

JACK STRAW IN MEXICO



IRVING CRUMP



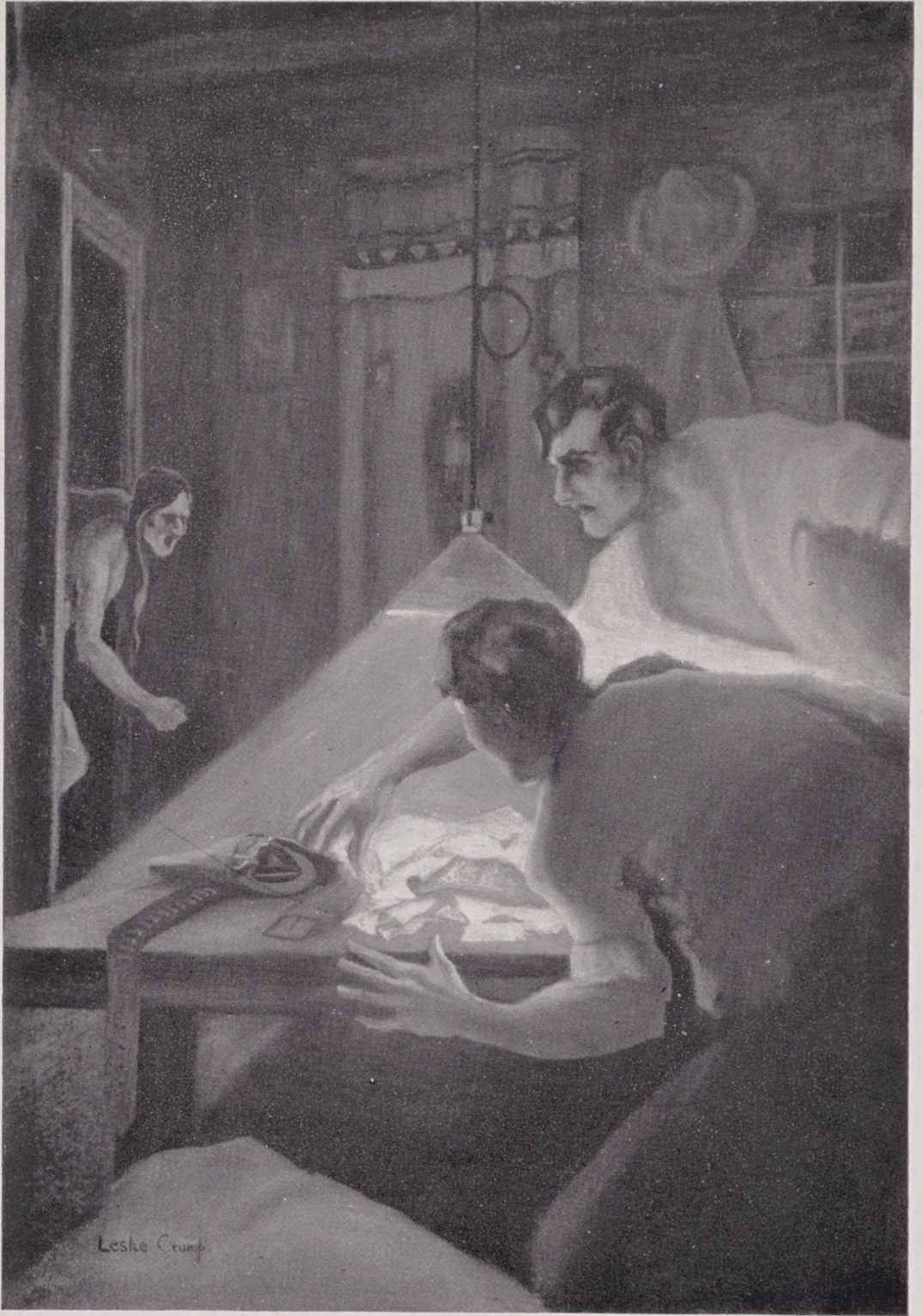
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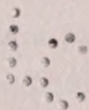
“The door was pushed violently open”

JACK STRAW IN MEXICO

How the Engineers Defended
the Great Hydro-Electric Plant

BY
IRVING CRUMP

Illustrations by
LESLIE CRUMP



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JACK STRAW IN MEXICO

CHAPTER I

JACK STRAW'S MISSION TO MEXICO

FIVE members of the "D" club had gathered in Jack Straw's room on the top floor of Phillip's Hall the last Saturday afternoon before the end of the Spring term. They had not assembled in official conclave, indeed they had not intended to assemble at all. They had merely gravitated there one by one in search of something to take their minds off the worst disappointment they had been compelled to face that year. The Drueryville-Seaton baseball game, the one that was to have settled the preparatory school championship of Vermont, had been scheduled for that Saturday afternoon, and, lo and behold, in spite of the importance of the day, Jupiter Pluvius or whoever it was that controlled the rain supply,

had made the game impossible by deluging everything in sight since early morning. And there was no chance of postponing the contest either as school closed the following Friday. The championship would have to remain undecided. And this was just the year Drueryville stood a better chance than ever of adding the "prep" cup to her trophy case. It was enough to make anyone glum.

"They should have named this place Drearyville instead of Drueryville," muttered Toad Fletcher, the stocky little catcher of the team, as he looked across the deserted campus at the dripping eaves of Bradley Hall.

John Monroe Strawbridge, who was known to every boy in school as Jack Straw, shifted his position on the window seat so that he could take another look at the weather.

"It is pretty gloomy on a day like this," he answered after searching the leaden sky for some signs of a break in the low hanging storm clouds.

Jack and Toad were too dejected in spirit for conversation and since Bunny Baily was deeply engrossed in a book of fiction and Dick Cory

and Harvey Maston were working out an absorbing game of checkers silence reigned in the room for some time. In fact a stranger passing the door would never have suspected that five perfectly normal, healthy boys were within. But then the "D" club was composed of the honor boys of Drueryville Academy and for that reason if no other, they were bound to be more dignified at times. You see the "D" club was made up of the students who had won the privilege of wearing a white and blue initial, the insignia of the school, on their caps or jersey; and in order to earn that distinction a boy must needs work hard both in the class room and on the athletic field. When a youth successfully attained such laurels the crown *was* apt to weigh heavily.

How long the clicking of checkers would have remained the only sound is hard to tell had not Tommy Todd happened to see Jack Straw curled up in the window seat. He paused a moment before Phillip's Hall and waved his hand in friendly greeting. Then he splashed across the muddy road and came up the stairs three steps at a time. Like a small

portion of the storm itself (for Tommy was by no means a big boy) he burst into the room, his yellow raincoat and rubber hat dripping wet.

"Say, don't flood the place!" shouted Jack as he noted two growing pools of water on the rug.

But Tommy only grinned as he removed his wet garments and draped them over the back of a chair so that they would drip on the hearthstone.

"Sort of hard luck to have a day like this happen along just when it isn't wanted," he suggested to no one in particular. Then without waiting for a response he looked at Jack and spoke.

