yes, Madame," said he, drawing off the ring that he had placed on his little finger, "this ring."

"It is mine, that I wrapped up in the letter," eagerly exclaimed the young girl, with a charming heedlessness.

The young man bowed, quite confounded.

"Keep that ring, Sir," answered the marchioness, smiling, "my daughter would be vexed if you were to return it."

"I will keep it, then," said he, with secret joy, and suddenly changing the conversation; "I will only come once more, ladies," said he, "in order not to arouse suspicion; that will be to tell you when all is ready; only every day, at my usual hour, I will pass before this house. When, in the evening, on my return towards home, you shall see me holding a *súchil* flower or a white rose in my hand, that will be a sign that our business proceeds well; if; on the contrary, I remove my hat and wipe my forehead, then pray to God, ladies, because new embarrassments will have risen before me. In the last place, if you see me pulling asunder the flower that I hold in my hand, you must hasten your preparations for departure; the very day of my visit we shall quit the town. You will remember all these recommendations?"

"We are too much interested in remembering them," said the marchioness; "never fear, we shall forget nothing."

"Now, not another word on this subject, and give your music lesson," said the abbess, opening an instruction book, and handing it to the young man.

The painter seated himself at a table between the two ladies, and began to explain to them as well as he could the mysteries of black, of white, of crotchets, and of minims.

When, some minutes afterwards, the portress entered, her serpent-like look gliding from under

her half closed eyelids, perceived three persons apparently very seriously occupied in estimating the value of notes, and the difference between the key of F and the key of G.

"My holy mother," hypocritically said the portress, "a horseman, saying that he is sent by the governor of the town, asks the favour of an interview with you."

"Very good, my sister. When you have reconducted this gentleman, you will introduce this *caballero* to me. Beg him to wait a few minutes."

The painter rose, bowed respectfully to the ladies, and followed the portress. The door of the room closed behind him.

Without uttering a word, the portress guided him through the corridors that he had already traversed, as far as the gate of the convent, before which several horsemen, enveloped in long mantles, had stopped, to the general astonishment of the neighbours, who could scarcely believe their eyes, and who had come out to their doors, the better to see them.

The painter, thanks to his looking like an old man, his little dry cough, and his trembling walk, passed in the midst of them without attracting their attention, and went away in the direction of the river.

The portress made a sign to one of the horsemen, that she was ready to conduct him to the superior.

Just at that moment, the painter, who had gone some little distance, turned to give a last look at the convent.

He suppressed a gesture of fright on recognising the horseman of whom we are speaking.

"Zeno Cabral!" murmured he. "What does this man do in the convent?"

[1] £850 sterling.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW.

The French painter was not deceived. It was indeed Zeno Cabral, the Montonero chief, whom he had seen enter the convent.

The portress walked with a hasty step, without turning her head, before the young man, who appeared plunged in sorrowful and painful reflections.

They proceeded thus for a considerable time through the corridors, without exchanging a word; but at the moment when they had reached the entry of the first cloister, the chief stopped, and lightly touching the arm of his conductress—

"Well?" said he, in a low voice.

The latter turned briskly, threw an enquiring look around her, and then, reassured, no doubt, by the solitude in the midst of which she was, she answered, in the same low and stifled tone, the single word—

"Nothing."

"How nothing?" cried Don Zeno, with suppressed impatience, "You have not, then, watched as I desired you, and as was agreed between us."

"I have watched," answered she, eagerly; "watched from evening to morning, and from morning to evening."

"And you have discovered nothing?"

"Nothing."

"So much the worse," said the Montonero, coldly; "so much the worse for you, my sister; for if you are so little clear-sighted, it is not just yet that you will quit your post of portress for a superior employment in the convent, or one better still, in that of the Bernardines."

The portress trembled; her little grey eyes gave a sinister look.

"I have discovered nothing, it is true," said she, with a dry and nervous laugh, like the cry of a hyena; "but I suspect, and soon I shall discover; only I am watched, and opportunity fails me."

"Ah! And what shall you discover?" asked he, with ill-concealed interest.

"I shall discover," she pursued, laying an affected stress on each syllable, "all that you wish to know, and more, too. My measures are now taken."

"Ah, ah!" said he, "And when will that be, if you please?"

"Before two days."

"You promise me?"

"As I hope for heaven."

"I rely on your word."

"Rely on it; but as to yourself?"

"I?"

"Yes."

"I will keep the promise I have made you."

"All?"

"All."

"Well, do not distress yourself about anything; but—giving, giving?"

"That's agreed."

"Now, come; they expect you. This long stay may excite suspicion; more than ever, prudence is necessary."

They proceeded. At the moment when they entered the first cloister, a black figure came away from an obscure corner, which, until that moment, it had remained shrouded in darkness; and after having made a threatening gesture to the portress, it appeared to vanish like a fantastic apparition, so rapidly did it glide through the corridors.

Arrived at the door of the superior's room, the portress knocked gently twice without receiving any answer; she waited a moment, and then knocked again.

"*Adelante*," was then answered from within.

She opened the door, and announced the stranger.

"Beg the gentleman to enter; he is welcome," answered the abbess.

The portress disappeared, and the general entered; then, on a sign from the superior, the portress withdrew, closing the door behind her.

The superior was alone, sitting on her great abbess's chair; she held open a Book of Hours, which she appeared to be reading.

At the entry of the young man she slightly inclined her head, and, with a gesture, directed him to a seat.

"Pardon me, Madame," said he, bowing respectfully, "in thus coming so inopportunely to disturb your pious meditations."

"You are, you say, Señor *caballero*, sent to me by the governor of the town. In that capacity my duty is to receive you at any hour that you please to come," pursued she, in a tone of cold politeness. "You have no apologies to make me, but only to explain the reason for this visit."

"I am about to have the honour of explaining myself; as you so graciously request it, Madame," answered he, with a constrained smile, taking the seat which she had pointed out.

The conversation had commenced in a tone of frigid politeness, which completely expressed the relation which the two speakers wished to hold towards each other during the whole interview.

There was a silence of two or three minutes.

The Montonero turned and returned his hat in his hands with a vexed air; while the abbess, who pretended to read attentively the book which she had not abandoned, stealthily cast a mocking look at the officer.

It was he who, feeling how strange his silence would appear, recommenced the conversation with an ease which was too marked to be natural.

"Señora, I do not know what causes the displeasure that you appear to have in seeing me; will you acquaint me with the reason, and accept, meanwhile, my humble and respectful apologies for the annoyances that, to my great regret, my presence occasions you?"

"You are in error, *caballero*," answered she, "as the meaning I attach to my words. I do not feel any annoyance, believe me, at your presence; only I am vexed at being obliged, at the good pleasure of the persons who govern us, to receive, without being prepared for it beforehand, the visits of envoys—very respectable, no doubt—but whose place should be anywhere else than in the room of the superior of a convent of women."

"That observation is perfectly just, Madame. It is not my fault that this has occurred. Unhappily it is, for the present, a necessity to which you must submit."

"So," resumed she, with some sharpness, "you see that I submit to it."

"You submit to it—yes, Madame," he pursued, in an insinuating tone, "but complaining at it, because you confound your friends with your enemies."

"I, Señor! You make a mistake, no doubt," said she, with compunction; "you do not reflect on who I am. What friends or what enemies can I have—I, a poor woman retired from the world, and devoted to the service of God?"

"You deceive yourself, or, which is more probable—excuse me, I beg, Madame—you do not wish to understand me."

"Perhaps, also, it is a little your fault, Señor," she resumed, with a slight tinge of irony, "owing to the obscurity in which your words are enveloped, unknown to yourself, no doubt."

Don Zeno repressed a gesture of impatience.

"Come, Madame," said he, after a pause, "let us be candid, shall we?"

"I wish nothing better for my part, Señor."

"You have here two prisoners?"

"I have two ladies that I have only received into this house on the express injunction of the governor of the town. Is it of these two ladies that you speak, Señor?"

"Yes, Señora, the same."

"Very well, they are here; I have, indeed, very strict orders with respect to them."

"I know it."

"These ladies have nothing, that I can see, to do with this conversation."

"On the contrary, Madame; it is them alone that it concerns; it is on their account alone that I have come here."

"Very well, Señor, continue; I am listening."

"These ladies have been made prisoners by me, and by me also conducted into this town."

"You could even add—into this convent, Señor; but continue."

"You are wrong in supposing, Madame, that I am the enemy of these unfortunate women; no one, on the contrary, interests himself more than I do in their fate."

"Ah!" said she, with irony.

"You do not believe me, Madame; indeed, appearances condemn me."

"Meanwhile, you condemn these unhappy ladies; is it not so, *caballero?*"

"Señora," he cried, with violence, but immediately controlling himself, "pardon me this outburst, Madame; but if you consent to understand me—"

"Is not that what I am doing at this moment, Señor?"

"Yes; you listen to me, it is true, Madame; but with your mind made up, beforehand, not to put faith in my words, however true they may be."

The abbess slightly shrugged her shoulders, and resumed: "It is, Señor, that you now tell me things which are so incredible. How can you expect, when you yourself have just admitted that you arrested these ladies, when it would have been so easy to allow them to continue their journey; that it is you who brought them into this town; that it is you who also brought them to this convent, in order to deprive them of all hope of flight—how can you expect that I should credit the professions of devotion of which you are now pleased to make a parade before me? It would be more than artlessness on my part, you must admit, and you Would have a right to believe me to be what I am not—that is to say, to speak frankly, a fool."

"Oh, Madame, there are many things which you do not know."

"Certainly, there are many things which people do not know in such cases; but come, let us come to the fact, since you yourself have proposed candour: prove to me that you really intend to speak the truth—tell me the things of which I am ignorant."

"I am quite willing to do so, Madame."

"Only I warn you that I perhaps know many of these things, and that if you wander from the right path I will pitilessly put you in it again. Does that course suit you?"

"Nothing better can be done, Madame."

"Well, speak; I promise not to interrupt you."

"You overwhelm me, Señora; but to acquaint you with the whole truth, I shall be obliged to enter into some details touching my family which, doubtless, will have little interest for you."

"I beg your pardon; I wish to be impartial, so I ought to know all."

And as she said these words, she looked stealthily towards the door of the adjoining room.

This look was not observed by the Montonero, who at this moment, his head sunk upon his breast, appeared to be collecting his thoughts.

At last, after a few minutes, he began—

"My family, as my name indicates, Madame, is of Portuguese origin; one of my ancestors was that Alvarez Cabral, to whom Portugal owes so many magnificent discoveries. Settled in Brazil from the period of the occupation, my ancestors established themselves in the province of São Paulo, and led, one after the other, by the example of their neighbours and friends, they made long and perilous expeditions into the interior of unknown lands, and several of them were reckoned among the most celebrated and the most bold Paulistas of the province. Pardon me these details, Madame, but they are indispensable; for the rest, I will abridge them as much as possible. My ancestor, as the result of a very lively discussion with the Viceroy of Brazil, Don Vasco Fernandez Cesar de Menezes, about 1723—a discussion, the topics of which he never wished to reveal—saw his property placed under sequestration. He himself was obliged to take flight with all his family. A little patience, I beg you, Madame."

"You are unjust, Señor; these details, of which I was ignorant, interest me in the highest degree."

"My great-grandfather, with the wreck which he had succeeded in saving from his fortune—of considerable value, I hasten to say; for he was enormously rich—took refuge in the vice-royalty of Buenos Aires, in order to go back the more easily to Brazil, if fortune ceased to be adverse to him. But his hope was frustrated; he was to die in exile; his family was condemned never again to see their country. However, on various occasions propositions were made to him to enter into relations with the Portuguese Government, but he always haughtily rejected them, protesting that, never having committed any crime, he would not be absolved, and that especially—pay particular attention to this, Madame —the Government which had taken away his property had no claim to what remained to him; that he would never consent to pay for a pardon that they had no right to sell him. Subsequently, when my great-grandfather was on the point of death, and my grandfather and father were round his bed, although then very young, my father thought he understood the propositions made by the Portuguese Government, and which the old man had always obstinately repulsed."

"Ah!" said the abbess, beginning to take an interest in the recital, which was made with an air of truth which could not be questioned.

"Judge of the matter yourself, Madame," resumed the Montonero; "my great-grandfather, as I have said, feeling that he was about to die, had called my grandfather and my father round his bed; then, after making them swear on the Cross and on the Gospel never to reveal what he was about to tell them, he confided to them a secret of great importance for the future of our family; in a word, he stated to them that some time before his exile, in the last expedition that he had made, according to his custom, he had discovered diamond mines and deposits of gold of incalculable value. He entered into the minutest details as to the route that was to be followed to discover the country where these unknown riches were hidden; gave to my grandfather a map traced by himself on the very spot, and added, for fear that my grandfather should forget any important detail, a bundle of manuscripts, in which the history of his expedition and of his discovery, as well as the itinerary life that he had followed, going and returning, were related as a diary, almost hour by hour; then, certain that this fortune which he had left them would not be lost to them, he gave his children his blessing, and died almost immediately, weakened by the efforts that he had been obliged to make to give them complete information; but before closing his eyes for ever, he made them, for the last time, swear inviolable secrecy."

"I do not yet see, Sir, what relation there is between this history—very interesting, certainly—that you are relating, and these two unfortunate ladies," interrupted the abbess, shaking her head.

"A few minutes more complaisance, Madame; you will not be long in being satisfied."

"Be it so, Sir; continue then, I beg."

Don Zeno resumed:

"Some years passed; my grandfather was at the head of the vast *chacra* occupied by our family, my father was beginning to aid him in his labours. He had a sister beautiful as the angels, and pure as they. She was named Laura; her father and brother loved her to adoration; she was their joy, their pride, their happiness—"

Don Zeno stopped; tears that he did not try to restrain slowly flowed down his cheeks.

"This souvenir affects you, Señor," said the abbess, gently.

The young man proudly nerved himself.

"I have promised to tell you the truth, Madame, and although the task that I impose on myself is painful, I will not give way. My grandfather had deposited in a place, known to him and his daughter only, the manuscript and the map that had been left them by my great-grandfather on his deathbed, and then neither of them had cared much more about the matter, not supposing that a time would arrive when it would be possible to take possession of this fortune, which, nevertheless, belonged to them by incontestable title. One day, a foreigner presented himself at the *chacra*, and asked hospitality, which was never refused to anyone. The stranger was young, handsome, and rich—at least, he appeared so—and for our family he had the great advantage of being our fellow countryman; he belonged to one of the most noble families of Portugal. He was then more than a friend—almost a relation. My grandfather received him with open arms; he lived several months in our *chacra;* he might have lived there altogether had he wished it; everyone in the house liked him. Pardon me, Madame, for passing rapidly over these details. Although too young to have personally assisted in that infamous treason, my heart is broken. One day the stranger disappeared, carrying away Doña Laura. That is how that man repaid our hospitality."

"Oh! that is horrible!" cried the abbess, carried away by the indignation she felt.

"Every search was fruitless; it was impossible to discover his traces. But what was more serious in this affair, Madame, was, that this man had coldly and basely followed out a plan previously laid."

"It is not possible!" said the abbess, with horror.

"This man had—I do not know how—discovered something in Europe about the secret that my great-grandfather had so well guarded. The stranger's design, in introducing himself into our house, was to discover the complete secret, in order to rob us of our fortune. During the time that he lived at the *chacra*, he several times tried, by artful questions, to learn the details of which he was ignorant—questions addressed sometimes to my grandfather, sometimes to my father, then a

young man. The odious violence that he committed did not proceed from love, pushed almost to distraction, as you might suppose; he might have demanded of my grandfather the hand of his daughter, which the latter would have given him; no, he did not love Doña Laura.

"Then," interrupted the abbess, "why did he carry her off?"

"Why, you say?"

"Yes."

"Because he believed that she possessed the secret that he wished to discover; that, Madame, was the only motive for the crime."

"What you tell me is infamous, Señor," cried the abbess; "this man was a demon."

"No, Madame, he was a wretch devoured by the thirst for riches, and who, at any price, determined to possess them, even if to do so he had to bring dishonour and shame into a family, or to walk over a heap of corpses."

"Oh!" she gasped, hiding her head in her hands.

"Now, Madame, do you wish to know the name of this man?" he pursued, with bitterness; "But it is needless, is it not? For you have already guessed, no doubt."

The abbess nodded her head affirmatively, without answering.

There was rather a long silence.

"But why render the innocent," at last said the abbess, "responsible for the crimes committed by others?"

"Because, Madame—an inheritor of the paternal hatred for twenty years—it is only a fortnight ago that I have again found a trace that I thought was lost forever; that the name of our enemy has, like a thunderclap, suddenly burst on my ear, and that I have demanded of this man a reckoning in blood for the honour of my family."

"So to satisfy a vengeance which might be just, were it brought to bear on the guilty, you would be cruel enough—"

"I do not yet know what I shall do, Madame. My head is on fire; fury carries me away," interrupted he, with violence. "This man has stolen our happiness; I wish to take away his; but I shall not be a coward, as he has been; he shall know from whence comes the blow which strikes him; it is between us a war of wild beasts."

At this moment the door of the adjoining room opened suddenly, and the marchioness appeared calm and imposing.

"A war of wild beasts let it be, *caballero;* I accept it."

The young man rose abruptly, and darting a look of crushing scorn at the superior:

"Ah! I have been listened to," said he, with irony; "well, so much the better, I prefer it to be so. This unworthy treachery precludes any further explanation; you know, Madame, the cause of the hatred that I bear towards your husband; I have nothing more to tell you."

"My husband is a noble *caballero*, who, if he were present, would wither, by his denial—as I do myself—the odious tissue of lies by which you have not scrupled to accuse him before a person," added she, directing a look of sorrowful pity to the superior, "who would not, perhaps, have believed this frightful tale, the falsity of which is too easy to prove for it to be necessary to refute it."

"Be it so, Madame; this insult, coming from you, cannot affect me; you are naturally the last person to whom your husband would have confided this horrible secret; but whatever happens, a time will come—and it is near, I hope—when the truth will be declared, and when the criminal will be unmasked before you."

"There are men, Señor, whom calumny, however skilfully concocted, cannot reach," answered she, with scorn.

"Let us cease this, Madame; all discussion between us would only serve the more to embitter us against each other. I repeat that I am not your enemy."

"But what are you then, and for what reason have you related this horrible story?"

"If you had had the patience to listen to me a few minutes more, Madame, you would have learned."

"What prevents you telling me, now that we are face to face?"

"I will tell you if you desire it, Madame," replied, he, coldly. "I should have preferred, however, that some other person, who might have more sympathy for you than I have, should perform this task."

"No, no, Sir; I am myself a Portuguese also, and when the honour of my name is concerned, my principle is to act for myself."

"As you please, Madame; I was about to make a proposition to you."

"A proposition—to me!" said she, haughtily.

"Yes, Madame."

"What is it? Be brief, if you please."

"I was about to ask you to give me your word not to quit this town without my authority, and not to try and communicate with your husband."

"Ah! And if I had made this promise?"

"Then, Madame, I should, in return, have freed you from the accusation which weighs upon you, and should immediately have obtained your liberty."

"Liberty to be a prisoner in a town, instead of in a convent," said she, with irony; "you are generous, Señor. But you would not have had to appear before a counsel of war."

"That is true; I forgot that you and yours make war on women—especially on women—you are so brave, you revolutionary gentlemen." The young man was unmoved by this bitter insult; he bowed respectfully.

"I wait your answer, Madame," said he.

"What answer?" she replied, with disdain.

"That which you will be pleased to make to the proposition which I have the honour to make."

The marchioness remained a moment silent; then, raising her head, and taking a step in advance —

"*Caballero*," she resumed, in a haughty voice, "to accept the proposition you make me, would be to admit the possibility of the truth of the odious accusation that you dare to bring against my husband. Now, that possibility I do not allow. The honour of my husband is mine; it is my duty to defend it."

"I expected that answer, Madame, although it afflicts me more than you can suppose. You have, no doubt, well reflected on all the consequences of this refusal?"

"On all—yes, Señor."

"They may be terrible."

"I know it, and I shall submit."

"You are not alone, Madame; you have a daughter."

"Sir," she answered, with an accent of supreme hauteur, "my daughter knows too well what she owes to the honour of her house to hesitate in making for it, if need be, the sacrifice of her life."

"Oh, Madame!"

"Do not try to frighten me, Señor; you will not succeed. My determination is taken, and I should not change it, even if I saw the scaffold before me. Men deceive themselves, if they think they alone possess the privilege of courage. It is good, from time to time, for a woman to show them that they also know how to die for their convictions. A truce, then, I beg you, to any more entreaties, Señor; they would be useless."

The *Montonero* bowed silently, made a few steps towards the door, stopped, and half turned as if he wished to speak; but, altering his mind, he bowed a last time and went out.

The marchioness remained an instant motionless; then, turning towards the abbess, and extending her arms to her—

"And now, my friend," said she to her, with a sorrowful voice, "do you believe that the Marquis de Castelmelhor is guilty of the frightful crimes of which that man accuses him?"

"Oh, no, no, my friend," cried the superior, melting into tears, and falling into the arms which opened to receive her.

CHAPTER V.

THE PREPARATIONS OF TYRO.

The painter's rencontre, on his leaving the convent, had struck him with a sad presentiment as to his *protégés*.

Without being able quite clearly to account for the sentiments he entertained for them, however unfortunate himself, he felt himself constrained to aid and succour by all means in his power, the women who, without knowing him, had so frankly claimed his protection.

His self-love—first as a man, and then as a Frenchman—was flattered at the part which he thus found himself called on to play unawares in this sombre and mysterious affair, the whole of which, notwithstanding the confidence of the marchioness, he much doubted whether they had revealed to him.

But what mattered that?

Placed by chance—or rather by bad fortune—which so furiously pursued him, in an almost desperate situation, the risks that he had to run in succouring these two ladies, did not much aggravate that situation; whereas, if he succeeded in enabling them to escape the fate which

threatened them, while he saved himself, he would bring to bear on his persecutors a little warlike strategy in showing himself more keen than they, and would once for all avenge the continual apprehensions they had caused him since his arrival at San Miguel.

These reflections, in bringing back calmness to the young man's mind, gave him back also his careless gaiety, and it was with a quick and deliberate step that he rejoined Tyro at the spot which the latter had assigned as a permanent rendezvous.

The place was well chosen; it was a natural grotto, not very deep, situated at two pistol shots or so from the town, so well concealed from curious eyes by the chaos of rocks, and of thickets of parasitic plants, that, unless the exact position of this grotto were known, it was impossible to discover it—so much the more, as its mouth opened onto the river, and that to enter it, it was necessary to go into the water up to the knees. Tyro, half lying on a mass of dry leaves, covered with two or three Araucanian *pellones*[1] and ponchos, was carelessly smoking a cigarette of maize straw, while he waited for his master.

The latter, after being assured that no one was watching him, removed his shoes, tucked up his trousers, went into the water, and entered the grotto—not, however, without having whistled two separate times, in order to warn the Indian of his arrival.

"Ouf!" said he, as he entered the grotto, "A singular fashion this of coming into one's house. Here am I returned, Tyro."

"I see, master," gravely answered the Indian, without changing his position.

"Now," pursued the young man, "let me resume my clothes, and then we can talk. I have much to tell you."

"And I also, master."

"Ah!" said he, looking at him.

"Yes; but first change your clothes."

"That's right," resumed the young man.

He immediately proceeded to abandon his disguise, and soon he had recovered his ordinary appearance.

"There—that's done," said he, sitting near the Indian, and lighting a cigarette. "I can tell you that this disgusting costume annoys me horribly, and I shall be happy when I shall be able to get rid of it altogether."

"That will be soon, I hope, master."

"And I also, my friend. God grant that we have not deceived ourselves! Now, what have you to tell me? Speak, I am listening."

"But you—have you not told me you have news?"

"That is true; but I am anxious to know what you have to tell me. I believe it is more important than what I have to tell you. So, speak first; my communication will come soon enough."

"As you please, master," answered the Indian, settling himself, and throwing away his cigarette, which began to burn his fingers; then, half turning his head towards the young man, and looking him full in the face—

"Are you brave?" he asked.

This question, put so suddenly unawares, caused such a profound surprise to the painter, that he hesitated an instant.

"Well," he at last answered, "I believe so then, collecting himself by degrees," he added, with a slight smile. "Besides, my good Tyro, bravery is in France so common a virtue, that there is no conceit on my part in asserting that I possess it."

"Good!" murmured the Indian, who caught his idea, "You are brave, master; and so am I, I believe; I have seen you in several circumstances conduct yourself very well."

"Then why ask me this question?" said the painter, with some slight annoyance.

"Do not be angry, master," quickly replied the Indian, "my intentions are good. When a serious expedition is commenced, and when we wish to bring it to a good conclusion, it is necessary to calculate all the chances. You are a Frenchman—that is to say, a foreigner, not long in this country, of the customs of which you are completely ignorant."

"I admit that," interrupted the young man.

"You find yourself on an unknown territory, which, at every moment must be a mystery to you. In asking you, then, if you are brave, I do not doubt your courage I have seen you act courageously—only I wish to know if this courage is white or red; if it shines as much in darkness and solitude as in broad daylight, and before the crowd—that's all."

"Thus put, I understand the question, but I do not know how to answer it, not having ever found myself in a situation where it was necessary for me to employ the kind of courage of which you speak. I can simply, and in all confidence, assure you of this—that day or night, alone or in company, in default of bravery, pride would always prevent me from retreating, and would constrain me to front my adversaries, whoever they might be, if they stood before me to oppose my will, when I had formed a resolution."

"I thank you for that assurance, master, for our task will be arduous, and I shall be happy to know that you will not abandon me in the great danger in which I shall be placed, and my devotion to you."

"You can count on my word, Tyro," answered the painter; "so, banish all afterthoughts, and boldly march ahead."

"That I will do, master, you may depend. Now, let us leave that, and come to the news that I had to tell you."

"Just so," said the painter; "what is this news—good or bad?"

"That depends, master, on how you estimate it."

"Good; let me know first."

"Do you know that the Spanish officers, whom they were going to try tomorrow, or the day after, have escaped?"

"Escaped!" cried, the painter, with astonishment, "When was that?"

"This very morning; they passed near here scarcely two hours ago, mounted on horses of the Pampas, and galloping furiously in the direction of the Cordilleras."

"Upon my word, so much the better for them—I am delighted at it, for, as matters go in this country, they would have been shot."

"They would have been shot certainly," said the Indian, nodding his head.

"That would have been a pity," said the young man. "Although I know very little about them, and they have placed me, by their fault, in a rather difficult position, I should have been sorry if any misfortune had happened to them. So you are certain that they have really escaped?"

"Master, I have seen them."

"Then, *bon voyage!* God grant that they may not be retaken."

"Do you not fear that this flight may be prejudicial?"

"To me! Why?" cried he, with surprise.

"Have you not been indirectly implicated in their affairs?"

"That is true, but I believe I have nothing to fear now, and that the suspicions which had been excited against me have been completely dissipated."

"So much the better, master; however, if I may give you advice—believe me, be prudent."

"Come, talk candidly. I see behind your Indian circumlocutions a serious thought which possesses you, and which you wish me to share. Respect, or some fear that I cannot understand, alone prevents you from explaining yourself."

"Since you demand it, master, I will explain myself, especially as time presses. The flight of the two Spanish officers has awakened suspicions which were but suppressed; and now they accuse you of having encouraged them in their project of flight, and of having procured them the means of accomplishing it."

"I! Why, that is impossible! I have not once seen them since their arrest."

"I know it, master; however, it is as I say; I am well informed."

"Then my position becomes extremely delicate; I do not know what to do."

"I have thought of that for you, master; we Indians form a population apart in the town. Disliked by the Spaniards, scorned by the Creoles, we sustain one another, in order to be in a position, in case of need, to resist the injustice they may design to do us. Since I have occupied myself with preparations for your journey, I have communicated with several men of my tribe, engaged in the families of certain persons in the town, in order to be informed of all that passes, and to warn you against treachery. I knew yesterday evening that the Spanish officers were going to escape today at the rising of the sun. For several days, aided by their friends, they have planned their flight."

"I do not yet see," interrupted the painter, "what relation there is between this flight and anything which concerns me personally."

"Wait, master," pursued the Indian, "I am coming to that. This morning, after having aided you to disguise yourself, I followed you and entered the town. The news of the flight of the officers was already known —everybody was talking of it. I mixed myself in several groups, where this flight was commented on in a hundred different ways. Your name was in every mouth."

"But I knew nothing of this flight."

"I know it well, master; but you are a stranger—that is enough for them to accuse you—so much the more as you have an enemy determined on your ruin who has spread abroad this report, and given it consistency."

"An enemy!—I!" said the young man, astounded; "It is impossible!"

The Indian smiled, sarcastically.

"Soon you will know it, master," said he; "but it is useless to occupy ourselves with him at this moment; it is you we must think of—you that we must save."

The young man shook his head sadly.

"No," said he, with a sad voice; "I see that I am really lost this time; all that I might do would but hasten my destruction; better resign myself to my fate."

The Indian looked at him for some moments with an astonishment that he did not seek to dissimulate.

"Was I not right, master," he resumed at last, "to ask you at the commencement of this conversation, if you had courage?"

"What do you mean?" cried the young man, suddenly collecting himself, and darting a look at the Indian.

Tyro did not lower his eyes; his countenance remained impassive, and it was with the same calm voice, with the same careless accent, that he continued:

"In this country, master, courage does not resemble in anything what you possess. Every man is brave with the sabre or the gun in hand—especially here, where, without reckoning men, we are constantly obliged to struggle against all kinds of animals of the most destructive and ferocious character; but what signifies that?"

"I do not understand you," answered the young man.

"Pardon me, master, for teaching you things of which you are ignorant. There is a courage that you must acquire—it is that which consists in appearing to give in when the strife is unequal—reserving yourself, while you feign flight, to take your revenge later. Your enemies have an immense advantage over you; they know you; they therefore act against you with certainty, while you do not know them. You are liable at the first movement you make to fall into the snare spread under your feet, and thus to give yourself up without hope of vengeance."

"What you say is full of sense, Tyro; only you speak to me in enigmas. Who are these enemies whom I do not know, and who appear so determined on my destruction?"

"I cannot yet tell you their names, master; but have patience—a day will come when you will know them."

"Have patience!—It's very well to say that. Unhappily, I am up to my neck in a trap, out of which I do not know how to escape."

"Leave it to me, master; I will answer for all. You will escape more easily than you think."

"Hum! That appears to me very difficult."

The Indian smiled, as he slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"All the whites are like this," murmured he, as if he were speaking to himself; "in appearance their conformation is the same as our own, and, nevertheless, they are completely incapable of doing the least thing by themselves."

"It is possible," answered the young man, nettled at this uncomplimentary remark; "that involves a number of considerations too long to explain to you, and which, moreover, you would not understand; let us return to what ought solely to occupy us just now. I repeat, that I find my position desperate, and that I do not know, even with the aid of your devotion, in what way I shall escape."

There was a short interval of silence between the two men, and then the Indian resumed, but this time with a clear and decided voice, like that of a man who desires to be understood at once, without being obliged to lose precious time in explanations.

"Master," said he, "as soon as I was informed of what had passed, convinced that I should not be unsupported by you, I laid my plan, and put myself in a position to ward off the new blow which threatens you. My first care was to go to your house. They know me; the greater part of the attendants are my friends; they took no heed of me. I was free to go and come as I liked, without attracting attention. I then took advantage of a time when the house was almost deserted on account of the *siesta* which closed the eyes of masters and servants, and, aided by some of my friends, I hastily carried away all that belongs to you, even to your horses, which I loaded with your baggage, and your boxes full of papers and linen."

"Well," interrupted the young man, with a satisfaction clouded by slight anxiety; "but what will my countryman think of this proceeding?"

"Do not let that distress you, master," answered the Guaraní, with a singularly expressive smile.

"Be it so; you no doubt found a plausible pretext to account for this strange proceeding."

"That is just it," said he, with a chuckle.

"Very well; but now tell me, Tyro; what have you done with this baggage? I should by no means like to lose it—it contains the best part of my fortune. I cannot camp out in the open air, more especially as that would avail me nothing, and that those who have an interest in seeking me would soon discover me; on the other hand, I can scarcely see in what house I can lodge, without running the risk of being soon arrested."

The Indian laughed.

"Eh! Eh!" gaily said the young man. "As you laugh, it is, perhaps, because my affairs go on well, and that you are nearly certain of having found a safe shelter."

"You are wrong, master. I am immediately going to seek some spot where you will be safe and completely hidden from pursuit."

"The devil! That is not so easy to find in the town."

"But it is not in the town that I look for it."

"Oh, oh! Where then? I scarcely see that there is any place in the country where it is possible for me to hide."

"That is because you do not, like we Indians, understand the desert. At about two miles from here, in a rancho of the Guaraní Indians, I have found an asylum where I defy them to come and look for you, or, in case of a visit, to find you."

"You strangely pique my curiosity. Is everything prepared to receive me?"

"Yes, master."

"Why do we then remain here, instead of going there?"

"Because, master, the sun has not yet set, and it is too light to venture into the country."

"You are right, my brave Tyro; I thank you for this new service."

"I have only done my duty, master."

"Hum! Well, since you wish it, I consent. Only, believe that I am not ungrateful. So that is agreed. I am unhoused. My dear compatriot will be much astonished when he finds that I have left without taking leave of him."

The Indian laughed, without answering.

"Unhappily, my friend," continued the young man, "this position is very precarious; it cannot last for long."

"Depend upon me for that, master; before three days we shall have set out. All my measures are taken accordingly. My preparations would have been finished already, if I had had at my disposal a sufficient sum to purchase some indispensable things."

"Do not let that disturb you," cried the young man, quickly putting his hand into his pocket, and drawing from it the purse which the marchioness had given him; "there is the money."

"Oh!" said the Indian, with joy, "There is much more than we want."

But suddenly the painter became sad, and took the purse again from the hands of the Guaraní.

"I am mad," said he. "We cannot use that money, it is not ours; we have no right to make use of it."

Tyro looked at him with surprise.

"Yes," continued he, gently shaking his head, "this sum has been given to me by the person whom I have promised to save, in order to prepare everything for her flight."

"Well?" said the Indian.

"Why, now," resumed the young man, "the affair appears to me to be quite altered; I should have a right, I think, to save myself alone."

"Your situation is just the same, master; you can keep the word that you have given; in fact, perhaps you are in a better position today than you were yesterday, to organise, not only your flight, but that of these persons. I have foreseen all."

"Come, explain yourself; for I begin no longer to understand you at all."

"How is that, master?"

"Why, you appear to know my affairs better than I do."

"Do not let that distress you. I only know as much about your affairs as I ought to know, to be useful to you in case of need, and to be in a position to prove to you what is my devotion for you. Moreover, if you wish it, I will appear to know nothing."

"That is a good joke!" exclaimed the young man, laughing. "Come, since it is not even possible to keep my secrets to myself, act as you like—sorcerer that you are. I shall complain no more; now, continue."

"Only give me this gold, master, and leave me to act."

"Well, I think that is the best; take it then," added he, putting the purse in his hand; "only, make haste, for you ought to know better than I do, that we have no time to lose."

"Oh! Just now nothing presses. They believe you have gone; they are searching for you far away; they thus give you every facility to do here all that you wish."

"That is true. If it only concerned myself, upon my word I have so great a confidence in my own skill, that I should not hurry myself at all, I assure you; but—"

"Yes," he interrupted, "I know what you wish to say, master, it concerns these ladies. They are anxious to be off, and they are right; but they have nothing to fear before three days. I only ask two, is that too much?"

"No, certainly; only I confess there is one thing which much embarrasses me at present."

"What is it, master?"

"It is how I shall introduce myself into the convent to warn them."

"That is very simple; you will go in the convent in the same disguise that you assumed yesterday."

"Hum! You think that is not risking too much?"

"Not the least in the world, master. Who will care to concern himself about a poor old man?"

"Well, I will try; if I fail, I shall have done my duty as a gallant man; my conscience will reproach me in nothing."

They continued to talk thus for several hours, making their final arrangements, and trying to foresee all the chances which might, at the last moment, occur to mar the success of their projects.

The more the young Frenchman became intimately acquainted with the Guaraní, the more he discovered intelligence in this poor Indian, so simple and so artless in appearance, and the more he congratulated himself on having accepted his offers of service, and trusting to him.

It should be added that if the painter had not thus, at this critical period, met this devoted servant, he would have been in a most critical situation, and it would have been almost impossible for him to escape from the terrible danger suspended over his head. He frankly owned this, and, putting aside the prejudices of race, he wisely left his servant to act for himself, contenting himself with following his counsels without trying to have his own way—which showed that the young man, notwithstanding his apparent frivolity of character, had good common sense, and a rather uncommon rectitude of judgment.

About half an hour after sunset, the two men quitted the grotto, in the recesses of which they had remained hidden more than four hours.

The Indian, who, notwithstanding the darkness, appeared to see as if it were broad daylight, guided his master through the intricate paths, apparently inextricable, but through which he proceeded with a certainty which indicated a complete knowledge of the places which he traversed. The painter, unaccustomed to these night journeys, followed him as well as he could, stumbling at nearly every step, but not being discouraged, and cheerfully taking his part in this new adventure.

The journey from the grotto to the place where they were to stay was short—it did not last longer than three-quarters of an hour.

Tyro stopped before a rancho of a sufficiently miserable aspect, built on the summit of a hill. He opened, without otherwise announcing his presence, a door formed of an ox hide stretched over a hurdle of willow.

The rancho was, or rather appeared, deserted.

The Indian struck a light with his flint and steel, and lit a *sebo*.[2]

The interior of the rancho resembled the exterior, and was very miserable.

"Eh?" said Emile, casting a scrutinising look round him, "This rancho is abandoned, then."

"By no means, master," answered Tyro; "but the occupants have withdrawn into the other room, so as not to see us."

"Oh! Oh! And for why?"

"Simply because, if they should come to look for us here, they could with a good conscience affirm that that they do not know you, and that they have not seen you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the young man, "That is very good of them, good people that they are! Well, I see with pleasure that the Jesuits make good pupils as well in America as in Europe. The plan is very ingenious."

Tyro did not answer. He was in the act of removing with a pickaxe a slight layer of earth, under which soon appeared a trapdoor. The Indian lifted it up.

"Come, master," said he.

"The devil!" murmured the young man, with some hesitation, "Am I going to be buried alive?"

The Indian had already disappeared in the opening left gaping by the removal of the trapdoor.

"Come," said the young man, "there is no time to hesitate."

He leant over the hole, perceived the first steps of a ladder, and boldly descended into the cave, where Tyro awaited him, the *sebo* being held towards him, to give him light, and prevent a false step.

This cavern was rather large and high, and completely furnished with palm mats to absorb the moisture. All the baggage of the young man had been brought here, and was ranged with care.

A washing stand, a couch, a table, and a hammock, hung in a corner, completed the simple furniture of the place.

Several candles and a lamp were placed on the table.

At each end of the cavern, the form of which was nearly oval, were galleries.

"Here is our temporary apartment, master," said the Guaraní; "each of these galleries is carried, after a few turns, a good way into the country. In case of alarm, you have a safe retreat; your horses have been placed by me in the gallery to the left; they have all they want. In this basket you will find provisions for three days. I do not pledge you as to going out before you have seen

me; only I warn you that I shall not return till all is ready for your flight; you will be here completely in safety. You have only to be patient."

While he thus spoke, the Indian had taken from the basket, and spread on the table, after having lit the lamp, provisions for the supper, of which the painter, who had fasted since he left the convent, began to feel the necessity.

"Now, master, I am going up into the rancho, to put everything in order, and to remove all traces of our movements. Good-bye, for the present, and keep up your spirits."

"Thank you, Tyro; but, in the name of Heaven, remember that I trust entirely to you; do not leave me too long a prisoner."

"Depend on me, master. Ah! I forgot to tell you that when I return, it will be by the gallery to the right I shall imitate the cry of the owl three times before entering."

"Well, I will remember. Will you not keep company with me, and have supper?"

"Thank you, master, that is impossible; I must be at San Miguel in an hour."

"Well, do as you wish," answered the painter, suppressing a sigh; "I will not detain you anymore."

"*Au revoir*, master; patience for a short time."

"*À bientôt*, Tyro; as to the patience you recommend, I will try and exercise it."

The Indian remounted the ladder, disappeared through the opening, and, after having again bidden adieu to his master, he re-closed the trapdoor.

Emile found himself alone.

He remained a short time motionless, buried in sad reflections; but soon, shaking his head several times, he seated himself on the couch, and proceeded to attack the provisions placed before him on the table.

"Supper!" said he; "That will pass away an hour, especially as I feel a formidable appetite. Positively," added he, after a pause, with his mouth full, "when, on my return to France, I relate my adventures in America, no one will believe me!"

And, pleased with this reflection, he carefully proceeded with his supper.

[1] Sheepskins dyed and prepared.

[2] A pot of tallow.

CHAPTER VI.

COMPLICATIONS.