"Say old man, I can't think what on earth you've been up to recently, but there's something in the wind. Dr. Moorland wants to see you as soon as possible. I just came from his house and he asked me to look you up. I was going on downtown first because the last place on earth I ever expected to find you was in your own room. What's the trouble anyway? You haven't done something that will keep

you from getting through next week, have you? It's mighty close to the end of the term and I hope you've been careful."

At this Cory and Maston suspended their game for a moment and Bunny Baily put down his book. All eyes were turned on Jack Straw. And as for Jack, it must be confessed he looked startled and somewhat worried. Hastily he ran through his mental diary, but so far as he could see no one entry stood out above the rest as warranting reprimand from the principal.

"I haven't the slightest idea what he can want of me," he assured his guests as he hastened into his bedroom and donned rain-coat and rubbers. A few moments later he hurried out into the hall and down the broad stairs toward the main entrance. As he passed the mail rack in the hall he noticed a letter waiting for him. Hastily he seized it and crammed it into his pocket, noting as he did so that the address was written in his father's hand.

Dr. Theodore Moorland, the principal, lived in a modest little cottage on the north side of the campus. It was almost hidden in a grove

of tall maples and, as if to make itself more inconspicuous, it had permitted woodbine and ivy to clothe its gray stone walls in a cloak of soft green. A graveled road that wound between fat old maples showed the way to the front door, and it was up this much used path that Jack Strawbridge hastened, his mind still puzzled over the reason for such an unusual command. The heavy old-fashioned door to the cottage was equipped with a ponderous brass knocker of quaint design which thumped with such resonance as to spread consternation in the soul of youngsters summoned thither. Thus they were thoroughly disturbed before they even faced the austere old master.

Such was not the attitude of Jack Straw, however. He had not been able to remember a single reason why he should expect to face a scolding from Dr. Moorland. Every examination paper had come back with excellent markings and his conduct for some time past had been beyond reproach. He thumped the old door knocker twice in his eagerness to find out just what the master wanted. Perhaps it was news from home, he thought, and he com-

forted himself by the fact that nothing serious had happened to his father, for the letter in his coat pocket attested to the fact that he was still well enough to write. But while he was speculating thus the door was opened by Dr. Moorland himself.

The dignified pedagogue greeted the boy with a broad smile and a hearty hand shake.

"I didn't know but what you and some of the rest of the boys had about grieved yourselves to death over your ill luck at having the championship game broken up by the weather," he said as he ushered Jack into his study in a secluded wing of the house.

"It is rather hard on us," said Jack with a smile. "Here we've been working since February to get our team in shape for the trophy contest and then a little thing like the weather spoils it. Next year I think we will have to arrange to have the championship game a little earlier so there will be enough time to play it in case of an emergency like this one."

"Never mind, Jack, my boy," said the principal, "I have a mission for you that is cal-

culated to take your mind off baseball and similar troubles for some time to come."

The boy was plainly puzzled at this remark. He looked curiously at the principal who was striding the room nervously. Dr. Moorland was a tall, broad shouldered man of sixty. His hair was snow white and so long in back that it curled down over his coat collar. A pair of horn rimmed spectacles that were constantly sliding forward on his nose made him appear to be a testy individual, but in reality he was a genial old gentleman who loved his boys as much as if he was the father of every one of them. The State of Vermont counted him among the best of its educators and he was famed throughout the country, indeed throughout the world as a chemist.

"Jack," he said after a long silence, "how would you like to go to Mexico?"

"To Mexico!" gasped Jack.

"Yes, to Mexico. It will be an opportunity for you to see a wonderful country and also to make enough money to pay your tuition at Drueryville next year. Do you care to go?"

"Why—why—Oh, I'd be delighted—but—

well I'd have to get father's consent first, you know."

"Ah, Jack, you don't suppose I would have suggested the subject before consulting your father about it, do you? I wrote him several days ago and asked his permission to let you go. I received word this morning that he was perfectly willing to have you avail yourself of the chance to see a little of the world providing you cared to go. I wonder that he hasn't written to you about it."

"Why, perhaps the letter I have in my pocket now is about that very thing," said Jack, searching in his pocket for the envelope.

"Very likely," said the principal, "but you can read it after. Let me explain exactly what I want you to do. When you have heard the details you can decide better whether you want to go."

Dr. Moorland had ceased pacing the room and settled deep in his comfortable study chair. With what seemed exasperating deliberateness to Jack, he removed his huge glasses and polished them thoroughly on his handkerchief before he was ready to talk. Then just as he

was about to begin he seemed to remember something else of importance, for he began to search drawer after drawer of his desk until he finally brought to light a large yellow envelope bulging with what appeared to be blueprints. He tossed the package on the desk before him and once again resumed his comfortable attitude.

“Perhaps you never heard of my nephew, Harry Ryder. In fact, I am quite certain you haven’t, for he has never visited Drueryville since you’ve been at school. Harry Ryder is the chief engineer of the enormous hydro-electric power plant at Necaxa where light and power is supplied for Mexico City, the capital, one hundred and twenty-five miles away. He was appointed to that important position by President Madero a year ago, and he has done his best to keep Mexico City lighted in spite of all the trouble in that turbulent republic, and the recent change to the Huerta régime.

“Time and again rebels have tried to break down the four transmission lines that carry the current to the city but they have never yet been successful and I judge from Harry’s let-