The same day on which transpired the various events which we have related in our preceding chapters, about nine o'clock in the evening, two persons were seated in the room of the Duke de Montone, and were talking in French with animation. These two persons were the Duke de Montone himself; or M. Dubois, as he wished to be called, and the other, General Don Eusebio Moratin, governor, for the Buenos-Airean patriots, of the town of San Miguel, and of the province Tucuman.

General Moratin was then about forty-five; he was short but stout, and well built. His features would have been handsome, had it not been for the expression of cold calculation in his black and deeply sunken eyes.

This officer, whose memory is justly execrated in the Argentine provinces, and who, if Rosas had not come after him, would have remained the most complete type of the villains which the revolutionary foam, from the commencement of the century, threw to the surface of society, to tyrannise over the people, and dishonour the great human family, played at this time an important part in his country, and enjoyed immense influence.

We shall give his history in a few words. Born in 1760, of a distinguished family of Montevideo, this man had early manifested the most wicked tendencies. The nomadic life of the gauchos, their savage independence, everything about them, even their ferocity, had led away this unruly spirit. For several years he shared their life, and then he got together a band of contrabandists and assassins, of whom he soon became the most active, the most cruel, and the most enterprising member.

The ascendancy gained by this man over his companions in rapine, made them choose him as their chief.

From that time his excesses knew no bounds, and acquired a celebrity at once brilliant and execrable.

He ravaged without pity the Banda Oriental, Entrekios, and Paraguay, destroying the crops, carrying away the women, murdering the men, pillaging the churches, and throwing more than 20,000 families into mourning.

Affairs came to such a pass that the governor of Buenos Aires was obliged to form a corps of

volunteers, specially charged to pursue the band of Moratin; but this means was insufficient, and the Spanish Government was obliged to treat with this brigand as between two powers.

His own father served as mediator. The bandits were amnestied, incorporated in the army, and their chief, besides a large sum of money, received the commission of lieutenant, which soon was worth more to him than that of a captain.

But at the first cry of independence raised in the Argentine provinces, Moratin deserted, went over to the insurgents, followed by his old companions, formed a powerful *Montonero*, resolutely attacked the Spaniards, and defeated them in several encounters—notably, in 1811, on *las Piedras*.

We will not dwell further on the daring deeds of this ferocious *condottiere*, whom—notwithstanding the care we have taken to conceal his name—those of his compatriots into whose hands this book may fall will immediately recognise. We will merely add that, after acts of revolting ferocity, mingled with brilliant deeds—for he was endowed with high intelligence—at the moment when we place him on the stage, he had the rank of general, was governor of Tucuman, and probably did not intend merely to remain that.

The picture that the insurgent provinces presented was the most sad and afflicting that could be imagined.

The men in power endeavoured to destroy one another, to the detriment of public tranquillity.

The soldiers had broken all the bonds of subordination, and it was by caprice that they agreed or refused to obey their officers, who themselves generally assumed their rank on their own authority.

The Portuguese made war for the aggrandisement of Brazil, the Montevideans for their own security, and the Buenos Aireans to maintain the union proclaimed, from the commencement of hostilities between the Spaniards.

In this strange conflict of every human passion, the last sentiments of patriotism had been drowned in blood, and each one no longer took his part in the contest, except according to his own avarice or ambition.

In a word, demoralisation was everywhere—good faith nowhere.

Don Eusebio Moratin, although as a Creole he had a sovereign contempt for everything foreign, and especially European, spoke English and French very well—not from a liking to these languages, but from necessity, and in order to facilitate, by an apparent love of liberty, and the support of the great European powers, the ambitious views that he concealed in his heart.

We shall now resume our narrative at the point at which we left it; that is to say, we shall make the reader present at the conclusion of the conversation of of the two politicians whom we have introduced in commencing this chapter.

The general, who had for some minutes been striding about the room, turned suddenly, and facing the duke—

"Bah! Bah!" said he, in a sharp voice, throwing back his head, and smacking his fingers—a gesture which was habitual to him—"I repeat, Monsieur le Duc, that your Zeno Cabral, good soldier as he may be, is but an arrant simpleton."

"Allow me, general—" objected the Frenchman.

"Come," he resumed, with violence, "be a politician! One must be mad to think so. A Montonero chief, who thinks of falling in love—of becoming sentimental! Is it thus that he acts? Eh! *Mon Dieu!* If the girl pleases him, let him take her! That's as simple as 'good day,' and does not require much diplomacy. I have experience in these matters myself. Every woman wishes to be a little forced—that's a preliminary. Instead of that he puts on sorrowful airs, rolls his eyes, sighs, and almost goes the length of composing madrigals. Upon my word, it would be enough to make one burst out into laughter, if it did not make one shrug his shoulders with pity. Mother and daughter only mock him, and they are right. He is a thorough simpleton. You will see that they will finish by slipping through his fingers, like two snakes as they are, and they will do it well! I shall heartily rejoice at such a splendid result of a platonic attachment, seasoned with hereditary vengeance. Do not speak to me any more of this man; there is nothing to be done with him."

The duke had listened to this impassioned outburst with coolness, which was perpetually stereotyped on his impassable countenance.

When the general had finished, he looked at him for a time, with a slightly mocking air, and then taking up the conversation—

"All that is very well, general," said he, "but this is, after all, only your individual opinion, is it not?"

"Certainly," said Don Eusebio.

"You would be very little pleased, I imagine,", resumed he, smiling, "if the words you have just muttered were repeated to Don Zeno Cabral."

A flash of ferocity darted from the eye of the general; but immediately recovering himself—

"I admit," said he, "that I should be annoyed at it."

"Then," resumed the duke, "of what use is it to say things which one day or other you might regret. With me it is of no consequence; I know too well by what slight threads the deepest

political combinations are often held, ever to abuse confidence; but in a hasty moment you might permit yourself to speak thus before a third party, of whom you could not be so sure as you are of me; and then the consequences might be serious."

"You are right, my dear duke," said the general, laughing; "consider that I have said nothing."

"That is right, general—especially as at this moment you have the most pressing need of Don Zeno Cabral and his squadron."

"That is true; unhappily, I cannot do without him."

"A charming way of inspiring his confidence, to treat him as a simpleton!"

"Oh, forget that, and let us come, if you please, to business. Don Zeno will not be long before he comes here. I should like that everything was decided upon between us before he comes."

The Frenchman looked at the clock.

"We have still twenty minutes," said he; "that is more than is necessary to decide upon everything. Now, what is your project?"

"To have me declared president of the republic!" he exclaimed, with violence.

"I know it, but that is not of what I am speaking."

"Of what are you speaking, then?"

"Of the means you intend to employ to reach the end you are ambitious to arrive at."

"Ah, that is just where the shoe pinches. I do not know what to do; we are now wading in such a muddy pool—"

"That's an additional consideration," interrupted the duke; "the best fish are always found in troubled water."

"To say that to me!" said the general, with a burst of laughter; "I have never fished in any other but troubled water."

"Well, if you have succeeded up to the present time, you must continue."

"I should like to do so, but how?"

The duke appeared to reflect seriously for some minutes, while the general looked at him anxiously.

"See how unjust you are, my dear general," at last resumed the duke; "it is just this love of Don Zeno for the daughter of the Marchioness de Castelmelhor—a love that you have spoken of so bitterly—that will furnish you with those means you have been unsuccessfully seeking."

"I do not understand the least in the world what relation there can be between—"

"Patience!" interrupted the diplomatist. "What do you wish first?—the immediate removal of Don Zeno Cabral, who, loved and respected by all as he is, resume his presence, influence the votes of the deputies uttered witted at this moment in the town to proclaim, independence, and perhaps elect a president; is it not that?"

"Just so; but Don Zeno will not consent, under any pretence, to go away."

The diplomatist slightly sneered, casting a look of pity on his companion.

"General," said he, "have you ever been in love in your life?"

"I!" cried Don Eusebio, with a start of surprise. "Ah, you are jesting with me, my dear duke."

"Not the least in the world," answered he, calmly.

"To the devil with such a silly question, when we are dealing with a serious affair!"

"Not so silly as you suppose, general. I am not at all wandering from our business. So I beg you do me the pleasure of answering me plainly. Have you, or have you not, been in love?"

"Since you insist on it—well, I have never been what you call in love; is that clear?"

"Perfectly; well, that's just the difference between you and Don Zeno Cabral, that he is in love."

"*Pardieu!* The good and important news that you tell me, my dear duke!—after an hour, I am waiting for it."

"Agreed; but wait the conclusion."

"Let us have the conclusion, then."

"Here it is. It has been said, a century ago, by a fabulist of our nation, in a charming way, in a fable that I will someday read to you—"

"But the conclusion!" cried the general, stamping with impatience.

"Hum! How lively you are, my dear general," replied the duke, imperturbably, amused by the exasperation of his companion. "Listen; it is not long, but it is in verse. Calm yourself; there are but two lines:"

> "'Amour, amour! Quand tu nous tiens,
> On peut bien dire: Adieu, prudence.'"[1]

"So you understand?"

"Pretty well," answered the general, who really did not understand at all, but who did not like to confess it; "however, I do not see—"

"It is, however, very simple, my dear general; it is just by his love that we hold him."

"That is to say—"

"That is to say, that in knowing how to excite this love, we shall succeed in the result we wish to obtain."

"For once, I do not understand you, Monsieur le Duc; this love has no need of being excited, I should think."

"Not love, perhaps," answered the Frenchman, laughing; "but jealousy, at all events; as to that, let me act; I have taken it into my head that you shall succeed, and it shall be so."

"I thank you, my dear duke, for the aid you are pleased to give me; but would it not be well that you should make me acquainted with your projects, so that I can, in case of need, come to your assistance; whereas, if I remain in ignorance, as at present, perhaps it will happen that, without knowing it, I shall run contrary to you."

"You are right, general; moreover, I have no reason to hide from you the means I intend to employ, since it is you alone that all this concerns."

"Just so; I shall, then, be much obliged to you to explain, my dear duke."

"Very well."

At that moment the door was opened wide, and a servant, dressed in a splendid livery, announced—

"His Excellency General Don Zeno Cabral."

The two men exchanged a rapid look of intelligence, and rose to salute the general.

"I am disturbing you, gentlemen?" said the latter, as he entered.

"Not the least in the world, Señor Don Zeno," replied the Frenchman; "on the contrary, we have been waiting for you with the greatest impatience."

"Pardon me for coming a few minutes earlier than the time you deigned to mention for our interview, Monsieur le Duc; but as I knew I should find his Excellency the governor here, I hastened to come, having an important communication to make to him."

"Then you are doubly welcome, dear general," answered Don Eusebio.

The servant brought forward a chair, and withdrew. The conversation, begun in French on account of the difficulty that the duke felt in expressing himself in Spanish, was continued in the same language, which—we will say, in a parenthesis—Don Zeno spoke with remarkable purity.

"You were saying, then, dear Don Zeno," pursued Don Eusebio, when they were seated, "that you have an important communication to make to me?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Gouverneur."

"Then be so good, I beg you, as to explain yourself freely. The duke knows all our secrets; moreover, it is not fair to our friends that we should make what interests us a mystery to them."

"Here is the affair in a few words," answered Don Zeno Cabral, with a bow. "The two prisoners, who were to have been tried tomorrow as spies by the council of war—Don Louis Ortego and the Count de Mendoza—that I myself arrested at the Cabildo on the night of the *fête*—"

"Well?" interrupted General Moratin.

"Well, they have escaped."

"Escaped!" cried the governor, with surprise.

"This very day, at sunrise, disguised as Franciscan monks. Accomplices held their horses, all prepared, at the gates of the town."

"Oh! Oh! That seems to me decided treason!" cried the general, knitting his eyebrows "I will—"

"Do nothing," interrupted Don Zeno; "any step would now be useless; they have fourteen hours in advance, and people travel quickly when it is to save their lives."

"When did you hear of this escape, of which no one has informed me?"

"You were hunting, general."

"That is true; I am to blame."

"By no means, for in your absence I took upon myself to give orders."

"I thank you, dear Don Zeno."

"In leaving the house of the Marchioness de Castelmelhor, where I had gone this morning, one of your aides-de-camp, general, who was looking for you, and wished to mount horse to join you, gave me the news of this flight; I immediately dispatched detachments in all directions in pursuit of the fugitives."

"Very good."

"These detachments have returned, except one, without learning any news of the prisoners."

"This is a serious affair, and which cannot but further complicate the difficult position in which we find ourselves just now."

"I did not stop there, Monsieur le Gouverneur," answered Don Zeno; "I went to the prison to ask the director about the particulars of the escape; moreover, I dispersed through the town some intelligent persons, whom I charged to converse about the matter, and to report to me what they heard."

"You could not have been more prudent or better advised, my dear Don Zeno; I congratulate you with all my heart."

"You give too much importance to so simple a thing."

"And what have you learnt?"

"Upon my word," replied Don Zeno, half turning towards the French diplomatist, "I have learnt one thing that will much astonish you, Monsieur le Duc, and that I do not yet dare to believe."

"What?" said the duke, smiling; "Have I, without knowing it, aided the flight of your prisoners?"

"Well," said Don Zeno, laughing, "it is something of that sort."

"Ah! Upon my word!" cried the duke; "You are going to explain, are you not, general?"

"I am quite willing, Monsieur le Duc; but, reassure yourself; you are not concerned in all this—only one of your friends."

"One of *my* friends! But I am a foreigner; there is no one except you that I know in the town, where I have come, for the first time, only a few days ago."

"Just so," said Don Zeno, laughing; "it is one of your compatriots."

"One of my compatriots!"

"Yes, a certain Emile Gagnepain. It would appear that he has—understand that I am only the echo of an *on dit*, general—"

"Continue—he has—"

"He has entertained relations with the prisoners, whom he has known for a long time; and, in a word, that he has finished by enabling them to escape."

A slight and scarcely perceptible smile played on the thin lips of the diplomatist at this revelation; but immediately regaining his coolness—

"As to that, gentlemen," answered he, "I can immediately prove to you the falsity of this accusation brought against my unhappy compatriot."

"I should like nothing better, for my part," said Don Zeno.

"How will you do that?" demanded Don Eusebio.

"You shall see; my compatriot, or rather, my friend, lives in this very house; I will have him called."

"Very good," observed the governor; "by his answers we shall soon know what he is."

"Observe, Monsieur le Duc, that I affirm nothing," pursued Don Zeno—"that I in no way attack the honour of this *caballero*."

"It is of no consequence, gentlemen," cried the duke, with an expression of indignation; "if he were really guilty—which I declare impossible—I should be the first to abandon him to your justice."

The two men bowed without answering. The duke struck a bell.

A servant appeared.

"Inform Don Emile," said the duke, "that I wish to speak to him immediately."

"Señor Don Emile is not in his apartment, your lordship," answered the servant, bowing respectfully.

"Ah!" said the diplomatist, with astonishment; "Still out at this hour! Well, when he returns—for he cannot be long—beg him to come here."

The servant bowed without moving.

"Have you not understood me?" resumed the diplomatist; "Why do you not withdraw?"

"Your lordship," respectfully answered the servant, "Don Emile will not return."

"Don Emile will not return! What do you know about it?"

"He has this morning had all his baggage taken away by a man, who said that he was going immediately to leave the town."

The duke made a sign for the servant to withdraw.

"This is strange!" murmured he, when the door had closed upon the valet; "What does this departure mean?"

The two Creoles looked at each other with astonishment.

"No," pursued the duke, decidedly, "I cannot yet believe him guilty; there is evidently something in this affair of which we are ignorant."

The door at this moment again opened.

"Señor Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga," announced the servant.

"Let him come in," said Don Zeno.

And turning towards the duke—

"Pardon me, sir; Captain Quiroga is the last officer dispatched by me in pursuit of the fugitives. He is an old traveller. I am much deceived if he does not bring us news."

"He will be very welcome, then," said Don Eusebio.

"Yes, we will welcome him," added the duke, "for I hope that the information which he will give us will dissipate the doubts which have been raised as to the honour of my unfortunate countryman."

"God grant it!" said Don Zeno.

Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga appeared. After having respectfully bowed to the persons who were in the room, he drew himself up, and waited till they should address him.

"Well!" asked Don Zeno, "Have you found any trace of the fugitives, captain?"

"I have, general," he answered.

"Have you brought them back?"

"No."

"You have not overtaken them?"

"Yes, general."

"Then, how is it that you return without these two men?"

"First, they are no longer two, general; it appears that they have secured a companion on their journey. I saw three of them myself."

There was a momentary silence, during which the Frenchman and the two Creoles exchanged looks.

"It is little matter whether they are two or three," resumed Don Zeno. "How is it, captain, that having overtaken them, you allowed them to escape?"

"General, here is the fact in a few words. At the moment when I was preparing to take them by the collar—for I was scarcely more than a pistol shot from them—two or three hundred horsemen unawares darted out of a little wood, and charged us with fury. As I had with me only eight men, I thought it prudent not to wait the attack of these enemies, that I was far from expecting so near me, and I immediately retreated with my companions."

"Oh! Oh! What do you say?" cried Don Zeno, "You were afraid perhaps, captain?"

"Upon my word, yes, general; I was afraid, and very much so," frankly answered the officer, "especially when I saw with what sort of people I had to do."

"Were they, then, so terrible?"

"I returned immediately, at all speed, to inform you, general; for, as I was escaping, I had plenty of time to thoroughly observe them."

"And they are?" demanded the governor, impatiently.

"They are Pincheyras, your Excellency," coolly answered the old soldier.

This revelation came like a thunderbolt on those to whom he spoke. Don Zeno especially, and Don Eusebio appeared extraordinarily agitated.

"Pincheyras!" repeated they.

"Yes, and we shall soon know what they want. I have placed two men in ambush on their route, with orders to watch their movements."

"Well," cried the governor, rising quickly, "we cannot take too many precautions with such demons. Excuse me, Monsieur le Duc, for quitting you so abruptly; but the news brought by this brave officer is of the utmost importance. I must, without delay, prepare for the safety of the town. Tomorrow, if you will permit me, we will resume this interview."

"When you please, gentlemen," answered the diplomatist; "you know that I am at your orders."

"A thousands thanks—tomorrow then. Are you coming with me, Señor Cabral?"

"Certainly, I am with you," answered the latter. "We cannot employ too much prudence in so grave a position."

The two generals immediately took leave of the duke, and went out, followed by the captain.

When the door was closed, and the old diplomatist found himself alone, he rubbed his hands, and darting an ironical look towards the place where his visitors had disappeared—

"I think," murmured he, with a smile of raillery, "there is already a pretty trap prepared! Eh! Eh! My dear friend Emile will do well if he escape. I like him too much not to make his fortune, in spite of himself. I at least owe him that for the service he has rendered me."

[1] O love, love, when thou takest possession of us, we may well say, Prudence, adieu!

CHAPTER VII.

THE PANIC.

It is difficult to form an idea of the rapidity with which, bad news spreads—of the way in which it is disfigured in passing from mouth to mouth, constantly increasing, and finishing, in a very short time, by returning to the author of it, so surcharged with statements, and embellished with details, that he cannot recognise it.

We might almost suppose that there exist in the atmosphere electric currents, which become charged, so as to transmit to the greatest distance, with the rapidity of lightning, that bad news that the chiefs in power only confide to the ear, and under the express condition of the utmost secrecy.

Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga had not, since his return to San Miguel, communicated with any other person but Don Eusebio Moratin and Don Zeno Cabral. His soldiers had, like himself, kept perfectly silent on what had passed during their short expedition in search of the fugitives; and yet, by an inexplicable fatality, scarcely had the two generals, on leaving the Duc de Montone, reached the gates of the Plaza Mayor, than on all sides they perceived frightened people, and heard voices, saddened by fear, murmuring the dreaded name of the Pincheyras.

The news had already made much way. It was no longer 300 men who had shown themselves in the environs of the town, but a formidable Spanish army, coming from Peru—pillaging, burning, devastating everything on its route—and of which the ferocious squadron of the Pincheyras formed the advance guard. They had arrived by forced marches; and soon—the next day, perhaps—they would encamp before the town. What was to be done? what was to be resolved on? Where were the people to hide, or to fly? It was all over with San Miguel; the Spaniards, to avenge their defeats, would not leave there one stone upon another.

Those who had seen them—for, as usual, there were people who asserted that they had seen this fantastic Spanish army, which existed only in their imaginations—were certain that they had heard the enemy utter the most terrible oaths of vengeance against the unfortunate insurgents.

People, furnished with torches, coming from no one knew where, traversed the town in all directions, crying—

"To arms! To arms!"

At these cries, at these lurid flames, which cast ill-omened reflections on the walls, the citizens came in all haste from their houses; the women and children wept and lamented—in a word, the panic had become in a few minutes so general, that the two officers, who, nevertheless, knew the truth, were themselves frightened, and asked themselves if the danger was not, in fact, greater than they had supposed it.

They mounted their horses, that their assistants were holding for them at the door of the duke's house, and set out at full gallop towards the Cabildo.

Notwithstanding the advanced hour—it was beyond midnight—the Cabildo, at the moment when the governor and the Montonero entered it, was invaded by the crowd, and offered a spectacle of disorder and of fear, not less animated and not less noisy than that which they had just seen in crossing the Plaza Mayor.

The two officers were received with cries of joy and protestations of devotion that fear alone could inspire in the greater part of the people present.

The governor had considerable difficulty in re-establishing a little order, and in making himself heard by these people, rendered almost insensible by terror.

But it was in vain that he tried to reassure them in relating simply what had passed; they did not wish to believe him, and he did not succeed in convincing anyone that the danger which they so much feared did not exist.

The tocsin sounded from all the churches; barricades were constructed at the corners of all the streets, which were constantly traversed by armed patrols of the citizens, whilst others bivouacked on the place.

The town at this time offered the aspect of a vast camp. It was useless to try and resist the torrent—the governor understood that. Despairing to re-establish security by ordinary methods, he pretended to give way to the views of the persons who surrounded him, and tried to organise the panic in giving orders for the defence of the city, and in dispatching aides-de-camp in all directions.

Don Zeno, after having exchanged a few words in a low voice with the governor, instead of going up into the Cabildo, had started off rapidly, followed by Captain Quiroga.

But his absence was not long. Soon a gallop of horses was heard, and Don Zeno reappeared at the head of his *Montonero*, which immediately installed its bivouac on the Plaza Mayor.

The sight of the partisans, in whose courage the inhabitants of San Miguel had full confidence, began by degrees to reassure the population.

So much the more as the *Montoneros*, after having attached their horses to the pickets, and

placed their sentinels, mingled with the crowd, and began gently—talking with one and the other, at first pretending to enter into the prevailing ideas—to re-establish the facts so strangely disfigured, by relating the affair just as it really was.

The influence of these recitals, carried from one to the other, and continually recommenced by the soldiers, was soon felt in the crowd; the reaction soon manifested itself, and the less cowardly felt their courage returning a little.

However, at last it was found that the danger, though less than it was supposed, nevertheless existed, and that the nearness of the royalist Montoneros could not but be very disquieting for the common safety. General Moratin skilfully took advantage of the excitement of the population, by taking the most efficacious measures he could think of to resist an attack till reinforcements arrived, in case the enemy might suddenly try and take the town by surprise—which was not without precedent in the history of the Buenos Airean revolution.

Devoted officers superintended the construction of the barricades; on the terraced roofs of the houses stones were carried to crush the assailants; depôts of arms and munitions were established in various places; and barriers were closed and defended by numerous soldiers.

Meanwhile, Don Zeno Cabral, at the head of forty resolute Montoneros, had set out on a journey of discovery, starting off madly into the open country.

All the deputies were assembled in the Cabildo, in the Hall of Assembly, and were declared *en permanence.*

The governor, wishing by his presence to assure the population, had mounted horse, and, followed by a numerous staff, had traversed the town in all directions, encouraging some, reprimanding others, and exciting the inhabitants to do their duty, and to fight the enemy bravely, if he dared to show himself.

The whole night passed thus. At sunrise, calmness was somewhat re-established, although everyone preserved his arms, and remained at his post.

Don Zeno Cabral, who had left more than four hours to reconnoitre, had not returned. Don Eusebio did not know what to think of this long absence, which began seriously to disquiet him.

Several aides-de-camp, dispatched by him to seek for the Montoneros, had returned without bringing news either of him or his detachment.

In the meanwhile, an officer entered, leant towards the ear of the governor, and murmured some words which he alone heard.

Don Eusebio started and turned rather pale, but immediately recovering himself:

"Captain," said he, to the officer, "sound the order to saddle, and let all the squadron of Don Zeno Cabral mount horse. We will go and make a reconnaissance out of the town, in order to reassure the population by proving that danger no longer exists."

The order was immediately executed; the Montonero left the town at a trot.

General Don Eusebio Moratin, mounted on a magnificent black horse, and dressed in a uniform covered with gold embroidery, rode at its head.

The crowd, scattered through all the streets, saluted the partisans as they passed with hearty exclamations.

The Montonero appeared rather to execute a military promenade, than to be setting out to make a reconnaissance.

When the troop was in the open country, and some rising ground had hidden it from the gaze of the inhabitants, the general had a halt sounded, stationed the sentinels, and ordered the officers to come to him on a hillock, on the summit of which he had stopped, at about a hundred paces in advance of the squadron.

The latter immediately obeyed with an impatience mingled with curiosity; for, although no one had informed them, they vaguely suspected that this sudden sortie from the town concealed some motive graver than that of a promenade.

When all the officers had arrived, and had dismounted, they ranged themselves in a circle round the general. The latter began:

"Caballeros," said he to them, firmly, "the time for dissimulation has passed; it is my duty frankly to explain to you the situation, especially as I have great need of your assistance."

"Speak, general," answered the officers; "we are ready to obey you as if you were really our chief, whatever may be the order you may give us in the interest of the country."

"I thank you, Caballeros, and I count upon your promise. Here is what has happened: your chief, Don Zeno Cabral, deceived by a traitor, a spy, or an imbecile—we do not yet know which—has been, with a few men who accompanied him, surprised by a party of royal scouts. Everything leads to the belief that this party belongs to the formidable band of the Pincheyras. Don Zeno, after prodigies of valour, has been constrained to surrender, to prevent bloodshed. Happily, one of his companions has succeeded in escaping almost by a miracle. It is he who has informed us of what has happened We can therefore depend on the news."

The officers, at these words, uttered exclamations of rage.

"The enemies are near," continued the general, commanding silence by a gesture. "Not knowing

of the flight of one of their prisoners, and feeling perfectly sure that their bold *coup de main* is still unknown to us, they have only withdrawn gently, and almost without order. The opportunity is, therefore, favourable to take our revenge, and to deliver our chief and your friends. Will you?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the officers, brandishing their arms. "At them! At them!"

"Very well," answered the general; "before an hour we shall have overtaken them; we shall attack them unawares, and then each will do his duty. Remember that the men that attack us are bandits, with neither good faith nor law, placed by their crimes under the ban of society. At them, then, and no quarter!"

The officers responded by cries and oaths of vengeance, placed themselves at the head of their respective platoons, and the squadron set out at a gallop, almost hidden by the cloud of dust that they raised on their passage.

What General Moratin had announced to the officers of the squadron was true, or, at least—somewhat misinformed by the fugitive—he thought it so; but affairs had not transpired exactly as had been stated.

Don Zeno Cabral left, as we have said, about two o'clock in the morning, at the head of a rather weak detachment, with the intention of making a reconnaissance in the environs of the town. After having scoured the country for two or three hours, without discovering anything suspicious, and without noticing any trace of the passage of an armed troop, he wished, before reentering the town, to explore the borders of the river, which—escarped by reason of the numerous masses of rock which lined it, and, moreover, covered with thick clusters of trees and shrubbery—might conceal an ambuscade of marauders. He had therefore made a turn, and, advancing with the greatest caution, in order not to be surprised, had commenced his exploration.

For a long time the Montoneros marched thus, beating the thickets and the underwood with the point of their lances, without discovering anything; and their chief, convinced that the enemy—if by chance he had ventured so near the town—had judged it prudent not to remain there any longer, gave the order to retreat; when all of a sudden, at the moment when it was least expected, a hundred men rose on all sides from the midst of the thicket, surrounded his troop, and vigorously attacked it.

Although surprised and harassed by an enemy of whose number they were ignorant, but whom they supposed, with reason to be much superior to themselves, the Montoneros were not the men to lay down their arms at the first blow, without trying to sell their life dearly, especially with such a man to command them.

There was, at first, terrible disorder—a terrible collision, hand-to-hand—in the midst of which Don Zeno Cabral was unhorsed, and thrown to the ground.

For a time his companions thought him dead.

It was then that one of them slipped unperceived into the midst of the trees and rocks, and galloped hard to San Miguel to carry the news of the defeat of the Montoneros.

They were, however, far from being conquered. Don Zeno Cabral had almost immediately risen, and had reappeared at the head of his men, who, discouraged for a time by his fall, had, on seeing him again on horseback, regained their confidence.

However, the assailants were too numerous—the place of ambuscade too well chosen—for the Montoneros to have the hope—not of conquering them, they had no thought of that—but of escaping from the scrape into which they had fallen.

Don Zeno Cabral perceived at a glance the difficulties of the ground on which it was necessary to fight, and where it was impossible for the men to manoeuvre their horses.

All his efforts were then directed to enlarge the field of battle. The Montoneros, grouped firmly around him, boldly charged the enemy several times without succeeding in breaking through them; the position was well attacked and well defended; they fought Montoneros against Montoneros, bandits against bandits.

The chief of the patriots knew with what enemies he had to contend: their red ponchos—a uniform adopted by the Pincheyras—had caused them to be recognised as soon as daylight had come.

For during the desperate combat that the two troops had been waging, the sun had risen.

Unhappily the light of day, in revealing the small number of the patriots, rendered their defeat more probable.

The Pincheyras, furious at having been so long held in check by so feeble a detachment, redoubled their efforts to completely defeat them.

But the latter were not discouraged; led a last time to the charge by their intrepid chief, they rushed with fury on their enemies, who vainly tried to bar their passage.

The Montoneros had succeeded in overturning the human barrier raised before them, and had gained the plain.

But at the price of what sacrifices!

Twenty of their men were lying lifeless on the rocks,—the survivors to the number of about fifteen at the most, were, for the most part, wounded and weighed down by the fatigue of the unequal combat they had so long to sustain.

All was not finished however; for the patriots to find themselves in open country was not to be saved. However, they did not deceive themselves as to their fate, but, knowing that they had no quarter to expect from their ferocious enemies, they preferred to be killed rather than to fall alive into the hands of their enemies, and be condemned to suffer horrible tortures.

Nevertheless, though still very bad, their situation was decidedly ameliorated, by reason that they now had space around them, and that their safety would depend on the swiftness of their horses.

The Pincheyras, to surprise their enemies, had been obliged to dismount, and to hide their horses some paces from them.

When the Montoneros had succeeded in opening a passage, the Pincheyras precipitated themselves immediately towards the spot where they had left their horses, in order to pursue them.

There was then compulsorily a pause, by which Don Zeno Cabral and his companions profited, to increase the distance which separated them from their enemies.

The chief of the Pincheyras, a man of tall figure, with energetic and marked features, and a harsh and cruel expression—still young, and who, during the combat, had performed prodigies of valour, and had furiously pressed Don Zeno Cabral himself, whom he had at the commencement of the action overthrown from his horse—soon appeared almost lying on his horse, furiously brandishing his lance, and exciting with loud cries the twenty horsemen by whom he was followed.

The other Pincheyras were not long in overtaking him, emerging successively from the midst of the rocks and the clusters of trees.

Then the pursuit began—rapid, disordered, desperate—on all sides.

The Montoneros, to give less chance to their enemies, had dispersed over a large space. They stretched themselves over their horses, hanging on one side by the stirrup, and holding the bridle with one hand, to avoid the *bolas* and the *lagos,* that their enemies, while rapidly galloping, flourished round their heads.

This manhunt, thanks to the skill of these practised horsemen, presented a most stirring spectacle, full of strange incidents.

The Pincheyras, however, notwithstanding the efforts of the Montoneros—owing to the fresh horses they rode—approached them rapidly. A few minutes more and they would arrive within reach of those whom they pursued, when, on a sudden, the earth resounded under the rapid gallop of a considerable troop of horsemen, and a thick cloud of dust appeared on the horizon.

This cloud soon separated, and General Don Eusebio Moratin, followed by the whole squadron of Don Zeno Cabral, charged furiously upon the royalists.

The latter, surprised in their turn, when they already thought themselves conquerors, uttered cries of rage, and immediately turning their bridles, they endeavoured to escape in all directions, closely pressed by the Montoneros, who, on recognising their chief, had redoubled their ardour. Don Zeno, burning to draw a brilliant vengeance from what he considered an affront, affectionately grasped the hand of the general; and, although overcome by fatigue, and wounded in two or three places, put himself at the head of his squadron, and dashed with it upon the Pincheyras.

Speedily the *bolas* and the *lagos* flew on all sides, and the horsemen, hurled from their saddles, rolled on the ground with cries of rage and anguish.

The strife was short, but terrible. Surrounded by the squadron, the Pincheyras, despite a desperate resistance, were defeated, and were obliged to surrender.

Scarcely twenty-five survived; the others, strangled by the *lagos*, wounded by the lances, or their skulls broken by the terrible *bolas*, lay stretched upon the field.

One man only had escaped, by what miracle it was impossible to say.

It was the chief of the Pincheyras.

Hemmed in by the Montoneros, trapped like a wild beast, he had penetrated into a thick cluster of mastic trees, and trees of Peru, whither the patriots had almost immediately followed him.

The Pincheyra had coolly faced his pursuers; with the last shot from his carbine he had killed one of those who most closely pressed him, and then, with a laugh of disdain, he had buried himself in the midst of a thicket, where he had suddenly disappeared.

Vainly the Montoneros, exasperated by the desperate resistance of this man, and the last death he had caused, started after him to capture him. For more than an hour they searched the ground foot by foot, inch by inch; separated the branches in the wood, and struck the ground with their lances; they could not succeed in discovering any traces of their bold adversary. He had become invisible. All search was vain—they could not find him again, and the Montoneros felt compelled to give up the pursuit.

The general had the order to depart sounded, though much against his liking. It annoyed him much not to be able to bring that man to San Miguel—so much the more as one of the prisoners had avowed that he whom they sought was no less than Don Santiago Pincheyra himself.

The reputation of Don Santiago was too well established for the general not to be vexed at not

having succeeded in capturing him.

However, he was obliged to return to the town. The prisoners were tied to the tails of the horses, and the squadron set out at a gallop for San Miguel.

"Señor general," said Don Zeno Cabral to the governor, taking his hand with emotion, "you have saved my life—more than that, you have saved my honour. Whatever happens, I am yours, at whatever time—I give you my word."

"Thank you, Don Zeno," replied the general, a slight smile answering to the warm grasp of the hand; "I accept your word, and will remember it in case of need."

"In everything, and for everything, depend on me."

An hour later the squadron re-entered San Miguel, received by the joyful cries of the inhabitants, at the sight of the unhappy Pincheyras led prisoners at the tails of the horses.

The passage of the Montoneros through the streets of the town was a complete triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOLITARY.

We must now return to the French painter that we have left buried, so to say, at the bottom of a cavern, philosophically making up his mind to this voluntary seclusion, which, however, circumstances rendered indispensable, and vigorously attacking the provisions placed before him.

Obliged to remain alone during a considerable time, and not knowing how to employ himself, the young man prolonged his meal as much as possible; and then—when, despite all his efforts, he felt the natural impossibility of taking another mouthful—he lit a cigar, and began to smoke with the beatific resignation of a Mahometan, or a drinker of *hatckich.* After this cigar he smoked another, then another, and then another, followed immediately by a fourth; so that midnight came almost without his perceiving it, and he laid himself upon his hammock without being wearied.

However, Emile had too nervous an organisation to content himself long with this kind of life. It was with a sigh of regret that he closed his eyes and slept; for he could not foresee the termination of his imprisonment, and the prospect of remaining several days thus alone frightened him.

How long had he remained plunged in sleep, he could not tell. Suddenly he jumped up, sat up in his hammock, with his forehead pale, and his features contracted, casting around him a look of fright.

In the midst of his sleep—while he was cradled in those sweet dreams that tobacco sometimes procures for those who abuse it when they are not accustomed to smoke it to excess—he suddenly thought he heard cries, and the trampling of horses, mingled with deadened sounds. For some time these sounds were mingled and incorporated with the events of his dream.

But soon these cries and trampling acquired such an intensity—appeared so near the young man—that they suddenly awakened him from his sleep.

At first he took no account of what he heard, believing that it was but a sound existing only in his imagination—the last echo, in fact, of his interrupted dream.

But when, by degrees, he succeeded in recovering his ideas, and when he felt that he was completely awake, he acquired the certainty, not only that this noise was real—that he was not the dupe of an illusion of his senses—but that it every moment increased, and had become very loud.

One would have thought that a desperate combat was even being fought in the cavern itself.

However, all was calm around the young man; the lamp—the wick of which he had lowered when he lay down, so that its too brilliant light might not hinder his sleeping—shed a gentle and uncertain light, but strong enough to enable him to assure himself at a glance that all was in the state in which he had left it on retiring to bed, and that he was still alone.

He rose, a prey to extraordinary agitation.

The first thought that occurred to him was that his retreat was discovered, and that they wished to arrest him; but he soon admitted the absurdity of this supposition, and reassured himself; the people charged to secure him would simply have entered the cavern, and would have had no combat to sustain; they would have made him a prisoner even before he had had time to open his eyes.

But what could be the cause of this frightful tumult which still continued quite near to him?

This extremely puzzled the young man, and awakened his curiosity to the highest pitch.

He looked at his watch. It was half past five in the morning.

Outside, then, it was daylight. It could not be a gathering of wild beasts, the sun making them

retire into their caves; moreover, these animals would not dare to venture so near the town.

What was it, then?

A battle, perhaps! But a battle in the middle of the night, almost at the gates of San Miguel, the capital of the province of Tucuman, where, on account of the congress, considerable forces were now united; this supposition was not admissible.

For a moment the young man thought of knocking at the trapdoor, to get it opened, and to ask information of the rancheros.

But he reflected that these good people were supposed to be ignorant of his presence among them—that this inconsiderate proceeding would displease them, and cause them to fear afterwards getting into trouble about him.

And then, if this uproar was really that of a fight, it was probable that the poor Indians at the commencement of the fight had abandoned their rancho, half dead with fright, and had flown across the country, in order to conceal themselves in some retreat known to themselves alone, to escape the fury of one or other of the two parties; so that it would be pure loss of time for him to call them and ask them to open the door.

These various considerations were strong enough to restrain him from committing an imprudence in revealing his retreat, if, by chance, the rancho had been temporarily occupied by his enemies.

But as—as we have said—his curiosity was excited to the highest degree, and as, in the precarious situation he was in it was important for him—at least, he gave himself this reason to justify in his own eyes the step he wished to take—to know what was passing around him, in order to know how to act; he resolved to act without further delay, and learn the causes of this extraordinary uproar, which had so suddenly troubled his repose.

HE therefore rose, took a sabre, passed a pair of pistols in his girdle, seized a carbine, and thus armed, and ready for any event, he lit a lantern, and proceeded towards the passage on the right —the side from whence the sound appeared to come.

This passage, or rather this gallery of the cavern, was large enough for two persons to walk abreast; its walls were high and dry, and the ground was covered with a fine yellow sand, which completely stifled the sound of steps. The gallery had several turnings.

After a short time the young man reached a room which at the moment served for a stable for his three horses.

The animals appeared frightened; they were drooping their ears, and violently snorting, as they tried to break the cords which bound them to the manger, furnished with a copious supply of provender.

The painter patted them with his hand, caressed them, and tried to reassure them, and then continued his investigations.

The further he advanced into the gallery, the more the noise became intense. It was no longer cries and trampling that he heard, but the sound of firearms, and the clashing of sabres.

Doubt was no longer possible; a furious combat was being fought a few steps from the entry of the cavern.

This certainty, far from stopping the young man, increased his desire to know positively what was passing; he almost ran to reach the end of the gallery.

There he was obliged to stop; an enormous stone hermetically sealed the entrance of the cavern.

The young man, nevertheless, was not discouraged by this apparently insurmountable obstacle.

This stone could evidently be moved; but what means could he employ to obtain that result? He knew not.

Then, with the help of his lantern, he proceeded to examine the stone above, below, and on the sides, seeking how he might succeed in removing it.

For nearly half an hour he gave himself up to an inspection as careful as it was useless, and he began to despair of discovering the secret which evidently existed, when suddenly he thought he saw the stone slightly move.

He looked more attentively. Yes, the stone was gently moved, and was, by degrees, coming out of its cell.

Emile was a bold fellow, endowed with a large share of coolness and energy. His mind was made up in a moment, and mentally thanking the individual, whoever he was, who was sparing him the long and fatiguing labour which he did not know how to bring to a successful termination, he quickly placed himself in concealment in a corner of the gallery, placed his lantern on the ground near him, taking care to cover it with his hat, so that its light might not be perceived. Seizing a pistol in each hand, to be ready for anything, he waited with his eyes fixed on the stone, which, owing to the numerous fissures in the walls of the gallery, he could easily distinguish—a prey to a strange emotion, which caused his heart to beat violently, and his blood to rush to his brain.

His watching was not long. Scarcely had he concealed himself before the stone was detached and rolled on the ground, and a man, holding in his hand a carbine, the barrel of which was still smoking, quickly entered the cavern.

The man leant forward towards the aperture, appeared to listen for a few seconds, and then stood up, murmuring loud enough for the young man to hear him.

"They come, but too late; the tiger has now escaped."

And skilfully aiding himself with the barrel of the carbine, as with a lever, he rapidly replaced the stone in its previous position.

"Search, search, *perros malditos,*" said the unknown, with an ironical sneer, "I do not fear you now."

And with the greatest coolness he proceeded to reload his gun; but the painter did not give him time to do so. Rushing from his concealment, and removing the hat which covered his lantern, he stood face to face with the unknown, and, presenting his pistols:

"Who are you? What do you want?" he demanded. The unknown made a movement of surprise and flight, stepped back apace, and letting fall his gun:

"Eh! What is this?" cried he; "Am I, then, betrayed?"

"Betrayed!" repeated the Frenchman, prudently placing his foot on the carbine; "The expression seems to me rather strange from your mouth, Señor; especially after the manner in which you have introduced yourself here."

But it was only the work of a minute for the unknown to regain his coolness, and become completely master of himself.

"Replace your pistols in your girdle, Señor," said he; "they are not wanted here; you have nothing to fear from me."

"I am pleased to hear it," answered the painter; "but what guarantee do you give me?"

"My word as a gentleman," he replied, with dignity.

Although the painter had been but a few months in America, he had been often enough in a position to study the character of the inhabitants of the country, to know what reliance he might place on this word so proudly given. So, after having affirmatively nodded his head:

"I accept it," said he, uncocking his pistols, and placing them in his girdle.

The unknown picked up his gun.

Without, the noise still continued, but its character had changed; it was no longer a combat which was heard, but the sound of iron striking the ground, and loud cries; they were seeking the fugitive.

"Come, follow me," pursued the young man; "you must not remain any longer here."

The unknown smiled with an air of raillery.

"They will not find me," said he; "let them search."

"As you please; come, let us talk."

"Talk—be it so."

"Who are you?"

"You see—a *proscrit*."

"Just so; but there are various kinds of *proscrits*."

"I am of the worst kind," said the other, smiling.

"Hum!" cried the young man, "What do you mean?"

"What I say—nothing else. At the end of a desperate combat, fought by me against my enemies, as I had fallen into an ambuscade, I have been conquered just at the moment when I thought I had gained the victory. After seeing all my companions fall around me, I have been obliged to fly."

"That is the fortune of war," said the young man, philosophically; "you know this retreat, then?"

"Apparently, since you see I have taken refuge in it."

"True; you do not fear that you will be discovered?"

"Impossible; nobody knows of the existence of the place."

"I, however—I know it."

"Yes, you; but you are a *proscrit*, like myself."

"How do you know that?"

"I suppose so; otherwise you would not be here."

"Possibly; but as I know it, others may know it—especially as I did not discover it myself."

"Yes, but he who has told you, and who has brought you here, wishes, no doubt, to place you in a position where you will not run the risk of falling into the hands of those who seek you. He must be master of his secret."

"Well, I give up any more discussion with you, for you answer everything with a knock-down logic. In my turn, I give you my word of honour as a Frenchman, that you have nothing to fear from me, and that I will serve you in all I can."

"Thank you," laconically answered the unknown, holding out his hand; "I expected nothing less from you."

"The tumult appears to go farther off; your pursuers, no doubt, give up seeking for you any longer. Follow me; I am, I believe, in a position to offer you better hospitality than you think."

"At the present moment, I want two things."

"What?"

"Food, and two hours sleep."

"And then—?"

"Then—unhappily that does not depend upon you."

"What is it, then?"

"A good horse to carry me as quick as possible to rejoin my companions, that I have left twenty leagues from here."

"Very well You shall first eat; then you shall sleep; then, when you have reposed long enough, you shall choose which of my horses suits you best, and you shall set out."

"Will you do that, indeed?" cried the unknown, with a thrill of joy.

"Why should I not do it, since I promise it?"

"You are right. Pardon me; I did not know what I was saying."

"Come then, proceed."

"Well, let us go."

They quitted the extremity of the gallery, and proceeded to the room.

"There are the horses," said the young man, as he passed through the stable.

"Good!" simply said the other.

When they were in the cavern, the unknown looked around him with wonder.

"What does this mean?" said he; "Do you really live here, then?"

"For a time, yes. Have you not guessed that I, like yourself, am proscribed?"

"How? you—a Frenchman!"

"Nationality has nothing to do with the matter," said the young man, laughing; "sit down and eat." And after having brought forward a chair, he placed provisions on the table.

"And you—will you not also eat?" asked the unknown.

"Pardon—I intend to keep you company."

The two took their places, and began the meal.

"Look you," said the unknown, after a pause, "I wish to give you a decided proof of the entire confidence I have in you."

"You do me honour."

"Would you like to gain 15,000 piastres?"

"Pooh!" said the young man, with a pout.

"You do not care for money?" said the unknown, with astonishment.

"Upon my word, no! It is not worth the trouble you have to get it."

"But it is easy for you, without the least trouble, to gain this money."

"That is another affair. Let me see your plan."

"It is very simple."

"So much the better."

"Have you heard of four Pincheyra brothers?"

"Often."

"Favourably or not?"

"Good and bad, but especially bad."

"Good! There are so many tongues of scandal."

"That is true. Go on."

"You know that a price is put on their heads?"

"Ah! Ah! Ah!"

"You did not know it?"

"How should I know it? It does not concern me, I suppose."

"More than you think: I am a Pincheyra," said he, looking at him fixedly.

"Bah!" cried the young man, turning round upon his chair so as to examine his guest more at his

ease; "It is a strange meeting."

"Is it not? I am Don Santiago Pincheyra, the second of the four brothers."

"Very good, I am delighted at having made your acquaintance."

"My head is worth 15,000 piastres."

"That is a pretty sum. I doubt whether mine, which I value very much, is worth so great an amount."

"You do not understand what I mean."

"Upon my word, no; not the least in the world."

"Give me up; they will give you the money, and, more than that, they will pardon you."

The Frenchman knitted his eyebrows; his eyes flashed, and a livid paleness covered his face.

"*Vive Dieu!*" cried he, striking the table with his fist, "Do you know that you insult me, *caballero?*"

Don Santiago remained motionless and smiling; he held out his hand to the young man, and, inviting him to resume his seat he had so suddenly quitted:

"On the contrary," said he, "I give you a proof of the confidence I have in your honour, inasmuch as without your having asked who I am, I have told you; and now, knowing that I am completely in your power, I am going to stretch myself in your hammock, where I shall sleep under your protection as tranquilly as if I were in the midst of my friends."

"Well, sir," answered the young man, still with some little resentment, "I admit your explanation; only, if you choose to make yourself known to me, you should have done it in some other way than by attacking my honour."

"I confess that I am wrong, and I ask pardon for it again, Señor; it is more than a man like me is accustomed to do. So give me your honest hand, and forget it."

The young man took the hand that the Pincheyra offered him, and resumed his place at the table beside him.

They continued their meal without any fresh disagreeable incident.

The Pincheyra was so overcome by fatigue, that, towards the end of the repast, he fell asleep talking.

The painter understood the effort which the Pincheyra was making, and put an end to his suffering, striking him on the shoulder.

"What do you want?" asked he.

"Merely to tell you that now you have appeased your appetite, you have another want, more imperious still, to satisfy; it is time that you went to sleep, so as to be speedily in a position to join your friends."

"True," said Don Santiago, laughing, "I am sleeping as I sit; I really do not know how to excuse myself for such ill manners before you."

"*Pardieu!* by lying down; that, I think, is the only thing you have to do at this moment."

"Upon my word, you are right; I will not make any fuss about it, and since you are so good a companion, I will, without any further delay, profit by your counsel."

In speaking thus, he rose with some little difficulty, so overcome was he by fatigue, and, aided by the young man, he stretched himself on the hammock, where he soon fell asleep.

Again free to give himself up to his own thoughts, the young man lit a cigar, installed himself comfortably in a seat, and, while digesting his breakfast, he began to reflect on this new episode of his varied life which had just been unexpectedly grafted on the others, and which would, perhaps, still more complicate the numberless difficulties of the position in which he found himself.

"This time," said he, "I can boldly say that I have had no hand in what has happened, and that this man has really come to me when I by no means sought him, as he knew the cavern before me. How will all this finish? Suppose Tyro does not arrive! Devoted as the brave fellow may be to me, I fear the allurement of 15,000 piastres—a very large sum for anyone who knows how to gain it honestly—may induce him to give up my guest and myself, which would be excessively disagreeable."

Several hours thus passed, during which the Montonero chief slept soundly. The Frenchman faithfully watched over his bed, and all the while gave himself up to reflections which gradually became more and more sombre.

At last, about one o'clock in the afternoon, Emile thought that the Montonero had sufficiently slept. He approached him, and touched him lightly on the shoulder, to awaken him.

The latter instantly opened his eyes, and bounded like a coyote out of the hammock.

"What is the matter?" demanded he, in a low voice.

"Nothing that I know of," answered the other.

"Then, why wake me, when I was sleeping so well?" said he, gaping.

"Because you have slept enough."

"Ah!" said the other.

"Yes, it is time to go."

"Time to go! already! You are chary of your hospitality, master. Well, let us say nothing more about it. I will do what you wish," added he, in a feigned tone; "I do not wish to embarrass you any longer with my presence."

"You do not embarrass me, Señor," answered the young man; "if it only depended upon me, you might remain here as long as you please. You cannot compromise me more than I am already."

"Perhaps; but on whom does it depend, then?"

"On the Indian servant who has concealed me here, and who, probably, will not be long before he pays me a visit. Consider whether it would suit you to be seen by him."

"Not the least in the world! To trust myself to an Indian would be to be irretrievably lost. And you say that he is coming here soon?"

"I do not know precisely when he will come, but I expect him from one moment to another."

"The deuce! With your permission, *I* will not expect him. If you will permit me, I will set out at once."

"Come and choose your horse."

The Montonero seized his carbine, which he loaded as he walked, and they went into the gallery.

The choice did not take long. The three horses were equally young, full of blood, fire, and swiftness. The Montonero, a good judge, saw this at a glance, and took one haphazard.

"What is unfortunate for me in all this," said he, quickly saddling his horse, "is, that I am obliged to leave the same way as I came, and that I run the risk of falling into an ambuscade. There used to be a second gallery in this cavern, but it has been stopped up long ago, I suppose?"

"No, not at all. This gallery is still there. You can easily go out that way."

"If it is so, I am saved," cried the Montonero, with joy.

"Silence!" said the young man, in a low voice, rapidly putting his hand on his companion's mouth; "I hear someone walking."

The Pincheyra listened, and heard the sound of steps close by.

"Oh!" cried he, with a gesture of despair.

"Remain here! Let me act—I'll answer for all," the young man quickly whispered.

And he briskly darted into the cavern. It was time that he came. Tyro was about to look for him in the gallery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIAN.

As we have said at the end of the preceding chapter, at the moment when the painter came out of the gallery in the cavern, he found himself face to face with Tyro, who, having entered by the opposite gallery, and not finding him in the room, was going to seek for him in the stable, where he supposed the painter might be.

The two men remained a short time motionless and silent, facing each other, carefully examining each other, and somewhat embarrassed how to commence the conversation. However, the situation, already very embarrassing, threatened, if it continued much longer, to become critical. The Frenchman saw that he must, at any price, get out of it; so he resolved on speaking boldly, persuaded that this was the best means of escaping from his embarrassment.

"You here, at last, Tyro!" he cried, feigning great joy; "I began to feel uneasy at this seclusion, to which I cannot become accustomed."

"It was impossible for me to come sooner to see you, master," answered the Indian, giving a cunning glance from under his half-closed eyelashes. "You have, I suppose, found everything in order here."

"Perfectly. I must confess that I have passed an excellent night."

"Ah!" said the Guaraní; "You have heard nothing? Has there been no unusual noise to disturb your sleep?"

"Upon my word, no; I have slept right off through the whole night. I only waked about half an hour ago."

"So much the better, master. I am delighted at what you tell me. If you did not tell it to me so decidedly, I frankly confess I should scarcely have believed you."

"Why?" asked he, with feigned astonishment.

"Because, master, the night has been anything but tranquil."

"Ah! Bah!" cried he, with the most natural air that he could assume; "What has happened, then? You understand that, buried here, at the bottom of this hole, I am ignorant of everything."

"A desperate battle has been fought close by here, between the Spaniards and the patriots."

"The devil! That is serious. And this combat has terminated?"

"Otherwise, should I be here, master?"

"That is right, my friend. And who have got the best of it?"

"The patriots."

"Ah! Ah!"

"Yes, and for certain reasons I am very sorry, for your sake."

"For me, do you say, Tyro? What have I to do in the matter?"

"Are you not proscribed by the patriots?"

"Just so, you remind me of a fact; but what does that signify?"

"Why, at this moment the Spaniards are, or at least are supposed to be, your friends."

"That is true; but conquerors or conquered, I should not be able to claim their aid."

The Indian remained a moment silent; then he took a step backward, and, bowing to the young man—

"Master," said he, in a sad voice, "What have I done to lose your confidence? What have I done that you should now wish to keep secrets from me?"

Emile felt that he blushed; however, he answered—

"I do not understand this reproach that you address to me, my brave friend; explain yourself more clearly."

The Guaraní shook his head with a sorrowful air.

"What good will it be," pursued he, "since you mistrust me?"

"I mistrust you!" cried the young man, who felt that he was to blame, but who did not believe himself authorised to give up a secret which did not belong to him.

"Certainly, master. Look at these two glasses and two plates; look, moreover, at these remains of cigars."

"Well?"

"Well, do you think, then, that, if I did not know already, these things would not be sufficient to prove to me the presence of another person here besides yourself?"

"How? What do you know?"

"I know, master, that a man, whose name, if I chose, I could easily tell you, this morning entered the cavern, that you have given him hospitality, and that at the moment I am speaking, he is still here—hidden there—look," added he, stretching out his arm—"in that gallery."

"But then," cried the young man, violently, "since you are so well informed, you have then betrayed me?"

"So, he is really here?" said the Indian, with a gesture of joy.

"Have you not just told me so yourself?"

"True, master, but I feared that he had already gone away."

"Ah! But what does all that mean? I am quite at a loss to understand it."

"It is, nevertheless, very simple, master; call this man; all will be explained in a few words."

"*Ma foi!*" cried the young man, in an ill-humoured tone; "Call him yourself, since you know him so well."

"You are angry with me, master; you are wrong, for in everything that occurs I should only act for you and in your interest."

"It is possible, but I am annoyed at the position in which fate constantly places me, and at the absurd part I am condemned to play."

"Oh, master, do not complain; for this time, I assure you, Fate, as you call it, has shown rare intelligence; and you will soon have a proof of it."

"I should like nothing better."

"Will you permit me, master?"—

"Are you not in your own place? Do what you like; I wash my hands of it."

After having answered, by this outburst, the young man threw himself on a seat, and lit a cigar with the most careless air he could affect, although he felt himself in reality quite upset by the situation in which he found himself.

The Indian looked at him a moment with an indefinable expression, and then, taking his hand, and kissing it respectfully—

"Oh, master!" said he, in a gentle and somewhat trembling voice, "Do not be unjust towards a faithful servant."

And then he strode towards the gallery.

"Come, Don Santiago," cried he, with a loud voice, stopping at the entrance, "you can show yourself; there are none here but friends."

The sound of a quick step was heard, and the Montonero almost immediately showed himself.

Alter having cast a glance around him, he advanced briskly towards the Guaraní, and, grasping him heartily by the hand—

"*¡Vive Dios!*" cried he; "My brave friend, I am happy to see you here!"

"And so am I, Señor," respectfully answered the Indian; "but first permit me to ask you a favour."

"What, my friend?"

"In return for the service I have rendered you, render me another."

"If it depends on me, I will do so willingly."

"Will you be good enough to explain to this gentleman, who is my master, what has passed between you and me the last two days?"

"What!" said the Spaniard, with surprise; "This *caballero* your master—my friend; the meeting is strange!"

"It may be that I had prepared it, or at least tried to arrange it," answered the Indian.

"That's possible, after all," said the Spaniard.

"You know that I do not understand a word of what you are saying," interrupted the Frenchman with suppressed impatience.

"Speak, Don Santiago, I beg you."

"This is what has occurred," pursued the Montonero. "For certain reasons, too long to tell you—and which, moreover, would very little interest you, I am convinced—I am the friend of this brave Indian, to whom I cannot, and do not wish to refuse anything. Two days ago, then, he came to me, at one of my habitual rendezvous that he has long known, and made me promise to come here with some of the men of my squadron, in order to protect the flight of several persons in whom he is much interested, and whom the patriots—I do not know for what reasons—have proscribed."

"Hum!" cried the young man, rising quickly, and throwing away his cigar; "Continue, continue; Señor; it this becomes very interesting to me."

"So much the better; only you do wrong to throw away your cigar on that account. I have come, then. Unhappily, notwithstanding all the precautions that I have taken, I have been discovered, and—you know the rest."

"Yes, but you do not know it, Señor, and I am going to tell you," answered the Indian.

"I should like nothing better."

"One moment!" cried the painter, holding out his hand to the Guaraní. "I owe you an apology, Tyro, for my unjust suspicions. I offer it from the bottom of my heart. You know how soured I must be through all that has happened to me the last few days, and I am convinced that you will excuse me."

"Oh, that is too much, master; your goodness confounds me," answered the Guaraní, with emotion. "I only wished to prove to you that I am still your faithful servant."

"There remains not the least doubt of that, my friend."

"Thank you, master."

"Yes, yes," murmured the Spaniard; "believe me, Señor, these redskins are better than they are generally supposed, and when they once are attached to you, you can always reckon on them; now, my brave friend," added he, addressing Tyro, "tell me what, according to you, I do not know."

"The result—here it is, Señor; you have been betrayed."

"*¡Vive Dios!* I feared so; you know the traitor?"

"I know him."

"Good!" said he, joyfully rubbing his hands; "you will no doubt tell me his name."

"It is useless, Señor; I intend to chastise him myself."

"As you please. I should, however, have much liked to give myself that pleasure."

"Believe me, Señor—you or me—he will lose nothing," pursued the Indian, with an accent of hatred it would be impossible to render.

"I will not cavil any longer with you on that; let us return to our business; I am sufficiently embarrassed at this moment."

The Indian smiled.

"Do you not know me then, Don Santiago?" said he; "The evil has been repaired as far as it is possible."

"Good! That is to say—"

"That is to say, that I have myself carried the news of your defeat to your friends; that tonight twenty-five horsemen will arrive here, where we shall conceal them, whilst fifty others will await your return to Vado del Nandus, ambuscaded in the rocks."

"Perfectly arranged all that—perfectly, my master," said the Spaniard, in a joyous tone. "But why should I not go myself, just to meet my friends? That would simplify matters very much, it appears to me. I do not expect to be a second time defeated, as I was last night. I do not propose this out of self-love, you know, especially as I hope someday or other to have my revenge."

"All that is just, Don Santiago," answered the Indian, "but you forget that I have asked you to render me a service."

"That is true! I do not know where my brains are at this moment; excuse me, I beg, and be convinced that I am still at your disposal."

"I thank you. Now, master," added he, turning towards the young man, "it is necessary that this very day the ladies that you know should quit San Miguel; tomorrow would be too late. You must go immediately and resume your disguise, and repair to the convent. It is but about two leagues from here to the convent. You will arrive just at sunset, only you must make haste."

"The devil!" murmured the painter, "But how shall I conduct these ladies here."

"Do not let that disturb you, master; at the gate of the convent a guide will await you, who will bring you safely here."

"And that guide?"

"Will be me, master."

"Oh, that will be all right then," said the young man.

"You have not a moment to lose."

"Can I resume my nap?" asked the Spaniard.

"Certainly, nothing will prevent you; especially as I shall return in time to introduce your companions into the cave."

"Very well. Good fortune then."

And he stretched himself comfortably in the hammock, while Tyro aided his master to complete his metamorphosis, which did not take long.

The two men then left the cavern by the gallery through which Tyro had entered, leaving the Spaniard already in a sound sleep.

The gallery by which the master and the servant departed led out to the very bank of the river, and was so completely concealed, that unless anyone had known of its existence, it would never have been suspected.

A boat, run aground on the land, at a few paces off, awaited them.

Tyro immediately went towards it; he set it partly afloat, made his master enter it, stepped into it himself, and then, taking the paddles, launched it into the current.

"We shall arrive quicker thus," he said; "by this means I can put you down at a few paces only from the spot where you are going."

The painter made a sign of assent, and they continued their route.

The idea of the Indian was excellent in this respect, that not only this means of locomotion, which was very rapid, very much shortened the journey that they had to make, but it also had the advantage of freedom from espionage, always to be feared on entering the town, and traversing streets filled with people.

The head of the boat soon grated on the sand of the bank; they had arrived. The Frenchman landed.

"Good fortune!" murmured Tyro, pushing off again.

Spite of himself, on finding himself again in the midst of a town, where he knew he was looked for as a criminal, and tracked as a wild beast, the young man felt some emotion, and felt his heart beat more than usual.

He knew that he was risking his head on a throw of the dice, in an enterprise that many others in his place would have considered as mad, especially in the critical position in which he found himself placed.

But Emile had a generous and intrepid heart; he had promised two ladies to try all he could to aid them; and, notwithstanding the natural apprehension which he felt as to the result of his expedition, he had not for a moment the thought of failing in his word.

Moreover, what had he to fear more than death? Nothing. Exposed already to the hatred of the patriots, in case of surprise, he still had the chance of selling his life dearly. Under his disguise, he was well armed; and, moreover, his course was decided on; the Rubicon was passed; he could not go back. He threw an inquiring look around him, assured himself that the environs were deserted, and, after having a last time touched the pistols placed under his poncho in his girdle, he boldly entered the street.

Like the bank of the river, the street was a desert.

The young man, affecting the somewhat trembling step of an old man, and looking carefully around him, took the side of the street opposite to that of the convent. Then, having arrived before the windows, he twice repeated the signal which he had agreed upon with the marchioness.

"Suppose," said he to himself, "they have placed someone in concealment, and my signal has been perceived!"

Then, after a pause, no doubt employed in still further bracing up his resolution, he crossed the street and approached the gate.

At the moment when he was preparing to knock, the gate opened.

He entered, and the gate shut immediately after him.

"Ouf!" said he, "Here am I in the mousetrap; what is going to happen now?"

A nun—not the same as had the first time opened to him—stood before him. Without uttering a word, she made him a sign to follow her, and proceeded.

They thus traversed silently and rapidly the long corridors and the cloisters, and at last reached the chamber of the superior. The door was open.

The conductress of the young man stood on one side to give him entrance, and when he had gone in, shut the door behind him, remaining herself outside.

One person only was in the chamber; this person was the superior.

The young man bowed respectfully to her.

"Well," she asked, briskly approaching him, "what has happened? Speak without fear; no one can hear us."

"What has happened, Madame," answered he, "is, that if these ladies still have the intention to fly, all is ready."

"God be praised!" cried the superior, with, joy, "And when shall they go?"

"Immediately, if they are disposed; tomorrow, as I am assured, it would be too late for them."

"It is but too true, alas!" said she, with a sigh; "So you can answer for their safety?"

"I can answer, Madame, that I would suffer myself to be killed to defend them; a man cannot engage to do more."

"You are right, *caballero;* it is, in fact, more than we have a right to ask you."

"Now, Madame, be so kind as to inform these ladies as soon as possible; I do not need to repeat, that time is very precious."

"They are aware of it already; they are now finishing their preparations; in a short time they will be here."

"So much the better, for I am anxious to get in the open country. I confess that I do not breathe freely within these thick walls. You know, Madame, that you have offered me the means of facilitating our quitting this house. I could not by myself undertake this task, in which I should fail."

"Do not distress yourself; what I have said I will do."

"A thousand thanks, Madame; permit me one last observation."

"Speak, *caballero.*"

"When I first came here, I thought I remarked—perhaps I was deceived—that the person who acted as my guide did not possess your entire confidence."

"Yes, Señor, you were not deceived; but," added she, with a significant smile, "you will now have nothing to fear from the indiscretions of that nun; her post is occupied by a reliable person; as to the former, I have given her another position."

The young man bowed.

At the same moment a door opened, and two persons entered.

The darkness which began to prevail in the room prevented the Frenchman at first recognising these two persons, enveloped in thick mantles, and their heads covered with hats, which so covered their faces, that their features could not he distinguished.

"We are lost?" murmured he, taking a step backward, and instinctively putting his hand to his pistols.

"Stop!" sharply cried one of the two unknown, letting fall the lappet of her mantle, "Do you not see who we are?"

"Oh!" cried the Frenchman, recognising the marchioness.

"I thought," she resumed, "that for the hazardous adventure which we undertake this costume would be better than our own."

"And you are most decidedly right, Madame. Oh! now, if there be no unforeseen complications, I think I may almost answer for the success of your escape."

The young girl concealed herself timidly and trembling behind her mother.

"We will leave when you please, Madame," pursued the young man, "only I think the sooner the better."

"Immediately! Immediately!" cried the marchioness.

"Very well," said the superior, "follow me."

They quitted the chamber.

The marchioness and her daughter each carried a light valise under their arms.

The marchioness also—no doubt to add to the correctness of her masculine costume—had a pair of pistols in her girdle, a sabre at her side, and a cutlass in her right *polena*.

The cloisters were deserted; a death-like silence reigned in the convent.

"You can go without any fear," said the superior; "no one watches you."

"Where are the horses?" asked the marchioness.

"At a few paces from here," answered Emile; "it would have been imprudent to have brought them to the convent."

"That is true," answered the marchioness.

They still walked on.

The painter was very uneasy. The last question of the marchioness, about the horses, reminded him—rather late in the day—that he had never thought of providing them. Carried away by the rapidity with which events had occurred since the arrival of Tyro in the cavern, he had left everything to the Guaraní, without for a moment thinking of this little matter, which was, nevertheless, so important for the success of his project of flight.

"Confound it," murmured he to himself, "suppose Tyro has had no more memory than I! I could not, however, admit this unpardonable forgetfulness; besides, the principal thing is to escape from here."

The four persons rapidly traversed the corridors, and were not long in reaching the gate of the convent. The superior, after having cast a searching look through the grating, to assure herself that the street was deserted, took a key from the bunch hanging at her girdle, and opened the door.

"Adieu, and the Lord protect you!" said she; "I have honourably kept my promise."

"Adieu, and thank you," answered the marchioness. As to the young girl, she threw herself into the arms of the nun, and embraced her, weeping.

"Go! go!" quickly cried the superior; and pushing them gently, she closed the door behind them.

The two ladies gave a last sad look at the convent, and, enveloping themselves carefully in their mantles, they prepared to follow their protector.

"Which way do we take?" asked the marchioness.

"This," answered Emile, turning to the right—that is to say, proceeding to the river.

Was it by chance or intuition that he took this direction? A little of one and a little of the other.

A rather large barque, rowed by four men, was waiting, run aground on the bank.

"Eh!" said one of the men, in whom Emile immediately recognised Tyro; "Here is the master—that is not unfortunate."

The latter, without answering, made his companions enter the barque, and immediately stepped in after them.

On a sign from the Indian, the oars were shipped, and the barque darted rapidly away.

The ladies gave a sigh of relief.

Tyro had thought that it would be better, on leaving, to resume the same mode of travelling, especially on account of the ladies, who, notwithstanding all their precautions, ran the risk of being easily discovered; only, as he had not thought of acquainting his master with his plans, he feared that the latter might have arranged to traverse the streets. He had therefore grounded the barque in such a position that he could see his master on his exit from the convent; and if he had seen him turn in an opposite direction to that which he had taken, he would have run after him so as to bring them back.

We have seen how, this time, Fate—no doubt tired of always persecuting the young man—had consented to protect him in directing him in the right way.

Thanks to the darkness—for the sun had set, and already the darkness was great—and especially to the breadth of the river, the barque keeping to the middle, the fugitives ran very little risk of being recognised.

They accomplished their passage in a very little time, and during all the time they did not meet any other boat than their own, except an Indian pirogue containing a single man, which crossed them on their leaving the town.

But this pirogue passed them too far off, and its course was too rapid, for it to be supposed that the man who was in it could perceive them.

They at last arrived at the entrance of the cavern.

We have said that the barque was rowed by four men.

Of these four men, two were gauchos, engaged by Tyro, and, as the Guaraní had well paid them, he had a right to reckon on their fidelity; let us add that, for greater safety, the Indian had told them nothing about their destination. The third was a domestic of the painter's—an Indian whom the latter had left at San Miguel, without taking any heed of him, when he himself took flight. The fourth was Tyro himself.

When the barque touched the bank, the Guaraní respectfully helped the two ladies to land, and then, going up to the entry of the cavern—

"Will you, ladies," said he, "enter this cavern, where we will speedily rejoin you."

The ladies obeyed.

"And we?—" asked the painter.

"We have still something to do, master," answered the Indian.

The peculiar stress with which these words were pronounced astonished Emile, but he took no notice of it, convinced that the Guaraní must have some serious reason to induce him to answer in so peremptory a way.

CHAPTER X.

ACROSS COUNTRY.

Turning towards the two gauchos, who were carelessly leaning over the side of the boat—

"I have paid you, you are free now to leave us," said the Guaraní to them, "unless you consent to make a new bargain with this gentleman, in whose name I have engaged you."

"Let us see the bargain," answered one of the two gauchos.

"First, are you free?"

"We are."

"Is it for both that you answer me?"

"This; this *caballero* is my brother; his name is Mataseis, and mine Sacatripas: where one goes, the other follows."

Tyro bowed with a delighted air. The reputation of these two *caballeros* had long been known, and Tyro was well acquainted with it. They Were two of the most noted bandits of all the Banda Oriental, Under present circumstances, nothing could have happened better. Men of the sack and of the cord, their arms were red up to the elbow. For a real, they would, without hesitation, have assassinated their fathers, but their word was their bond. Once given, they would not have violated it for the possession of all the mines of the Cordillera. It was their only failing, or, if it be preferred, their only virtue. Man, that strange animal, is so constituted that he is neither complete for good, nor for evil.

"Very well," resumed Tyro, "I am happy, *caballeros*, to have to do with men like you; I hope that we shall understand one another."

"Well, let us know what you want," answered; Mataseis.

"Would you like to remain in the service of this *caballero?*"

"On what conditions? Besides, it would be well to know if the service will be hard," pursued the positive Mataseis.

"It will be; it will commit you to do all, you understand—*all,*" added he, intentionally emphasizing the last word.

"That is the least consideration, if it pays well."

"Five *onces* per month each; will that suit you?"

The two bandits exchanged a look.

"Agreed," said they.

"Here is a month in advance," resumed Tyro, taking a handful of gold from his pocket, and handing it to them.

The gauchos held out their hands with a movement of joy, and instantly pocketed the gold.

"Only, understand that a month begun must finish, and that when you wish to quit the service of this *caballero,* you must give him eight days' notice, and refrain from doing anything against his interest during the week after the breaking off the engagement. Do you accept these conditions?"

"We accept them."

"Swear, then, to keep them faithfully."

The two bandits opened their ponchos, took in their hands the scapularies hanging at their necks, and, taking off their hats, and raising their eyes to heaven with an emotion worthy of a more Christian oath—

"We swear on these blessed scapularies to keep the conditions accepted by us," said they, both together; "may we lose the portion we hope for in Paradise, and be damned, if we fail in the oath we freely give."

"Very good," said Tyro; and turning towards the Indian, while the gauchos, after dropping their scapularies, put them in their breasts again—"And you, Neno, will you remain in the service of your master?" he asked.

"That would be impossible," boldly answered the Indian; "I have another master."

"Very good; you are free. Go."

Neno did not require the request to be repeated. After bowing to the painter, he leaped lightly out of the boat, and proceeded hastily towards San Miguel.

The Guaraní followed him a minute with his eyes; then, leaning towards Sacatripas, he whispered a word into his ear.

The bandit made an affirmative gesture with his head, gently touched his brother's arm, and both, rapidly landing, set off running, and disappeared in the darkness.

"These demons will be very valuable to you, master."

"I believe so, but they appear to me atrocious scoundrels; unhappily, in the circumstances in which I find myself, perhaps I shall be obliged some day or other to make use of their services."

The Guaraní smiled, without answering.

"Do you not consider the conduct of this Neno shabby, after so many kindnesses that I have done him?" pursued the painter.

"You do not yet know all that he has done, master."

"What do you mean?"

"It is he who has betrayed you, and who has sold your head to your enemies."

"You knew that!" cried the young man, with violence, "And you have brought this wretch with us? We are ruined, then!"

"Listen, master," coldly answered the Guaraní.

At this moment a cry of agony pierced the air. Although far off it had such an expression of anguish and of grief that the painter involuntarily trembled, and felt himself covered with a cold perspiration.

"Oh!" cried he; "It is the cry of a man who is being murdered. What is happening? *Mon Dieu!*" And he made a movement to jump out of the barque.

"Stop, master," said Tyro, "it is useless; the treachery of Neno need no longer be feared."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, master, that your gauchos have commenced their services; you see that they are valuable men. Go and rejoin the ladies, while I conceal the boat with the aid of these worthy *caballeros,* whom I already see running in this direction."

The young man rose, without answering, and quitted the boat, staggering like a drunken man.

"It is frightful!" murmured he; "And yet, perhaps, the death of this wretch may save the life of three persons."

He proceeded to the gallery and rejoined the ladies, who were trembling close to each other, not understanding the prolonged absence of the young man, and naturally frightened by the death cry, the mournful echo of which had reached them.

The sight of the Frenchman reassured them.

"What shall we do now?" asked the marchioness, in a low voice.

"In a few minutes we shall know," answered Emile; "we must wait."

At this moment the Guaraní appeared, followed by Mataseis.

"I have sunk the barque," said the Indian, "in order to destroy the traces of our journey. The brother of this Señor has gone out as a scout; come."

They followed him.

The Indian proceeded in the darkness with as much ease as in full daylight. The fugitives were soon sufficiently near for the sound of several voices to reach them.

Tyro twice imitated the sound of an owl. A profound silence immediately reigned in the cavern; then a man appeared, holding in one hand a lantern, with which he showed a light, and in the other a loaded pistol.

This man was Don Santiago Pincheyra.

"Who goes there?" asked he, in a threatening tone.

"A friend," answered the painter.

"Ah! Ah! Your expedition has succeeded, it appears?" answered the Montonero, replacing the pistol in his girdle. "So much the better; I began to be uneasy at your long absence. Come, come, all our friends are here."

They entered.

There were, indeed, a dozen Montoneros in the cavern.

With a delicacy which, in such a man, would not have been suspected, the Montonero approached the two ladies, whom, notwithstanding their costume, he had discovered, and, bowing to them as he presented them with silk neckerchiefs—

"Cover your faces, ladies," said he, respectfully. "It will be better for no one to know who you are. At a later time you would not, perhaps, be much pleased to be recognised by one of the companions whom fate gives you today."

"Thank you, Señor; you are really a *caballero*," graciously answered the marchioness; and, without any further remark, she concealed her features with the neckerchief, and in this she was immediately imitated by her daughter.

This happy thought of the Montonero preserved the *incognito* of the fugitives.

"As to us," continued he, addressing the painter, "we are men capable of answering for our acts, are we not?"

"It is of little consequence for us to be recognised," answered the latter; "but what hinders us from setting out? Is everything ready?"

"Everything is ready; I have a numerous troop of bold companions concealed like *guanacos* in the thicket. We will leave when you like."

"Well, I think the sooner the better."

"Let us go, then."

"One moment, Señor! I have dispatched one of the retainers of my master to keep watch; perhaps it would be well to wait his return."

"Just so; however," said Emile, "in order not to lose time, it would be well to leave here, and mount horse, that would allow the gaucho to overtake us. As soon as he comes we will proceed on our journey."

"Well said; only I am somewhat embarrassed at this moment."

"Why?"

"Why, to mount a horse, it is necessary to have one, and I fear some of us have none."

"I have thought of that; do not bother yourself about that little circumstance. There are, in the rancho, six horses that I have had brought here today," said Tyro.

"Oh! then nothing prevents us; let me just give a look out, and I will tell you when it is time to rejoin me."

And after having with a gesture ordered his companions to follow him, the Montonero disappeared in the gallery.

There only remained in the cavern the two ladies, the painter, and the Guaraní.

"My good Tyro," then said Emile, "I do not know how to acknowledge your devotion; you are not one of those men whom one pays, but, before separating, I should wish to give you a proof of—"

"Pardon, master," quickly interrupted Tyro, "if I interrupt you. Did you speak of separating?"

"Yes, my friend, and believe me, that this causes me real sorrow; but I have no right to condemn you any longer to share my bad fortune."

"You are then discontented with my services, master? If it is so, excuse me, I shall try for the future better to understand your intentions, in order to execute them to your entire satisfaction."

"What!" cried the young man, with a joyful surprise, "You intend to follow me, notwithstanding the bad position in which I am, and the dangers of all kinds which surround me?"

"These dangers would themselves be an additional reason for me not to leave you, master," he answered, with emotion, "if I had already not decided on not abandoning you. Although I may not be of much account—although I may be but a poor Indian—nevertheless, there are certain occasions when one is happy to know that there is a devoted heart available."

"Tyro," said the Frenchman, profoundly touched with the simple and sincere affection of this man, "you are no longer my servant, you are my friend, take my hand. Whatever may happen, I shall never forget what has passed this moment between us."

"Thank you, oh! Thank you," answered he, kissing his hand; "then you agree that I shall accompany you."

"*Pardieu!*" cried he, "It is now between us for life and death; we will never leave each other more."

"And you will speak to me as before."

"I will speak to you as you wish; are you content?" pursued he with a smile.

"Thank you once more, master. Oh! Make your mind easy; you shall never repent the kindness

that you have shown me."

"I know it well; therefore, I am easy. Go, and you have but to try and reassure me."

"Come," said the Montonero, reappearing; "all is ready; we only wait for you; as to the horses—"

"I will take care of that," answered Tyro.

They then went to the gallery; the horses of the young man were not in the stable which had been assigned to them, but he did not disquiet himself on that account.

They soon came out into the midst of the underwood, where, the night before, the Spaniards and the patriots had waged so furious a battle. A numerous troop of horsemen was stationed motionless and silent before the entrance of the cavern.

The Guaraní had taken precautions; when the Montonero came out into the open air, he immediately found the gaucho, holding several horses by the bridle.

"Here are your horses, ladies," said he, addressing them; "here are two coursers of very sure and swift pace."

The marchioness thanked him. The Indian fastened behind the horses the valises that she had given him, and then assisted the mother and the daughter to place themselves in the saddles.

Emile, the Montonero, and the gaucho were already mounted.

Two horses still remained—one for Tyro, the other for Sacatripas.

At the moment when the Guaraní put his feet in the stirrups, a sharp whistle was heard in the woods.

"There is our scout," said he; and he answered the signal.

Sacatripas, indeed, almost immediately appeared.

The gaucho appeared to have been running rapidly; his chest heaved, his face was covered with perspiration.

"Let us go, let us go!" said he, in a sad voice; "If, we do not want to be smoked out like wolves. In less than half an hour they will be here."

"The devil!" cried the Montonero; "That is bad news, companion."

"It is certain."

"What direction must we take?"

"That of the mountains."

"So much the better—that is what I prefer;" and then raising his voice, "Advance!" he cried; "And do not let us spare the horses!"

The horsemen applied the spurs as they loosed their bridles, and all the troop darted forward in the darkness with the rapidity of a hurricane, taking the plain in a right line, clearing ravines and thickets without taking count of obstacles.

The two ladies were placed between Emile and the Guaraní, who were themselves each flanked by a gaucho. There was something strange and fantastic in the mad flight of this black legion, flying in the darkness, silent and sad, with the irresistible rapidity of a whirlwind.

The flight continued thus for several hours; the horses gasped; some even began to stumble.

"Whatever happens, we must stop an hour," murmured the Pincheyra; "if not, we shall soon be dismounted."

Tyro heard him.

"Let us only reach the rancho of the Quemado," said he.

"What good will that be?" sharply replied the Montonero; "We are still two leagues from it at least; our horses will be completely knocked up."

"What matter? I have prepared a relay."

"A relay! We are too numerous."

"Two hundred horses await us."

"Two hundred horses! Mercy! Your master is very rich, then?"