JACK'S MISSION TO MEXICO 11

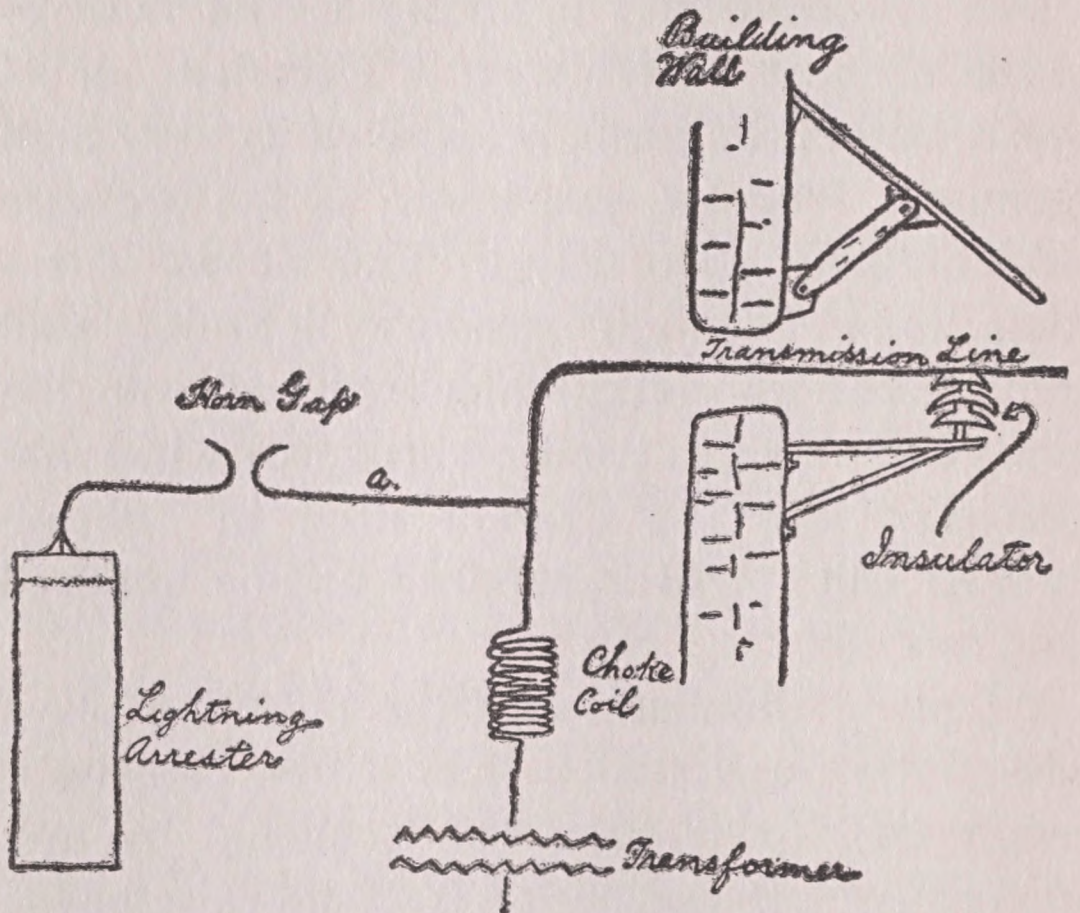
ters that he never intends they shall. But besides rebels, Harry has other important things to contend with. Up there in the mountains where the plant is located, thunderstorms are quite frequent and lightning is the troublesome element. Lightning is electricity in its most dangerous form, because of its very high voltage. Voltage, you know, is the pressure which causes it to travel. One of our scientists once tried to measure lightning and found that its voltage mounted well into the millions. This is tremendous force when you consider that the current used in lighting houses and stores is supplied at one hundred and ten volts.

“During thunderstorms the lightning plays about the transmission lines, often causing a great deal of trouble. If it should by any chance get into the station it would raise havoc with the generators and other machinery. To prevent this, lightning arresters have been constructed that will waylay the lightning, as it were, and send it into the ground before it reaches the vital machinery.”

Here Dr. Moorland paused and began to

sketch rapidly on a piece of paper while Jack looked on, still very much mystified.

“The usual transformer is arranged something like this. First a choke coil is put in the



Dr. Moorland's Sketch

transmission line near the end. When the lightning strikes this coil it piles up and is forced back exactly like a flying wedge of football players that suddenly tries to break through an impregnable defense. The light-

ning that is thus forced back rushes into line 'A,' which is the point of least resistance, jumps the horn gap and plunges through the arrester tank and into the ground. When the excessive electricity has left the line and the flow is normal, the current is checked at the horn gap and arrested. This combination of gap and arrester does not permit current to flow into the ground during normal operation and does not actually become active until lightning gets into the line and there is danger of the plant being wrecked by an overload of electricity."

"My, but that is interesting," said Jack Straw as he fingered the master's sketch. Indeed, he had been so carried away with the description of that interesting piece of engineering work that for the moment he had completely forgotten about Mexico. But Dr. Moorland revived his interest with his next sentence.

"And now for my reason for wanting you to go to Mexico. The lightning arresters now in use are not entirely satisfactory, and Harry Ryder has been trying to build one on com-

pletely new lines. Indeed, he has perfected the contrivance, except for a neutral chemical solution of a new nature for which he asked me to construct a formula. He forwarded his drawings for me to look over and now I am ready to send them back. But a few weeks ago, Harry communicated with me and asked me to take particular care that the drawings reach him safely. In fact, he suggested that they be sent to him by messenger instead of by the mails. You see, Mexico is in a state of extended turmoil now with Villa, Carranza and Zapata all carrying on campaigns against Huerta, and under such conditions the mails are not trustworthy. In fact, I understand from Harry that three-quarters of the mail is destroyed by revolutionary forces and that the rest of it is left lying in almost any corner of the republic until it can be distributed.

“These drawings,”—Dr. Moorland fingered the bulky yellow envelope as he spoke,—“are far too valuable to trust to such mail service and since Harry is willing to meet the expenses of a messenger and at the same time pay him for his services, I can see no reason why

you should not be the one to take them safely to Necaxa."

"Why, I'd be delighted with the undertaking, if you think I can do it satisfactorily," said Jack.

"And why can't you do it satisfactorily?" demanded the principal rather brusquely. "Any boy whom the students of Drueryville honor by electing captain of the football team for two successive seasons certainly must have some good qualities. You are strong and healthy. You are not a coward and above all you are reliable. These are qualifications that I could not find in every man. Will you go, Jack?"

"Yes, I will. When do I start?" asked the boy enthusiastically, and from the expression on his face it was evident that he was pleased with the confidence the old master had in his ability to carry out the mission.

"A steamer sails from New York on Saturday next. I would like to have you be on board when it leaves the dock for I am more than eager to have the drawings back to their owner and the responsibility off my mind.

Then, too, I am afraid the hostilities in Mexico might become more serious. You will have a week to prepare for the journey, and since I have looked up all your examination papers and found them above the proper rating I will excuse you from school for the last week of the term and you can spend that time with your father, for I know he has many things to say to you. You can leave Drueryville on the ten o'clock train to-morrow morning after you have called here to receive final instructions and the precious drawings. And now you must hurry back to your room and pack. Good afternoon and good luck to you."

It was a rather serious moment for Jack when he shook hands with Dr. Moorland. He realized that the old schoolmaster was putting great trust in him. It was in truth a struggle for him to hide his emotions as he bade the old man good afternoon.

CHAPTER II

“IN SELF-DEFENSE OR A CAUSE THAT IS
HONORABLE”

TOWNSEND STRAWBRIDGE, Jack's father, lived alone in what was left of a once very large estate in the upper end of the pleasant Champlain Valley. The old dwelling was located on the outskirts of the village of Middlebury less than fifty miles from Drueryville, and it was toward this point that Jack hurried as soon as he received the precious yellow envelope and final instructions from Dr. Moorland.

Mr. Strawbridge had in his day suffered a double misfortune through losing his wife and his money almost at the same time. His story was the same as that of many others in that region of the country. He had discovered outcroppings of another section of the rich marble vein that runs from one end of the Cham-

plain Valley to the other and almost bisects the State of Vermont. Lured on by the vast fortune that certain other men were making in marble quarrying, Mr. Strawbridge sought to develop his own property. All the money he had saved, as well as all that he could borrow on mortgages, was invested in quarrying machines, derricks and the like. With these and a force of burly Canadian quarrymen he went to work, opening quarry holes in what had once been the farm's pasture lot.

But unfortunately he had not been able to gather together money enough to more than to tide him over the early part of the operation. This consisted in removing the top soil and breaking away the upper layers of worthless stone, a condition he had not reckoned with. The result was that when the channeling machines were finally put to work to get out the first blocks Mr. Strawbridge found himself unable to finance the undertaking much longer. He tried to borrow more money, but before he could successfully negotiate a loan the quarrymen called a general strike throughout the State and the men at the Strawbridge

quarries went out with the rest. The strike affected the entire valley and every one was pressed for money. Instead of making new loans old accounts were called in, and since Mr. Strawbridge had no way of meeting his debts, the mortgages on his property were foreclosed. However, he had steadfastly refused to mortgage his house and the property on which it stood. Nor would he jeopardize his interest in the old pasture lot where the quarries were located; consequently these sections alone were saved to him.

On top of all this trouble Jack's mother died. This was almost more than Mr. Strawbridge could stand and for several years he was very much depressed. But gradually he was mastering his unhappiness. He was, in fact, working on a plan to organize a company and develop his marble quarries and this served to keep his mind occupied enough to prevent unpleasant memories from creeping in.

Naturally his son was very dear to him. In fact, he and Jack were more like chums than father and son. In summer, during Jack's long vacation, they would go hunting and fish-

ing together and have a thoroughly good time in general. In the fall and winter, when Jack was at Drueryville, Mr. Strawbridge made weekly visits to the old academy, just for the pleasure of being able to chat with Jack and his schoolboy companions.

Considering this mutual affection it may seem strange that his father was willing to let Jack spend his vacation in Mexico, but then, as Mr. Strawbridge said in his letter to Jack sanctioning the trip, "It is an opportunity that you cannot well miss, as it will give you a chance to see a very wonderful country. If you do not avail yourself of this chance you may have to wait a long time before I can afford to pay the expenses of such a journey. Besides, you will be able to earn enough money to pay your tuition next year which also counts for a great deal because I am now using every penny I have at my command to re-establish my fortune."

When Jack reached home that Sunday afternoon after leaving the academy, Mr. Strawbridge was for putting by his plans for organizing a quarry operating company and de-

voting the entire week to his son. But Jack would not hear to this, for he was thoroughly interested in the work of reopening the quarries. Mr. Strawbridge was well pleased at this and explained all the intricacies of issuing stock and organizing a company until the boy had secured an excellent insight into business of this nature. Many hours were spent in wandering over the old pasture lot and climbing in and out of the quarry holes. They even visited other quarries that were being successfully operated in the vicinity of Middlebury.

But though they were employed in working out the more serious problems of life they did find time to go a-wandering beside babbling trout brooks with their fly rods. Altogether they crowded more enjoyment into that one week than they really expected and Friday morning came all too soon for both of them. This, in spite of the fact that Jack was looking forward to his voyage to Mexico with as much enthusiasm as ever.

After breakfast the last morning before his departure Jack went over the contents of his

valise to see that nothing important had been overlooked. While he was thus engaged his father asked him to step into the library for a moment. When Jack entered the room Mr. Strawbridge was seated at his desk and before him lay a huge blue steel Colt revolver, a well-worn leather holster and a cartridge belt studded with brass ends of many cartridges. Jack had often viewed this weapon in his father's room and occasionally he had been allowed to fire it at a target when his father was at hand.

“My son,” said Mr. Strawbridge kindly as he patted the heavy six-shooter, “you have been greatly honored by your principal, Dr. Moorland. He has asked you to undertake a mission of importance. He has entrusted you with valuable drawings, the loss of which would mean the ruination perhaps of a man's most important contribution to the scientific world. All this has pleased me a great deal for I find satisfaction in knowing others besides myself have faith in your ability to carry out an undertaking. Do everything you can, my boy, to have them retain this faith. I

realized when I gave you permission to go to Mexico that I was letting you take your life in your own hands. This worried me a great deal at first, but I would not for anything in the world cheat you of the honor of making that journey successfully. You will be traveling most of the time among people to whom human life is of little value. These people are violent and warlike. They are uneducated and untrained, and all the time that you are in their country your life will be in danger. For that reason I am going to give you this revolver. Take it and use it only in self-defense or in a cause that is honorable. If others believe that you are to carry out an important task I am ready to believe that you are careful enough to know how to use a weapon of this kind and not misuse it."

Jack's heart beat fast as he took the heavy holster and cartridge belt from the desk. He always liked to feel it in his hands, and to examine it closely. He had been accustomed to firearms of all kinds, but this huge army revolver fascinated him because of its massiveness.

“Father,” he said finally, “I shall be as careful with this as you have been, and you can be certain that whatever use it is put to will be honorable.”

“Jack, I believe you,” said Mr. Strawbridge heartily, as he grasped his son’s hand.

The rest of the day Jack and his father devoted to planning the details of his trip and at four o’clock Mr. Strawbridge opened the heavy door of his private safe and took the yellow envelope from the compartment in which it had been reposing since Jack’s arrival from Drueryville. He also took a heavy waterproof wallet from the safe and emptying the papers contained therein gave it to Jack with instructions always to keep the precious drawings in it. The wallet, with drawings inside, Jack placed in an inner pocket of his coat, taking good care first to see that there were no small holes that might become enlarged by the weight of the package, thereby providing a way for it to slip through. Shortly after that the village bus drove to the door and Jack and his father bundled inside.

Thus did our hero depart on the first stage of what was to prove an unusual adventure.

The express from Montreal that was to take him to New York was in the station when he arrived and Jack had but a very few minutes to say a last good-by to his parent. In fact, the train started as they were shaking hands and Jack just had time to toss his bag to a dusky Pullman porter and swing aboard.

CHAPTER III

SEASICK

FORTUNATELY Dr. Moorland had arranged all the details concerning Jack's sailing and had forwarded his steamship ticket and stateroom reservation to him while he was still in Middlebury, otherwise he never would have made the Pringle Line pier before the sailing hour. Somewhere south of Albany a freight train had been wrecked during the night and in consequence the entire line had been tied up for three hours. The Montreal express had merely crawled along for the greater part of its journey and when Jack awoke the next morning he found to his dismay that it had many miles to go before it reached the Grand Central depot. In fact, when it finally pulled into the train shed the young traveler had a little more than half an hour in which to reach the Brooklyn dock.

Valise in hand he stood on the platform of the first car when the long train rolled in. And while the brakes were yet crunching against the wheels he leapt down, to the imminent peril of a colored porter whom he nearly bowled over in his mad haste to reach Forty-second Street. Down the long concourse and through the waiting-room he hurried until he finally gained the sidewalk. There he hailed the first taxicab in sight. Pausing only a moment to give the driver hasty instructions, Jack plunged inside and immediately was being whisked through New York at top speed.

But with all this hustle and bustle he came very near to missing the boat. Indeed he was among the last aboard. All but one gangplank had been hauled in and the few remaining visitors were being hastened ashore by the stewards when he finally gained the deck and paused to catch his breath. She was a long low white-hulled steamer that sailed under the name of the *Yucatan* and her seaworthiness was apparent even to Jack, who had never before set foot on a ship's deck.