"He?" said the Indian, laughing; "He is as poor as Job. But," added he, significantly, "his companions are rich, and I have been preparing this flight for twelve days, foreseeing what would happen today."

"Then," cried the Montonero, with feverish emotion, "ahead! Ahead! companions, though the horses be killed!"

The journey was continued with feverish rapidity.

A little before sunrise they reached the rancho. It was time they did so; the horses were only kept up by the bridle; they stumbled at each step, and several had already fallen never to rise again.

Their masters, with that careless philosophy which characterises the gauchos, after having relieved them of their saddles, and having charged themselves with them, had abandoned the horses and followed the cavalcade as well as they could by running.

The rancho of the Quemado was in some respects but a vast shed, to which was attached an immense inclosure filled with horses.

At three or four leagues behind, were extended, as a sombre barrier, the first chain of the Cordilleras, whose snowy tops masked the horizon.

On the order of Santiago, the fatigued horses were; abandoned after their saddles had been removed, and, each Montonero entered the enclosure, whirling his lago round him.

Each man had soon caught the horse which he wanted, and proceeded to harness it.

There remained eighty or one hundred horses in the inclosure.

"We must not leave these horses here," said the Montonero; "our enemies would make use of them to pursue us."

"It is easy to avoid that," observed Tyro; "there is a *yegua madrina*, we will put a bell on her; the horses will follow her; ten of our companions will set out in advance with them."

"*Pardieu!* You are a valuable comrade," replied the Montonero, joyously; "nothing is more easy."

The order was immediately given by him, and the spare horses were soon out of sight, in the direction of the mountains, under the escort of some horsemen.

The horses, thus at liberty, could make long tracks without fatiguing themselves. This mode of relay is generally adopted in America, where it is almost impossible otherwise to procure fresh horses.

"Now," resumed the Montonero, "I think we shall do well to mount horse again."

"Yes, and to set out again," added Emile, extending his arm towards the plain.

In the first rays of the sun, which glittered on their arms, a numerous troop of horsemen was perceived coming towards them at full speed.

"*Rayo de Dios!*" cried Don Santiago; "The scout was right; we were closely followed; the demons have made haste, but now it is too late for them. We do not fear them any longer. To your saddles, and ahead! Ahead!"

They set out again.

This time the journey was not so rapid. The fugitives believed themselves safe, not to be overtaken. The lead they had gained was too great, and, according to all probability, they would arrive at the mountains before the patriots could reach them.

Once in the passes of the Cordilleras, they were saved.

The flight, however, could not but be fatiguing to the two ladies, who, accustomed to all the refinements of luxury, could only keep themselves on horseback by dint of energy and of will, and stimulated especially by the fear of again falling into the hands of their persecutors. Tyro and his master were obliged to keep constantly by their side, and watch over them attentively. Without this precaution they would have fallen from their horses—not so much by reason of the fatigue they suffered, though that fatigue was great, but because sleep overcame them, and prevented them, notwithstanding all their efforts, from keeping their eyes open and guiding their horses.

"But who has betrayed us?" suddenly exclaimed Don Santiago.

"I know him," answered Sacatripas.

"You know him, Señor? Well, then, you will do me the pleasure of telling me, will you not?"

"It is useless, Señor. The man who has betrayed you is dead; only he has been killed two hours too late."

"That is unfortunate, indeed; and why too late?"

"Because he had had time to speak."

"A good many things can be said in two hours, especially when there is no interruption. And you are sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"At least," philosophically replied the Montonero, "we have the consolation of being certain that he will speak no more—there is something in that. As to the men who follow us," added he, turning round, "we—"

But he suddenly checked himself, uttering a horrible oath, and bounding from his saddle.

"What is the matter?" asked Emile, with uneasiness.

"*¡Mil demonios!*—that these pícaros are gaining on us every moment, and that in an hour they will have reached us."

"Oh! Oh!" quickly cried the young man; "Do you think so?"

"Why, look yourself."

The painter looked; the Montonero had spoken truly. The enemy's troop was sensibly approaching.

"*¡Caray!* I do not know what I would give to know who are these demons."

"They are part of the squadron of Don Zeno Cabral I even believe that he is among them."

"So much the better!" said the Montonero, with rage; "I shall perhaps have my revenge."

"Do you intend to fight these people?"

"*Pardieu!* Do you think that I will allow myself to be shot from behind, like a cowardly dog?"

"I do not say that; but it appears to me that we can redouble our pace."

"What good will that be? Do you not see that these fellows have with them a fresh *recua*, and that they will still overtake us? We had better anticipate them."

"As affairs stand, I believe, with you, that that will be best," said Emile, who feared that the Montonero might suppose he was afraid.

"Good!" answered Don Santiago, "You are a man! Let me act."

Then, without anyone foreseeing what was his intention, he made his horse suddenly dart off, and dashed at full speed to the front of the patriots.

"Tyro," then said Emile, addressing the Guaraní, "take with you the two brothers that you have engaged in my service, and put the marchioness and her daughter in safety."

"Señor, why separate us?" asked the marchioness, with a sorrowful air; "Would it not be better for us to remain near you?"

"Pardon me for insisting on this temporary separation, Madame. I have sworn to do all I can to save you, and I will keep my word."

The marchioness, overcome, either by the lassitude she suffered, or by the sleep which, spite of her efforts, weighed down her eyelids, only answered by a sigh.

"You will not abandon these ladies under any pretext," continued the young man, addressing the Indian; "and if misfortune happen to me during the combat, you will continue to serve them, as far as they require your protection. May I reckon on you?"

"As on yourself, master."

"Advance, then! And God protect you."

On a sign from the Indian the gauchos took by the bridle the horses of the two ladies, and setting off at a gallop, they took these horses with them, without the fugitives, who perhaps had not a thorough knowledge of what was passing, trying to oppose them.

The painter, who, as they galloped, followed them with his eyes, saw them disappear in the midst of a thick cluster of trees, where the first chain of the Cordilleras commenced.

"Thank God! Conquerors or conquered, they will not fall into the hands of their persecutors," said he; "I have kept my promise."

Suddenly, several shots afar off were heard. Emile looked round and perceived Don Santiago, who was returning at full speed towards his troop, brandishing his carbine above his head, with an air of defiance.

Three or four horsemen were in hot pursuit of him.

Arrived at a certain distance the Spaniard stopped, shouldered his carbine and fired, and then started off again at a gallop.

A horseman fell; the others retreated.

The Spaniard soon found himself again in the midst of his own people.

"Halt!" cried he, with a voice of thunder.

The troop immediately stopped.

"Companions, loyal subjects of the king," continued he; "I have reconnoitered these *ladrones;* they are scarcely forty. Shall we fly any longer before them? Advance! And long live the king!"

"Forward!" repeated the troop, rushing forward with him.

Emile charged with the others—with rather a sullen air, it is true; he cared as little for the king as for the country, and it appeared to him wiser to have made their escape as rapidly as possible; but as, in reality, it was his own cause that these men were defending—as it was to protect him that they fought—he was obliged to take heart against fortune, and not to remain in arrear.

Notwithstanding their small number, the patriots did not appear at all intimidated by the aggressive return of the Spaniards, and continued bravely to advance.

The shock was terrible; the two troops resolutely attacked each other with their swords, and soon found themselves mingled together.

In the *mêlée* Emile recognised Don Zeno Cabral. He darted towards him, and, striking with the chest of his horse that of his adversary, fatigued with a long journey, the latter was overthrown.

Leaping immediately to the ground, the young man immediately put his knee to the chest of Don Zeno, and putting the point of his sabre to his throat—

"Surrender!" said he.

"No!" answered the latter.

"Death! Death!" cried Don Santiago, who now came up.

"Let the fight cease," answered Emile, turning towards him; "this gentleman has surrendered, on

condition that he shall be free to return to San Miguel with his companions."

"Who has authorised you to make conditions?" said the Montonero.

"The service I have rendered you, and the promise you have made me."

The Spaniard suppressed a gesture of rage.

"Well," answered he, after a pause; "you wish it; let it be so, but you will repent of it. Retreat!"

And he left.

"You are free," said the young man, holding out his hand to Don Zeno, to aid him in rising.

The latter darted a fierce look at him.

"I am obliged to accept your offer," said he, "but all is not finished between us. We shall see one another again."

"I hope so," simply answered the young man; and, remounting his horse, he rejoined his companions, already a good way off.

Two hours later, the Spaniards penetrated the first defiles of the Cordilleras, while the patriots returned leisurely and sufficiently discontented at the result of their expedition to San Miguel de Tucuman, where they arrived at nightfall of the same day.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.—THE MONTONERO

CHAPTER I.

EL RINCÓN DEL BOSQUECILLO.

It was about the middle of a southern summer; the heat during the whole day had been suffocating; the dust had covered the leaves of the trees with a thick layer of a greyish tint, which gave to the landscape— picturesque and varied as it was in the *Llano de Manso*, where our narrative recommences—a sad and desolate appearance, which, happily, was soon to disappear, thanks to the abundant shower of the night, which, in washing the trees, would bring back to them their primitive colour.

The *llano* presented, as far as the eye could reach, in all directions, only an uninterrupted chain of low hills, covered with a yellowish grass, dried up by the burning rays of the sun, and under which myriads of red grasshoppers uttered in emulation of each other their sharp twitterings.

At some distance on the right was a little stream, half dried up, which meandered like a silver ribbon, bordered with a narrow fringe of mastic trees, of guanas, and of thistles. Only on an elevated shore of this stream, called the Rio Bermejo, and which is an affluent of the Parana, there was a thick wood, a kind of oasis, planted by the all-powerful hand of God in this desert, and the fresh and green foliage of which strongly contrasted with the yellow tint which formed the chief feature of the landscape.

Black swans allowed themselves carelessly to drift on the stream; hideous iguanas wallowed in the mire; flights of partridges and turtledoves rapidly flew to the shelter of the trees; here and there vicuñas and viscachas were bounding and playing in the air; and high in the air large bald vultures were wheeling their flight in broad circles.

From the profound calm which reigned in this desert, and from its wild appearance, it would seem to have remained as it had come from the hands of the Creator, and never to have been trodden by a human foot.

But it was not so; the Llano de Manso—the furthermost plains of which reached the banks of the Grand Chaco, the almost impregnable refuge of the Indian bravos, or of those whom the cruelty of the Spaniards had, after the dispersion of the missions founded by the Jesuits, thrown back into barbarism—is in some respects a neutral territory, where all the tribes, by a tacit understanding, had their rendezvous for hunting. It is incessantly traversed in all directions by warriors belonging to tribes the most hostile to each other, but who, when they meet on this privileged territory, forget for the time their rivalry or their hereditary hatred, to remember only the hospitality of the llano—that is to say, the freedom that each one ought to have to hunt or travel as he pleased.

The whites have but rarely, and at long intervals, penetrated into this country, and always with some apprehension; so much the more, as the Indians, continually beaten back by civilisation—feeling the importance of preserving this territory for themselves—defended its approaches with unspeakable fury, torturing and massacring without pity the whites whose curiosity or ill fortune brought into this region.

However, notwithstanding these apparently insurmountable difficulties, bold explorers have not

been afraid to visit the llano, and to traverse it at their risk and peril, with the design of enriching the domain of science by interesting discoveries.

It is to them that the wood of which we have spoken, and which appears an oasis in this sea of sand, owes its charming name of Rincón del Bosquecillo, out of gratitude, no doubt, for the freshness they have found there, and the shelter that has been offered them after their long and fatiguing journey in the desert.

The sun was rapidly setting on the horizon, considerably lengthening the shadow of the rocks, bushes, and a few trees here and there scattered in the llano. The panthers already commenced to utter their hoarse and mournful growlings as they sought their drinking places; the jaguars bounded out of their dens with dull cries of anger, lashing with their powerful tails their panting sides; troops of wild oxen and horses fled frightened before these dreadful kings of the night, whom the first hours of evening rendered masters of the desert.

At the moment when the sun, having reached the level of the horizon, was drowned, so to say, in waves of purple and gold, a troop of horsemen appeared on the right bank of the Rio Bermejo, proceeding apparently towards the bank of which we have spoken, on the summit of which was the thick wood called the Rincón del Bosquecillo.

These horsemen were Indian Guaycurus, recognisable by their elegant costumes, by the band which circled their heads, and especially by the matchless grace with which they managed their horses—noble sons of the desert—as fiery and as untameable as their masters.

They formed a troop of about fifty men, all armed as warriors, and not having any tuft of ostrich feathers or streamers at the point of their lances—which showed that they were on some important expedition, and not united for the chase.

A little in advance of the troop were two men, chiefs, as was shown by the vulture's feather placed in their red bands, and whose external appearance contrasted strongly with that of their companions.

They wore variegated ponchos, trousers of brown holland, and boots made of leather from horse's legs. Their arms—*laco bolas*, lance and knives—were the same as those of their companions; but here the resemblance stopped.

The first was a young man of twenty-two at the most. His figure was tall, elegant, supple, and well formed; his manners noble, his least gesture graceful. No painting, no tattooing, disfigured his expressive features, of almost feminine beauty, but to which—an extraordinary thing in an Indian—a black beard, short and frizzled, gave a masculine and decided expression. This beard, added to the dull white of the skin of the young man, would have made him pass easily for a white man, if he had worn a European costume. However, let us hasten to state that among the Indians men are often met with whose skin is completely white, and who appear to belong to the Caucasian race. This singularity, therefore, did not attract any attention among their companions, who attached no other importance to it than to cause them to manifest for them a greater respect, believing them to be descended from the privileged race of men who first united them into tribes, and taught them the first elements of civilisation.

The young man, whose portrait we have briefly sketched, was the principal chief of the warriors by whom he was at this moment followed. He was named Gueyma, and notwithstanding his youth, he enjoyed a great reputation in his tribe for wisdom and bravery.

His companion, as far as it was possible—in spite of his upright figure, his hair black as the raven's wing, and his countenance free from wrinkles—to fix his age with any certainty, was about seventy. However, as we have said, no sign of decrepitude was observable in him; his eye shone with all the fire of youth, his limbs were supple and vigorous; his teeth, of which not one was missing, were brilliantly white, rendered more striking by the dark hue of his complexion, although, like the other chief, he had neither tattoo nor painting; but, in default of physical signs of old age, the expression of severity on his fine and intelligent countenance, his emphatic gestures, and the measured slowness with which he let fall the least word, would have proved to every man accustomed to the Indians that this chief was very aged, and that he enjoyed among his people a great renown for wisdom and prudence, rather holding his place at the council fire of the tribe, than at the head of a war expedition.

In the centre of the troop were two men who, by their complexion and their clothing, it was easy to recognise as Europeans.

These men, though they were without arms, appeared to be treated, if not as completely free, at least with a certain consideration, which proved that they were not looked upon as prisoners.

They were two young men of twenty-five or twenty-eight, dressed in the costume of Brazilian officers, with fine bold features, and careless and hearty expression. They galloped in the midst of the Indian warriors without appearing to concern themselves in any way as to the place whither they were being conducted, and talked gaily, changing from time to time a few words in a good-humoured tone, with the warriors nearest to them.

The sun had set below the horizon, and perfect darkness had almost immediately replaced the light of day—as happens in all intertropical countries, which have no twilight—at the moment when the Indians were ascending at a gallop the scarcely-traced path which led to the summit of the bank, and gave access to the wood.

Arrived in the middle of a glade—from which sprang a stream of water, clear and limpid, which, after a tortuous course through the rocks, fell in the form of a splendid cascade into the Rio

Bermejo, from a height Of forty or fifty feet—the young Gueyma chief stopped his horse, leaped from his saddle, and ordered his warriors to instal themselves in a camp for the night; his intention being not to go farther that day.

The latter obeyed; they immediately alighted, and quickly occupied themselves with securing the horses, giving them provender, lighting the watch fires, and in preparing the repast for the evening.

Some five or six warriors had alone preserved their arms, and were stationed on the outskirts of the glade, to watch over the safety of their companions.

The two Brazilian officers, no doubt fatigued with the long journey during the great heat of the day, had, with a sigh of relief, heard the order of the chief, and had obeyed it with a speed which testified to the desire which they felt to take repose.

Twenty minutes later the fires were lighted, a covering constructed to shelter the whites against the abundant dew of the morning, and the warriors, clustered in little groups of four or five, ate with a good appetite the simple provisions placed before them—consisting for the most part of yams, baked under ashes, of the meal of manioc, and of meat dried in the sun, and roasted over the fire—the whole accompanied with limpid water from the stream—a wholesome and fortifying beverage, but in no way liable to get into the heads of the guests.

The chiefs had, through a warrior, invited the Brazilian officers to take part in the meal—a courteous invitation that the latter had accepted with so much the more pleasure as, with the exception of gourds full of sugar cane brandy, which they carried at their saddles, they were completely without provisions, and at over time thought they were condemned to a forced fast—a prospect all the more disagreeable for them, as they were literally dying with hunger, not having had the opportunity, since the previous evening, of taking any other refreshment than a little brandy, diluted with water, a regimen quite insufficient for them, but to which they had resolutely submitted, rather than exhibit their distress to the Indians, amongst whom they had accidentally been thrown. Happily for them, the Guaycurus chiefs had noticed this forced abstinence, and had kindly put an end to it by inviting the young men to sup with them—a proceeding which had the double advantage of saving the pride of the officers, and of breaking the ice between them and the Indians.

However, as often happens between persons who do not know each other, or who at least know one another but little, the first few minutes were embarrassing to these four companions, so different in manners and disposition.

The officers, after a ceremonious bow, which the chiefs acknowledged in a very awkward fashion, seated themselves on the grass, and attacked the provisions set before them, at first with a certain forbearance which politeness demanded; but they soon gave way to the imperious demands of their appetites.

"*Epoï!*" said the old chief, with a smile of good humour, "I am happy, gentlemen, to see you so much enjoy so poor a meal."

"Upon my word," answered one of the officers, laughing, "poor or not, chief, it comes at a time when we cannot disdain it."

"Hum!" said the second, "it is just twenty-four hours since we have eaten; and that is rather a long time."

"Why did you not say that before?" resumed the chief; "We would immediately have given orders for you to have the necessary provisions."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, chief; but it neither suited our dignity nor our disposition to make such a request to you."

"The whites have strange scruples," murmured Gueyma, speaking rather to himself than to the officers.

However, they heard the remark, to which one of them replied—

"It is not a question of delicacy, chief, but an innate feeling of propriety amongst men who not only respect themselves, but also in themselves respect those whom they are charged to represent."

"You will excuse us, Señor," pursued Gueyma, "we Indians, almost savages, as you call us, know nothing of those subtle distinctions that you are pleased to establish; the life of the desert does not teach such things."

"And we are, perhaps, only the more happy that it is so," added the old chief.

"Possibly," answered the officer; "I will not discuss so futile a point with you. Let us quit this subject, and allow me to offer you a mouthful of brandy."

And after having uncorked his gourd, he presented it to the chief.

The latter, pushing away the gourd, looked in astonishment at the officer.

"You refuse me?" asked the latter, "For what motive, chief? Have I not accepted what you have offered me?"

The Indian several times shook his head.

"My son is not accustomed to be in the company of the Guaycurus," said he.

"Why this question, chief?"

"Because," answered he, "if it were otherwise, the young pale chief would know that the Guaycurus warriors never drink that liquid which the whites name ardent spirits, and which makes them stupid; the water from the springs which the Great Spirit, Macunhan, has profusely scattered in the desert is sufficient to slake their thirst."

"Excuse my ignorance, chief; I had no intention of offending you."

"Where there is no intention, as the paleface says," answered the old chief, smiling, "an injury cannot exist."

"Well spoken, my master," gaily pursued the young man. "I should have been annoyed if an inconsiderate action on my part had disturbed the good understanding which ought to exist between us; so much the more, as I wish to ask you a few questions, if it is not inconvenient."

The meal was concluded. The two chiefs had rolled up some tobacco in palm leaves, and were smoking; the officers had lighted their cigars.

"What are the questions that the paleface wishes to ask me?" pursued the Indian.

"First, let me tell you, that since chance has brought me among you, I am a prey to continual astonishment."

"*Epoï!*" said the chief, smiling; "Indeed!"

"Upon my word, yes. I had never seen an Indian. At Rio de Janeiro, when they spoke to me of the redskins, they were represented as men quite savage, fierce, faithless—entirely sunk in the most horrible barbarism. I thus acquired an impression which, according to what I now see, was most erroneous."

"Ah, ah! And what does the paleface now see?"

"Why, I see men brave, intelligent—enjoying a civilization different to ours, it is true, but which is civilization, nevertheless—chiefs like you and your companion for example, speaking the Portuguese language as well as myself, and who, in all circumstances, act with a prudence and wisdom, and a circumspection which I have often regretted I have not met with in my own countrymen. That is what I have seen among you up to the present time, chief, without taking account of the white complexion of your companion, which—you will admit—added to his features, and the expression of his countenance, gives him rather the appearance of a European than of an Indian warrior."

The two chiefs smiled as they exchanged a stealthy look, and the elder resumed, with an expression of pride—

"The Guaycurus are descendants of the great Tupinambas, the ancient possessors of Brazil, before the whites had robbed them of their territory. They are called by the palefaces themselves *Cavalheiros*. The Guaycurus are masters of the desert; who would dare to resist them? When many winters shall have blanched the hair of my son, and he shall have seen other Indian nations, he will recognise the immense difference that exists between the noble Guaycurus and the miserable savages scattered here and there in the *llanos*."

The young officer bowed affirmatively.

"So," said he, "the Guaycurus are the most civilised among the Indians?"

"The only civilised," answered the chief, with pride; "the Great Spirit loves and protects them."

"I admit it, chief; but that does not explain to me how it is that you speak our language with perfection—a perfection which you warriors are far from attaining, for they can scarcely understand a word I say to them."

"The Cougar has lived many years," answered he; "the snows of many a great winters have fallen on his head since he saw the light. The Cougar was a warrior before the paleface was born. At that time the chief visited the great villages of the whites; for several moons he even lived amongst them as if he had formed part of their families. He thus loves them, although he has left them forever to rejoin his tribe. The whites taught the Cougar their language. Has my son any other questions to ask him?"

"No, chief; I thank you sincerely for the frank and friendly way in which you have been pleased to answer me. I am the more delighted at the sympathy which you say you have for my countrymen, as in the circumstances in which we are placed, this sympathy cannot but be very conducive to the satisfactory termination of the business we have in hand."

"I hope it may be so."

"And I also, with all my heart. Are we still far distant from the place where the interview is to take place? I confess that I am anxious for the conclusion of the treaty between us."

"Then let my son rejoice, for we have reached the spot assigned by the Guaycurus captains, to the chiefs of the palefaces. The interview of which he speaks will take place probably tomorrow, two or three hours at most after sunrise."

"What! We have already reached the place called by the Spaniards the Rincón del Bosquecillo?"

"It is here."

"Thank God, for the general will not be long before he comes here, as we have already come; and now, chief, accept again my thanks. I am going, with your permission, to take a few hours'

repose, which I really want, after the fatigues of the journey which has just finished."

"Let my sons sleep; sleep is good for young men," answered the chief, with a benevolent smile.

The officers immediately withdrew under the awning prepared for them, and were not long before they slept.

The chiefs remained, facing each other.

The Guaycurus warriors, stretched before the fires, slept, enveloped in their ponchos.

But the sentinels watched, and were motionless as bronze statues, their eyes open to the surrounding country, and their ears ready for the least sound.

A complete calm reigned in the desert; the night was warm, clear, and starlight.

The Cougar looked for a moment pensively at his companion, and then, after looking inquiringly around him—

"Of what is Gueyma thinking at this moment?" said he, with a gentle voice, and in a tone of tender nation; "Is he communing with his heart? Do his thoughts recall the pleasant memory of Dove's Eye, the Virgin with the azure eyes or is his spirit busy with the meeting scheduled for tomorrow?"

The young man trembled, raised his head and cast an uncertain look, in which a spark glowed, on the old chief, who looked at him sadly.

"No," he replied with a voice, silent and broken by inner emotion: "my father has not clearly read in the heart of his son; the memory of Dove's eye is ever present in Gueyma's soul: she need not be called up to shine even more. The result of the conference that will take place tomorrow is not of the young chief's concern. His mind is elsewhere; he wanders in the midst of the clouds guided by the wind to seek his father."

The face of the old chief suddenly grew dark with these words; he frowned his brow and answered after a while with an uncertain, emotional voice:

"Is that thought still tormenting you, my son?"

"Still!" replied the young man with some animation; "Until the Cougar has fulfilled his promise."

"Which promise is that, that my son reminds me of?"

"This, to reveal to me my father's name; because I never knew him as a child; and because the warriors of my nation sadly turn their heads when I ask them why he left from our midst so long ago."

"Yes, surely," replied the Cougar, "I did promise that to my son, but he gave me another one, doesn't he remember?"

"Yes, my father; forgive me, I do remember, but my father is good, and will be tolerant toward a young man and pardon an impatience that only comes forth from his childish love."

"My son is not only one of the most feared warriors of his nation, but also one of the most renown chiefs; he must be the example of patience for all. It will seal his mouth better, if I don't disclose the secret; to learn that when he is so impatient the men will follow him therein, to give him this and this only thought; it is: to see him once happy."

After he had spoken these words in a tone both stern and moved, the old chief wrapped his poncho around him, stretched himself on the ground and closed his eyes.

Gueyma gave him a glance with a mixture of indescribable anger, reverence and despondency; then he sighed deeply, and let his head sink to his chest, overwhelmed by sleep. He lay down beside his fellow tribesmen. Soon there were no more people awake in the whole of the Indian encampment, except for the sentinels appointed to watch over the common safety.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREATY.

The night was calm; nothing disturbed its peaceful and majestic tranquillity. The guardsmen kept watch with a conscientious alertness over the repose of their kinsmen, which is not very often the case among the Indians.

At about half past four in the morning, the darkness gradually began to give way to the still faint glow of the first daylight; the sky painted itself with broad strokes of changing colours, which at last blended into a brilliant red, and the sun appeared rising above the horizon as if it had come from a furnace, suddenly illuminating the heavens with its resplendent rays, which resembled flakes of fire.

In the desert the first hours of the morning are the sweetest and the most splendid of the day.

Nature, on awaking calm and refreshed, appears during the darkness to have resumed all her powers. The freshened foliage is pearled with dew; a light and transparent mist rises from the ground, and is speedily absorbed by the sun; a fresh breeze ripples the silvery surface of the

rivers and the lakes, agitates the branches of the trees, and sends a quivering through the tall grass, from the midst of which rise every now and then the heads of affrightened oxen, wild horses, deer, or gazelles; while the birds, joyously clapping their wings, make their morning toilet, or fly about with cries and twitterings of pleasure.

The Indians are not generally heavy sleepers; so the sun had scarcely appeared above the horizon than they all awoke and proceeded to dress, washing themselves every day; for the Guaycurus, contrary to other American tribes, number among their characteristics that of strict cleanliness, and even have a kind of coquetry in the arrangement of their picturesque clothing.

At the voice of Cougar, they united in a semicircle, their eyes turned towards the rising sun, and addressed a fervent prayer to the radiant orb of day—not that they look upon it as positively a god, but because it is, according to their belief, the visible representative of the invisible Divinity, and the great dispenser of benefits.

We have remarked with astonishment this worship rendered to the sun in all the countries of America, as well in the south as in the north, and which, although varied in form, is everywhere in substance the same in all the indigenous tribes. Moreover, this natural religion must be more easily understood by primitive races, who thus render homage to what the more forcibly strikes their eyes than their senses.

This pious duty accomplished, the warriors arose, and immediately shared the labours of the camp.

Some led the horses to water; others rubbed them down carefully; some went to cut wood, in order to rekindle the smouldering fires, whilst some five or six chosen warriors, leaping on their barebacked horses, started off into the savannah, to procure by hunting the necessary provisions for their breakfast, and that of their companions.

In a few minutes the camp offered a most animated picture; for just as the Indians are idle and careless when their wives, to whom they abandon all the domestic work, are with them, so they are active and alert in their war expeditions, during which they cannot claim their wives' assistance.

The Brazilian officers, awakened by the noise and movements which were being made around them, came out from the canopy under which they had passed the night, and proceeded gaily to mix among the groups of Indians, having themselves also to tend their horses, and to see that nothing had occurred to them during the night.

The Guaycurus received them in the most cordial way, laughing and talking with them, affably inquiring if they had well slept, and if they were completely recovered from their fatigue of the previous day.

Soon all was in order in the camp; the horses which had been led to water were again attached to pickets, with a good supply of fresh grass; the huntsmen returned loaded with game; and the morning meal, prepared in all haste, was soon served to the guests on large banana and palm leaves, which served for plates and dishes.

Immediately after breakfast, the Cougar—after having conversed some minutes with Gueyma, who, although the principal chief of the detachment, appeared only to act under his counsel—dispatched several scouts in different directions.

"Your friends are late in arriving," said he to the Brazilian officers; "perhaps something has occurred to hinder them. These men are charged to ascertain the state of affairs, and to announce to us their approach."

The officers bowed as a sign of assent; they had nothing to reply to this observation, especially as they themselves began to be uneasy at the delay of the persons expected.

Several hours thus passed. The Guaycurus warriors talked among themselves, smoked, or fished from the banks of the Rio Bermejo; but no Indian wandered far from the camp, in the midst of which was raised, as a standard, the long lance of Gueyma planted in the ground, and having floating at its summit a white banner made with a handkerchief borrowed from the officer.

About eleven in the morning the sentinels signalled the appearance of two troops coming from two opposite directions, but both riding towards the camp.

The Guaycurus chief dispatched two warriors towards these troops.

The latter returned in a very few minutes.

They had recognised the strangers. The first were Macobis, the others Trentones.

But almost immediately appeared a third troop, then a fourth, then a fifth, and at last a sixth.

Scouts were immediately dispatched to meet them, and they were not long in returning, announcing that they were detachments of Chiriguanos, Langoas, Abipones, and Payagoas.

"*Epoï!*" answered the Cougar, at each announcement which was made to him; "The warriors will camp at the foot of the hill; the chiefs will come up near us."

The scouts then set off at full speed, and proceeded to communicate to the captains of the different detachments the orders of their chief.

Arrived at a certain distance from the bank, on the summit of which the camp of the Guaycurus was established, the Indian detachments stopped, uttered their war cry with a resounding voice, and, after having executed certain evolutions, making their horses caracole, they proceeded to

establish themselves at the points which had been assigned to them.

The chiefs of their detachments, followed each by two warriors more particularly attached to their persons, ascended the hill at a gallop and entered the camp, where they were received in the most cordial way by the Guaycurus chiefs, who were mounted on horseback, and had advanced some paces to meet them.

After a rather long interchange of compliments, in which all the minute exigencies of Indian etiquette were studied, the chiefs proceeded together towards the council fire, where all sat down without distinction of, place or rank.

There was then perfect silence in the assembly. The slaves gave to each some tobacco rolled in palm leaves, and sent round the *maté* that the chiefs drank slowly and religiously, according to custom.

When the cup had passed from hand to hand, and when the last puff of smoke had been drawn from the rolls of tobacco, Gueyma made a gesture with his hand to claim attention—

"Allied captains of the powerful and invincible tribe of the Guaycurus," said he, "I am happy to see you here, and at the readiness you have shown in coming at the invitation of the members of the supreme council of our tribe. The reason for this extraordinary assembly is extremely important; you will soon learn it. It is not for me, and I should fail in my duty as a faithful ally, if I tried on this occasion to influence your ultimate determination, which your interests alone must of course decide. Let it suffice, at present, to know that your friends the Guaycurus have thought it right only to act in this affair with your consent, and the assistance of your counsel."

A Payagoa chief, aged and of respectable aspect, bowed and answered—

"Captain of the Guaycurus, although still very young, you unite in yourself the prudent circumspection of the agouti with the fervid courage of the jaguar. The words that you utter are inspired by the Great Spirit. In the name of the captains here present, I thank you for the latitude you give us in leaving us entire freedom as to our determinations. We shall, you may be convinced, know how to distinguish the true from the false in this affair; that we are now ignorant of, and, availing ourselves of your wisdom, conclude it according to the laws of justice, while we conform to the interests of the tribes of which we are the representatives."

The other chiefs then bowed, and each in his turn, with his hand placed on his heart, pronounced these words—

"Emavidi Chaïme, the great captain of the Payagoas, has spoken as a prudent man; wisdom is in him."

At this moment one of the sentinels signalled the approach of a numerous troop, shown by a thick cloud of dust which rose on the horizon.

"Here are those with whom we shall now confer," said Gueyma. "To horse, brothers! And let us go to meet them, to do them honour, for they come as friends, which has permitted them to come safe and sound upon our territory."

The captains immediately rose and mounted their horses, that their slaves held by the hand behind them.

Gueyma and the Cougar put themselves at their head; the troop, composed of some fifteen chiefs, all chosen horsemen and warriors, renowned in their tribes, rode like a hurricane from the top to the bottom of the hill, and darted at full speed through the plain, raising in its passage thick clouds of greyish dust, in the midst of which it was not long in disappearing completely.

Meanwhile the newcomers rapidly approached, although with some circumspection, demanded by the rules of strict prudence.

The troop was composed but of ten horsemen, of whom two were Indians, and appeared to act as guides to those who followed them.

The latter were whites—Brazilians—as was easy to discover by their costume.

He who rode at the head of the little troop was a man of some fifty years. With noble and haughty features, and refined and elegant manners, he wore the rich gold-embroidered uniform of a general. Although he sat upright and firmly on his horse, and his full black eye seemed to flash with all the fire of youth, nevertheless, his greyish hair, and the deep wrinkles of his forehead, added to the careworn and pensive expression of his countenance, gave proof of a life which had been much tried, either by passions or the chances of continual war.

The horseman who was at his side wore the costume of a captain, and the insignia of an aide-de-camp; he was about twenty-three or twenty-four. He had a proud eye and noble and regular features; his countenance indicated bravery; and an expression of bantering carelessness gave to it an undefinable air of knowing confidence.

The six other horsemen were dressed in the costume of soldiers of the Conquista; one of the two bore the insignia of a sub-officer.

As to the Indians, who probably acted as guides to, the troop, they did not carry any apparent arms, but thanks to the war dress and by the feather planted in the bright red band which circled their forehead, it was easy to recognise them as Guaycurus chiefs.

Both—warriors of a certain age, and of sombre and reserved appearance—galloped silently side by side, their eyes obstinately fixed in front, and not appearing in any way to occupy themselves with the Brazilians, who came a few paces after them.

As they rode, the two officers talked with a freedom which, considering the difference of grade, showed a certain intimacy between them, or at least a long acquaintance.

"Here we are at last, arrived at the Bosquecillo," said the captain, casting a curious look around him, "and this river is the Rio Bermejo, which we have been obliged twice already to cross. Upon my word— saving the respect that I owe you, general—I am happy to see at last this mysterious territory, which these brutes of Indians guard with such jealous mistrust."

"Hush! Don Paulo," answered the general, placing a finger on his lips, "do not speak so loud; our guides can hear you."

"Bah! Do you think so, general? At this distance?"

"I know the sharpness of ear of these fellows, my dear Don Paulo; take my advice; be prudent."

"I will follow your counsel, general—especially as, according to what you tell me, you have had some experience of these Indians."

"Yes," answered the general, with a suppressed sigh; "I had something to do with them on a terrible occasion; and although long years have flown since then, the memory of it is always present to my thoughts. But let us quit that subject, and speak of the occasion which brings us today in these parts. I do not conceal from you, my friend, that, honourable as may be the mission which has been confided to me by the Government, I consider it extremely difficult, and as presenting very few chances of success."

"Is that really your opinion, general?"

"Certainly. I should not wish to speak diplomatically with you."

"Do you fear treachery on the part of these Indians?"

"Who knows? However, as far as I know of the manners of the tribe with which we have especially to do, I feel assured that all will be done honourably."

"Hum! Do you know, general, that our friends would be in a terrible position if the fancy seized these Indians to violate the right of nations? For—pardon me, general, for saying so—it appears to me that if our guides should have the desire to leave us in the lurch, nothing would be more easy for them, and then, what hostages—when they had gone—would answer for the lives of our companions?"

"What you say is very true; unhappily, I have not been able to take any other measures. I ought, in the interest even of our companions, to leave these Indians free, and to treat them honourably; their disposition is very gloomy; they do not pardon what they believe to be an insult. Moreover, one thing reassures me; it is, that if they had the intention of betraying us, they would not have waited until this moment to do so; a long time ago they would have abandoned us."

"That is true; and in fact, if I am not deceived, here we are at the rendezvous."

"Or at least we shall arrive there before half an hour."

"Our guides have, without doubt, perceived something now, general; for you see they have stopped, and are turning towards us, as if they had a communication to make to you."

"Let us rejoin them, then, as soon as possible," answered the general, spurring his horse, which set off at a gallop.

The two Indians had indeed stopped to await the Brazilians. When the general had reached them he ranged his horse near theirs, and immediately addressing them—

"Well, captains," said he to them, in a cheerful voice, "what has happened that you stop thus short in the middle of the path?"

"My brother and I have stopped," sententiously replied the elder of the two chiefs, "because the captains come to meet the palefaces, to do them the honour which is their due in their quality of ambassadors."

"We have then just reached the place?"

"Look," pursued the chief, stretching out his arms towards the hill, which was distant at the most a mile from the spot where they were.

"Ah! Ah! So I was not deceived; this hill is indeed the Rincón del Bosquecillo?"

"That is the name which the palefaces call it."

"Very well, I am charmed to know it with certainty. You say then, chief, that the captains are coming to meet us?"

"You see that dust?" resumed the Indian; "It is raised by the hasty feet of the captains' horses."

"If it is so, captain, I shall be obliged to you, captain, to inform me what I ought to do."

"Nothing. Wait and respond to the friendly reception of the captains when they arrive."

"That is what I will do with pleasure. By the way, I avail myself of the opportunity of thanking you personally, captain, for the honour with which your companion and you have guided us hitherto."

"We have accomplished our duty; the pale chief; does not owe us any thanks."

"However, captain, honour compels me to acknowledge the loyalty with which you have acquitted yourselves of this duty."

"Tarou Niom and his brother I-me-oh-eh are Guaycurus captains; treachery is unknown to them."

At the first name pronounced by the Indian chief the general had imperceptibly started, and his black eyebrows were for a moment knitted.

"The name of my father is Tarou Niom?" asked he, as if he had wished to know it for certain.

"Yes," laconically answered the Indian; and he added, after a short pause, "these are the captains."

In fact, almost immediately the tall grass appeared to divide, trodden down by several horses, and the Indians appeared.

"The palefaces are welcome on the hunting grounds of the Guaycurus," said Gueyma, after he had gracefully bowed to the general; "the warriors of my tribe and of the allied tribes are happy to see them amongst them."

"I thank the captains for their kind words," answered the general, "and especially for the distinction with which the allies honour me in coming thus to meet me. I am ready to follow the captains to the place whither they please to conduct me."

After some other commonplace politeness, the two troops, blended into one, resumed the direction of the hill.

A few minutes afterwards the Brazilian officers, escorted by the Indian chiefs, reached the summit of the hill, where they were received with marks of the most lively joy by their countrymen.

As soon as they had reached the camp, Gueyma stopped his horse, and, placing his right hand on the shoulder of one of the two officers, who had come forward to meet the newcomers, he turned towards the general—

"Here are the two hostages confided by the palefaces to the Guaycurus captains; these men have been treated by us as brothers."

"Indeed," answered immediately one of the two officers, "we hasten to state that we have only to praise the conduct pursued towards us, and the attentions of which we have been the object."

"I think," said the general, "that the two Guaycurus captains confided to our keeping, to answer for the safety of our hostages, have not had to complain of the manner in which they have been treated by us."

"The palefaces have acted honourably towards the Guaycurus warriors," answered Tarou Niom, bowing to the general.

After some few words the Brazilians were ceremoniously conducted before the council fire, where a felled tree had been prepared to serve them for a seat.

The general took his seat, having his officers at his side, while the soldiers silently ranged themselves behind.

The Guaycurus chiefs and the captains of the other allied nations crouched on their heels in the Indian fashion, in face of the whites, from whom they were only separated by the fire. The rolled tobacco and the cigars were lighted, then the *maté* was presented to the Brazilians, and the council commenced.

"We beg," said Gueyma, "the great captain of the palefaces to repeat, as it has been agreed before the captains of the allied tribes, the propositions that he addressed to us on the Salto Grande, where we met at his request. These propositions, communicated by us to the allied captains, have been, I ought to state, well received by them; however, before engaging themselves definitely, and contracting an offensive alliance with the palefaces here assembled, against other men of the same colour, the captains wish to be assured that these conditions will be strictly and honourably executed by the whites, and that the red warriors will not afterwards have to repent having opened a complacent ear to perfidious counsels. Let my father speak, then the chiefs will hear him with great attention."

The general bowed, and after having looked attentively on the crowd which, so to speak, hung upon his lips, he rose, leant carelessly on the handle of his sabre, and commenced in Portuguese —a language that the greater part of the chiefs spoke with case, and which they all understood.