The first thing that the boy from Drueryville Academy did after locating his stateroom was to see that the wallet with its precious contents was secure in its proper place. His mind at ease on this point, he immediately returned to the deck, for he was eager to see the sights of New York harbor. The *Yucatan* was slipping past the lower end of Governor's Island and the entire skyline of Manhattan was spread out before his admiring gaze. But presently, as the ship passed Tompkinsville, his attention was diverted to three huge gray vessels with queer basket-like masts that were anchored just off the Staten Island shore. He recalled that a United States Navy coaling station was located in that vicinity and concluded that this was the reason for the presence there of three of the largest of Uncle Sam's battleships.

And as these vessels faded in the distance a new delight was revealed to him. The *Yucatan* was steaming down the Narrows toward the lower bay and on either bank Jack beheld the many innocent looking grass-grown terraces of Fort Wadsworth and Fort Hamilton

behind which the deadly disappearing guns of the harbor defense are concealed. The mere sight of these embankments with the Stars and Stripes whipping in the breeze above them made the young Vermonter thrill with patriotism, and for the first time in his life he realized fully how glad he was that Yankee blood coursed through his veins. And as he stood there almost spell-bound by this picture of silent power, some one at his elbow spoke to him.

"They look almost impregnable," said the stranger, whereat Jack turned to find himself addressed by a tall, good looking man whose face was tanned to a ruddy brown, and whose eyes sparkled with as much enthusiasm as his own.

"Indeed they do, and I am proud of them," our young friend replied with feeling.

"So am I, son; so am I," said the other with equal fervor. "And every day I feel more grateful to Providence for making an American of me. You'll appreciate it too after you have traveled in foreign lands a little while."

Jack instinctively liked this man. He was

so heartily enthusiastic about America and everything American that the boy could not help but admire him. Indeed he found him decidedly interesting as a companion and they chatted away about everything in general until the *Yucatan* reached Sandy Hook. Here the stranger brought forth a pair of binoculars and scrutinized the beach and the Atlantic Highlands beyond until he located the object of his search. Then he passed the glasses to Jack, saying as he did so:

“Here, look at the greatest lighthouses in the world. See those two towers standing out of the foliage over there on the hill. The reflection of their lights can be seen seventy miles out at sea.”

After a search Jack found them. They appeared like the towers of some medieval castle connected by a long low brick structure.

“Are those the Sandy Hook Lights?” he queried.

“No,” said his companion, “they are officially known as the Navesink Lights. The Sandy Hook Light is that old octagonal white tower over yonder. That is one of the oldest,

if not the oldest, lighthouse in America. It was built by the British Government in 1764 and during the Revolutionary War the King's soldiers used it as a military prison. Not long ago when they were making some improvements in the foundation a dungeon was unearthed in which were found several human skeletons, evidently Colonial soldiers imprisoned there and not liberated when the lighthouse was abandoned. Now if you will turn your glasses off to the right you will be able to see the Sandy Hook Lightship. That little cockleshell of a craft is there winter and summer fighting every storm and fog that comes up. She's in competent hands, however, for the captain is a master mariner."

Jack was exceedingly interested. He wondered how his companion came to know so much about lighthouses and lightships and several times he was on the point of asking him. This, however, was not necessary, for a few moments later the information was furnished quite voluntarily.

"By the way," said the stranger, after Jack had finished scrutinizing the tossing light-

ship, "I've neglected to introduce myself. My name is Warner, James Warner, I am supposed to be a marine engineer. You understand; a builder of lighthouses, concrete dykes and all that."

"And I am John Strawbridge of Drueryville Academy, but since Strawbridge is a rather large mouthful I suggest you call me Jack Straw. It's handier, you know."

"Jack Straw, eh? Well, that's corking," said Mr. Warner heartily, clapping the boy on the back. "Where are you bound for, Jack? I'm on my way to Tampico. President Huerta, of Mexico, has just given me a contract to rebuild the foundation of the Lobo's Island Light. That is one of the most important coast markings in Mexico."

"I'm bound for Necaxa, by way of Vera Cruz and Mexico City," said Jack, who had already begun to feel like a seasoned traveler.

"Necaxa," exclaimed his companion; "why that's where the big hydro-electric power plant is located. That's where Mexico City gets its light from. Harry Ryder, the engineer in charge of the plant, is an old chum of mine."

In fact, we were classmates at Sheffield Scientific School."

"Why, he's the man I am expecting to visit there," said Jack, somewhat surprised at the fact that Mr. Warner knew Dr. Moorland's nephew. He refrained, however, from telling his companion the reason for his journey.

"Well, that's mighty interesting," replied the marine engineer. "I haven't seen Harry Ryder in more than two years, though I've kept in touch with him. He's a very capable fellow, and he deserves the honor of being in charge of the largest electric station in Mexico. He won the office, you know, about a year or so ago. President Madero held competitive examinations in Mexico City. Harry carried off the highest honors. But from what he told me he was rather hard pressed by several other good electrical engineers, both Americans and Mexicans. I guess he expected to lose his position when Huerta won the revolution and deposed Madero. But the new president reappointed him."

Jack was greatly pleased to learn that Dr.

Moorland's relative was so well liked by his former classmate. It served to increase his interest in the man whose plans he was carrying and he concluded that his visit to Mexico was destined to be very pleasant with Mr. Ryder as his host. He became silent after that, for his thoughts were far away, anticipating his sojourn in the land that Cortez conquered. The voice of Mr. Warner interrupted this pleasant mental occupation.

"Look over there on the horizon. That's a storm cloud. I rather think it's fixing for a blow. Do you ever get seasick?" he queried.

"Well, I've never had an opportunity to find out," said Jack, "for you see this is my first experience on salt water."

"Well, you'll know within an hour. It's freshening up now and before long the boat will be pitching around like a Mexican burro, a beast you are destined to become acquainted with before you have traveled in Mexico very long."

Jack smiled at Mr. Warner's simile, but it was not long before he noticed that the long

rolling swells had changed to white crested waves that pounded against the steel sides of the *Yucatan* with a hiss and a shower of salt spray. The pitching of the ship had increased, too, by the time he and Mr. Warner went below for luncheon. Indeed, he found it rather hard to follow his companion across the dining saloon without seeming to stagger. At the same time he began to feel very peculiarly. It was as if he had been swinging around and around so violently that he had finally become very dizzy. He tried his best to hide his feelings from Mr. Warner, hoping that he would be a little better after he had eaten. But his companion looked at him sharply as he took his seat at the table and Jack was certain that he saw the semblance of a smile about the corners of his mouth. This nettled the boy and he determined that he would master the peculiar feeling immediately. About that time, however, the waiter placed a plate of hot soup before him. Jack looked at it once and all his self-control vanished. Somehow the sight of food made him ex-

tremely ill and without even the formality of excusing himself he pushed back his chair and bolted for his stateroom.

Life hardly seemed worth living to Jack Straw during the next three days for he was so ill that he could not stir out of his stateroom. The *Yucatan* pitched and rolled as if she was being tossed about for a plaything by some very inconsiderate giant, and it frequently seemed to the boy that the steel hull was on the point of foundering under the heavy seas that broke against it. Nor did Jack care particularly whether it did or not.