"Captains of the great allied tribes," said he, "your white grandfather, the powerful monarch that I have the honour to represent, has heard your complaints; the tale of your misfortunes has moved his heart, always good and compassionate, and he has resolved to put an end to the disgraceful vexations of which, for so many years, the Spaniards have made you the victims; therefore, he has sent me to you to communicate his benevolent intentions. Listen, then, to my words; for although it is my mouth that pronounces them, they are in reality the expression of the sentiments of your white grandfather."

A murmur of pleasure received this first part of the general's discourse. When silence was re-established, he continued—

"The Spaniards," pursued he, "in contempt of treaties and of justice, not content with oppressing you—you, the true possessors of the soil we tread—have traitorously seized on large, rich, and fertile territories, belonging for a very long time to the powerful monarch, my master. These territories he means to recover by force of arms. Since the perfidious Spaniards continually break, in the most dishonourable way, the treaties concluded with them, my sovereign, seizing the opportunity which presents itself, to render you that justice to which, as his children, you

have a right, takes your cause in hand, makes it his own, and will protect you in everything. He engages that the hunting grounds which have been so unjustly taken from you shall be restored, and he also engages that not only your liberty, but your life, your flocks—in fact, all that you possess—shall be respected. But it is just, captains, that you should show yourselves grateful for the aid that my sovereign deigns to accord you, and that you will be as faithful towards him as he is towards you. This is what, through me, the powerful sovereign whom I represent demands of you: you shall arm your chosen warriors, of whom you shall form detachments of horsemen under the orders of experienced captains. These detachments shall abandon the Llano de Manso—or, as you call your territory, the valley of Japizlaga; at a signal given by us, and from several points at the same time, they will invade the provinces of Tucuman and Cordova, so as to effect their junction with the Indians of the Pampas, and to harass the Spaniards, to whatever faction they belong, and wherever they may be met with, only attacking isolated parties, and acting as pioneers and scouts, to the troops which the king, my master, will, under my orders, and those of the other chiefs, send into the enemy's territory. The war ended, all the promises made through this *quipu*," added he, throwing into the midst of the assembly a stick split halfway up, and garnished with cords of several colours in the form of chaplets, having seeds, shells, and flints strung upon it, and separated by knots tied in various ways, "their promises, I say, shall be strictly kept. Now, I have given my *quipu* thirty mules, loaded with lassos, bolas, ponchos, frazadas, bits for the horses, knives, &c., wait at the entrance of the llano, under the care of some soldiers. If you please, you can share among yourselves the treasures that the king, my master, deigns to present to you. On my return, if my propositions are accepted, I will give the order that all shall be given to you. I await, then, the reply through your *quipu*, persuaded that you will not falsify the word given, and that the king, my master, shall be able confidently to rely on your loyal assistance."

Warm applause followed the general's speech, and he sat down again with the most unequivocal manifestations of sympathy.

The slaves again sent round the *maté*, and the Indian captains commenced to converse among themselves, although in a low voice, and in a language incomprehensible to the Europeans.

We will here draw the reader's attention to a peculiarity that we have only met with in these regions, and especially among the Guaycurus.

The men and the women have a language which presents striking differences; moreover, when they discuss diplomatic questions before the envoys of a foreign nation—as occurred at the present time—they produce by the contraction of the lips a hissing which has received among them certain recognised modifications, and which has thus become a distinct language.

Nothing is more curious than to be present at a serious deliberation, hissed in this way by the orators, with modulations and graces, which are really remarkable, and which produce a strange and mysterious effect.

The general talked in a low voice with his officers, sipping his *maté*, while the captains in turn discussed his propositions, as he conjectured, at least; for it was impossible for him to understand anything, or even to seize a single word in the midst of this continual hissing and chirping.

At last Gueyma rose, and after having claimed silence by a majestic gesture, he replied to the general in Portuguese—

"The captains," said he, "have listened to the words of the grand captain of the palefaces with all the attention they deserve; they have considered attentively the propositions which he has been charged to make to them. These propositions the captains find just and equitable; they accept them, begging the captain of the palefaces to thank their white grandfather, and to assure him of the respect and devotion of his children of the desert. From the twelfth sun after today the war detachments of the allied tribes will be ready, at the first signal, to invade the enemy's frontiers. I have said it; there is my *quipu;* a troop of warriors shall accompany my father, the captain, to do him honour, and bring back the presents intended for the chiefs of the allied tribes."

After these words he sat down, and threw in his *quipu*—a movement which was imitated by the other chiefs.

The general thanked the council, requested his aide-de-camp to gather up the *quipus;* and the treaty was thus concluded.

An hour later the Brazilians, to whom the hostages had been given up, left the Rincón del Bosquecillo in company with a detachment of chosen warriors, and again took the road to the plantations, after having derided, with Gueyma, Tarou Niom, and the principal captains, upon supplementary measures for the success of the projected invasion, and upon the means to be employed for the Brazilians and the Indians, under all circumstances, to communicate with each other.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUGAR.

About a month had passed since the conclusion of the treaty between the Brazilians, the Guaycurus, and their allies of the Rincón del Bosquecillo. At the foot of a steep mountain, surrounded by ridges and ravines, the rugged soil of which was covered with a thick forest of oaks, a numerous troop of horsemen was camped at the entrance of a canyon—the dry bed of a torrent—the soil of which was covered with stones rounded and smoothed by the action of the water, which was at this moment exhausted.

This troop, composed of some 250 or 300 men at the most, wore the characteristic costume of Guaycurus Indians.

It was evening. The camp, firmly established and watched over by active sentinels, was, by its position, completely sheltered from attack.

The warriors were sleeping, lying before the fires, enveloped in their ponchos, their arms placed within reach of their hands, so as to be ready to make use of them at the least alarm.

A little behind the camp, on the flank of the mountain, the horses were feeding on the grass, and the young shoots of trees, carefully tended by six Indians, well armed.

Two men, seated before a half extinguished fire, having each a carbine placed near him on the grass, were talking and smoking, and every now and then sipping their *maté*.

These two men were Gueyma and the Cougar; the troop was placed under their immediate orders. It was composed of the youngest, the most vigorous, and most renowned warriors of the tribe.

From the time when, at the signal given by the Brazilian Government, this troop had crossed the Spanish frontier, and had—like a flight of birds of prey—fallen on the enemy's territory, terror had accompanied it; murder, incendiarism, and pillage had preceded it; behind it, it had left only ruins and corpses; in its presence fear chilled the courage of the inhabitants, and made them abandon as rapidly as possible their poor ranchos, to fly from the cruelty of these barbarous Guaycurus, who spared neither women, children, nor old men, and who appeared to have taken an oath to change into a desert the rich and fertile fields, in the midst of which they traced a furrow of blood.

They had thus traversed, like a devastating hurricane the greater part of the province, and had reached the Rio Quinto, not far from which they were camped, on the environs of a little town named Aquadita, a miserable place, the inhabitants of which had taken flight, abandoning all they possessed at the news of the approach of the Guaycurus.

The treaty concluded between the Brazilians and the Indians could not have been more advantageous to the former, for this reason: from the discovery of America, the Portuguese and the Spaniards continually disputed possession of the New World. Placed side by side in Brazil and Buenos Aires, they could not long remain without making war.

When the family of Braganza was obliged to abandon Portugal, to take refuge in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil became the real centre of Portuguese power, and the king contemplated aggrandising his empire, and of adding to it what, in some respects, he reasonably considered his natural frontiers —the Banda Oriental, and the course of the Rio de la Plata.

The war lasted a long time, with alternations of success and disaster on both sides. England offered her mediation, and peace was on the point of being concluded; but, at the epoch we are dealing with, the Brazilian Portuguese, profiting by the troubles which desolated the Rio de la Plata, and especially the Banda Oriental, abruptly broke the negotiations, called out an army of 10,000 men, under the orders of General Lecor, and invaded the province—the lasting object of their covetousness—skilfully making their movements cooperate with those of the Indian bravos, with whom they were leagued, and who themselves rushing from their deserts with the fury of wild beasts, had invaded the Spanish territory from the rear, and had thus placed them between two fires.

The picture presented at this time by the insurgent provinces was one of the saddest that could be offered as a warning to the wisdom of governors, and the good sense of peoples.

The ancient vice-royalty of Buenos Aires, previously so rich and flourishing, had become a vast desert, its towns heaps of cinders; all its territory was but a vast battlefield, where were incessantly contending armies fighting each for its own interests, drowning patriotism, in streams of blood, and replacing it by private ambition.

The Brazilian Portuguese, rendered stronger by the weakness of their enemies, had, almost without striking a blow, occupied the principal strategic points of the Banda Oriental. The gaining of two battles would render them masters of the remainder, and make this province fall into their hands.

Such was the situation of the country at the moment when we resume our narrative, which we have been obliged to interrupt, to put the reader in possession of these facts, indispensable to the understanding of those which follow.

The night was dark; the moon, veiled with clouds, only shed at intervals a pale and trembling light, which impressed a stamp of sadness on the features of the landscape; the wind sighed gloomily through the branches of the trees. The two chiefs, seated side by side, were talking in a low voice, as if they feared that their companions, stretched near them, might hear their conversation. At the moment we place them on the scene, Gueyma was speaking with some animation, while his companion, listening attentively to what was said, only heard it with an ironical smile, which raised the corers of his slender lips, and gave an expression of sarcasm to

his fine and intelligent countenance.

"I repeat it, Cougar," said the young man, "affairs cannot go on like this; we must return, and that not later than tomorrow, on the day after at furthest. Do you know that we are now more than 150 leagues from Rio Bermejo, and from the Llano de Manso?"

"I know it," coldly answered the old chief.

"Look you, my friend," pursued the young man, with impatience, "you will finish by putting me in a rage, with your provoking impassibility."

"What would you like me to answer you?"

"How should I know? Give me an opinion—advice; tell me something, in fact. The situation is grave, even critical, for us and our warriors. We have set out on an adventure, like a herd of wild bulls, destroying and scattering everything on our passage, and now, here we are, after a devious and aimless journey, brought to a stand at the foot of the mountains, in a country that we do not know, separated from friends and allies that might have aided us, and surrounded by enemies who, on the first opportunity, will, no doubt, assail us on all sides at once."

"That is true," observed the Cougar, bowing his head affirmatively.

"Observe," pursued Gueyma, with increasing animation, "that I do not address to you any reproach, my friend; but several times I have wished to retreat, but each time you have opposed yourself to it, and have induced me to continue to go forward. Is not that true?"

"It is true, I admit it."

"Ah! You admit it—very well; but you have probably had some design in acting thus?"

"I have always a design, Gueyma; do you not know that?"

"I know it, indeed, for your wisdom is great; but I should like to know this design."

"It is not yet time, my friend."

"That is always what you say. However, our position becomes intolerable. What is to be done? What is to become of us?"

"Still to push on in advance."

"But to go where? To do what?"

"When the moment arrives I will instruct you."

"Come, I give up any further discussion with you, Cougar. It is playing with myself to try and oppose you when you have made up your mind. Only, as I shall afterwards have to render an account of my conduct to the great chiefs of my nation, if I escape safe and sound from the dangers which threaten us, and as; I do not wish to take upon myself the responsibility of the events which, no doubt, will soon transpire, I have a request to make."

"What is it, my friend?"

"It is, at break of day, to convene the council, to explain frankly to the warriors the precarious situation in which we are placed, and your firm determination to push forward, whatever happens."

"You wish it, Gueyma?"

"No, my friend, I desire it."

"The one is as good as the other; no matter, you shall be satisfied."

"Thank you, my friend; I see in this your habitual honour."

"In this only?" said the old man, with a sad smile.

The young man turned his head without answering.

"Cougar," he resumed, after a pause, "the night advances; we have nothing more to say; with your permission I will go to sleep, I am not made of granite, like you—I am horribly fatigued; I want to get strength for tomorrow, which, no doubt, will bring rough work."

"Sleep, Gueyma, and may the Great Spirit give you calm repose."

"Thank you my friend; but you—are you not going to sleep also?"

"No, I must watch moreover, I intend to profit by the darkness to try a reconnaissance about the camp."

"Would you me to accompany you, my friend?" briskly asked the young chief.

"It would be useless; sleep. I shall be equal to the task I have set myself."

"Do as you like, then, my friend; I do not say any more."

Gueyma then carefully wrapped himself in his poncho, stretched himself comfortably before the fire, closed his eyes, and some minutes afterwards he was sunk in profound sleep.

The Cougar had not changed his position; crouched before the fire, his head reclining on his breast, he was reflecting.

The Indian thus remained for a considerable time—so motionless, that, from a distance, he rather resembled one of those idols of the East Indies, than a man of flesh and blood.

At last, after about an hour, probably passed in serious meditation, he gently raised his head, and looked anxiously around him.

A death-like silence pervaded the camp; the warriors were all sleeping, with the exception of a few sentinels, placed behind the entrenchments, to watch over the general safety. The Cougar rose, tightened his girdle, seized his carbine, and proceeded slowly towards the spot where the horses were feeding.

Having reached this spot, he gave a light whistle. Almost immediately a horse came out of the group, and rubbed his head against the shoulder of the chief.

The latter, after having patted him with his hand, put a bridle on him, and, without making use of the stirrup, bounded into the saddle, after having tightened the girth, relaxed for the horse to feed more easily.

The sentinels, although they noticed the various movements of the chief, did not address to him the least observation, and he left the camp without anyone appearing to notice his departure.

The warriors had for a long time been accustomed to these nocturnal absences of their chief, who, from the commencement of the expedition, set out thus nearly every night from the camp, without doubt to go on a discovery, and always remained several hours away.

The Cougar had set out from the camp slowly; he preserved the same pace while he thought he was in view of the sentinels, but as soon as a ridge of ground had concealed his movements, he loosed the bridle gave a slight click with his tongue, and the horse immediately setting off at full speed, ran with extraordinary velocity in a right line without concerning himself with obstacles which were met with on the route, and which he escaped with great agility without slackening his course.

He galloped thus for about an hour and a half, and reached the bank of rather a broad river, whose waters, like a silver ribbon, contrasted strongly with the dark shapes of the landscape.

Having reached the banks of the river, the chief threw the bridle on the neck of his horse.

The intelligent animal sniffed at the river for some time, and then he boldly entered and forded it, scarcely becoming wet up to the chest.

Immediately when he was on the other bank, the horse set out again at a gallop, but this time its course was short, lasting only a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes.

The spot where the chief went to was an immense and desolate plain, where there were but ragged shrubs, and in which, here and there, were rather high hillocks of a blackish sand.

It was at the foot of one of these hillocks that the chief stopped. He immediately alighted, rubbed down his horse carefully, covered him with his poncho, to prevent his chilling after the violent exercise to which he had been for so long a time subject, and, throwing the bridle on his neck, he left him free to browse, if he liked, on the scanty and withered grass of the savannah.

This accomplished, the chief put his hands to his mouth, and three distinct times, at equal intervals, he imitated the cry of the screech owl of the Pampas.

Two or three minutes passed. The same cry was repeated three times at a considerable distance, and then the precipitate gallop of a horse was heard.

The chief hid himself as well as he could behind the hillock, loaded his carbine, and waited.

Soon he perceived the outline of a horseman emerging from the darkness, and rapidly approaching the place where he was.

Having come a certain distance, the horseman, in place of continuing to advance, stopped short, and the cry of the screech owl again broke upon the silence of night.

The Cougar repeated his signal; the horseman, if he had only waited for this answer, immediately resumed his gallop, and soon found himself within pistol shot of the Indian.

A second time he stopped, and the sound of a gun being loaded was heard.

"Who goes there?" cried a firm voice, in Spanish.

"A friend of the desert," immediately answered the chief.

"What hour is it?" pursued the unknown.

"The hour of vengeance," again said the chief.

These passwords exchanged, the two men put up their guns, and advanced towards each other with the utmost confidence.

They recognised each other.

The stranger immediately alighted, and grasped cordially, as that of an old friend, the hand which the chief held out to him.

The unknown was a white. He wore the elegant and picturesque costume of the gauchos of the Pampas of Buenos Aires.

"I have waited a long time for you, chief," said the stranger. "Has anything happened to prevent your coming?"

"Nothing," replied the latter; "only the camp is far off; I have been obliged, before setting out, to wait till my companion was decidedly asleep."

"He still knows nothing?"

"Is it not agreed between us?"

"Just so; but as you have, you say, the greatest confidence in him, I thought that perhaps you might think fit to tell him."

"I have not wished to do anything Without informing you—so much the more as he is a chosen warrior, a chief of acknowledged wisdom, and, more than all, a man of honour under all circumstances. I have not liked to risk taking him into confidence on so serious a matter without having in hand the certain proofs of the treason of the general."

"These proofs I bring in my *alforjas*;[1] I will give them to you. It is important for the success of our project that Gueyma be informed of it. Otherwise, when the moment had come to strike the grand blow—and that will not be long—he would doubtless counteract our plans, and cause them to fail."

"You are right; I will tell him all immediately on my arrival at the camp."

"Very well, I count upon you."

"Make yourself easy on that head; now, what must we do?"

"Continue to go on in the same direction."

"I thought so; My companion begins to be uneasy at seeing me thus pushing forward in an unknown country."

"When you have informed him he will make no more difficulties."

"That is true but is this journey to last much longer?"

"Watch with care your approaches, for tomorrow we shall probably meet."

"*Epoï!* You will not fail us at the critical moment?"

"Trust to me; I have given you my word. Our movements will be so planned that both will act at once—the one in advance, the other in arrear; they will be taken as by the throw of a net. If we give them time to recognise us they will escape, so skilful are they. I cannot, therefore, too much urge you to act with the greatest circumspection."

"In your turn, trust in me, Don Zeno. If I your word, you have mine."

"I trust you, then."

"You remember our agreement?"

"Certainly."

"And you will act accordingly?"

"Blindly, although—permit me to tell you—I do not understand your demand."

"One day you will understand me, and then, take my word for it, Don Zeno, you will thank me."

"Be it so; as you like, Diogo, you are an undecipherable man, and wrapped in mystery; I give up your explaining yourself."

"And you are right," answered the chief, laughing; "for you would lose your time and your pains; only remember, Don Zeno, that, white or red, you have not a better friend than I am."

"Of that I am convinced, Diogo; however, I avow that I am very much concerned on your account. If some day you tell me your history, I expect to hear marvellous things."

"And terrible things also, Don Zeno. This history, if you will have patience for some time longer, I promise to tell you; it will interest you much more than you think."

"It is possible; but, meanwhile, let us think of the affair we have in hand."

"Leave that to me; I must quit you."

"Already! We have scarcely had time to exchange a few words."

"I have a long journey to make, you know."

"True; I will not retain you, then."

"And the proofs that you are to give me?"

"You shall have them in a moment."

"Of what do they consist?"

"In *quipus*, and especially in letters. You know how to read, do you not?"

"Enough to decipher these papers."

"Then all is right; here is the affair," added he, drawing a rather voluminous packet from his *alforjas*, and handing it to the Indian.

"Thank you," answered the latter; "thank you, and shall soon see you again, eh?"

"Most probably we shall see one another again, even today."

"So much the better; I should be delighted if it were all over."

"And I also."

The two men once more shook hands. The gaucho remounted his horse, and set off; he soon disappeared in the darkness.

The Cougar whistled to his horse, which came running at his call, and he set off in the direction of the camp. His horse, refreshed by the rest he had had during the conference of the two men, appeared to annihilate space.

The Indian reflected. His ordinarily sombre countenance had a joyous expression which was not natural to it. He pressed to his chest the packet which the gaucho had given him, as if he feared it Would escape him; and as he galloped he spoke to himself, and at times allowed exclamations of pleasure to escape him, which would have much astonished the warriors of his tribe, if they had heard him.

He made such haste that he re-entered the camp about two hours before daybreak.

After having sent his horse among the others, he laid himself down before a fire, taking care to wrap his precious packet in his poncho, and to place it under his head, to be certain that it should not be carried away then he closed his eyes, murmuring in a low voice, and between his teeth—

"I have well earned two or three hours of repose and I think I shall sleep well, for now I am content."

Indeed, five minutes later he slept as if he would never wake again.

However, at sunrise the Cougar was one of the first awake, and the first up.

Gueyma, crouched near him, waited his awaking.

"Already up?" said the old chief to him.

"Is there anything extraordinary In that? Have I not slept all the night?"

"That is true. Why do they not raise the camp?"

"I did not wish to give the order for it before speaking with you."

"Ah! very well; speak, Gueyma; I am listening."

"Have you forgotten what We said yesterday evening?"

"We said many things, my friend; it is possible that amongst the number I have forgotten some; recall them to me, I beg."

"We agreed to assemble the council this morning."

"True; have you done it?"

"No, not yet; you were asleep, my friend; I did not wish to take upon myself the order for this convocation for fear of displeasing you."

"You are good and generous, Gueyma," answered the old man, after a pause for reflection; "I recognise your habitual delicacy. Do me a pleasure."

"What, my friend?"

"Do not convoke the council yet."

The young chief fixed on him an inquiring look.

"Yes," continued the Cougar, "what I say astonishes you, I can well understand; but we must have a serious conversation before this convocation."

"A conversation?"

"Yes; I have to communicate to you matters of the highest importance, which, no doubt, will render the calling of this assembly needless; be patient; grant me till the halt for the morning meal—that is not too much to exact, I think?"

"You are my friend and my father, Cougar; what you say is a law to me; I will wait."

"Thank you, Gueyma, thank you; now nothing prevents you from giving the order for the raising of the camp."

"That is what I will do, immediately."

"Ah! Recommend the greatest vigilance to the warriors; the enemy is near."

"You discovered his track during your wandering last night?"

"Yes, my friend; I think you will do well also to send scouts in advance in order to avoid a surprise."

"Agreed," answered the young chief, withdrawing.

One hour later the Guaycurus warriors were on the march, in the direction of the Cordilleras, of which the mountain, at the foot of which they had camped during the night, was but one of the advanced and lesser chain.

[1] Double canvas pockets, which are carried behind the saddle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO CHIEFS.

By degrees, as the Guaycurus warriors advanced towards the mountains, the landscape assumed a more severe and a more picturesque aspect.

The road, or rather the path followed by the troops mounted by an almost imperceptible slope, by risings of earth which serve, so to speak, as gigantic steps to the first chain of the Cordilleras.

The forests became more dense, the trees were larger and more closely packed to each other. Hidden streams might have been heard murmuring—torrents which precipitate themselves from the height of the mountains, and, uniting, form these rivers, which at some leagues in the plain acquire great importance, and are often large as arms of the sea.

Large flights of vultures wheeled slowly, high in the air, over the horsemen, uttering their harsh and discordant cries.

Gueyma had not neglected any precautions that the Cougar had recommended him; scouts had been dispatched in advance in order to search the woods, and to discover, if possible, the tracks that they suspected would not fail them in these regions.

Other Indians had quitted their horses, and, right and left, on the flanks of the troop, they searched the forests, whose mysterious depths could well conceal an ambuscade.

The Guaycurus advanced in a long and close column—thoughtful and silent—the eye on the watch and the hand on their arms, ready to make use of them at the first signal.

The two chiefs marched in front, about twenty paces from their companions.

When they were in the middle of a thick forest, the immense masses of verdure in which not only deprived them of a view of the sky, but also intercepted the burning rays of the sun; and when the horsemen, whose horses were passing through a long and thick grass, filed through the trees silently as a legion of phantoms, the Cougar placed his hand on the arm of his companion, and making use of the Castilian dialect—

"Let us speak Spanish," said he; "I do not wish any longer to delay giving you that information I have promised you. If we have to be attacked, it will only be in the neighbourhood of such an unlucky place as that in which we now find ourselves; it is one of the best chosen for an ambuscade. I am much deceived if we shall not soon hear resounding under these arches of foliage the war cry of our enemies. It is time, then that I explained myself clearly to you, for perhaps it will be too late when we arrive at the encampment. Listen to me, then, attentively, and whatever you hear me say, my dear Gueyma, concentrate in yourself your emotions, and do not exhibit in your features either anger, joy, or astonishment."

"Speak, Cougar; I will conform to your advice."

"The time has not yet come," pursued the old man, "to reveal to you the whole truth. Let it suffice, at present, to know that, brought up among the whites, whose faith and customs I had adopted, and for whom I professed, and profess still, the most sincere devotion, it is not for you, Gueyma—for you whose birth I remember, and whom I love as a son—that I have consented to abandon the numberless enjoyments of civilised life, to resume the life—precarious and full of dangers and privations—of a nomadic Indian. I had taken an oath of vengeance and devotion. This oath I believe, I have religiously kept. The vengeance, long time prepared by me in secret, will be, I am convinced, so much the more terrible as it, will have been slow to strike the guilty. In the great act that I meditate, Gueyma, you will aid me, for they are your interests alone that I have constantly defended in all I have done, and it is you, more than I, who are interested in the success of what I wish still to do."

"What you tell me," answered the young chief, with emotion, "my heart has had a presentiment of, and I have almost guessed. For a long time I have known and appreciated, as I ought, the faithful and almost boundless friendship which you have always manifested for me. You will, therefore, render me this justice Cougar, that I have always conformed to your advice, often severe, and have allowed myself to be blindly guided by your counsels, that I have scarcely ever understood."

"It is true, my boy, you have acted thus; but when we talk between ourselves, call me Diogo. This is the name they formerly gave me when I was among the whites, and it recalls to me ineffaceable memories of joy and of grief."

"Well, my friend, as you wish it, I will call you so between ourselves, till you permit me, or till circumstances permit me to resume boldly in the face of all a name which I am sure you have honoured all the time you have borne it."

"Yes, yes," answered the old man, with complaisance, "there was a time when the name of Diogo had a certain celebrity, but who remembers it now?"

"Resume, I beg, what you commenced to tell me, and do not dwell any more on painful memories."

"You are right, Gueyma; let me forget them for a time, and return to the affair that I am going to confide to you. What I have said has no other design than that of proving to you that, if often I have apparently arrogated to myself the right of counselling you, or of wishing you to modify your plans, this right was acquired by long services and a devotion under all circumstances to yourself."

"I have never had, my friend, the thought—even for a moment—of discussing your acts or counteracting your projects. I have, on the contrary, always studied to bend my convictions to your long experience."

"I am pleased to render you this justice, my friend; but if I insist so much on this subject, it is that the circumstances in which we are now placed demand that you have entire confidence in me. In a word, here are the facts: the Brazilians, believing they no longer want us, now that they have seized upon the greater part of the towns of the Banda Oriental—thanks to the civil war which divides the Spaniards, and obliges them to fight against each other rather than against the common enemy—would not be sorry to be free of us, and to allow us to be crushed by superior forces. Forgetting the services that, from the commencement of the war, we have rendered them, the Brazilians, not only in a cowardly way abandon us, but, not content with that, they wish to deliver us to the enemy, in the hope that, succumbing, notwithstanding our courage under the weight of superior force, we shall be all massacred."

"I feared this treason," answered Gueyma, with pensive air, sadly shaking his head. "You remember my friend, that I was opposed to the conclusion of the treaty."

"Yes, I even remember that it was I who induced you to conclude it, and that from consideration to me alone you consented to throw down your *quipo* in acceptance in the council. Well, my friend, from that moment I foresaw this treason; I will say now—I hoped it."

The young chief turned sharply to his companion, looking at him with the most lively surprise:

"I begged you," resumed the old man, without in any way manifesting emotion, "not to show on your countenance any sentiments which, during our conversation, might agitate your heart. Collect yourself, then, my friend, in order to avoid awakening the suspicions of our warriors, and allow me to continue."

"I am listening to you; but what you say to me is so extraordinary—"

"That you do not understand me—is that it? But, patience; you will soon have the explanation of this mystery, especially as I shall be able to give you this explanation without perilling the success of the projects that I meditate."

"All this appears to me so strange," said Gueyma, "that my reason almost refuses to comprehend it."

The Cougar smiled silently, and after having cast an inquiring look around him, he unaffectedly approached his companion, and, leaning towards his ear—

"Do you like the whites?" he asked.

"No," decisively answered the chief; "but I do not entertain any hatred towards them. It is true," added he, with an ill-concealed bitterness, "that I am too young yet to have had to suffer from their tyranny."

"Just so; however, my friend, if it is allowable for me to boast before you of my experience, let me tell you that every sentiment is unjust when it is exclusive; that the life you have led, the examples you have had under your eyes, indispose you towards the company of the whites. I understand this, and do not reproach you with it; but you should not, even if you should have had to complain of one or of several of them, render them all responsible for the crime of some, and include them in the same hatred. Amongst the whites there are some good. I even intend soon to make you acquainted with one of them."

"Me!" cried the young man.

"You, certainly; and why not, if it conduce to the success of our plans?"

"My friend, you speak in a way that is entirely incomprehensible to me; my mind seeks vainly to follow you, and to grasp your meaning in the midst of the inextricable network in which you are pleased to entangle it. Be plain with me, and do not let me thus fatigue myself to no purpose in trying to guess your meaning."

"Well, in a few words, here is what has happened: The Brazilian general with whom we treated had but one motive in entering into relations with us—to remove us, for reasons that he thinks are known to himself alone, but which I know as well as he does from our hunting territories, and to remove us in such a way as we should never return to them again."

"But it appears to me that if such were his design he has attained it to a certain extent."

"Perhaps he has realised the half of his plan, but the other half will not succeed so easily. This man is not only the enemy of our tribe, but he is your most implacable enemy, and his most anxious desire is to make you succumb to him."

"Me! But he does not know me, my friend."

"You think so, dear Gueyma; but I am in a better position than you to judge the matter; believe then, the truth of my words."

"It is sufficient; I am happy to know what you tell me."

"Why so?"

"Because the first time that chance brings me in his presence I shall make no scruple to cleave his head open."

"Be careful not to do that, my friend!" cried the Cougar, with a start of fear. "If—which I hope will

not happen—you should find yourself face to face with him, it will be necessary for you to feign—I will not say friendship—but at least the most complete indifference to him. Remember this advice, and make use of it if occasion require. Vengeance has been prepared for him long ago, and will only succeed when a good opportunity offers. What I tell you appears to you, I know, incomprehensible; but soon, I hope, I shall be able to explain myself more clearly, and then you will acknowledge the truth of my words and how far I have been right in recommending prudence. I do not wish to insist anymore on this point; we shall not be long before we reach the spot assigned for the encampment, and, I have to speak to you of another person towards whom I shall be happy to see you process the most frank and amicable sentiments."

"And who is this person, if you please, my friend? Does he belong to our race, or is he a white?"

"I speak of a white, my dear Gueyma, and, moreover, of a white who, up to the present time, you have thought one of our deadliest enemies; in a word, I mean the chief, whom the Spaniards call Zeno Cabral."

"I admire the prudence which you manifested at the commencement of this conversation, in recommending me not to allow myself to express any mark of surprise, and to preserve an impassive countenance."

"Yes, you sneer," answered the Cougar, with a slight smile, "and apparently you are right; however, before long—as always happens when people have not been in a position to thoroughly examine facts—events will show you are wrong."

"Upon my word I avow to you, my friend, in all sincerity, that I ardently desire—and you can believe me, notwithstanding all the injury this chief has done us since the commencement of our expedition—I feel myself attracted towards him by a feeling that I cannot analyse, and which—in spite of the wish I have often had to do so—has always prevented me from hating him."

"Do you speak truth? Do you really feel this instinctive attraction towards this man?"

"I assure you it is so; I feel myself constrained to love him; and if you proved to me ever so little that he ought to be so, I assure you that I shall not feel any displeasure in following your injunction."

"Love him then, my friend; follow the impulse of your heart; it will not deceive you. This man is indeed, really worth your friendship, and you will soon have the proof of it."

"How so?"

"In the most simple way. I will soon present you to each other."

"You will make me acquainted with Zeno Cabral?"

"Yes."

"That is what astonishes me. Why, he will not dare to come into our camp!"

"In case of need, at my call, he would not hesitate to do so; but it is not in this way that we must act. He will not come into our camp; we, on the contrary, will go to find him."

"We?"

"Certainly."

"Oh! Oh! Have you well reflected, my friend, on the consequences of such a proceeding? If this man should spread a net for us?"

"We have nothing of that sort to fear from him."

Gueyma lowered his head with a pensive air. For a long time the two chiefs continued thus to ride side by side without exchanging a word, absorbed each by his own thoughts. At last the young man looked up and said:

"We shall soon be at the spot where we have decided to camp till the hottest part of the day passes. Have you nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing at present, my friend. We shall soon resume this conversation; now we must instal our warriors in a secure position, for, perhaps, we shall remain in this encampment longer than you suppose."

"What! Shall we not set out again in a few hours?"

"It is scarcely probable, but for that matter you will decide for yourself when the time has come."

And as if he wished to prevent the young chief asking him a question that he probably would not have cared to answer, the Cougar checked his bridle, and stopping his horse, allowed his companion to pass him.

Meanwhile, the pathway broadened more and more, the forest became less dense, and, after having turned a corner, the Indians came out on to a kind of rather large esplanade, entirely denuded of trees, although covered with a tall and coarse grass. This esplanade formed what in Mexico they call a *voladero*, that is to say, that from this side the base of the mountain—which the Guaycurus had traversed almost without perceiving it, by a gentle declivity, worn away by the streams, or by an inundation produced by one of those convulsions so frequent in this country—formed beneath the esplanade an enormous cavity, which gave it the appearance of a gigantic balcony, and rendered it on this side almost impossible to attack.

On the opposite side, the flanks of the mountain were escarped in abrupt blocks of rock, on the

edge of which the vicuñas and the lamas alone would have been able to place their delicate feet without fear of falling.

The only accessible points were those by which the esplanade was reached—that is to say, the path itself—a point most easy to defend by means of some trunks of trees thrown across it.

Gueyma could not retain a smile of satisfaction at the sight of this natural fortress.

"What a misfortune that we must in a few hours abandon so advantageous a position!" murmured he.

The Cougar smiled without answering, and proceeded to organise the camp. Some warriors went to seek the wood necessary for the fires, others felled several trees, leaving all the branches on, and which thus formed an almost impregnable entrenchment.

The horses were unsaddled and set at liberty, so that they could get at the green grass, which they began to eat heartily.

The fires lighted, they prepared the morning meal, and the Guaycurus warriors soon found themselves installed on the esplanade in as firm a position as if they intended to make a long stay, instead of only stopping there in passing.

When the sentinels were stationed, the meal was finished, and the warriors were stretched here and there to repose—according to the invariable custom of Indians, who do not think that, unless in exceptional circumstances, they should remain awake when they can sleep—the Cougar approached Gueyma.

"You feel fatigued?" he asked, with a significant gesture.

"Not at all," answered he; "but why this question?"

"Simply because I intend to go out a little on discovery, to assure myself that the country is clear—that we have no ambuscade to fear on our march; and that if you like to accompany me while our warriors repose, we will go together."

"I should like nothing better," answered Gueyma, who felt that the excursion was but a pretext to deceive the warriors, and to account for their own departure.

"If it is to be so," pursued the Cougar, "let us set out without waiting any longer; we have not a moment to lose."

The young man immediately rose and took his gun.

"We go on foot?" said he.

"Certainly, our horses would embarrass us; they would only retard our progress, which, moreover, ought to be secret."

"Let us go then."

The two chiefs immediately quitted the camp by the point opposite to that by which they had arrived, but not without having recommended an older chief to replace them during their absence, and to watch with the greatest vigilance over the common safety.

They were not long in disappearing in the midst of the thick shrubbery and trees by which the track was bordered on either side.

They walked at a good pace, contenting themselves by at times casting an enquiring look around them, without taking any other precaution to conceal their presence.

Gueyma silently followed the Cougar, inwardly asking himself what was the design of this mysterious excursion.

As to the old man, he advanced without any hesitation, proceeding through this labyrinth of verdure with a certainty which showed a perfect knowledge of the place, and previously determined plan, for the two chiefs had left the track, and without following any path they walked straight on, surmounting the obstacles which from time to time came in their way, without turning to right or left.

In about half an hour they reached the dry bed of a torrent, which formed a large hollow in the mountain, and clinging with hands and feet, with that skill which characterises the Indians, to the rugged stones, the tufts of grass, and the branches of shrubbery, they began to descend rapidly by a rather rude declivity, and which, to any other men, would have presented great difficulty, and even danger.

About halfway down, the Cougar stepped on a fragment of rock, before a natural excavation, whose gaping mouth opened just before him.

After looking in all directions, the old man made a sign to his companion to place himself near him, and pointing to the cavern:

"It is there we are going," said he, in a low voice.

"Ah!" answered the young man, with as smiling an air as he could affect, although his curiosity was much excited; "If that is the case, let us not stop here any longer; let us enter."

"One moment," pursued the Cougar, "let us first assure ourselves that he has arrived."

"Arrived! Who?" asked the young man.

"He whom we wish to see, probably," said the old man.

"Ah! Very well; only it is you, not I, who wish to see the person of whom you speak."

"Let us not play upon words, my friend; it is as important to you as to me, believe me, that this interview takes place."

"You know that I allow myself to be entirely guided by you; I think I have even given proof of exemplary docility. After this conversation which is about to take place, I shall probably be in a better position to know of what importance to me is this proceeding, which, I avow, I only enter upon with misgiving; although, I repeat, I feel myself attracted towards this man."

The Cougar opened his lips as though he was about to answer, but immediately changing his mind, he turned with an abrupt movement, and, after having again explored the locality by looking around him, he imitated twice the cry of the condor.

Almost immediately a similar cry came from the cavern.

The old man quickly approached the entrance, and slightly leaning forward, as he cocked his gun to be ready for any emergency:

"We have walked a long time, we are fatigued," said he, as if he addressed his companion; "let us rest here a few minutes; this solitary place appears to me to be safe."

"You will be received there by good friends," immediately replied a voice from the interior of the cavern.

The sound of steps was heard, and a man appeared.

The newcomer, clothed in the picturesque costume of the Banda Oriental, was no other than Zeno Cabral.

Gueyma remarked, with a surprise which he did not attempt to conceal, that the chief of the Montonero had no arms, at least, apparently.

"Welcome," said he, bowing with graceful courtesy to the two Indian chiefs; "I have waited for you some time, I am happy to see you."

The Guaycurus captains bowed silently, and followed him, without hesitation, into the cavern.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROYAL ARMY.

We will abandon for some time the Guaycurus chiefs, to transport ourselves twenty leagues off, in the very heart of the Cordilleras, where were certain personages which have much to do with this narrative, and where, two or three days before that we have reached, events had passed which we must relate.

The civil war, in destroying the old hierarchy, established by the Castilians in their colonies, and in overturning ranks and castes, had brought to the surface of Hispano-American society certain persons very interesting to study, and amongst whom the Pincheyras undoubtedly held the most prominent place.

Let us state who were these Pincheyras, whose name has already several times been mentioned, and from whence came that dark and mysterious celebrity, which, even now, after so many years, surrounds their name with so much horror.

Pincheyra began, like the greater part of the partisans of this epoch—that is to say, that at first he was a bandit. Born at San Carlos, in the centre of that province of Manli whose inhabitants never bowed to the yoke of the Incas, and only submitted to that of the Spaniards, Don Pablo Pincheyra was an Indian from head to foot; the blood of the Araucans flowed almost unmixed in his veins; so that when he was outlawed, and constrained to seek a refuge among the Indians, the latter responded with alacrity to his first call, and came joyfully around him, to form the nucleus; of that redoubtable squadron which afterwards was to be called the royal army.

Pincheyra had three brothers. These men, who had gained but a scanty subsistence in wielding by turns the lasso and the hatchet—that is to say, in working on the farms and as woodcutters—seized the opportunity which their elder brother offered them, and attached themselves to him, in company with all the scapegraces it was possible to recruit.

Thus, the Pincheyras, as they were called, were not long in becoming the terror of the country that they had been pleased to choose as the theatre of their exploits.

When they had pillaged the great *chacras*, and put the hamlets to ransom, they took refuge in the desert, and here they braved with impunity the powerful rage of their enemies.

In fact, in these far-off regions, Justice, too weak, cannot make herself respected, and her agents, notwithstanding their good will, were obliged to remain spectators of the depredations daily committed by the bandits.

Don Pablo Pincheyra was far from being an ordinary man. Nature had been bountiful to him. To the courage of a lion he added a rare sagacity, a keenness of perception which was uncommon, united to manners full of nobility and affability.

Thus, events aiding, the bold chief of the bandits, far from being disquieted by his incessant acts of brigandage, knew how to make himself acceptable, not only as a partisan, but also to be sought after and solicited by those whose interest it had so long been to crush him, but who now found themselves obliged to claim his aid.

Don Pablo did not allow himself to be dazzled by this new caprice of fortune; he found himself at once equal to the part which chance called on him to play, and he boldly declared for Spain against the revolution.

His troop, considerably augmented by the deserters and volunteers who came to range themselves under his banner, was by degrees disciplined, thanks to some European officers which Don Pablo had succeeded in obtaining, and the old squadron of bandits was metamorphosed almost immediately into a regular troop—nearly an army—since it numbered in infantry and cavalry more than 1,500 combatants, a considerable number at that time in these sparsely populated countries.

When he considered that the royal army, as he emphatically called it, was in a position to take the field, Don Pablo Pincheyra boldly took the offensive, and commenced hostilities against the insurgents, falling upon them suddenly, and defeating them in several encounters.

The Pincheyras knew the most secret hiding places in the Cordilleras. Their expeditions over, they withdrew into these retreats, so much the more inaccessible, as they were defended not only by desolate solitude, but by the terror which these redoubtable partisans inspired. They cared for nothing, and spared neither children, women, nor old men, dragging them after them, attached by the wrists to the tails of their horses.

Another partisan chief—a brave and honest Castilian officer—also fought for the defence of the losing cause of Spain. He was named Zinoxain.

Thus, at the time when South America, from Mexico to the frontiers of Patagonia, rose at once against the odious yoke of Spain, and boldly proclaimed its independence, two isolated men, without any other *prestige* than their indomitable energy, sustained only by Indian bravos, and adventurers of all nations, heroically struggled against the current which was carrying them away, and endeavoured to place the colonies again under the domination of Castile.

Notwithstanding the misdeeds of these men—the Pincheyras especially, whose savage cruelty often led them into unjustifiable acts of barbarism—there was, nevertheless, something really grand in this determination not to abandon the fortune of their old masters, and to perish rather than betray their cause. Accordingly, even now, after so many years, their names in these countries are surrounded with a kind of halo of glory, and they have become to the mass of the people legendary beings, whose incredible exploits are related with respectful fear, as, after the hard labours of day, they peacefully talk round the watch fire on the Pampas, drinking their *maté*, and smoking their cigarettes.

At about twenty leagues from the spot where the Guaycurus had stopped till the hottest part of the day had passed—in the centre of a vast valley, crowned on all sides by the snowy and inaccessible peaks of the Cordillera—Don Pablo Pincheyra had established his camp.

This camp, placed near the source of two rivers, was not provisional, but permanent; so it rather resembled a town than a bivouac of soldiers. The huts—made in the Indian fashion, in the form of *toldos*, with stakes crossed at the top, and covered with leather from the hides of cows and mares —affected a kind of symmetry in their position, forming streets, squares, and crossways, having *corrals*, filled with oxen and horses. Some of them had little gardens, where were grown, as well as it could be done considering the region of the climate, a few kitchen herbs.

In the centre of the camp were the *toldos* of the officers, and of the four brothers Pincheyra —*toldos*, better built, better furnished, and much cleaner than those of the soldiers.

Entrance could only be had into the valley where the camp was established by two narrow canyons, situated one at the east, and the other at the southwest of the camp; but these two canyons were so fortified by means of heaps of wood massed together, apparently pell-mell, but perfectly arranged nevertheless, that any attempt to force the double entry of these canyons would have been vain. The sentinels planted there, however—their eyes fixed on the windings of the defiles—watched attentively over the common safety, while their companions, withdrawn under their *toldos*, lounged at their occupations with an easy carelessness which showed they were certain they had no serious danger to fear.

The *toldo* of Don Pablo Pincheyra was easy to recognise at the first glance. Two sentinels paced before it, and several horses, saddled and ready to be mounted, were attached to pickets at some paces from the door, over which, from a long lance fixed in the ground, floated majestically the Spanish flag, in the inconstant play of the fresh morning breeze. Women—amongst whom several were young and pretty, though their features were for the most part tarnished by sorrow and excessive labour—traversed the streets of the camp, carrying water, wood, or provisions; some at the entrance of the *toldos* were occupied in the cares of the house; and soldiers mounted on strong horses, and armed with long lances, drove the animals out of the *corrals*, and led them to the pasturage outside the camp. In fact, all was bustle and animation in this strange repair of the bandits, who called themselves the royal army; and yet, through all this excitement and apparent disorder it was easy to recognise a regulating mind, and a powerful will which directed all, without ever meeting objection or even hesitation on the part of the subordinates.

At the moment we enter the camp a man wearing the costume of the Gauchos of the Pampas Of Buenos Aires, lifted the *frazada*, a covering serving for a door to a *toldo*, built with some

regularity, and after having cast around him a curious and anxious look, he left the *toldo*, though with some hesitation, and entered the street.

Like all the inhabitants of this singular centre of population, this man was armed to the teeth, with a sabre which hung at his left side, a pair of long pistols passed through his girdle, a knife with a straight blade fixed on his right *polena*, and the horn handle of which rested on his thigh, and a double-barrelled gun, which was thrown on his shoulder.

Notwithstanding this formidable arsenal which he carried with him, the man of whom we speak appeared by no means at his ease. His hesitating walk, the furtive glances which he continually threw around him—all denoted a misgiving which he tried vainly to conceal, but which he could not succeed in conquering.

"*Parbleu!*" murmured he, in a low voice, "I am an idiot, upon my honour! One man is as good as another; and if it should come to blows, it must. If I am killed—well, so much the better, for then all will be over. I should like that the more, as this absurd existence begins to weigh heavily on me. Never mind, I doubt whether Salvator Rosa, when he was among the brigands, ever saw such a complete collection of bandits as those with whom I have had the happiness of living for the last two months. What magnificent vagabonds! It would be impossible, I think, to meet their equals. Ah!" added he, with a sigh of regret, "If it were only possible for me to sketch some of them! But no, these fellows have no love for art; it is impossible to trace them for a moment. To the devil with that queer notion which made me stupidly abandon France to come here."

And Emile Gagnepain—for the reader has doubtless already recognised him—gave a second sigh, more profound than the first, and cast upward a despairing look.

Meanwhile, he continued to advance hastily towards one of the outlets of the camp. His step had become by degrees more firm: he had proudly raised his head, and had succeeded—with great difficulty, no doubt—in affecting the most complete carelessness.

The painter had nearly traversed the entire length of the camp; he had reached a rather large *toldo*, serving as a *corps de garde* for the soldiers, watching at the entrenchments; and he hastened his pace with the design, no doubt, of escaping the inquisitive questions of some lazy partisan, when he felt himself tapped on the shoulder. Although this touch had nothing aggressive in it, and was, on the contrary, quite friendly, the young man started; but, putting a good face on it, he immediately turned, and, assuming the most amiable look that he could, he held out his hand to him who had thus come upon him unawares, and smilingly saluted him with the *buenos días caballero*, which is the rule throughout Spanish territory.

"And you, Señor Frenchman," gaily answered his visitor, returning his salute, and gently pressing his hand, "you are well, I hope. It must be by chance like this for me to have the pleasure of glancing at your friendly face."

The painter was for a moment taken aback at this speech, the malicious tone of which did not escape him; but, conquering his emotion, and feigning the most complete friendliness—

"What do you wish, Don Pablo?" he answered; "This apparent negligence of which you complain is by no means my fault. The cares of your command occupy and absorb you so much that you become unapproachable, whatever desire I may have to visit you."

Don Pablo Pincheyra—for it was he—smiled craftily.

"Is that really the motive which makes you avoid me?" said he.

"Avoid you?"

"Well, find another expression if you can—I am agreeable; I will say abstain from seeking me, if you prefer it."

"You make a mistake, Don Pablo," answered the young man, with firmness, who was getting rather warm; "I do not avoid you any more than I have reason to abstain from seeking you, and the proof—"

"The proof?" interrupted Don Pablo, with a searching look.

"It is that today, at this very moment, I was proceeding towards the intrenchments in the hope of meeting you."

"Ah! Ah!" said he; "Then, as it is so, I am happy, *caballero*, that chance has so well served you in bringing us face to face."

"Chance has nothing to do in the affair, I beg you to believe, Don Pablo."

"It would have been better, however, to have come simply to my *toldo*."

"That is not my opinion, since I meet you here."

"That is true," said the partisan, laughing; "you have an answer for everything, my dear Sir. Let us admit, then, that you really had the intention of visiting me; and will you acquaint me with the reasons to which I owe the honour of this tardy visit?"

"Believe me, dear Don Pablo, this place is not well suited for such a serious conversation as that which I wish to have with you."

"Ah!" said Don Pablo; "Is it then important business on which you have to speak?"

"It could not be more important."

"If that is the case, I am, to my great regret, compelled to beg you to defer this conference for

some hours."

"May I be permitted, without appearing impertinent, to ask you the motive of this delay, which, I admit, annoys me much?"

"Oh! *Mon Dieu!* I have no secrets from you, my dear sir, you know. The fact is, that I expect every moment the arrival of certain persons with whom I must, as soon as they come, have a conversation of the highest importance."

"Pardon, Seigneur Don Pablo, but these persons to whom you allude—I think I know them, by reputation at least; moreover, if I am well informed, I know on what subject their conversation with you will turn."

The black eye of Don Pablo Pincheyra darted a flashing look, which he immediately controlled, and he answered in a gentle and honeyed tone—

"And you infer from that, my dear Sir?—"

"I infer, Seigneur Don Pablo, that perhaps it would be best, in the general interest, that you consented to hear me first."

The painter, whose mind was made up, and who felt anger working within him, had become severe and sharp, and was resolved to push affairs to an extremity, whatever might be the consequences.

On his side, Don Pablo, under his feigned friendliness, concealed a resolution previously made, and from which nothing would make him depart. Between these two men who spoke thus—with a smile on their lips, but hatred, or at least anger, in their hearts—a strange scene was thus being enacted.

It was the partisan who renewed the conversation, which had been for a moment interrupted.

"So, Señor Frenchman," said he, "you had left your *toldo* with the intention of paying me a visit."

"Yes, Seigneur."

"To me specially."

"Yes, to you."

"Eh!" said he, with an expressive sneer, pointing to the young man's girdle, which was furnished with arms; "You will admit that you take singular precautions when you come to see your friends."

"We are in a country, Seigneur," coldly answered the painter, "where it is well to be always on one's guard."

"Even with one's friends?"

"Especially with one's friends," said he, sharply.

"Well," coldly resumed the partisan, "follow me secretly, that we may be able to talk without fear of interruption."

"I will do so."

"You will remark, Señor, that I have more confidence in you than you deign to show towards me."

"Because, Seigneur?—"

"Because I am without arms."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"You act as you think fit," said he, coldly; "perhaps you are wrong, perhaps you are right—who can say?"

"I do not fear being assassinated."

"If that insult is addressed to me, it fails. If I am taking precautions against you, it does not follow that I am capable of assassinating you, as you insinuate."

The partisan shook his head with an air of doubt.

"People furnish themselves with arms," continued the young man, with a cutting accent, "to defend themselves against the attacks of wild beasts, without having on that account the desire of fighting them."

"Well, well, Señor Frenchman," said Don Pablo, in a melancholy tone, "come without any more words; I have but a few minutes to give you—take advantage of them."

While exchanging these bitter complaints, the two men had proceeded side by side, and had left the camp, saluted on their passage by the sentinels at the entrenchments.

They continued thus to advance into the country till they had reached a rather retired spot—a kind of elbow formed by a turn in the canyon in which they were, and where they could be neither seen nor heard; while they, on the other hand, could see a considerable distance to right and left up and down the road which led to the camp, and on which no one could have appeared without being discovered.

"I think, Señor Frenchman," said Don Pablo, stopping, "that this place will suit you; be so good, then, as to speak without further delay."

"So I will," answered the Frenchman, placing on the ground the butt end of his gun, and leaning his two hands on the end of the barrel, as he cast a suspicious look around him.

"Oh! We are quite alone; come," pursued Don Pablo, with an ironical smile, "you can speak without fear."

"It is not fear which restrains me just now, but I have so many things to say to you that I do not really know how to commence."

"As you like; only, make haste if you wish me to hear you to the end. In a few minutes, perhaps, I shall be obliged to leave you."

"The Spanish officer whom you expect will not be here for an hour at least; we have time, then."

"How do you know that I expect a Spanish officer?"

"What does that matter, if it is so?"

"Señor Frenchman," pursued he, knitting his eyebrows, and with a somewhat threatening tone, "take care how you penetrate my secrets before I should wish you to know them. For two months that we have lived together you have been, I suppose, in a position to know me. It will not be well, believe me, to try and mix yourself up, against my will, in my affairs."

"You would do well to speak thus if these affairs concerned you alone; but as, unhappily, I find myself concerned in them, they are as much mine as yours."

"I do not understand you."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked the young man, with an ironical smile.

"Come, explain yourself frankly and honourably, as a man, instead of prating like an old woman," pursued the partisan, beginning to be angry.

"It is two months," resumed the young man, "that we have lived together, as you yourself have said. What have you done during these two months? How have you kept the promise you made me?"

"Have I not saved the two ladies, as I promised, from the peril that threatened them?"

"Yes, but to make them fall into one still worse."

"I do not understand you, Señor."

"There are none so deaf as those who do not wish to hear. You understand me very well Unhappily for you, you have not yet reached the point where you think you are. I have sworn to defend these poor ladies, and I will defend them, if it is at the peril of my life."

"You are mad, Señor; no one that I know—I less than anyone—has any intention to injure these ladies in any way. Since their arrival here at Casa-Frama, you cannot deny that they have been treated with the greatest attention and respect. Of what do they complain?"

"They complain of being exposed to misplaced and almost dishonouring attentions on your part; moreover, they say with reason that, far from giving them that liberty that you had engaged to give them, you sequester them, and treat them as if they were your captives."

Don Pablo shrugged his shoulders with disdain.

"The women are all alike," said he, with irony; "nothing will satisfy them. I am in a better position than these ladies are to judge what is fitting for them.

"Besides, if they will keep quiet, they will not have long to remain here, and if the sight of my companions shocks them, they will soon be delivered from it."

"It is not the sight of your companions which shocks them, but yours and your brothers—the ridiculous homage with which you fatigue them every hour of the day, and the pretentions that you do not fear to make everyone acquainted with."

The features of the partisan contracted, a terrified pallor covered his face, and his eyebrows were knitted till they met.

"Take care, Señor," cried he in a sullen and forced tone, repressing with great difficulty the anger which he felt; "take care; you are in my power—do not forget that; and I am the man whom his enemies have called the bear of Casa-Frama."

"What matters it to me the names they give you?" cried Emile, forgetting all bounds: "One only will suit you, if you persist in the fatal course you have entered on—that of bandit."

"*Vive Dieu!*" cried he, with violence, "This insult deserves blood! A coward only dares thus to outrage a man without arms."

"Nonsense," resumed the young man, with contempt; "without arms!" and with a gesture of nobility, he threw a pistol at the feet of the partisan, at the same time abandoning his gun, and taking his second pistol from his girdle.

"*Pardieu!* That is a good evasion! If you are as brave as you pretend, here is a weapon—do me justice. You imagine, then, that I am afraid to fight with you?"

"*¡Rayo de Dios!*" cried the partisan, with rage, "You shall have the pleasure of it!"

And darting at the pistol, he cocked it, and discharged it almost close to the breast of the young man.

The fate of the latter seemed doomed. Considering the little distance which separated him from his adversary, nothing apparently could save him. Happily the partisan, blinded by rage, had not calculated his fire; the ball, badly directed, instead of striking the Frenchman full in the body, only made a slight graze on the arm, and fell harmless.

"Your life belongs to me," coolly said the young man, cocking his pistol in his turn.

"Blow my brains out then, *¡caray!*" cried Don Pablo; "Fire, and let all be over!"

"No," replied the young painter, without emotion, "it is well for you to see the difference which exists between a man of your sort and of mine."

"Which means—?" murmured the partisan, when rage stifled.

"That I pardon you!" said Emile.

"Pardon, you say—pardon?" cried he, with the roar of a tiger, "To me!"

"To you, *pardieu!* To whom else?"

And coolly pushing away with his wounded arm the partisan, who had darted towards him, he raised his pistol, and discharged it over his head. Don Pablo remained an instant astounded, his eyes bloodshot, his features livid, his hands clinched, incapable of understanding the grandeur of this action, but conquered spite of himself, by the ascendancy that the young man had in an instant acquired over his rude and savage nature.

"Your life, then," quietly resumed the young man "belongs to me; I have given it you back. I only demand in return one thing."

"You demand something of me?" said he, with a mocking sneer.

"Yes."

"Oh! Oh! And if I should not choose to accord you anything?"

"Oh, then," pursued he, with the greatest coolness, "as everything must have an end, and as it is always allowable to rid one's self of a wild beast, I shall blow your brains out, as though you were a mad dog."

While speaking thus, Emile had taken his gun in his hand.

The partisan found himself again at the mercy of his adversary.

The former cast at him a look of hatred, but he could see by the countenance of his enemy that he would not hesitate to put his threat into execution. Then—thanks to that control which he had over himself—he brought back calmness to his features, which had been distorted by rage, and, bowing with a gracious smile—

"Be it so, I will do what you wish, Señor. Your noble generosity has conquered my obstinacy. Speak."

"Swear on your salvation, by Our Lady of Solitude, to be faithful to what you engage to do."

"I swear it, on my salvation, by Our Lady of Solitude."

This virgin, much venerated by the gauchos, the trappers, and other people of that kind, was—at least he thought so—the protectress of Don Pablo Pincheyra; he was very devoted towards her, and no consideration whatever would have induced him to violate an oath made in her name. Emile was aware of this circumstance.

"During three days from this time you will not take any steps against the two ladies confided to my care."

"I swear it."

At this moment a distant gallop was heard, and a troop of horsemen soon appeared at a considerable distance.

"Here are the persons whom you expect," pursued Emile; "I should like to be present at your interview with them."

"Very well, you shall be present at it Do you wish anything else?"

"Nothing."

"What, is that all?"

"Yes."

"You do not stipulate anything for your personal safety?"

"Nonsense," answered the young man, with disdain. "You are jesting, Seigneur; what have I to fear from you? You would not dare to attempt the life of his who, master of yours, has refused to take it."

The partisan stamped his foot with rage, but he did not answer.

The horsemen rapidly approached; a few minutes more, and they would have overtaken the two men who looked at them as they came on, without making any movement towards them.

CHAPTER VI.

AT CASA-FRAMA.

The horsemen who advanced in the canyon, in the direction of Casa-Frama—as the headquarters of the Pincheyras was called—formed a troop of about thirty men. All were well armed and well mounted. Their costume had a military appearance, and, although riding at a hand gallop, they preserved their order, and rather resembled soldiers or partisans than peaceable travellers who had come to the Cordilleras on business.

Two horsemen, mounted on magnificent black animals, richly harnessed, preceded by a few paces the body of the troop, and were talking together with some animation. They had not yet perceived Don Pablo or the French painter, who, half hidden by the fragments of rock, observed them attentively.

"These are indeed the persons whom I expected," said he; "come let us go into the camp again."

"Why not receive them here where we are, since they must absolutely pass before us?"

"Better that they should not find us here; I ought to receive these persons with a certain decorum that their rank exacts."

"As you like; but it will be rather difficult to reenter the camp without being overtaken by them, especially at the pace they are coming."

"Do not be uneasy about that," pursued Don Pablo, smiling; "still follow me."

"Let us go," said the painter, repressing a movement of curiosity.

Indeed, it seemed impossible, from the place where they were, for the two men to regain the camp without being not only perceived, but overtaken in a few minutes by the travellers.

However, against all probability, it was nothing of the kind.

The partisan, after having scaled, followed by the painter, some blocks of rock, massed without apparent order one upon the other, found himself at the entrance of a natural cavern, of which so many exist in the mountains, and into which, after having removed the brambles and brushwood which masked the mouth of it, he boldly entered. The painter did not hesitate to follow him, curious to see this passage so skilfully concealed, and the existence of which, without any trouble, the partisan revealed to him—a passage which at some time or other might be of the greatest importance to the young man. The cavern was large, spacious, and airy; daylight penetrated it by imperceptible fissures, and produced a dim light sufficient to walk without fear and to wander in this labyrinth of galleries, which opened right and left, and were lost under the mountain at probably considerable distances, or perhaps had exits in several directions.

After a rapid walk of a few minutes, a dull and continuous sound, resembling a considerable fall of water, was heard, and became louder and louder. At last the two men emerged from the cavern and found themselves on a narrow platform, two or three yards broad at the most, masked completely by a sheet of water which fell from a great height two or three yards before the platform, and broke with a great sound upon a chaos of rocks twenty yards lower down, where it divided into two branches, forming a little farther off two distinct rivers.

"We have arrived," said the Pincheyra, turning towards his companion, to whom, till then, he had not addressed a word; "do you recognise this place?"

"Perfectly. It is just at the foot of this cascade that the camp is established; your *toldo* is not more than a gunshot from it."

"You are quite right. You see that I have not deceived you."

"It is true; but how shall we descend into the valley? It appears to me that the road is scarcely practicable."

"You are mistaken; it is, on the contrary, most easy, as you shall see; only give me your word as a caballero not to reveal to anyone the secret that I confide to you. You understand, do you not, the importance to me, in case of attack, of having a way by which I could escape with my companions without striking a blow, and glide, so to say, like a serpent between the fingers of my enemies, when they would think me at their mercy?"

"I understand that perfectly, and I heartily take the oath you exact, especially as the confidence with which you have conducted me here is an unquestionable proof of the esteem you have for me."

Don Pablo bowed politely.

"Come," said he, "we will descend."

He then made a turn on the right, and gained the western extremity of the platform.

"See," said he.

The painter looked.

A ladder cut in the solid rock descended at a gentle declivity to a certain depth on the flanks of the mountain, and was lost in a thick cluster of forest trees.

"Chance, a long time ago," pursued Don Pablo, "revealed to me this passage at a time when I

thought I should never have to make use of it. Now, it is very useful to me to enter and leave the camp without being seen; but we shall not remain long here. Come."

Don Pablo, with a confidence which would have been decided folly with any other man than the painter, then passed first, and began to descend without even turning his head to see if his companion followed him.

Nothing would have been more easy than to make this partisan lose his equilibrium by gently pushing him as if by chance, and so making him break his neck against the rocks. The thought did not even occur to the painter, notwithstanding the hatred which rankled in his heart against this man—a hatred revived by their recent quarrel. He followed his enemy in this hazardous descent, as unconcerned as if he had made a promenade of pleasure with an intimate friend.

It did not take them more than a few minutes to reach the base of the mountain, and place their foot in the valley.

"Here we are," said Don Pablo; "we ought to separate here; go to your affairs, and I will go to mine."

They were, in fact, in the middle of the camp, at few paces only from the *toldo* of the chief.

"Are you not going to receive the strangers who are coming?" asked Emile.

"Yes, I am going to receive them, for they will be here in ten minutes or so; and, as I have told you, I wish to pay them a certain respect to which they have a right."

"It was arranged between us, I thought, that I should assist at this interview?"

"Certainly, and I will keep my promise, you may depend; but this interview will not take place till later—in two or three hours at least. I am only now about to fulfil towards the strangers the duties of hospitality. When they have rested, we will occupy ourselves with business. So, make your mind easy; when the time comes, I will take care to tell you that you may assist at the conference."

"I have your word, I will therefore make no further objection. God keep you, Seigneur Don Pablo."

"God keep you, Señor Don Emile," answered the partisan.

The two men bowed, and without further discussion they turned their backs, and each went his way: Don Pablo proceeding to the entrance of the camp, where, no doubt, his presence would soon be required; and the painter returning to his *toldo*, where he soon arrived A man, sitting on the threshold, appeared to be waiting his arrival.

This man was Tyro the Guaraní. At a few paces from him, crouched on the soil, two ragged individuals, but armed to the teeth, were playing at *monte*. These persons were Mataseis is and Sacatripas, the two bullies engaged by the painter on his flight from San Miguel de Tucuman. Without disturbing themselves, they saluted their master as he passed, and continued the eager game they had commenced at sunrise, and which probably would last, unless important affairs called them off, until the end of the day.

At the sight of the Frenchman, Tyro quickly rose, raised the curtain of the *toldo*, and, after his master had entered, followed him.

"What news?" asked Emile.

"Nothing important apparently," answered the Guaraní, "but much in reality."

"Ah!" said the young man, with a thoughtful air, "What has happened then?"

"Nothing, I repeat, my friend; however, I think you will do well to be on your guard."

"Eh! Am I not always so?"

"True, but an increase of precaution could do no harm."

"Then you have learned something?"

"I have learned nothing positive as yet; however, I have my suspicions; soon, I hope, I shall be able to inform you."

"Have you seen the ladies today?"

"Yes, my friend; this morning I had the honour to pay them a visit; they are sorrowful and resigned, as usual, and it is easy to see that their position becomes more painful to them every moment, and that their feigned resignation conceals a profound despondency."

"Alas!" murmured the young man, with sadness, "I am unhappily unable to be of service to them."

"Perhaps, my friend."

Emile quickly brightened up.

"You know something, do you not, my good Tyro?" cried he, with anxiety.

"I must say nothing yet, my friend; be patient You shall soon know all."

The young man sighed.

"I have seen Don Pablo," said he.

"Ah!" said the Guaraní, with curiosity.

"I shall assist at the interview."

"Good!" cried the Indian, joyfully rubbing his hands together; "So much the better, Don Pablo has not made any difficulties?"

"Hum! He only consented when the pistol was at his breast."

"No matter; the principal thing is that you will be present."

"You see that I have followed your counsel."

"Soon, my friend, you will yourself acknowledge the importance of it."

"God grant it! I confess that since I have been in this frightful den of Casa-Frama, I feel that I am losing all energy."

"Courage, my friend; perhaps you are nearer escaping from it than you suppose."

"You never speak except by enigmas."

"Excuse me; it is at present impossible for me to explain myself."

"Do as you like; I will not interfere in anything."

"Till the moment for action has arrived."

"But when this moment has come—?"

Tyro did not answer, occupied in preparing for his master's breakfast. Apparently absorbed by this grave occupation, he feigned not to hear these too significant words.

"Now it is ready, my friend," said he; "eat and drink, you must require refreshment. We never know what the future reserves for us, and it is well to be prepared for anything that may happen."

The painter looked at him a moment attentively.

"Come," said he, sitting on a stool before the table, "you are plotting something?"

The Guaraní burst out a laugh maliciously.

"Ah!" said he, after a pause, "You know, my friend, that the engagement of our two companions terminated yesterday."

"What companions, and what engagements?" answered the young man, with his mouth full.

"Why, that of Mataseis and his worthy acolyte Sacatripas."

"Good, but what have I to do with that? These fellows have been paid in advance; I do not owe them anything."

"Pardon, my friend; you owe them two months."

"How is that?"

"Because I have renewed their engagement for two months this very morning at the same price; for that matter it is not dear; the fellows have a certain value."

"What a strange idea to hamper us afresh with these wretches! Would it not have been better to have got rid of them, and to send them to get hanged somewhere else?"

"As to being hanged, make your mind easy; that will happen to them sooner or later. Meanwhile, I have thought it preferable to keep them in our service. Do you remember, my friend, that when we fight against bandits we should have some of the same stamp in our interests?"

"Arrange it as you like, that's your affair; for you do everything here according to your own notions. I Keep them or don't keep them—I wash my hands of it."

"You are merry, my friend?"

"No, I am sad; I have sometimes a temptation to put an end to it by blowing out the brains of that cursed Pincheyra, and then taking the same leap myself."

"Be careful not to give way to these temptations, my friend; not that I interest myself the least in the world in these Pincheyras, for I am reserving for Don Pablo and his brothers a dish of my own preparing, which they will find too highly spiced, I am convinced; but the moment has not yet come. Let us be patient, and, for a commencement, be present at the interview today, my friend; and open your ears, for if I do not much deceive myself, you will hear strange things."

"Yes, yes, I suppose that an interview with the colonel—for he has definitively taken this grade on his own authority—must be fertile in curious incidents."

"I wish to leave you the pleasure of the surprise, my friend. Are you going out?" added he, seeing his master proceeding towards the door.

"I intend to pay my respects to the ladies."

"You will not have time for it; moreover, you could not talk freely with them; the two sisters of Don Pablo are at present with them."

"These women appear to have received orders not to lose sight of these two unhappy ladies; they pass nearly the whole day with them."

"It is probable that they have received instructions of the kind."

The young man did not answer, but he knitted his eyebrows, stamped with rage, and began to

walk to and fro.

Some minutes elapsed

"*Parbleu!*" cried he at last, "I am a perfect ass to fret thus about things which cannot affect me, and which I cannot prevent! It is evident, in fact, that as life is a continual game of seesaw, when I shall have; reached the last step of bad fortune, I must remount, and that, according to fate, my position will improve. Bah! I will trust to Providence. He is more skilful than me, and will know well, when it pleases Him, how to enable me to escape from my embarrassment! However, it appears to me that it is time for a change; I am horribly wearied here. Upon my word, it was a splendid idea to come into this new world to seek tranquillity and patriarchal manners! Mercy on us! What patriots these Pincheyras are! And how true and copied from nature are the narratives of travel!"

And he laughed heartily.

As what precedes had been said in French, and consequently the Indian had not understood a word, he looked at the young man with a wondering air, which redoubled the hilarity of the latter; so that the Guaraní asked himself if his master had not suddenly gone mad. But a new personage at the moment appeared in the *toldo*, and by his presence calmed, as by enchantment, the gaiety of the Frenchman, and rendered him serious again.

This personage was no other than Don Santiago Pincheyra, one of the brothers of Don Pablo; he to whom the young man had rendered so great a service on the occasion of his skirmish with the squadron of Zeno Cabral.

Brutal and morose as was Don Santiago, he appeared to have preserved some gratitude to the painter for this service, and on several occasions he had manifested a slight interest in him. It was owing to his influence that the painter was treated with consideration in the camp of the partisans, and nearly free to act in his own way without being exposed to the gross annoyances of this undisciplined troop of bandits.

"I see with pleasure that you do not breed melancholy among you, Seigneurs Frenchmen," said he, holding out his hand. "So much the better! Grief would kill a cat, as we say."

"You see that I adapt myself to circumstances," answered Emile, pressing his hand. "To answer your proverb by another, I will say, things that can't be helped should be forgotten. What brings me the honour of your visit, dear Seigneur?"

"First, the desire of seeing you, and then, a message from my brother, Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Believe me, that I feel as I ought this proof of courtesy, dear Seigneur," said the young man, bowing with politeness; "and this message that, through you, his Excellency Colonel Don Pablo Pincheyra does me the honour to send is important, no doubt?"

"You will decide that better than me, Señor; my brother requests your presence at the interview which is immediately to take place with some Spanish officers, who arrived about an hour ago at our headquarters."

"I am honoured by his Excellency deigning to think of me. I will present myself at the council when I shall have received the order to do so."

"This order I bring you, Seigneur Frenchman, and if you please to follow me I will accompany you to the place chosen for the interview, which is the council room in my brother's *toldo*."

"Very well, Seigneur Don Santiago, I am ready to follow you."

"Then we will set out together; for they only wait for you."

The painter exchanged with the Guaraní a last look, to which the latter responded by one not less significant, and, without saying anything further, he left the *toldo* with Don Santiago.

All was gossip at Casa-Frama; the unforeseen arrival of the strangers had awakened general curiosity; the streets were literally crammed with men, women, and children, who pressed towards the *toldo* of the colonel.

The two men had much difficulty in threading a passage through the crowd of idlers who obstructed the public way; and had it not been for Don Santiago, known and respected by all, the Frenchman would probably not have succeeded in reaching the spot he wanted.

Although the abode of Don Pablo Pincheyra bore the name of *toldo*, it was in reality a vast and airy house, built with the greatest possible care for the convenience of its owner. The walls were of clay, plastered and whitewashed carefully. Ten windows, with shutters painted green, and ornamented with climbing plants, which grew in various directions, gave it an air of gaiety which made it pleasant to look at. The door, preceded by a peristyle and a verandah, was in the centre of the building. Before this door a flagstaff was planted in the earth, surmounted by a Spanish flag. Two sentinels, armed with lances, were seated, one at the threshold of the door, the other at the foot of the flagstaff. A battery of six pieces of cannon was pointed a few paces in advance, half hidden at this moment by thirty horses, all harnessed, which champed their bits, and covered them with foam.

At the sight of Don Santiago the sentinels presented arms, and moved aside respectfully to give him passage, while the crowd was kept at a distance by some soldiers, previously placed there for that purpose, and had no other means of slaking their curiosity than that of questioning the attendants of the strangers who were watching their master's horses.

The two men entered the house. After having passed through a hall full of soldiers, they entered

a room where several officers were talking in a high voice about the arrival of the strangers. Some of these officers approached Don Santiago to ask him the news; but the latter, who perhaps knew no more than they on this subject, or who had received strict instructions from his brother, only gave them evasive answers, and putting them aside gently with, his hand, he at last entered the council room, followed closely by the French painter, who began to be much interested in all he saw.

The council room was a rather large apartment, the whitewashed walls of which were completely bare, with the exception of a large Christ in ivory, placed at the extremity of the room, above an armchair occupied at the moment by Don Pablo Pincheyra. To the right of this figure a wretched engraving, frightfully illuminated, purported to represent the King of Spain, crowned, and with the scepter in his hand. To the left an engraving, not less ugly, represented, or was supposed to represent, Our Lady of Solitude.

The furniture was mean and primitive; some few benches and stools ranged against the walls, and a small table, formed the whole of it.

Don Pablo Pincheyra, dressed in the uniform of a Spanish colonel, was seated in his armchair; near him was his brother, Don José Antonio, on the right; the place of Don Santiago on his left was for the time vacant; then came Father Gomez, chaplain of Don Pablo—a fat and jovial monk, but whose eyes sparkled with wit; several officers—captains, lieutenants, and subalterns, grouped without order round their chief—were leaning on their sabres, and carelessly smoking their cigarettes, talking in a low voice.

Before the table was seated a tall, lean man, with ascetic features, and ambiguous, deceitful eyes. This was Don Justo Vallejos, Secretary of Don Pablo; for, as he had given himself the luxury of a chaplain, this worthy colonel no doubt had felt all the greater need of attaching a secretary to his person.

A *cabo* or corporal stood near the door, and filled; the functions of doorkeeper, introducing the visitors.

"At last!" cried Don Pablo, perceiving the Frenchman; "I began to fear that you would not come."

"We have had great difficulty in reaching here," answered Don Santiago, taking the place which had been reserved for him.

"Now you have come, all is ready, Señor Frenchman; place yourself there, near my secretary. Cabo Mendez, bring a chair for this gentleman."

The young man bowed silently, and, as he had received the order to do, he sat down near the secretary, who in turn bowed, and cast a furtive look at him by way of salute.

"Now, *caballeros*," pursued Don Pablo, addressing the company, "do not forget that representatives of his Most Sacred Majesty the King, our sovereign, are about to appear before us. Let us act, then, as the true *caballeros* that we are, and let us prove to them that we are not so savage as they perhaps have supposed."

The officers answered by a respectful bow, sat upright, and threw away their cigarettes.

Looking around him, Don Pablo assured himself that his wishes had been attended to, and that his officers had assumed an attitude more becoming than that they had previously taken, and then, turning towards the corporal, motionless at the door, on the lock of which his hand was placed—

"Cabo Mendez," said he, "introduce to us the representatives of his Catholic Majesty the King of Spain and the Indies."

The corporal opened both leaves of the door, and the persons expected, who were in an adjoining apartment, entered the room with a grave and measured tread, after the corporal had repeated, with a clear voice, and in an emphatic tone, the last words of Don Pablo Pincheyra.

These strangers, to whom was given a title to which they probably had a very doubtful right, were to the number of five.

Their escort had remained without. On perceiving them the young Frenchman with difficulty repressed an exclamation of surprise. Of the five persons he had recognized two whom he certainly was far from expecting to meet under such circumstances.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTERVIEW.

If Emile Gagnepain became somewhat more calm, certainly the strange spectacle that he had before him had aroused not only his gaiety but his caustic fancy. This shameless parody of interviews accorded by the chiefs of a powerful nation to the representatives of another—played seriously by bandits with low and cruel features, and hands red with blood—half fox and half wolf—whose affected manners had something despicable and repulsive in them—disagreeably impressed the young man, and caused him to experience an undefinable sentiment of disgust and pity for the Spanish officers, who did not scruple to come and humbly implore the aid of these

ferocious partisans, whom for a long time they had implacably pursued, to punish them for their innumerable misdeeds.

And, in fact, the Spanish officers appeared to be perfectly aware of their anomalous position, and of the reprehensible step, with regard to honour and the right of nations, that they did not at this moment scruple to take.

Notwithstanding the assurance they affected and their haughty bearing, the blush of shame covered their faces. In spite of them their heads drooped, and their eyes rested only with a kind of hesitation on the persons by whom they were surrounded, and who, without doubt, they wished had been less numerous.

This unusual ceremony, displayed before them with the evident design of cutting them off from all retreat, and of engaging them irrevocably, weighed upon them; for they understood all the bearings of such a measure, and the effect it could not fail to have beyond the mountains.

The bearing of the Pincheyras formed a striking contrast to that of the Spaniards.

Tumultuously grouped round their chiefs, with mocking eye and sardonic lip, they whispered to each other, throwing over their shoulders disdainful glances at those whose bad fortune constrained them to seek their aid.

Don Pablo Pincheyra and his brothers alone preserved a becoming countenance. They felt their hearts swell with pride as they thought of the past, which fortune, by one of her incomprehensible caprices, called on them suddenly to play. They looked upon this attitude as serious, and really believed themselves called upon to replace, by the force of their arms, under Spanish domination, those rich colonies which had so providentially escaped them, by that just and implacable law of retaliation which wills that, sooner or later, the executioners shall become in their turn victims of those whom they have martyred.

When the strangers had been introduced by the *cabo*, and the first salutations had been exchanged, Don Pablo Pincheyra commenced—

"Welcome to Casa-Frama, *caballeros*," said he, beginning with studied politeness; "I will try, while you are pleased to stay among us, to render your visit agreeable."

"I thank you, *caballero*, in the name of my companions and my own," answered one of the strangers, "for the gracious welcome you have been pleased to give us; permit me on one point only to correct you. It is not a visit that we make to you and your brave companions, so devoted and loyal champions of Spain; we come charged with an important mission by our sovereign and yours."

"We are ready to listen to this message, *caballero*; but first will you be so good as to acquaint us with your name and those of the honourable persons who accompany you."

The stranger bowed.

"I am," he said, "Don Antonio Zinozain de Figueras, lieutenant colonel in the service of his Majesty the King of Spain and the Indies."

"I have very often heard your name, Señor *caballero*," interrupted Don Pablo.

"Two others, captains of his Majesty, have been attached to me," continued Don Antonio, directing the partisan's attention to them, "Don Lucio Ortega and Don Estevan Mendoza."

The two officers, whose names had just been mentioned, ceremoniously bowed.

Pincheyra darted a piercing look at them, and addressing him who had been designated by the name of Don Estevan Mendoza—

"Prudence, no doubt, has induced you, *caballero*, to conceal yourself modestly under the name of Don Estevan."

"Señor—" stammered the Spaniard.

"Reassure yourself, *caballero*," continued Don Pablo; "although these precautions are useless, I understand your scruples; your *incognito* shall be respected."

Don Estevan—or at least the person who had given himself this name—blushed with shame and confusion at these cutting words, but he found no words to answer, and bowed silently with an ill-concealed gesture of spite.

Don Pablo smiled slyly, and turning towards Don Antonio—

"Continue, I beg, *caballero*," said he.

The latter had been as surprised as annoyed at the mocking observation of the partisan, and it was with some difficulty that he succeeded in concealing the annoyance he felt; however, thus questioned by Don Pablo, he bowed and answered—

"The two other persons who accompany me are—the one an Indian Araucan chief, renowned—"

"I know him," said Pincheyra. "A long time ago Captain Marilaün and I slept side by side under the same *toldo*, as two brothers who loved each other; I am, then, happy to see him."

"And I also," answered the chief in excellent Spanish. "If it had only depended on my will, I should have united myself to your chief several months ago, for you are brave as the most redoubtable Ulmen of my tribe."

Don Pablo pressed the hand of the chief.

"It only remains to me, *caballero*," pursued Don Antonio, "to present to you this officer."

"It is needless, *caballero*," quickly interrupted Don Pablo; "when the time arrives he will present himself, informing us of the motives which lead to his presence among us. Will you now be so good as to acquit yourself of the mission with which you are charged, in making us acquainted with the message of which you are the bearers."

"Señor *caballero*," pursued Don Antonio Zinozain, "the king, my master and yours, satisfied with the services you have rendered to his government since the commencement of this deplorable revolt, has deigned to confer on you the grade of colonel."

"I thank his Majesty for his kind solicitude for me," answered Don Pablo with a sardonic smile, "but the grade which he is good enough to confer upon me today, my sword has long ago conquered for me in the battlefield, where I have poured out my blood like water, to maintain the rights of his sacred Majesty."

"I know it *caballero*, but it is not to this distinction only that his Majesty confines his favours."

"I am listening to you, Señor."