Several times he made an attempt to leave his stateroom, believing that he would feel very much better if he could only reach deck. But each time he left his berth he became so nauseated that he was glad to climb back again. Mr. Warner made three efforts to visit him but Jack had bolted the door against all intruders, including a solicitous steward who tried to persuade him to drink a cup of tea and eat some hot toast.

On the morning of the fourth day out, however, he awoke to find himself much relieved.

To be sure he was very weak, but the sea had gone down and walking was not the effort it had been before. He found himself able to eat a light breakfast and later he managed to reach his steamer chair into which he sank with a sigh of relief. He was not the only passenger convalescing. Indeed all the occupants of the steamer chairs were pale and weak appearing and Jack found a great deal of satisfaction in knowing that others had been affected by the storm.

The *Yucatan* was plowing her way through the dark blue water of the Gulf, riding the long lazy swells with graceful ease, and to Jack, who had never before been out of sight of land, the vast stretch of water was awe-inspiring. The vessel seemed small and insignificant out there all alone and he wondered how Columbus and other early adventurers had ever found courage enough to sail for weeks over untraveled seas knowing so little of their destination. In fact, how mariners could navigate a vessel even with present-day charts and equipment seemed a mystery to the boy from Vermont.

Late that afternoon while Jack was trying to get interested in a book that he had brought from his stateroom, Mr. Warner appeared on deck. "By George," he exclaimed as he caught sight of Jack, "you're not the boy with whom I was talking a day or so ago! Why, you look as pale as a ghost. You must have had a rather disagreeable few days. Well, we did run through something of a blow and I guess you weren't the only one who was seasick. To tell the truth, I felt a little squeamish myself for a time."

"I think it was about the most unpleasant sensation I ever had," said Jack.

"You are right," said Mr. Warner; "but most of us have to experience it sometime. Well, you are headed straight for your destination now. I expect we will reach Tampico by late to-morrow night or the following morning, and after that it is only a day to Vera Cruz. I am rather glad I came across you here, for I've a lot of figuring to do on some specifications I brought with me and I may not have an opportunity to see you again before I land. I'll say good-by to you now and

let me wish you the very best of luck in Mexico. Be sure and remember me to Harry Ryder when you see him and tell him also that I may find an opportunity to visit him if I am in Mexico long enough."

Jack shook his hand warmly, for he had come to like the marine engineer a great deal.

"I am sure we shall see each other again some day," he said as they parted company.

CHAPTER IV

AT ODDS WITH CUSTOMS INSPECTORS

THOUGH it was hardly daylight Jack was up and dressed and on deck when the Mexican pilot came aboard to take the *Yucatan* into Vera Cruz. A filmy blue mist was rising from the broad surface of the harbor, making the white walled seaport seem like a dream city. Dawn, like twilight, in the Tropics is of brief duration, and the boy from New England scarcely had time to mark the fleeting changes of color along the eastern horizon before the sun came up, dispelling at once the lingering night mist. And with the coming of day the city and the harbor became alive. Tiny sail boats put out and from wharves and jetties here and there puffing tugs made their appearance.

Jack Straw watched the scene with eager

interest. It was all so new and so very unlike what he had expected that he became thoroughly fascinated. Off to the right he beheld the frowning walls of the old fortress and military prison of San Juan de Ulloa. He recalled stories he had heard of its dungeons where numberless horrible executions had taken place, and he wondered how many enemies of Huerta lingered there at the present time. From this grim building he turned his attention to the city. The spires of the cathedral showed high above the housetops, and as Jack caught sight of them there arose the most confused jargon of metallic sound that he had ever heard. It was as if a regiment of blacksmiths were beating on cracked anvils. He did not learn until he landed that these sounds emanated from the belfry of the cathedral and were caused by a group of bell ringers bent on calling the population to early mass.

In due time, after port inspectors, quarantine officers, and a host of other uniformed individuals had climbed aboard and inspected every one and everything in sight, the *Yuca-*

tan was permitted to make her way slowly to the Pringle Line wharf.

Jack, valise in hand, was among the first down the gang-plank, but he had hardly put foot on the dock before he was accosted by another uniformed attendant who spoke very poor English. The boy managed after a great deal of effort to understand that he was one of the customs inspectors and that he was about to make an examination of the contents of the valise. Jack willingly unlocked the leather bag and permitted the swarthy searcher to tumble its contents about until he became convinced that the youth had nothing on which he could collect duty. But he did not seem satisfied. He looked at Jack from head to heels, noting particularly each one of his pockets. Then suddenly he pointed to where the leather wallet and drawing made the boy's coat bulge slightly.

“What—ah—have. Ah—you—ah—er—” he puzzled his brain to know how to finish the sentence in English. But finally becoming exasperated he tapped Jack's coat violently with his fingers.

"*Aqui! Aqui! Aqui!*" (here! here! here!) he demanded. Jack did not understand the Spanish, but he knew that the leather wallet interested the inspector. He hesitated to produce it at first and tried to satisfy the dark-visaged little man by telling him that it was only a wallet. But the Mexican would not be contented and in the end the boy had to reveal to him the contents of the yellow leather case. At the sight of the blue prints and sketches the native became thoroughly aroused. He tried to ask questions in English but became so very confused that he resorted to his native tongue and talked a perfect stream of Spanish. And of course Jack was unable to understand a word of it.

Then the Mexican beckoned the young American to follow him, pointing at the same time to a long low stone building near by which Jack concluded was the custom house. Together they hurried across the street, the inspector chattering so hard that Jack's protests were lost completely.

The man led the way through several rather poorly kept offices to the far end of the

building, where they entered what was evidently the room of the Chief Inspector of the port. An elderly and very dignified old gentleman was the sole occupant. He was seated at a desk in the far corner, but at their coming he arose and advanced to meet them. Immediately the little inspector became thoroughly animated. He opened the wallet (upon which he had kept a firm grip since Jack gave it to him) and spread the drawings on the table before his superior, talking very fast all the while. Together the two Mexicans examined each sketch, then finally the old man turned and spoke to Jack.

“Do you converse Mexican?” he queried and Jack shook his head.

The Chief Inspector clapped his hands twice, whereat a servant appeared, to disappear immediately upon receiving a few abrupt instructions. Shortly after the servant entered again followed by a light-haired youth of about Jack's own age, and undoubtedly an American. The boy from Vermont was decidedly pleased, but before he could speak the Chief Inspector addressed the newcomer,

pointing to the drawings and the wallet at the conclusion of his remarks.

“He wants to know what these drawings are,” said the interpreter; “he thinks that you are a spy in the employ of the revolutionists and that these papers are very important.”

“Please tell him,” said Jack with a smile, “that the drawings are valuable only to one person and he is the man who is making the electricity which lights President Huerta’s palace and the streets of Mexico City.”

There was a decided change in the attitude of both officials when this was translated for them. The Chief Inspector bowed and smiled most apologetically.

“So, Señor Ryder. He is your friend?” he said; “he is a—” but he could get no further with his English, so he addressed the rest to the interpreter who imparted it to Jack.