"His Majesty has not only resolved to place under your immediate orders a body of two hundred men of regular cavalry, commanded by myself and other officers of the army, but also he authorises you, by a decree duly signed by him and registered in the chancellor's office, to take for the corps placed under your orders the title of the Faithful Corps of Mountain Chasseurs, to hoist the royal standard quartered with Castile and León, and to place the Spanish cockade on the hats of your soldiers."

"His Majesty accords me these signal favours?" interrupted Dou Pablo, with a joyous trembling in his voice.

"Moreover," impassively continued Don Antonio Zinozain, "his Majesty, considering that, up to the present time, guided solely by your devotion and your inviolable fidelity, you have sustained the war at your own risk and peril, dispensing and compromising your own fortune for his service, without hope of regaining these enormous disbursements—his Majesty, I say, whose high wisdom nothing escapes, has thought fit to give you a proof of his high satisfaction at this loyal conduct. He has consequently ordered that a sum of 100,000 piastres should be immediately placed at your disposal, in order to cover a part of your expenses. Moreover, he authorises you to take in advance, from all the war contributions that you shall impose on the towns which fall in your power, a tenth, of which you shall dispose as you think fit, as being entirely your own property, and this to the amount of another 100,000 piastres. His Majesty, besides, charges me, through his Excellency the Viceroy, his delegate and bearer of full powers, to assure you of his high satisfaction and of his desire not to limit to what he has done today the reward that he reckons to accord to you in the future."

"So," said Don Pablo, standing erect with a proud smile, "I am now really a war chief."

"His Majesty has so decided," coldly answered Don Antonio.

"*¡Vive Dios!*" cried the partisan with a menacing gesture; "his Majesty has done well, for I swear that of all those who now fight for his cause, I shall be the last to lay down arms if I die for it. Never will I consent to treat with the rebels, and this oath I will keep, *¡rayo de Cristo!* Even if heaven and earth should league against me to weigh me down, I hope that, a century hence, the grandchildren of the men that we now fight should still tremble at the memory of my name."

The ferocious partisan had risen as he uttered this terrible imprecation; he had bowed his tall figure, thrown back his head, and placed his hand on the pommel of his sabre, whilst he cast at those around him a look of inexpressible arrogance and of savage energy.

The assembly were moved by these bold words; an electric shock appeared to run through them, and suddenly the whole room burst out into cries and exclamations; and then, the partisans warming by degrees through their own excitement, soon reached a paroxysm of joy and delirium.

Primitive natures are easy to draw out. These men, half savages, felt themselves recompensed by the honours accorded to their chief; they were proud of him, and manifested their joy in their own way—that is to say, by bawling out and gesticulating.

The Spaniards themselves shared to a certain extent the general excitement. For a time, hope, nearly extinguished, arose as strongly in their hearts as on the first day, and they persuaded themselves into the belief in a success henceforth impossible.

In fact, at the point at which affairs had now arrived, this last attempt made by the Spaniards was but an act of foolish temerity, the result of which could not but be the prolongation, without any necessity, of a war of extermination between men of the same race, speaking the same language —an impious war, and a sacrilege which they ought, on the contrary, to have terminated as soon as possible, in order to spare bloodshed, instead of leaving America under the burden of general reprobation. But they were driven forward much more by the hatred of the colonists towards themselves, than by a sentiment of patriotism and nationality, that the latter did not yet understand, and which could not exist on a land which never, since its discovery, had been free.

Emile Gagnepain, the only spectator, apart from his reasons as to personal safety, completely disinterested in the question, could not, however, preserve his indifference, and assist coldly at this scene. He would even have ended by giving way to the general excitement, if the presence of the two Spanish officers—the first cause of all his misfortunes—had not restrained him, by inspiring a secret apprehension which he vainly tried to combat, but which, spite of all his efforts,

continued with an obstinacy more and more disquieting to him.

Although the young Frenchman was prominently placed near Don Pablo Pincheyra's secretary, the Spaniards, from their entrance into the room, had not appeared to notice him. Not once had their eyes been directed to him, although they must have seen him. This obstinacy in feigning not to see him appeared the more extraordinary on the part of these two men, as they had no ostensible motive for avoiding him—at least he supposed so.

Emile was only waiting for the interview to terminate to approach Captain Ortega, and ask him to explain a proceeding which was not only painful to him, but which seemed to denote intentions anything but friendly towards himself.

When the tumult began to subside, and the partisans had by degrees ceased their vociferations, Don Pablo claimed silence with a gesture, and prepared to take leave of the Spanish envoys, but Don Antonio Zinozain took a step in advance, and turning towards the Indian chief, who, up till then, had remained impassable and mute, listening to and observing all that was passing around him, though taking no part in it.

"Has my brother Marilaün nothing, then, to say to the great pale chief?" asked he.

"Yes," sharply answered the Araucan, "I have sworn this: Marilaün is a powerful Apo-Ulmen among the Aucas; a thousand warriors when he demands them follow his horse wherever he is pleased to conduct them; his *quipu* is obeyed on all the territory of the Puelches and the Huiliches; Marilaün loves the grandfather of the palefaces; he will fight with his warriors to bring back to their duty the wandering sons of the Toqui of the whites. Five hundred Huiliche and Puelche horsemen will range themselves near the Pincheyra when he orders it, for Pincheyra has always been a friend of the Aucas, and they consider him as a child of their tribe. I have said. Have I spoken well, powerful men?"

"I thank you for your generous offer, chief," answered Don Pablo, "and I accept it with alacrity. Your warriors are brave; your own reputation for courage and wisdom has long since passed the bounds of your territory. The aid you offer me will be very useful to his Majesty. Now, *caballeros*, permit me to offer you hospitality. You are fatigued with a long journey, and must want to take some refreshments before leaving. As there is nothing to retain us any further here, will you follow me?"

"Pardon, Señor Colonel," said the Portuguese officer, who till then had kept modestly on one side; "before you quit this room I will, if you permit me, acquit myself of a mission to you with which I am charged."

Notwithstanding his self-control, Don Pablo allowed a gesture of dissatisfaction to escape him, which he almost immediately repressed.

"Perhaps it would be better, Señor Captain," he replied, in a conciliating tone, "to postpone till a more fitting moment the communication that you have to make me."

"Why so, Señor Colonel?" quickly answered the Portuguese; "the moment appears to me very suitable, and the spot where we are very appropriate. Moreover; do you not come here to treat of subjects of the highest importance?"

"Perhaps so, Señor, but it appears to me that this meeting has lasted too long already—it is prolonged beyond ordinary limits. You, like ourselves, must want some hours of repose."

"So, Señor Colonel, you refuse to hear me?" drily pursued the officer.

"I do not say that," quickly answered Don Pablo; "do not misunderstand me, I beg, Señor Captain. I address a simple observation to you in your own interest—that is all, Señor."

"If it is to be so, *caballero*, permit me, while thanking you for your courtesy, not to accept, at present at least, the gracious offer you make me, and, if you will permit me, I will acquit myself of my mission."

Don Pablo threw a stealthy look on the French painter, and then answered with visible repugnance—

"Speak, then, Señor, since you insist on it. *Caballeros*," added he, addressing the other strangers, "excuse me for a few minutes, I beg. You see that I am obliged to listen to what this *caballero* so ardently wishes to tell me; but I am glad to think that he will not detain you long."

"A few minutes only, Señor."

"Be it so; we listen to you."

And the partisan resumed with a wearied air the seat that he had quitted. Although he put a good face upon it, an observer would have seen that he felt annoyed. The Frenchman, put on his guard by Tyro, and who, till this time, had seen nothing in what passed that concerned himself, did not allow this circumstance to escape him, slight as it was. Feigning entire indifference, he redoubled his attention, and imposed silence on Don Pablo's secretary, who—no doubt warned by his master—had suddenly felt inclined to talk with the young man, to whom he had previously not condescended to accord the least mark of politeness.

Thus rebuffed, Señor Vallejos felt constrained to subside again into the same silence that had previously distinguished him.

The Portuguese captain, taking advantage of the permission that had been given him, advanced a few paces, and after having ceremoniously bowed to Don Pablo, he commenced in a firm tone—

"Señor Colonel," said he, "my name is Don Sebastiao Vianna; I have the honour to serve, in the capacity of captain, in the army of his Majesty the King of Portugal and the Algarves."

"I know it, *caballero*," drily answered Don Pablo; "come to the fact, if you please, without further delay."

"I will do so, Señor; but before acquitting myself of the message with which I am charged, I was bound first to make myself officially known to you."

"Very well; continue."

"General Don Roque, Marquis de Castelmelhor, commander in chief of the second division of the corps of occupation of the Banda Oriental, of whom I have the honour to be aide-de-camp, sends me to you, Don Pablo Pincheyra, colonel commanding a squadron in the service of his Majesty the King of Spain, to beg you to explain yourself clearly and fully on the subject of the Marchioness of Castelmelhor, his wife, and Doña Eva de Castelmelhor, his daughter, whom—according to certain reports which have reached him—you retain, against the law of nations, prisoners in your camp at Casa-Frama."

"Ah!" cried Don Pablo, with a gesture of denial, "Such a supposition attacks my honour, Señor Captain; beware!"

"I do not speak on supposition, *caballero*," pursued Don Sebastiao, with firmness; "be so good as to answer me clearly. Are these ladies, or are they not, in your power?"

"These ladies have claimed my assistance to escape from the rebels, who had made them prisoners."

"You retain them, in your camp—here, at Casa-Frama?"

Don Pablo turned with an air of vexation towards the Frenchman, whose eye he instinctively felt weighed upon him.

"It is true," at last he answered, "that these ladies are in my camp, but they enjoy perfect liberty."

"But on several occasions, when they have entreated you to allow them to rejoin General Castelmelhor, you have always objected to it on some vague pretext."

The situation became more and more embarrassing; the partisan felt rage boiling within him; he saw that he had been betrayed, that his conduct was known, that all denial was useless. The honourable distinction that had been so recently conferred upon him induced him to restrain himself, but he was not sufficiently master of himself to repress all manifestation of annoyance—there was in him too much of the partisan and the bandit for that.

"*¡Vive Dios!*" cried he, with violence, "One would think that you are now making me undergo an examination!"

"It is so, in fact," proudly answered the officer.

"You forget, it appears to me, where you are and to whom you are speaking, Señor."

"I forget nothing; I do my duty without troubling, myself with the probable consequences that this conduct may have for myself."

"You are jesting, Señor," pursued the partisan, with a wily smile; "you have nothing to fear from me or mine; we are soldiers and not bandits; speak, then, without fear."

Don Sebastiao smiled bitterly.

"I have no fear, Señor," said he, "but that of not succeeding in accomplishing my mission; but I find that I am detaining you longer than I wished; I therefore briefly conclude. My general charges me to remind Don Pablo Pincheyra, a Spanish officer, that his honour, as a soldier, demands that he fail not in his word, loyally given, in retaining against their will two ladies who, of their own accord, have placed themselves under his safeguard. He, consequently, begs him to send them under my escort to the headquarters of the Portuguese army. To Pincheyra, the partisan chief—a man to whom the words, honour, and loyalty are void of meaning, and who only seeks lucre—the Marquis of Castelmelhor offers a ransom of 4,000 piastres, that I am charged to pay on the surrender of the two ladies. Now I have finished, *caballero*; it is for you to tell me to whom I am now speaking—to the Spanish officer or to the Montonero."

After these Words, uttered with a short and dry voice, the captain leant on his sabre, and waited.

Meanwhile, a lively agitation reigned in the room; the partisans whispered to each other, casting angry glances at the bold officer who dared to brave them in their own camp; some even had their hands already on their arms, and a conflict seemed imminent.

Don Pablo rose, calmed the tumult with an imperious gesture, and, when silence was re-established, he replied to the general's envoy with exquisite courtesy—

"Señor Captain, I excuse the bitterness and exaggeration in what you have just said; you are ignorant of what has passed, and do not know how to acquit yourself of the mission with which you are charged; The tone you have thought proper to take would perhaps, with any other man than me, have serious consequences for you; but, I repeat, I excuse you in wrongly supposing me to have intentions which have always been far from my thoughts. These ladies have asked for my protection; I have accorded it them to the full. They now think they can do without it. Be it so; they are free; nothing prevents them leaving with you; they are not my prisoners. I have, then, no ransom to exact from them. My only reward will be to have been happy enough to have been of service to them in so perilous a position. That is the answer, Señor Captain, that I have to make

to you. Will you inform his Excellency the Marquis de Castelmelhor as to the manner in which I have acted with you, and assure him that I have been happy to render to these ladies the services that they have claimed from me on my honour as a soldier."

"This answer fills me with joy, *caballero*," resumed the officer. "Believe me that I thought it a duty to dispel from the mind of my General the prejudices which he had acquired against you—and with some reason, permit me to say. He does not know you, and your enemies have traduced you to him."

"All is settled then, Señor. I am happy that this grave affair has at last terminated to our mutual satisfaction. When do you wish to leave?"

"As soon as I possibly can, Señor."

"I understand; the Marquis de Castelmelhor must be impatient to see once more two persons who are so dear to him, and from whom he has been so long separated. But these ladies must require some hours to make their preparations for departure; they are not yet informed of it. I venture to hope, then, that you will accept the invitation that I have made these *caballeros*, and share the hospitality that I offer them."

"With all my heart, *caballero*, only I should wish that you would permit me to see these ladies without delay."

"I will myself conduct you to them, Señor Captain, as soon as you have taken some refreshments."

The captain bowed; a further persistence would have been in bad taste.

Don Pablo then left the room with his guests and his most intimate officers. On passing the French painter he did not say a word to him, but he looked at him sardonically, and with a smile which much struck the young man.

"Hum!" murmured he to himself; "It is not so clear to me. I believe I must more than ever watch over these poor ladies. Don Pablo has too readily consented to let them go."

And he left the room, shaking his head for some time.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOLDO.

On leaving the reception room, Emile Gagnepain proceeded to the *toldo* occupied by the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter. In thus acting, the young man obeyed a presentiment which told him that in what had passed before him a melancholy farce had been played by Don Pablo, and that the readiness with, which he had consented to part with them concealed some perfidy or other.

This presentiment had become so fixed in the young man's mind—it had become so real to him—that, although nothing arose to corroborate this suspicion of treachery, he was perfectly convinced of it, and would have asserted as much had occasion called for it.

Drawn, spite of himself, into a series of adventures very disagreeable to a man who, like him, had come to America to seek for that freedom and tranquillity of mind which his country, torn by factions, refused him, the young man had at last—as always happens—become interested in the anomalous position into which he had been thrown, with the feverish anxiety of a man who sees passing before him the scenes of a stirring drama. Moreover, without his taking any heed of it, a sentiment that he could not analyse had taken possession of his heart. This feeling had grown, unknown to himself, almost insensibly, and finally had acquired such force that the young man—who began to be frightened at the novel situation in which he was suddenly placed—despaired of freeing himself from it. Like all natures not feeble, but careless—not daring seriously to question himself, and sound the gulf which had thus opened in his heart—he allowed himself carelessly to be drifted by the current which carried him along, enjoying the present without caring for the future, and assuring himself that when the catastrophe arrived it would be time enough to face the danger and to take his stand.

He had taken but a few steps in the camp when, turning his head, he perceived Don Santiago Pincheyra at a few paces behind him.

The Montonero was walking carelessly, his arms behind his back, with a vague look, whistling a *zambacueca*—in a word, all the appearance of a man taking a lounging walk. But the painter was not deceived: he knew that Don Pablo, engaged with his guests, towards whom he was obliged to do the honours of the camp, had deputed his brother to watch his movements and render an account of his proceedings.

The young man by degrees slackened his pace unaffectedly, and, turning suddenly on his heel, found himself face to face with Don Santiago.

"Eh!" said he, feigning to see him for the first time; "What a charming surprise, Señor! You have then left to your brother, Don Pablo, the care of treating with the Spanish officers."

"As you see, Señor," answered the other, rather nonplussed, and not well knowing what to say.

"And you are, no doubt, taking a walk?"

"Upon my word, yes; between ourselves, dear Señor, these formal receptions weary me; I am a plain man, you know."

"*Caray*, if I know it!" said the Frenchman, with a sly air; "So you are free?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Yes, completely."

"Well, I am delighted that you have succeeded in disengaging yourself from these proud and haughty strangers. It is very fortunate for me that you are free. I confess I scarcely reckoned on the pleasure of meeting you thus."

"You were seeking me, then?" said Don Santiago, with astonishment.

"Certainly, I was looking for you; only, under the present circumstances, I repeat, I did not hope to meet with you."

"Ah! Why were you seeking me, then?"

"Well, dear Señor, as I have long known that you are one of my best friends, I intended to ask a service of you."

"To ask a service of me—me!"

"*Parbleu!* Who else? Except your brother Don Pablo and you, I do not know anyone at Casa-Frama."

"It is true; you are a *forastero* stranger."

"Alas! Yes—all that there is left of a forastero."

"What is the service?" asked the Montonero, completely deceived by the feigned good nature of the young man.

"This is the affair," answered the latter with imperturbable coolness; "only I beg you to keep the secret, for it concerns other persons, and consequently is rather serious."

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed Don Santiago.

"Yes," pursued the young man, nodding his head affirmatively, "you promise to keep it secret, do you not?"

"On my honour."

"Thank you, I am satisfied. I confess, then, that I begin to be horribly bored at Casa-Frama."

"I can understand that," answered the Montonero, shaking his head.

"I wish to leave."

"What prevents you?"

"*Mon Dieu!* A multitude of things; first, the two ladies whom you know."

"That is true," said he with a smile.

"You do not understand me."

"How so?"

"Why, you appear to suppose that I wish to remain with them, whereas it is they who persistently demand that I stay with them."

The Montonero cast a stealthy and suspicious look on his companion, but the Frenchman was on his guard; his face was inexpressive as marble.

"Good, continue," said he, after a pause.

"You know that I have assisted at the interview."

"*Parbleu!* Seeing that it was I who conducted you there. You were seated near the secretary."

"Señor Vallejos—just so—a very amiable gentleman. Well, these ladies are on the point of quitting Casa-Frama. Don Pablo consents to their departure."

"You wish to leave with them?"

"You have not guessed it; I should like to leave, it is true, but not with them; since they go under the escort of Spanish officers, I should be of no service to them."

"Just so."

"Then they will no longer have any pretext for preventing me quitting them."

"That is true; then—"

"Then I desire that you get your brother to grant me—unless you would prefer to give it me yourself—a safe conduct to traverse your lines and regain as quickly as possible Tucuman, which I ought never to have left."

"Is it really to return to Tucuman that you want a safe conduct?"

"For what reason should it be, then?"

"I do not know; but my brother,"—he suddenly stopped with ill-concealed embarrassment.

"Your brother!" suggested the young man.

"Nothing—I made a mistake; do not attach to what I say to you a sense which cannot be true; I am frequently subject to make mistakes."

"Are there any difficulties in your granting me the safe conduct?"

"I do not see any; however, I should not dare to do so without informing my brother."

"Do not distress yourself about that; I have no intention of leaving the camp without his authority; if you like we will go together to find him."

"You are then in a hurry to depart?"

"To a certain extent; it would be better, I think, if I could go away without seeing these ladies, and before them. In this way I should avoid the request they would not fail to make, to accompany them."

"That would indeed be better."

"Then come and find your brother, in order to settle the affair as soon as possible."

"Be it so."

They proceeded towards the *toldo* of Don Pablo; but about halfway the Frenchman stopped, slapping his forehead.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Don Santiago.

"I am thinking there is no occasion for us to go together; you will arrange this matter much better than me. While you go there I will prepare everything for my departure, so that I shall be able to set out immediately after your return."

The young man spoke with such decided good nature—his countenance was so expressive of frankness and carelessness—that Don Santiago, despite all his cleverness, was deceived.

"Very good," said he; "while I see my brother, make your preparations—there is no necessity for you to come."

"However, if you prefer it, perhaps it would be better for me to accompany you?"

"No, no, it is needless; in an hour I shall be at your *toldo* with the safe conduct."

"I thank you in advance."

The two men shook hands and separated, Don Santiago proceeding towards his brother's house, which was also his own, and the Frenchman apparently going in the direction of the habitation which had been assigned to him; but as soon as the partisan had turned the corner of the nearest street, Emile, having assured himself that no new spy was dogging his steps, immediately changed his route, and took that towards the dwelling of the two ladies.

Pincheyra had lodged his captives in an isolated *toldo* at one of the extremities of the camp—a *toldo* with its back to an almost perpendicular mountain, and which for that reason assured him against the probabilities of their flight. This *toldo* was divided into several compartments; it was clean and furnished with all the luxury that the locality admitted.

Two Indian women had been attached by the partisan to the service of the ladies, apparently as servants, but in reality to watch them and render him an account, of what they said and did; for, notwithstanding all the denials of Don Pablo, the marchioness and her daughter, although treated with the greatest respect, were really prisoners—which they had not been long in perceiving.

It was only with great caution and by stealth that the young painter succeeded in seeing them, and in exchanging with them a few words without any witness.

The domestics incessantly hovered round their mistresses, ferreting, listening, and watching; and if by chance they want away, the sister of Don Santiago, who pretended to manifest a lively friendship for the strangers, came and installed herself near them unceremoniously, and remained there nearly all the day, fatiguing them with studied caresses and lying exhibitions of a friendship which they perfectly knew was false.

However, thanks to Tyro, whose devotion did not slacken, and who knew well how to cope with the two Indian women, Emile had succeeded in pretty well escaping from them. The Guaraní had found means of attracting them by little presents, and of bringing them over a little to the interests of his master, who himself never came to the *toldo* without offering them some trifle. There remained, then, only the sister of Pincheyra. But today, after having during the morning made a long visit to the ladies, she had withdrawn, in order to assist at the repast that her brother gave to the officers, and to fulfil towards them her duties as mistress of the house, a care with which she could not dispense.

The marchioness and her daughter were then, for some time at least, delivered from their spies, mistresses of their time, and free to a certain extent to converse with the only friend who had not abandoned them, without fear of their words being repeated to the man who had so disgracefully betrayed, in their case, the laws of hospitality.

At a few paces from the *toldo*, the young man came across Tyro, who, without speaking to him, made him understand by mute signs, that the ladies were alone.

The young man entered.

The marchioness and her daughter, sitting sadly by each other's side, were reading a prayer

book.

At the sound which Emile made in crossing the threshold of the door, they quickly raised their heads.

"Ah!" exclaimed the marchioness, whose countenance immediately brightened up, "It is you at last, Don Emile?"

"Excuse me, Madame," he answered, "I can but very rarely come to see you."

"I know it. Like us, you are watched, and exposed to suspicion. Alas! We have only escaped the revolutionists to fall into the hands of men more cruel still."

"Have you to complain of the proceedings of Don Pablo Pincheyra, or of any of his people, Madame?"

"Oh!" answered she, with a significant smile, "Don Pablo is polite—too polite, perhaps, for me! Oh! Mon Dieu! What have I done to be thus exposed to his persecutions?"

"Have you seen my servant this morning, Madame! I ask pardon for interrogating you thus, but time presses."

"Is it of Tyro that you speak?"

"Yes, of him, Madame."

"I have seen him for a moment."

"Has he said nothing to you?"

"Very little; he announced to me your visit, adding, that no doubt you would have important news to communicate to me; so I was anxious to see you. In the position in which my daughter and I are, everything is matter for hope."

"I have indeed, Madame, important news to announce to you, but I do not know how to do so."

"How so?" cried Doña Eva, fixing on him her large eyes, with an undefinable expression; "Do you fear to afflict us, Señor Don Emile?"

"I fear, on the contrary, Señora, to raise in your heart a hope which may not be realised."

"What do you mean? Speak, Señor, in the name of heaven," quickly interrupted the marchioness.

"This morning, Madame, several strangers entered Casa-Frama."

"I know it, *caballero*. It is to that circumstance that I owe not having near me the bodyguard of a cornet that it has been thought I ought to have—that is to say, the sister of Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Do you know these strangers, Madame?"

"Your question surprises me, *caballero*. Since my arrival here, you know that I have scarcely been permitted to take a few steps out of this miserable place."

"Excuse me, Madame; I will put my question more definitely. Have you heard speak of a certain Don Sebastiao Vianna?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Doña Eva, clapping her hands with joy; "Don Sebastiao is one of the aides-de-camp of my father."

The countenance of the young man clouded.

"So you are sure you know him?" pursued he.

"Certainly," answered the marchioness; "how can my daughter and I fail to know a man who is our distant relation, and who has stood godfather to my daughter?"

"Then, Madame, I am deceived, and the news I bring you is really good news for you. I have been wrong in hesitating so long in announcing it to you."

"How is that?"

"Among the strangers who have arrived this morning at Casa-Frama, one of them is charged with claiming your being immediately set at liberty, on the part of the Marquis de Castelmelhor—your husband, Madame—your father, Señora. This stranger is named Don Sebastiao Vianna, wears the costume of a Portuguese officer, and is, he says, aide-de-camp of General the Marquis de Castelmelhor. I ought to avow that in this matter Don Pablo Pincheyra has conducted himself as a true *caballero*. After having denied that you were his prisoners, he nobly refused the sum proposed for your ransom, and engaged to place you today in the hands of Don Sebastiao, who is, under his escort, to conduct you to your husband."

There was a minute's silence. The marchioness was pale, her eyebrows knitted under the influence of internal emotion, and her fixed look denoted an intense feeling, which she repressed with difficulty. Doña Eva, on the contrary, brightened up; the hope of liberty illuminated her features with a halo of happiness.

The young man looked at the marchioness without understanding this emotion, the cause of which he vainly sought. At last she said:

"Are you really certain, *caballero*," said she, "that the officer of whom you speak is named Don Sebastiao Vianna?"

"Perfectly, Señora. I have several times heard him called in my presence; besides, it would be quite impossible for me to invent a name that I have never before today heard pronounced."

"It is true; and yet what you tell me is so extraordinary, that I confess I do not dare to believe it, and that I fear a snare."

"Oh, my mother," cried Doña Eva, in a tone of reproach, "Don Sebastiao Vianna, the most loyal man, and the most—"

"Which assures you, my daughter," quickly interrupted the marchioness, "that this man is really Don Sebastiao."

"Oh, Madame," said the young man.

"*Caballero* Don Sebastiao was, scarcely two months ago, in Europe," answered the marchioness, in a peremptory tone.

This remark fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of the conversation, and suddenly chilled the hope in the heart of the young girl.

At the same moment a whistle sounded from without.

"Tyro warns me," said Emile, "that someone comes this way; I can stay no longer. Whatever happens, do not abandon yourself to despair, feign to accept, whatever they are, the propositions that will be made to you; anything is preferable to you than to remain longer here. I also will watch. I shall soon see you again—courage! Reckon on me."

And without waiting for the answer that the two ladies were doubtless preparing to make, the young man darted into the street.

Tyro, who was watching for his appearance, seized him quickly by the arm, and led him towards the *toldo*.

"Look!" said he.

The painter leant forward cautiously, and perceived Don Pablo Pincheyra, his sister, the Portuguese officer, and three or four other persons, who were going towards the habitation of the ladies.

"Hum!" he exclaimed; "it was time—"

"Is it not? But I was watching, happily."

"Come, Tyro, let us return to my place. Don Santiago must expect me."

"You have given me a rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Well, have I deceived you, my friend?"

"No, certainly; what I have seen has surpassed my expectation. But who, then, is this Don Sebastiao?"

The Guaraní answered by a sneer of bad omen.

"There is something, is there not?" asked Emile, with uneasiness.

"With the Pincheyras there is always something, my friend," pursued the Indian, in a low voice; "but here we are at your *toldo;* be prudent."

"Inform the gauchos that probably we shall set out today; prepare all, so that we may be ready."

"We are going to leave?"

"I hope so."

"Oh, then, all is not yet lost."

They entered the toldo; it was deserted; Don Santiago had not yet appeared.

Whilst Tyro went to tell the gauchos to get ready, to saddle their horses, and to bring the baggage mules from the corral, the young man proceeded, with feverish rapidity, to make his preparations.

So when, half an hour later, Don Santiago entered the *toldo*, the suspicious look that he threw around him did not reveal anything which could give rise to a suspicion that the Frenchman had not commenced his task immediately after having quitted him.

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed the young man on seeing him, "Welcome, Don Santiago, especially if you bring my safe conduct."

"I bring it you," laconically answered Don Santiago.

"*Pardieu!* It must be confessed that you are a valuable friend; Don Pablo has not made any difficulties?"

"None."

"Well, he is really very obliging to me; so I can set out?"

"Yes, on two conditions."

"Ah! There are conditions! And what are they?"

"The first is, that you will set out immediately, and without seeing anyone," added he, carefully emphasising the last part of his sentence.

"My people?"

"You shall take them with you; what do you think that we should do with them here?"

"You are right; well—but this condition pleases me much; you know that I especially desire to set out without taking leave of anyone whatever. It's all for the best, then. Now, what is the second condition; if it is like the first, I doubt not that I shall accept it without hesitation."

"Here it is: Don Pablo desires that I escort you, with a dozen horsemen, for a few leagues from here."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man.

"Does that displease you?"

"Me!" answered Emile, laughing, for he had already recovered his coolness; "Why should it be displeasing to me? I am, on the contrary, very grateful to you, brother, for this new favour. He, no doubt, fears that I should wander in the inextricable mazes of these mountains," added he, with an ironical emphasis.

"I do not know; he has ordered me to escort you; I obey—that is all."

"That is right, and particularly logical."

"So you accept these two conditions?"

"With gratitude."

"Then we will set out when you like."

"I would say immediately, but, unfortunately, I am obliged to wait for my horses, which have not yet come from the *corral*."

"It is not yet late, so there is no time lost."

"Now that we are agreed, suppose we take a drop of brandy?"

"Upon my word I shall be delighted, Señor."

The Frenchman took a bottle and poured out some brandy into two horn goblets.

"To your health!" said he, drinking.

"To your pleasant journey!" answered Don Santiago.

"Thank you."

A sound of horses was heard from without.

"Here are your animals."

"Then we shall be ready in a few minutes. If you like, while we are loading, inform the men who are to accompany you."

"They have been told; they are waiting for us in the intrenchments."

Tyro and the gauchos then proceeded, aided by Emile and Don Santiago, to load the two mules and to saddle the horses.

The Frenchman, accustomed to travel in these countries, had very little luggage; he never carried with him anything but what was indispensable.

Half an hour afterwards the caravan started out at a gentle pace, accompanied by Don Santiago, who followed it on foot, smoking his cigarette, and talking with the young man in a friendly way.

As the Montonero had said, a dozen horsemen were waiting at the intrenchments.

The Pincheyra mounted his horse, gave the order of departure; the keepers opened the barriers, and the little troop quitted the camp in good order.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE MOUNTAIN.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when Emile Gagnepain left the camp. Notwithstanding the rather suspicious escort by which he was accompanied, it was with a sigh of satisfaction that the young man at last saw himself clear of this repair of bandits, from which at one time he feared he should never again set out.

The route which the little caravan followed was most picturesque and varied. A narrow path wound on the side of the mountains, almost always close to unfathomable precipices, from the base of which arose mysterious murmurs produced by invisible waters. Sometimes a bridge formed by two trunks of trees thrown across a chasm, which suddenly interrupted the route, was crossed, as if in play, by horses and mules for a long time accustomed to walk over routes more perilous still.

Obliged to travel one behind the other, owing to the narrowness of the scarcely traced path which they were pursuing, the travellers could not talk to each other; it was scarcely possible for them to exchange a few words, and they were constrained to abandon themselves to their own

thoughts, or to charm the weariness of the journey by singing or whistling. It was in thus examining the abrupt and wild landscape by which he was surrounded that the young man formed a good idea of the formidable and almost impregnable position chosen by the partisan for his headquarters, and the great influence that this position must give him over the dismayed inhabitants of the plain. He shuddered as he thought of the imprudence he had committed in allowing himself to be taken to this fortress which, like the infernal circles of Dante, was by nature surrounded by impassable intrenchments, and which never gave up the prey that had once been drawn into it. A crowd of melancholy stories of young girls, who had been carried away and had disappeared, recurred to his mind, and, by a strange reaction of thought, he experienced a kind of retrospective turn—if we may be allowed the expression—in thinking of the terrible dangers that he had run in the midst of these lawless bandits, by whom, in many instances, the law of nations—sacred among all civilised peoples—had not been respected.

Then, from reflection to reflection—by a very natural gradation—his mind fixed itself on the ladies whom he had left without support or protection in the midst of these men. Although he had only left them with the design of attempting a last effort for their deliverance, his conscience reproached him for having abandoned them; for, notwithstanding the absolute impossibility of his being useful to them at Casa-Frama, he was convinced that his presence was a check upon the Pincheyras, and that before him none of them would have dared to have subjected the captives to any brutal act.

A prey to these painful thoughts, he felt his spirits sadden by degrees, and the joy that he had at first experienced on seeing himself so unexpectedly at liberty gave place to the despondency which several times already had seized on him, and had destroyed his energy.

He was drawn from these reflections by the voice of Don Santiago, which suddenly fell upon his ear.

The young man quickly raised his head, and looked round him like a man suddenly awakened.

The landscape had completely changed. The path had by degrees become broader, and had assumed the appearance of a regular route; the mountains were lower; their sides were now covered with verdant forests, the leafy summits of which were tinted with all the colours of the rainbow by the mild rays of the setting sun. The caravan emerged at this moment into a rather extensive plain, surrounded by thick shrubbery and traversed by a narrow stream, the capricious meanderings of which were lost here and there in the midst of high and thick grass.

"What do you want?" asked the Frenchman, who, susceptible like all artists, had become absorbed, unknown to himself, by the influence of this majestic landscape, and felt gaiety replace the sadness which had for a long time oppressed him; "What do you want now, Don Santiago?"

"The devil!" exclaimed the latter; "It is fortunate that you have at last consented to answer me. For more than quarter of an hour I have been speaking to you without getting a word out of you. It seems as if you had been sound asleep, companion."

"Pardon me, Señor, I was not asleep; I was reflecting, which is often much about the same."

"*¡Demonio!* I will not quibble about that; but as you now consent to listen to me, will you be so good as to answer me?"

"I am quite agreeable; but that I may do so, it will be necessary, my dear Don Santiago, to repeat your question, of which I assure you I have not heard a word."

"I will do so, although, without exaggeration, I have done so at least ten times to no purpose."

"I have already begged you to excuse me."

"I know it, and I therefore will not be offended at your inattention. This is what I have to say: it is at least six o'clock; the sun is setting amidst coppery clouds of the worst kind; I fear a storm tonight."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed the young man; "Are you sure of that?"

"I have too much acquaintance with these mountains to be deceived."

"Hum! And what do you intend to do?"

"That is what I ask; that concerns you at least as much as me, I suppose."

"Just so—even more, since it is for my sake that you have agreed to accompany me. Well, what is your advice. I will at once adopt the expedients that your experience may suggest, and accept them without question."

"That is what I call speaking, and your answer is none the worse for making me wait for it. My advice, then would be to stop here, where we can—unless there is a deluge impossible to foresee—place ourselves under shelter from the hurricane, and camp for the night. What do you think of it?"

"I think that you are right, and that it would be folly, under circumstances like those, considering the advanced hour—especially the charming spot where we are—to persist in going further."

"Especially as it would be almost impossible for us to reach as good a refuge as this, before it is quite dark."

"Let us stop, then, without further discussion, and let us hasten to make our encampment."

"Well, dear Señor, as it is to be so, alight and let us unload the mules."

"Very good," said the young man, leaping from his horse—a movement immediately imitated by the Pincheyra.

Don Santiago had spoken truly. The sun was setting, drowned in waves of dull clouds; the evening breeze was rising with some force; the birds wheeled in large circles, uttering discordant cries—everything, in fact, foretold one of those terrible hurricanes called *temporales*, the violence of which is so great that the country over which they wreak their vengeance is in a few minutes completely changed and thrown into disorder, as if an earthquake had shattered it.

The painter had several times, since his arrival in America, been in a position to witness the terrifying spectacle of these frightful convulsions of nature in labour. Knowing the inconvenience of the danger then, he hastened to prepare everything, so that the tempest might do as little damage as possible. The baggage piled together in the centre of the valley, not far from the stream, formed a solid rampart against the greatest fury of the wind; the horses were left free and abandoned to that infallible instinct with which Providence has endowed them, and which in giving them a foreknowledge of the danger, suggests to them the means of escaping from it. Then, in a hole dug in haste, they lit the fire for cooking the slices of *charqui*, or wild bull's flesh dried in the sun, destined, with the *harina tostada* and a little *queso* of goat's flesh, for the evening meal. The water from the brook served to satisfy the thirst of the travellers, for, except Don Santiago and the painter, who were each provided with a large *bota* of white brandy, they did not carry with them either wine or liqueurs; but this forgetfulness, if it really was such, was of little importance for men of such great frugality as the Hispano-Americans—people who live, so to speak, on nothing, and whose hunger or thirst is appeased by the first thing which offers itself.

The meal was what it should be among men who expect from one moment to another to see a terrible and inevitable danger fall upon them—that is to say, sorrowful and silent. Each ate in haste, without holding conversation with his neighbour; then, hunger satisfied and the cigarette lighted, the travellers, without even wishing good night to each other, enveloped themselves in their *frazadas* and their *pellones*, and tried to sleep with that placid resignation which forms the foundation of the character of the Creoles, and makes them accept without useless murmurs the frequently disastrous consequences of the nomadic life to which they are condemned.

Soon, with the exception of the three or four sentinels placed on the outskirts of the encampment, in order to guard against the approach of wild beasts, and the two chiefs of the caravan—that is to say, Don Santiago and Emile—all were plunged into deep sleep.

The Pincheyra appeared thoughtful; he smoked his cigarette, his back leaning on a trunk of a tree, and his eyes directed straight forward, without looking on any object. The Frenchman, on the contrary, more wakeful and more gay than ever, was humming a tune and amusing himself by digging with the point of a knife a hole in which he piled some dry wood, evidently intending to light a watch fire to warm his feet, when he felt inclined to go to sleep.

"Eh! Don Santiago," said he at last, addressing Pincheyra, and touching him lightly on the shoulder, "what are you thinking of now? Is it that you are not going to try and sleep for a couple of hours?"

The Chilian shook his head without answering.

"What does it matter?" pursued the young man persistently—"You, who a little while ago reproached me for my melancholy—you seem to have inherited it, upon my word. Is it the weight of the atmosphere that influences you?"

"Do you take me for a woman?" answered he at last, in a surly tone; "What matters to me the state of the sky? Am I not a child of the mountains, accustomed from my infancy to brave the most terrible storms?"

"But, then, what is it that distresses you?"

"What is it? Do you wish to know?"

"Pardieu! Since I ask it."

Don Santiago shook his head, threw around him a suspicious look, and then at last made up his mind to speak in a low and almost indistinct voice, as if he feared to be heard, although all his companions were asleep at too great a distance for the sound of his voice to reach them.

"I have," said he, "but one thing which vexes me."

"You, Don Santiago—you much astonish me; can it be that you are on bad terms with your brother, Don Pablo?"

"My brother, it is true, has something to do with the affair, but with him personally I have no misunderstanding—at least I believe so, for with him one never knows how to act; no, it is only on your account that I am chagrined just now."

"On my account!" cried the young man with surprise, "I confess I do not understand you."

"Speak lower; there is no occasion for our companions to hear what we say. Look you, Don Emile, I wish to be frank with you. We are about to separate, perhaps never to see one another again—and I hope, for your sake, it may be so. I wish our parting to be friendly, and that you should not entertain any ill feeling against me."

"I assure you, Don Santiago—"

"I know what I say," interrupted he, with some vivacity; "you have rendered me a great service. I cannot deny that, to a certain extent, I owe my life to you, for when I met you in the cavern of the

rancho my position was almost desperate; well, I have not, in appearance, conducted myself towards you as I ought to have done. I engaged myself to shelter you and yours from the danger which threatened you, and I have conducted you to Casa-Frama, when I ought, on the contrary, to have taken you in quite an opposite direction. I know that I have acted badly in this aspect, and you have a right to entertain ill feeling to me. But I was not free to do otherwise. I was forced to obey a will stronger than my own—the will of my brother—whom no one has ever dared to resist. Now, I acknowledge my fault, and I wish as much as possible to repair the evil I have done, and that I have allowed to be done."

"That is speaking like a *caballero* and a man of heart, Don Santiago. Be assured that, come what may, I shall be pleased at what you tell me at this moment; but, since you have begun so well, do not leave me any longer in the painful doubt in which I now am; answer me sincerely, will you?"

"Yes, as far as it depends on me."

"The ladies that I have been obliged to abandon, do they run any danger at present?"

"I think so."

"On the part of your brother?"

"Yes, on his, and others also. These two strangers have implacable enemies bent on their destruction."

"Poor women!" murmured the young man, sighing; "They will not, then, leave the camp?"

"Yes; tomorrow, at sunrise, they will quit it, escorted by the officer who, in our presence, claimed them of my brother."

"Do you know that officer?"

"A little."

"Who is he?"