“He says that Mr. Ryder is a very wonderful man and that if you are his friend he is sorry that he detained you. You are free to go now,” said the American, and Jack, after thanking the dignified old Mexican, tucked the wallet into his pocket and left the office. In

the corridor of the building he was overtaken by the interpreter, who paused a moment to speak.

"My name is Dave Anson," he said, "and if I can help you any, while you are in Vera Cruz, just let me know. I always like to help out a fellow countryman."

"You have done a great deal for me already," said Jack, "for if it had not been for you I am afraid I would have found myself in a mighty unhappy position. I certainly am obliged to you."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Anson, then in an undertone he added, "Don't let the old chap deceive you. I could see he was rather skeptical about what you said, but he is afraid to detain you any longer for fear you might have a little more pull than he has, so he let you go. Don't worry; you'll be shadowed every minute that you are in Vera Cruz, so mind your actions. Well, so long and good luck to you." The two boys shook hands warmly and parted.

Jack gave little thought to his recent experience after he left the custom house, for he had

a great deal to attend to. First of all he must find a banking house where he could get his American money exchanged for Mexican currency. Dr. Moorland had given him the address of one of the few honest banking firms in Vera Cruz, and after a long search he located the place. He was very much surprised to find that for every one of his American dollars he received two Mexican dollars in exchange. Indeed, his capital was doubled and when he left the bank his trousers' pockets and wallet were weighted down with huge silver coins. Jack's next object was to find the railroad terminal, and since an English speaking clerk had given him explicit directions as to its location he experienced little or no difficulty in finding the long low building with its dirty trainshed.

A great many of the railroad men in Mexico above the grade of brakemen are Americans and the young traveler had very little trouble at the station. He learned, however, that he had two hours to wait before the next train to the capital would be made up, and after buy-

ing his ticket and making Pullman reservations he checked his valise and started on a trip about the city.

Through hot unshaded streets he wandered, peering into the curious little shops and watching with interest the swarthy people. Finally he reached the broad plaza with its imposing cathedral, bandstand and line upon line of park benches. Here he sat down to rest and watch a score of dirty, half-clad children playing on the sidewalk. They were apparently taking part in a game and Jack tried very hard to understand the details of it. Indeed he became so interested that he did not realize some one had taken the seat beside him until he felt a hand upon his arm.

"Un centavo, Señor, un centavo," pleaded a whining voice, and Jack found himself accosted by a very ugly and dirty-looking Mexican with a monstrous hat. Though the lad did not understand his language he had little difficulty in guessing that the man was begging for money. Eager to be quit of such an uncouth companion he took several small coins from his coat pocket and dropped them into

the beggar's outstretched palm. But as he did so he looked up to find a man on a bench not far distant watching him closely.

He was rather well dressed when compared to others Jack had noticed about the city, wearing an unusually large sombrero of much better texture than that of the beggar's. The brim and band about the crown was embellished with Indian beadwork which made it very picturesque. On being observed this man lowered his eyes and began to roll a black paper cigarette, nor did he look up again until Jack left the bench and started across the plaza. However, he watched the lad's movements from the corner of his eye until the Vermonter turned toward the street that led to the railroad terminal. Then he arose and followed at a distance.

CHAPTER V

IN THE HANDS OF THE SECRET SERVICE

ALTHOUGH the train for Mexico City was due to leave Vera Cruz promptly on the hour, it was forty minutes late when it started to get underway. This slight disregard for schedule did not surprise Jack, however, for already he had discovered this natural failing of all Mexicans. The Pullman coach in which he had secured accommodations was fortunately one of a number of American-built cars that had been taken over the Rio Grande and into Mexico from time to time during the extension of the national railroad system, and in consequence the young traveler did not suffer much from lack of comfort. Before he had traveled very long Jack realized that he had embarked upon the most interesting portion of his journey to the power plant. The train sped along through the most

wonderful country that he had ever seen. Now he was racing through deep ravines with perpendicular walls of rock rising so high that daylight was almost shut out and perpetual twilight reigned. From this he was whisked into broad valleys with mountain ranges towering on either side. And often the tracks led high up on the sides of one of these mountains, revealing a broad panorama of tropical country, with Popocatepetl, the monstrous volcano, in the distance.

Now and then Indian villages were passed and Jack caught fleeting glimpses of a group of thatched huts and adobes and crowds of naked children and half-clad men and women who stared stolidly at the train as it shot by. Occasionally a stop was made at some large town and picturesque groups of Mexicans gathered at the station to stare in wonderment at the passengers. Always these groups were made up entirely of men, for the women had far too much to do to waste time idly watching trains. These men were a motley throng, all wearing high-crowned, broad-brimmed hats and gaily colored *serapes*, or

blankets, which they hugged close about them in spite of the heat. The better dressed wore trousers that were extremely tight fitting. The others, however, wore frayed and tattered garments made of everything from sail cloth to sacking and ungainly sandals bound across the arch and around the ankle with long buckskin thongs. Not a shoe did Jack discover among them.

What with the scenery and the picturesque towns and villages, Jack's interest was kept out of doors for several hours. But eventually even the novelty of traveling through a foreign country grew wearisome and he turned his attention to a book that he had stowed away in his traveling bag. He had not been reading long, however, before he began to be troubled by a strange presentiment that some one was watching him. Quite involuntarily he glanced up from the page he was perusing and looked into the bead-like eyes of a native who was occupying a Pullman chair at the other end of the car. Instantly the Mexican's eyes were turned away. The lad became suspicious immediately, for he recog-

nized the man as the one who had watched him in the plaza at Vera Cruz. There was no mistaking him, for he wore the same big-brimmed sombrero with its curious beadwork binding.

Jack instinctively put his hand to the pocket where he kept the wallet of drawings, for he had a vague feeling that this man was interested in them, though he really could not understand why he should be since they had not been exhibited at any place save in the custom house. Then he suddenly recalled the young American interpreter's warning that he would probably be closely watched at all times! Was this man shadowing him? Had he been trailed all through Vera Cruz? The thought angered him and he glanced at the Mexican again. That individual, however, had removed his big hat and was gazing calmly out of the window, as if he did not know that Jack Straw ever existed, and his unconcerned manner caused the young traveler to wonder whether this second meeting was only a strange coincidence after all.

Jack tried to resume his reading, but it was

not long before his mind was far from the printed pages and busy evolving a plan whereby he could become certain as to whether the tall Mexican was watching him or not. Soon the train began to slow down for another stop and on the instant the American got an idea. He waited until the train came to a full stop; then as if he suddenly realized that this was the station he wanted to get off at he jumped up and seizing his traveling bag bolted for the door.

It was all done so quickly that the Mexican was taken completely off his guard. When he saw the boy rush for the door he gave one hurried glance up the car, then followed as fast as he could. By the time he reached the door, however, Jack had alighted and was racing along the side of the car to the rear platform where he swung aboard and returned to the seat he had just vacated. He had successfully lost the Mexican for five minutes at least, for the man searched up and down the station platform and in all directions trying to locate the Vermonter. Then, purely by accident, he

looked toward the train again and saw Jack smiling at him from one of the windows.