"That I cannot say; I have sworn not to reveal it to anyone."

The Frenchman saw that he must not persist, so he modified his questions.

"What route will they take?" asked he.

"That which we are following."

"And they are going—"

"Towards the Brazilian frontier."

"So they will rejoin General Castelmelhor?"

The Pincheyra shook his head negatively.

"Then why take this direction?"

"I do not know."

"And, nevertheless, you think that danger threatens them?"

"Terrible."

"Of what kind?"

"I do not know."

The young man stamped his foot with vexation. These continual reticences on the part of the partisan disquieted him more than the truth, so frightful that he kept watching out to hear it.

"So," pursued he, after a pause, "supposing I remain here for some time, I shall see them."

"There is no doubt of it."

"What do you advise?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Nothing; I am not, like you, in love with Doña Eva," said he, with a certain tinge of raillery which made the young man start.

"In love with Doña Eva!"—cried he—"I!"

"What other motive could induce you, with all the chances against you, to risk your life to save her, if it were not so."

The young man did not answer. A light flashed suddenly on his mind. That secret, which he had hid from himself, others knew it; and when he did not dare to question himself on this insensate love which burned within him, the certainty of its existence was discovered even by strangers.

"Oh!" stammered he at last; "Don Santiago, do you think me capable of such a folly?"

"I do not know if it is a folly to love when one is young and ardent as you are," coldly answered the Pincheyra. "I have never loved but my horse and my gun; but I know well that the love of two young and handsome beings is a law of nature, and that I do not see what reason you should have to try and escape from it I do not blame you or approve you; I state a fact—that is all."

The young painter was astonished to hear a man speak thus who, up to that time, he had

supposed to be endowed with a very moderate share of intelligence, and all whose aspirations seemed to him directed towards war and pillage. This half savage, uttering with so careless an air sentiments so humanely philosophic, seemed to him an incomprehensible phenomenon.

The Pincheyra, without appearing to notice the impression that he had produced on his companion, continued quietly—

"The officer who escorts these ladies, not only is ignorant of your love for the youngest of the two ladies, but he is not even aware that you know them. For particular and personal reasons, my brother has thought proper to keep silence on that subject. I give you this information, the correctness of which I guarantee, because it will be of service to you in case of need."

"Now, it is too late."

"Don Emile, know this—that immediately after our conversation my companions and I will withdraw, for our mission is terminated; and if I have remained so long with you, it is because I decided to tell you certain things."

"I thank you for it."

"Well, I am certain that you will not quit this place without having tried, not only to see these ladies again, but to carry them off from those who have them in charge—which, for that matter, would not be impossible, since they will be but a dozen at the most. I wish you good fortune from the bottom of my heart, for I like you. Only, take my advice—act with prudence; cunning has united more bonds than force has broken. Follow the counsel that I give you, and I hope that you will find it good. Now we must separate; I have, if not repaired, at least lessened the serious consequences of the fault I have been obliged to commit. Let us part as two friends. The only hope that I have is, that we shall never see one another again."

"What! You are going to set out in the midst of darkness when we are threatened with a storm!"

"It must be, Don Emile. I am expected there. My brother is preparing an important expedition, in which I ought, and wish, to assist. As to the storm, it will not burst for two or three hours, and, terrible as it may be, it is too old an acquaintance for me not to know how to defend myself from it. Adieu, then, and once more—good fortune! Whatever happens, silence on what I have said! Now, wrap yourself in your poncho, and feign to sleep till I have given the signal for my men to depart."

The young man followed the counsel which had been given to him; he rolled himself in his mantle and stretched himself on the ground.

When Don Santiago was assured that nothing would arouse suspicion as to the conversation which had just taken place, he rose, stretched his limbs to freshen himself up, and, taking a whistle suspended to his neck by a little silver chain, he gave a shrill and prolonged call with it.

The horsemen immediately raised their heads.

"Come, boys!" cried the Pincheyra in a loud voice, "Up and saddle your horses, we return to Casa-Frama."

"What! You leave us at this hour, Señor Don Santiago?" asked the young man, feigning to be awakened by the sound of the whistle.

"It must be so, Señor," answered he; "our escort is not necessary to you, and we have a long journey to make if we would reach Casa-Frama before sunrise."

Meanwhile, the Pincheyras had with alacrity obeyed the order which they had received; they had risen and had proceeded to get ready and saddle their horses.

By accident apparently, but no doubt as planned by Don Santiago, the sentinels who were charged with watching over the common safety were the two gauchos and the Guaraní, so that he was certain that the secret of his conversation with the Frenchman would not transpire.

In a few minutes the horsemen were in the saddles. The Pincheyra put himself at their head, and, turning towards Emile, making him a friendly salute with the hand—

"Adieu, Señor, and good fortune!" said he significantly.

"The painter returned his cordial salute, and the little troop set out. It soon disappeared at the turn of the path. The sound of its steps gradually lessened, and before long had ceased altogether. When silence was completely re-established, Emile made a sign to his companions.

"Now that we are alone, Señores," said he, "let us talk, for affairs are serious. Tyro, light the fire; we will hold counsel in the Indian fashion."

The Guaraní gathered some dry wood, piled it carefully, struck a light, and soon a slight column of flame rose brightly in the air.

A death-like silence reigned in the valley; the breeze had died away; there was not a sound in the air; the sky, black as ink, had not a single star; nature appeared to be gathering all her powers for a terrible strife of the elements; from the unexplored depths of the chasms dull and mysterious sounds sometimes rose, mingling at intervals with the low growl of beasts going to seek water.

The four men crouched round the fire, lit their cigarettes, and the young man talked to them, telling them what he thought advisable of the conversation which had taken place between him and Don Santiago.

"Now," added he, "answer me frankly; can I count on you for all that I think proper to do?"

"Yes," answered they with one voice.

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

"Well, I shall not be ungrateful; the reward shall equal the services; now, if you have any observations to submit, I am ready to hear them."

The gauchos, peculiarly men of action, and not by nature great talkers, contented themselves by saying that when the moment for action arrived they would be ready—that they had nothing to say on the mode of proceeding—that that did not concern them.

"That is right," said Tyro. "Go to sleep, my braves, and leave us—the Señor, our master and I, agree on what is best to be done."

The gauchos did not require this to be repeated; they rose and proceeded to stretch themselves amongst the baggage: a few minutes later, and they were sound asleep.

Emile and the Guaraní, who alone were awake, held a long and serious conversation, and arranged a plan which it is needless to state here.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARTISAN.

We must now return to the Guaycurus chiefs, whom we left at the moment when, following Don Zeno Cabral, they entered a cavern where the Montonero—at least according to the words he made use of in accosting them—appeared to have given a rendezvous to the Cougar.

This cavern—the entry of which, without knowing it well, it was impossible to distinguish from without, by reason of the conformation of the ground of which it formed the centre, and of the difficulty with which it was reached—was vast and perfectly light, on account of a number of almost imperceptible fissures which allowed the light to penetrate at the same time as it renewed the air. At the bottom and on the sides several galleries opened, which were lost under the mountain at probably very great distances. The spot where the partisans stopped, that is to say at a few steps from the opening, contained several seats formed by blocks of oak awkwardly squared, and two or three masses of dried leaves, serving probably for beds to those who came to seek a temporary refuge in this place.

In the centre of the cavern a great fire was lighted. Over this fire, suspended by a chain from three stakes placed triangularly, was boiling an iron pot, while a quarter of *guanaco*, spitted on a ramrod fixed in the ground, was roasting very gently; some potatoes were cooking under the cinders, and several bullock-horn cups containing some *harina tostada* were placed near seats on the ground. The arms of Zeno Cabral, that is to say, his gun and his sabre, were leaning against one of the walls of the cavern; he had only kept his knife in his right pocket.

"Señores," said the partisan with a courteous gesture, "permit me to offer you the poor hospitality that the circumstances in which we are compel me to give you. Before anything else we will eat and drink together to establish confidence between us, and to remove all suspicion of treason."

These words were spoken in Portuguese; the captains answered in the same language, and sat, after the example of their Amphytrion, on the seats prepared for them.

Zeno Cabral then unhooked the pot and served with uncommon skill and vivacity, in the *couis* which he presented to his guests, some *tocino*, *chorizo*, and *charqui*, seasoned with *camotes* and *ají*, which form the national dish of these countries.

The meal commenced; the chiefs vigorously attacked the dishes placed before them, helping themselves with their knives instead of forks, and drinking in turn water slightly dashed with brandy to remove its brackishness.

The Indians do not speak as they eat, so their meals are generally short. After the *charqui*, it was the turn for the *guanaco;* then the *harina tostada* was taken, diluted with warm water, and at last Zeno Cabral made the maté[1] and offered it to his guests.

When the maté had been drunk, and our three personages had lighted their maize straw cigarettes, Zeno Cabral at last spoke.

"I ought to apologise to you, Señor Captain," said he in Portuguese to Gueyma, "for the kind of surprise by means of which I have obtained an interview with you; the Cougar, of whom I have for a long time had the honour of being a friend, has induced me to act as I have done; if a fault has been committed, it is on him that the blame ought to rest."

"What the Cougar does is always right," answered the chief smiling; "he is my father, since it is to him that I owe what I am; I have not to blame him then, convinced that very important reasons, and which no doubt will afterwards be explained to me, prevented him from acting otherwise."

"Gueyma has well spoken as usual," said the Cougar; "wisdom dwells with him; the white chief will not be long in adducing motives for his conduct."

"That is what I am immediately going to do, if the captains will be so good as to lend me their attention," pursued Zeno Cabral.

"Let my father speak, our ears are opened."

The partisan collected himself for two or three minutes, and then commenced in these terms:

"My brothers, the Guaycurus warriors, deceived by the lying words of a white, have consented to form an alliance with him, and to follow him into this country, to aid him in fighting other whites, who have never done evil to my brothers, and even of whose existence they were ignorant. But while the warriors entered on the path of war, and abandoned their hunting territories, under the safeguard of the honour of their new allies, the latter, who had no other design than that of getting them away, in order to seize more easily their rich and fertile countries, invaded, to the contempt of sworn faith, these territories, and tried to establish themselves there. This iniquitous project, this infamous treason, would probably have succeeded, considering the absence of the brave warriors of the tribe, if a friend of the Guaycurus, disgusted with that infamous action, had not warned Tarou-Niom, the great captain of the Guaycurus, to put himself on his guard, and had not contracted an offensive and defensive alliance with Emavidi-Chaimé, the great chief of the Payagoas, to oppose the attacks of the common enemy."

Notwithstanding the command of countenance of which the Indians boast in the most important circumstances, Gueyma, on learning this news, so decisively and coldly uttered, could not contain himself. His eyebrows knitted, his nostrils dilated like those of a wild beast; he bounded on his feet, and violently clapping his hands:

"My brother, the pale chief, has proofs of what he states, has he not?" cried he, with a tone of sudden menace.

"I have," simply answered Zeno Cabral.

"Good, then he will give them to me."

"I will give them to the captain."

"But there is another thing I wish to know."

"What does my brother wish to know?"

"Who is the friend of the Guaycurus who has warned them of the horrible treason which is plotted against them?"

"What good will it be to tell my brother that?"

"Because, as I know my enemies, I wish to know my friends."

Zeno Cabral bowed.

"It is I," said he.

Gueyma looked at him a moment with a strange earnestness, as if he had wished to read his most secret thoughts.

"It is good," said he at last; "what my brother says must be true. Gueyma thanks him, and offers him his hand."

"I accept it with alacrity, for I have a long time loved the captain," answered the partisan, pressing the hand that the chief held out to him.

"Now, what are the proofs that my brother will give me?"

Zeno Cabral searched under his poncho and drew out a *quipu*; the latter quickly seized it, and immediately proceeded to decipher it with the same rapidity that a European reads a letter.

Little by little the features of the chief resumed their marble rigidity; then, after having completely deciphered the *quipu*, he handed it to the Cougar, and, turning towards Zeno Cabral, who followed all his movements with secret anxiety:

"Now, I know the insult that has been offered me," said he, coldly, "my brother will give me, no doubt, the means of avenging myself."

"Perhaps I shall succeed," answered the partisan.

"Why have a doubt on the lips when certainty is in the heart," pursued Gueyma.

"What does the captain mean?"

"I mean that no one with the simple design of being agreeable to a man whom he does not know, would do as my brother has done."

"I know the captain better than he thinks."

"It is possible; I admit that; but it is not the less evident to me that my brother, the pale chief, had a design in acting as he has done. It is that design that Gueyma wishes to know."

"If my brother were to suppose that I also have to avenge myself on the man who has insulted him, and that for this vengeance to be more sure and striking I need the aid of my brother—would he refuse me?"

"No, certainly, if instead of being a supposition it was a reality."

"The captain promises me?"

"I promise it."

"Well, the suspicions of the chief are just. Notwithstanding the lively and sincere friendship that I have for him, obliged for the present to occupy myself with very important affairs, I should have, perhaps, neglected to concern myself with his, if I had not had a powerful inducement to do so, and if the man of whom he wishes to avenge himself had not long been my enemy. There is the whole truth."

"Ah! My brother has well spoken; his tongue is not forked; the words that come from his breast are loyal. What will my brother do to assure my vengeance at the same time as his own?"

"Two things."

"What is the first?"

"I will deliver into the hands of the captain the wife and daughter of his enemy."

The Indian's eye darted a lightning flash of joy.

"Good," cried he, "now what is the second?"

"I will guide my brother by the paths of wild beasts, known only to myself, and with the rich plunder that I shall have given him, I will enable him to reach in less than five days the frontier of his hunting territory."

"My brother will do that?"

"I will do it, I swear."

"Good! When will the two pale women be my captives?"

"Before two days, if the chief consents to aid me."

"I have told the white chief that he can dispose of me; let him speak, then, without fear."

Zeno Cabral cast an inquiring look at the Cougar, who, up to that time, had sat mute and impassive during the conversation.

"My brother can speak," said the old chief; "the word of Gueyma is the word of a captain; nothing can make him change it."

"Only let my brother pay the most serious attention to what I am about to say. I will only do what I propose on one condition."

"I am listening."

"My brother will not be able to dispose, under any pretext, of the captives placed in his hands without my authority; under no pretext can he give them liberty without I consent to it. For the rest, the Cougar knows my intentions, and he has promised to conform to them."

"Is it true?" asked Gueyma of the old chief; turning towards him.

"It is true," laconically answered the latter.

"The Cougar," resumed the young man, "is one of the wisest warriors of my tribe; what he says is always good: it is my duty to follow his example; I adhere to what the white chief wishes."

Zeno Cabral bowed his head as a sign of thanks, and, spite of himself, a gleam of satisfaction for an instant illumined his austere face.

Gueyma resumed:

"Has the pale chief anything to add to what he has told me?"

"Nothing," answered the partisan.

"It is well; it is my turn now to impose conditions."

"That is quite true, chief; I listen to you."

"My brother, the white chief, knows the customs of the Pampa, does he not?"

"I know them; my life has been almost wholly passed in the desert."

"Does he know the ceremony of the compact of vengeance in use in the tribe of the Guaycurus?"

"I have heard speak of it, without, however, having ever practised it on my own account; I know that it is a kind of brotherhood of arms which binds two men to each other by a tie stronger than the nearest relationship."

"Yes, that is it; does my brother consent to this ceremony being performed by us?"

"I consent to it with all my heart, chief," answered the partisan without hesitation, "because my intentions are pure, no thought of treachery is in my heart, and I have for my brother great friendship."

"Good," resumed the young chief, smiling; "I thank my brother for accepting me as his blood companion; the Cougar will bind us to each other."

The three men rose.

The Cougar then advanced between them, and making them stretch out the right hand:

"Each of you," said he, "is double; he has a friend to watch over him in all places and in all

circumstances—night as well as day, morning as well as evening; the enemies of one are the enemies of the other; what one possesses belongs to his friend; at the call of his blood companion, no matter where he is, no matter what he is doing, the friend must immediately abandon all to run to him who claims his presence. Death even cannot disunite you; in the other life your compact must continue as strong as in this. You, Zeno Cabral, for the tribe of the Guaycurus, you are now named Cabral Gueyma; and you, Gueyma, for the brothers of your friend, are Gueyma Zeno. Your blood even ought to mix in your breasts, in order that your thoughts may be really the same, and that, at the hour when you shall appear after death before the Master of the world, he may recognise you and reunite you to each other."

After having thus spoken, the Cougar drew his knife from its sheath, and slightly punctured the chest of the partisan, just over the heart.

Zeno supported without trembling or paling this startling incision; the old chief received the blood which flowed from the wound in a *coui*, in which a little water remained. He then punctured in the same way the chest of the young chief, and caused his blood to flow into the *coui*.

Then raising the vessel above his head:

"Warriors," cried he, in a sombre and majestic voice, "your blood is contained there, so well mixed that it cannot be separated; each of you is about to drink of this cup, which between you you must empty; it is your turn first," added he, turning to Zeno Cabral, and holding out the vessel to him.

"Give it to me," coldly answered the partisan, and he carried it without hesitation to his lips.

When he had drunk about half of what it contained he presented it to Gueyma. The latter took it without uttering a word, and emptied it at a draught.

"At our next meeting, brother," then said the young chief, "we will exchange our horses, for we cannot do so now. Meanwhile, here is my gun, my sabre, my knife, my powder horn, my shot pouch, my *laco*, and my *bolas*. Accept them, and may the Great Spirit grant that they may do you as good service as they have done me."

"I receive them, brother, in exchange for my arms—which take."

Then the two men embraced, and the ceremony was over.

"Now," said the Cougar, "the moment for separation has come; we must rejoin our warriors; where shall we see one another again, and when will the meeting take place?"

"The second sun after this," answered the partisan, "I shall expect my brothers three hours before the setting of the sun at the *Cañon de Yerbas Verdes*. The captives will be with me. The cry of the eagle of the Cordilleras, three times repeated, will warn my brothers of my presence; they will answer me by that of the maukawis, repeated the same number of times."

"Good! My warriors will be exact."

The three men heartily shook hands, and the Guaycurus chiefs withdrew, again taking the almost impracticable way by which they had come, but which could not offer any serious difficulties to men inured like them to every bodily exercise, and endowed with an unequalled suppleness and agility.

Zeno Cabral remained alone in the cavern.

The partisan threw himself on a seat, leant his head on his breast, and thus remained for a considerable lapse of time plunged in profound reflection.

When the first shadows of evening began to invade the entrance of the cavern, the young man stood up.

"At last," murmured he in a low voice, "I am about to have that vengeance that for so long a time I have sought. No one now can snatch my prey from me. My father will start with joy in his grave on seeing in what way I keep my oath. Alas! Why must I use the hatchet intended to martyr two innocent women? The true culprit still escapes me! Will God permit him to fall through my hands? How shall I compel him to give himself to me?"

He kept silence some moments, and then resumed with savage energy.

"Of what use is it to pity the fate of these women? Does not the law of the desert say, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? It is not I who have committed the crime. I avenge the insult done to my family; the die is cast; God will judge me!"

He rose and took a few steps in the cavern. The darkness was nearly complete. Zeno Cabral took a torch of rotten wood, lit it, and fixed it in the ground; then, after another hesitation, he shook his head, passed his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away a passing idea, and sat himself down on one of the seats, after having cleared away the traces of the meal and those left by the Guaycurus warriors.

"I am mad," murmured he in a low voice, "it is too late now to go back;" and seizing his gun he fired it in the air.

The sound of the report repeated by the numerous echoes of the cavern reverberated for a considerable time, grew weaker and weaker, and finally ceased.

Almost immediately the light of several torches shone at the bottom of a side gallery, rapidly increased, and soon illuminated the cavern with reddish tints which fell upon the walls with

fantastic reflections. These torches were carried by Montoneros led by several officers, among whom was Don Silvio Quiroga.

"Here we are, General," said the captain, with a respectful bow.

"Where are the prisoners?" asked Zeno Cabral, as he loaded his gun, which he placed within reach.

"Guarded at a few paces off by our detachment of our men."

"Let them come."

The captain withdrew without answering. Some minutes passed, at the end of which he reappeared, accompanied by three unarmed men, who walked in the midst of a group of partisans.

"It is well," said the General, "leave me with these *caballeros*, I wish to talk with them; only be ready to run here if occasion requires, at the first signal. Go."

Captain Quiroga planted two or three torches in the ground, and then disappeared in the gallery from which he had come out.

Don Zeno remained alone with the two prisoners; the latter stood upright before him, cold and haughty, their heads proudly thrown back, and their arms crossed on their chests.

There was a moment of silence.

It was one of the prisoners who broke it.

"I suppose, Señor General," said he, with a slight tone of raillery, "since that is the title they give you, that you have called us into your presence in order to have us shot?"

"You are deceived, Señor Don Lucio Ortega," coldly answered the partisan; "at present at least, such is not my intention."

"You know me," cried the Spaniard, with a movement of surprise which he could not suppress.

"Yes, Señor, I know you, as well as your companions, the Señor Count Mendoza and Colonel Zinozain. I know even with what design you have come thus to wander about these mountains; you see that I am well served by my spies."

"*¡Caramba!*" gaily cried Captain Ortega, "I wish I had been as well served by mine."

The partisan smiled with irony.

"In point of fact, Señor," said the Count, "what do you intend to do with us, since we are in your power, and you do not wish to have us shot?"

"You acknowledge, do you not, that I should have the right to do so if that were my good pleasure?"

"Perfectly," pursued the captain; "as to us, be convinced that we should not have failed to break your skull if fate had made you fall into our hands. Is it not so, Señores?"

The two officers answered affirmatively.

"Touching unanimity!" said the Montonero with a sneer, "I give you credit, believe me, for your good intentions towards me; however, they do not change my resolution."

"Then," resumed the captain, "it is probable that you find it more advantageous to yourself to allow us to live than to order our execution?"

"That is evident."

"But it is probable also that the conditions you will impose upon us," said the colonel, "will be of such a kind that we shall refuse to accept them, preferring death to dishonour."

"Well, you have not at all guessed it, my dear colonel," answered the partisan with good humour; "I know too well how soldiers ought to conduct themselves, even as enemies, to profit by the advantages that my position gives me; and these conditions will be, on the contrary, excessively easy."

"Oh, oh! that is strange," murmured the Count.

"Very strange indeed, Monsieur Count, to see one of those miserable Creoles—those wild beasts, as you call them—preserve sentiments of humanity so completely forgotten by their ex-masters, the noble Castilians."

"I confess that for my part, I am curious to know these benign propositions," said the captain with a sneer.

"You are about to be satisfied, Señor," replied the partisan, with the sly tone that he had affected from the commencement of the interview; "but meanwhile will you be so good as to sit down: I am at home, I wish to do you the honours of my abode."

"Be it so, we listen to you," said the captain, sitting down—a movement imitated by his two companions.

"Here are my conditions," resumed the partisan: "I offer to restore you immediately to liberty, giving you the baggage which has been taken from you, and allowing you the facility of continuing your journey, and to accomplish the mission with which you are charged for Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Eh!" cried the captain, "You know that also."

"I know all, have I not told you?"

"That is true; pardon me this interruption," said the captain; "you said, then, that you offered to set us at liberty, &c., &c.—on condition—"

"On condition," replied Don Zeno, "that first you will give me your word of honour as gentlemen and soldiers, that whatever happens during all the time that we remain together, you will never utter my name, and that with regard to me you will be inviolably secret."

"At present I do not see anything which prevents us taking this engagement. Then, Señor, for that is not all, I imagine—"

"Just so, that is not all. I wish to go in your company to the camp of Casa-Frama, to treat with Don Pablo Pincheyra on an affair which concerns myself. I will take the name and the costume of a Portuguese officer. You will not betray me, and, moreover, you will aid me in terminating the affair in question; I know that you possess sufficient influence over Don Pablo to enable me to succeed."

"Do you refuse to instruct us as to this affair?" asked the Count.

"By no means. This susceptibility is too honourable for me not to accede to your request. It concerns two Portuguese ladies, the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter, whom the Pincheyras have seized against the right of nations, and whom I wish to deliver."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, *caballero;* see if your honour will permit you to accept these conditions?"

"Señor Don Zeno Cabral," answered the Count, "the history which you are pleased to relate to us is very well imagined, although we doubt much the reality of your devotion to these ladies. As they are almost unknown to us, and as you have told us this affair entirely concerns yourself, we do not acknowledge the right to inquire into it; consequently my companions and I accept your conditions, which, let us state, are really very easy. We give you our word of honour to fulfil exactly the engagement that we take with regard to you, without we are otherwise compelled by force."

"We give you our word of honour, as well as our noble friend, Count de Mendoza," said the captain and the colonel together.

"And now," added Don Lucio Ortega, "when shall we be free?"

"Immediately, *caballeros*."

"And we shall set out?—"

"At sunrise, so as to be tomorrow morning at Casa-Frama. Now, dispose of me, Señores; I am no longer your host."

We have already stated in what way the Count and the persons who accompanied him had been received by the Pincheyras.

[1] In a preceding work, the "Grand Chief of the Aucas," I have explained what this drink is. In Southern America it replaces tea, and is very much liked by the white inhabitants and Indians.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CAPTIVES.

As soon as the reception had terminated, Don Pablo had offered to the Spanish envoys and to the Portuguese officer—that is to say, to Don Zeno Cabral, whom he was far from suspecting was a guest in his camp—a collation that the latter had accepted.

Although camped in one of the most inaccessible parts of the Cordilleras, the Pincheyras—thanks to their continual excursions, to the robberies and pillage they committed in the *chacras*, the towns and even the cities situated on the two sides of the mountains—were well provisioned; their retreat was filled with the rarest and most delicate things.

By the care of the sister of Don Pablo, charged by her brother with the domestic management, a table had been prepared and covered with a profusion of provisions of all sorts—with sweets, fruits, and liqueurs, and even with the wines of Spain and France, that certainly one would have been far from expecting in such a place.

The Spaniards and the Hispano-American Creoles are generally sober; however, when the occasion presents itself, they by no means scorn the pleasures of a well-furnished table. On this occasion they feasted in emulation of each other on the good cheer provided for them—either on account of the long privations that they had previously endured, or because all was in reality exquisite, and served with much taste. The meal was thus prolonged a considerable time; it was more than three hours after dinner when the guests at last rose from the table.

Don Pablo then took on one side Zeno Cabral, whom he had placed near him at table, and for

whom he had a strong liking.

"Señor Don Sebastiao," said he, in a somewhat trembling voice; for notwithstanding, or perhaps on account of, his habitual sobriety, the few glasses of generous wine that the partisan had been obliged to drink while entertaining his guests, had given him a slight touch of drunkenness—"I find you, *¡vive Dios!* a charming companion. I should like to do something which will be agreeable to you."

"You do me honour, *caballero*," answered Zeno Cabral, with some reserve.

"Yes, *¡Dios me ampare!* It is so. I confess that this morning I was somewhat thwarted in giving you up the two ladies."

"Why?"

"*¡Diablo!* I ought to have had a good ransom for them."

"Do not let that distress you, *caballero;* I am quite ready—"

"No, no," he quickly replied, "do not let us speak of that; I shall gain with others what I have lost with them. I wish now to tell you that I am delighted with what has happened. Bah! you please me—much better that it is so. Besides, these women weary me; they weep continually—it is insupportable."

"Just so; you were saying, then?—"

"Well, I was saying that if I could be agreeable to you in anything, I should be happy if you would allow me to show the esteem I have for you."

"You flatter me, *caballero*, in speaking, thus; I do not deserve this kindness on your part."

"Well, as you will have it so, I will be frank with you, Señor; there is, indeed, one thing in which you could be useful to me."

"Well and good—what is it?"

"Oh! *Mon Dieu!* a very simple affair. Leave these ladies, I beg you, in ignorance of their deliverance; you know that joy, like grief is to be feared when it comes suddenly without any preparation. I am afraid of the revulsion that the announcement of this sudden departure will cause these ladies, as they are so far from expecting it."

"What you ask me is very easy of course; however, I must tell them tomorrow, or this evening."

"Don't worry about that; it's easily managed. Tell them that they must be ready to mount horse tomorrow at sunrise, without telling them of the cause or the destination of the journey. I shall be careful to keep out of their sight till I find an opportunity of presenting myself to them without too much exciting them."

The Pincheyra, a man naturally very unsentimental, did not appreciate what the Montonero said to him. But, by reason of that species of innate vanity in all men, which leads them to attribute qualities to themselves which they do not possess—attracted, moreover, towards his own acquaintance by an inexplicable sympathy—he made no difficulty in agreeing to what Don Zeno Cabral asked him, and consented to let him act quite in his own way, inwardly flattered by the good opinion that the latter appeared to have of him, and anxious to prove to him that he was not deceived in him.

Matters thus arranged, Don Pablo requested—without entering into any details—his brother, Don Antonio, to inform the ladies of their approaching departure, and, going out with Don Zeno, he took him to visit the camp of Casa-Frama.

José Antonio, the third brother of Pincheyra, was a man of about twenty, of a melancholy disposition and limited intelligence, who accepted with bad grace the commission which had been given him; but he proceeded to acquit himself of it as quickly as possible.

He went, therefore, to the *toldo* inhabited by the two ladies.

They were alone, talking to each other, when the Pincheyra presented himself.

At sight of him they could not repress a movement of surprise—almost of fright, but they immediately recovered themselves, and returned the abrupt salute which he had given them without speaking to them, which led the marchioness to ask what was the reason of his visit.

"Señora," he replied, "my brother the colonel, Don Pablo Pincheyra, has requested me to give you notice to be ready to leave the camp tomorrow at sunrise."

"I thank you for this good news, *caballero*," coldly answered the marchioness.

"I do not know if the news is good or bad, and it's all one to me. I am ordered to tell you, and I do it—that is all. Now that my commission is done, adieu—I withdraw."

And, without further remark, he made a move to go away.

"Pardon, *caballero*," said the marchioness to him making an effort to continue the conversation, in the hope of seeing a favourable light burst upon the chaos which surrounded her; "one word, if you please."

"One word let it be," answered he, stopping, "but no more."

"Do you know why we are to quit the camp?"

"Upon my word, no; what is it to me whether you leave or not?"

"That is true—it must be quite indifferent to you; but you are, I believe, one of your brother's principal officers?"

"I am a captain," he answered, holding himself up proudly.

"In that capacity you must be in the confidence of your brother's projects, so as to know what are his intentions."

"I! What for? My brother does not render account to me, and I do not ask any."

The marchioness bit her lips with vexation; but she continued, abruptly changing the conversation—

"If I am so soon to leave the camp, permit me, *caballero*, to offer you, before leaving, this slight mark of remembrance;" and taking from her breast a delicate reliquary in gold, curiously chased, she presented it to him with a gracious smile.

The eye of the bandit flashed with covetousness.

"Ah!" said he, holding out his hand, "What is that?"

"This medallion," replied the marchioness, "contains relics."

"Relics!" he exclaimed; "Real?"

"Certainly, it contains a splinter of the true cross, and a tooth of Santa Rosa de Lima."

"Ah! And they are of use, are they not? Father Gomez, my brother's chaplain, says that the relics of saints are the best arms that a Christian can carry with him."

"He is right; these are infallible against wounds and sickness."

The bandit's eye dilated; an indescribable expression of joy overspread his countenance.

"And you will give them to me?" he quickly exclaimed.

"I give them to you, but on one condition."

"Without condition!" he resumed, knitting his eyebrows, and casting a sinister look at the marchioness.

The only active sentiment in the heart of this man—his superstition—had been aroused. Perhaps to seize these relics that he coveted he would not have recoiled from a crime.

The marchioness immediately perceived the thought, indistinct as it was, that agitated his obtuse mind. She exhibited no emotion, and continued:

"These relics would immediately lose their virtue if they were taken by violence from the person who possesses them."

"Ah!" murmured he, with a sullen and husky voice, "They must be freely given?"

"They must," coldly answered the marchioness.

Doña Eva had felt a shudder of fear run through her limbs at the concealed threat of the bandit; but his exclamation reassured her; she saw that the wild beast was tamed.

"What is this condition?" pursued he.

"I wish to know if some strangers arrived in the camp yesterday."

"They arrived this morning."

"Spaniards?"

"Yes."

"Was there a Portuguese among them?"

"I believe there was one."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Yes, it is he who is to take you away; he offers a large ransom for you. I remember, because my brother has refused the ransom while consenting to part with you—which I cannot at all understand on his part."

"Ah!" she murmured, with a dreamy air.

"Have you anything else to ask me?"

"One question more."

"Be quick," he answered, his eyes greedily fixed on the reliquary, which he never lost sight of.

"Do you know Don Emile?"

"The Frenchman?"

"Yes, the same."

"I know him."

"I should like to speak with him."

"It is impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because he left the camp an hour ago, in company with my brother Don Santiago."

"Do you know when he will return?"

"Never; I repeat that he has gone away."

A sigh of relief escaped the breast of the marchioness. If the young man had gone away, it was with the intention of being of service to them. All hope was not then lost to them, since a devoted friend was still watching over their safety.

"I thank you," she replied, "for what you have consented to tell me; there is the reliquary."

The Pincheyra bounded on it like a wild beast on his prey, and hid it under his poncho.

"You swear to me that these relics are true?" he asked, in a suspicious tone.

"I swear it."

"No matter," murmured he, shaking his head; "I will have them blessed by Father Gomez; that can do no harm. Adieu, Madame."

And without further salutation he turned on his heel, left the *toldo* as abruptly as he had entered it, keeping his right hand firmly on his breast, no doubt to assure himself that the precious reliquary was still in the place where he had hidden it.

There was a long silence between the two ladies after the departure of the Pincheyra.

The marchioness at last raised her eyes, and fixed a long look on her daughter, who, her head reclined on her breast, seemed lost in bitter reflections.

"Eva!" said she, in a gentle voice.

The young girl started, and, holding up her beautiful face, paled with grief:

"Do you speak, mother?" she answered.

"Yes, my girl," replied the marchioness; "you were thinking, no doubt, of our unhappy situation?"

"Alas!" exclaimed she.

"A situation," continued the marchioness, "that every moment renders more dreadful; for, do not deceive yourself, my child, this liberty that the bandit accords us, whose prisoners we are—this liberty is but a snare."

"Oh! Do you think so, mother? What makes you suppose that?"

"I know nothing; and yet I am convinced that the man who says he is sent by your father to take us back to him, and who obstinately keeps out of the way, instead of presenting himself to us as he ought to do—I am convinced that this man is our enemy, more to be feared, perhaps, than he from whom he takes us away, and who—a bandit without faith or law—has only kept us in the hope of a rich ransom, entertaining towards us neither hatred nor anger."

"Pardon me, mother, for not being of your opinion in this matter. In a country so far from our own—where, except Don Emile, we know no one—strangers in the midst of the people who surround us—what enemy can we have to fear?"

The marchioness smiled sadly.

"Your memory is short," she said, "my dear Eva; careless, like all children of your age, the past is nothing more to you than a dream, and without dwelling on the present, you look only to the future. Have you, then, forgotten the partisan chief who, two months ago, made us his prisoners, and from whom Don Emile's devotion saved us?"

"Oh, no! Mother," cried she, with a nervous start; "no, I have not forgotten him, for this man seems to be our evil genius. But, God be praised! Here, at least, we have nothing to fear from him."

"You deceive yourself, my daughter; it is he, on the contrary, who now pursues us."

"It cannot be, mother; this man, you know, is attached to the opposite party to that of the bandit, in whose hands we are."

"Poor child! The wicked always unite when there is any evil to be done. I repeat, this man is here."

"Mother," said the young girl, whose voice trembled with emotion, but in a resolute tone, "you have long known this man?"

"Yes," she simply answered.

"As that is the case, you no doubt know the motives, true or false, of this implacable hatred?"

"Yes, I know them, my girl."

"And," said she, with some hesitation, "why do you not acquaint me with them?"

"No, that is impossible."

"Permit me to ask you a question, mother."

"Speak, my girl; if I can answer I will."

"Do the reasons for this hatred affect you personally?"

"No, I am, in every way, innocent of the deeds with which we are reproached."

"Why *we*, mother?"

"Because, dear child, all the members of a family are so intimately connected, you know."

"I know it, mother."

"It is an unquestionable consequence of this that a deed laid at the door of one member of a family must be for all, and that if this action is shameful or guilty, all must submit to the shame of it, and bear its responsibility."

"That is true; thank you, mother, I understand you; now there only remains one point on which I am not well informed."

"To what do you allude?"

"To this—that at Santiago de Chile, and afterwards at Salto, Señor Don Zeno Cabral—that is his name, I think?"

"Yes, that is his name; well?"

"When he came to our house, did you then know this hatred that he bears us?"

"I knew it, my girl," briefly answered the marchioness.

"You knew it, mother!" cried Doña Eva, with surprise.

"Yes, I knew it, I repeat."

"But then, mother, if that were the case, why receive him on the footing of intimacy, when it would have been so easy for you to have closed the door to him!"

"Do you think that would have been possible for me?"

"Forgive this persistence, mother; but I cannot explain to myself such conduct on your part. You, endowed as you are with such exquisite tact, and so deep a knowledge of the world!"

The marchioness slightly shrugged her shoulders, while a smile of an indefinable expression played round her mouth.

"You reason foolishly, my dear Eva," she answered lightly impressing her pale lips on the forehead of the young girl. "I did not personally know Don Zeno Cabral. He was ignorant then, and probably is ignorant still, that I was mistress of the secret of his hatred—a secret of which, in fact (with a disposition less candidly honourable than that of your father), I should not have had (on account of certain particulars hurtful to me as a woman)—I should not have had, I say, to share the heavy burden. My design, in entertaining our enemy, and even in introducing him into our private intimacy, was to put him on the wrong scene—to make him believe that I was in complete ignorance; and thus excite his confidence, and so succeed, if not in making him renounce his projects against us, at least in making him modify them, or obtain the avowal of them from him. The apparent weakness of Don Zeno—his effeminate manners, his pretended gentleness, his beardless face, which makes him appear much younger than he is—everything made me suppose that I should easily succeed in overreaching him. Unhappily it has not been so. This man is of granite; nothing moves him, nothing affects him. Availing himself of irony—so much the more dangerous, as it is difficult coolly to combat it—he always knew how to meet my stratagem and repulse my attacks. Tired of this, and galled one day by the tone of biting raillery which never left him in our private interviews, I allowed myself to be carried away by anger; I grievously offended him by a bitter word that I threw in his face, and which I wished immediately to retract. But it was too late; the imprudence was irreparable. In wishing to unmask my adversary, I had allowed him to read my heart. From that moment all was over between us—or rather all commenced. After having coldly bowed to me, he withdrew, ironically warning me to be more on my guard for the future. I saw him no more till the moment when he caused us to fall into the ambuscade which puts us in his power."

While the marchioness was speaking, the countenance of Doña Eva by turns expressed contrary feelings. The young girl, a prey to an emotion she vainly tried to conquer, pressed her panting bosom, and secretly wiped her eyes, which every moment filled with tears. At last this emotion was so apparent that the marchioness could not but perceive it. She abruptly stopped, and fixing on her daughter a hard and imperious look, whilst her eyebrows knitted, and her voice assumed a tone of menace:

"What is the matter with you, niña?" asked she; "Why these tears that I see you are shedding?"

The young girl blushed and lowered her head with embarrassment.

"Answer," severely resumed the marchioness; "answer, I desire."

"Mother," stammered she, in a feeble and trembling voice, "is not what you tell me sufficient to cause the grief which you see I am suffering? I do not at all deserve the unjust anger that you display to me."

The marchioness shook her head, continuing to fix her eye upon her daughter, who, blushing and paling by turns, more and more lost countenance.

"Well," said she, "I am willing to believe what you say, but take care that someday I do not discover that you have spoken falsely—that a feeling, if not of the existence, at least of the power of which you are ignorant, and which you vainly try to conceal from me, has taken possession of your heart."

"What do you mean, mother? In the name of Heaven, I do not understand you."

"Heaven grant that I may be deceived," she replied, mournfully; "but let us quit this subject—we are getting too melancholy about it; I have warned you, and I will watch—the future will decide."

"Mother, when we are so unhappy already, why increase my sorrow by unjust reproaches?"

The marchioness darted a look, in which there was a flash of anger, but immediately recovering herself—

"You have, then, understood me?" she cried, with a calculating coolness.

The young girl shivered, fell trembling on the bosom of her mother, murmuring an answer interrupted by grief, and fainted.

The marchioness lifted her gently and laid her on a hammock. For a long time she contemplated her with an expression of anger, love, and sadness impossible to express.

"Poor, poor child!" murmured she, and falling on her knees near the hammock, she clasped her hands and addressed a fervent prayer to Heaven.

She prayed a long time thus. Suddenly she felt a burning tear fall upon her forehead. She quickly raised her head.

Her daughter, half raised upon the hammock, and leaning over her, was looking at her as she prayed.

"Mother! mother!" she cried, drawing her gently towards her.

The marchioness rose without answering, approached her daughter, and the two women fell into each other's arms, mingling their tears in an impassioned embrace.

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