It was evident from his distorted features that the native was thoroughly enraged. He plunged for the train which was already underway and swinging aboard hurried into the Pullman car, brandishing a huge army revolver as he advanced. Several women passengers screamed and every man in the car put his hands above his head when they saw the angered native striding down the aisle. They were certain that the train had been boarded by highwaymen and that they were about to be asked to turn over their valuables. But the Mexican disregarded the disturbance he had caused. He put the muzzle of the ugly revolver against Jack's breast and hissed:

"You, gringo, you are arrest for a spy of the revolution. Not holler."

But Jack did not intend to "holler." With the hard nose of the gun pressed against his ribs he did not hesitate to put his hands above his head as the other men in the train had done.

"You are arrest by that great Secret Service of Mexico," said the native very impressively; "give me up your guns."

"I have no guns that are dangerous," said Jack Straw, and he spoke the truth, for the big Colt that his father had given him reposed unloaded and quite harmless in the bottom of his valise. But the Mexican refused to believe him.

"Give up or I make of you an examination," he said, trying hard to be courteous in spite of his outraged temper.

"Search," said Jack, "only let me put my arms down." And the detective forthwith began to go through his pockets while the other passengers, many of whom were Americans, gathered around and looked on. One of the first things that the detective did was to confiscate the yellow wallet with the drawings. His eyes sparkled with pleasure when he opened it.

"Ah! Señor, it is for these you will be shot, maybe. You are a bad gringo," he said with an evil chuckle.

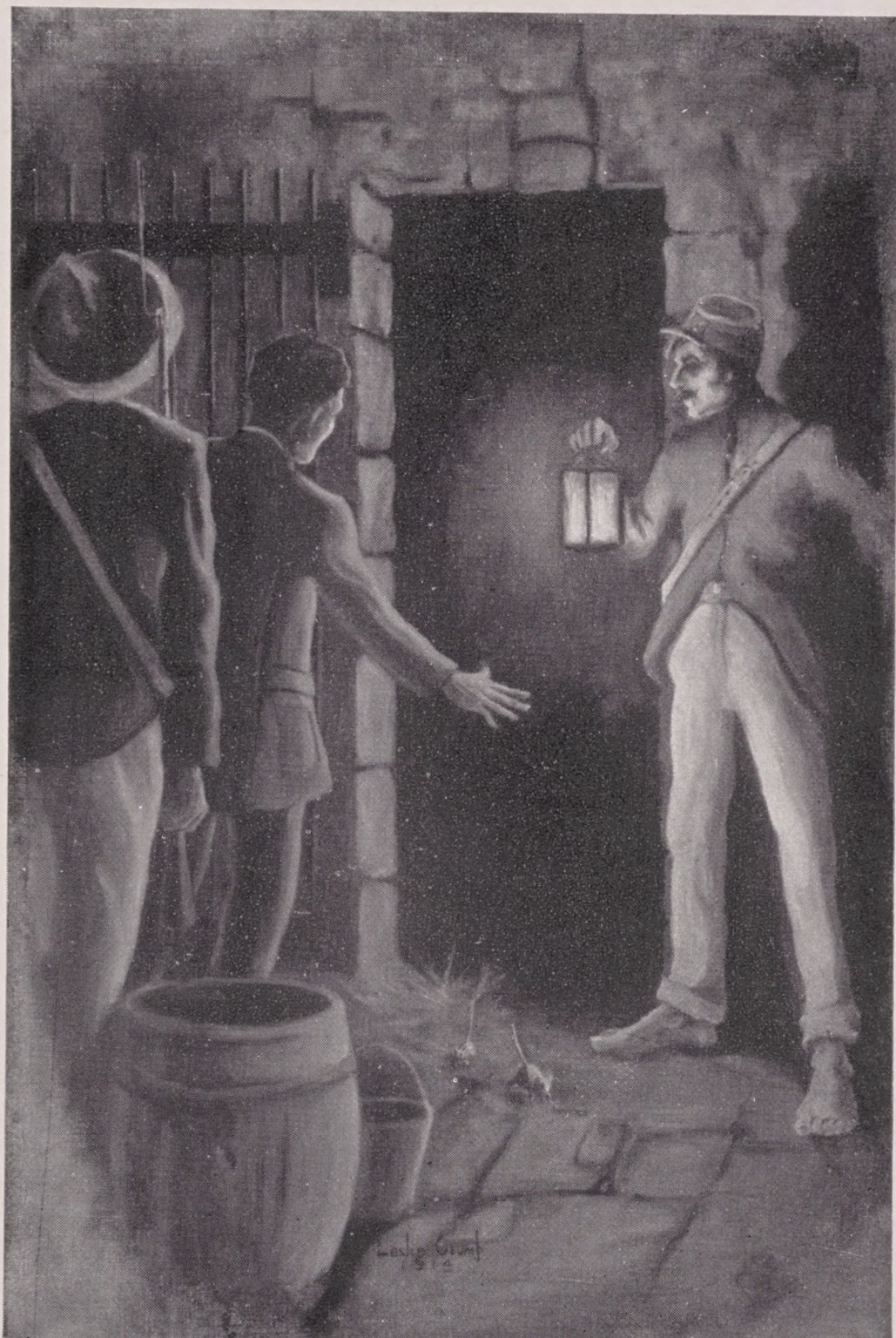
"They are only working drawings of a machine," protested Jack.

"Yes, a war machine, I think," said the Mexican, continuing his search for firearms. Finally, after finding nothing more formidable than a jack-knife, the officer put his own revolver away and informed Jack that he might sit down and be at ease until they reached Mexico City. He warned the boy, however, that any attempt on his part to leave the car would call forth the huge revolver again, and since Jack had no desire to learn how good a marksman the Mexican was he refrained from rising from his Pullman chair for the rest of the afternoon. The Secret Service man sat directly opposite, his dark eyes never moving from the lad from Drueryville.

CHAPTER VI

ON TRIAL AS A SPY

THE lights of Mexico City were a welcome sight to the young American. Never had a train ride seemed so long. The Secret Service guard refused to allow him conversation with his fellow-passengers and as the circumstances were too strained to permit his reading with any degree of interest, Jack had little to do but gaze out of the window and think over his misfortune. The moment the train rolled into the station, the detective hustled Jack to the military barracks in the heart of the city. It was almost midnight when they were challenged by the white-clad sentry before the heavy double gates of the enclosure. Jack's captor answered with a few brief sentences in Spanish and the gates were unbarred to let them pass. Inside another sentry located the officer on duty and he and



"To Jack it all seemed like a horrible nightmare"

the Secret Service man held a short conference. A few moments later two privates were summoned. They took charge of the young Vermonter, escorting him toward the far end of the long barracks buildings, where he was locked into a stuffy unlighted cell in the guardhouse.

To Jack it all seemed like a horrible nightmare. Here he was a prisoner in the capital of a strange country. He had no knowledge of the language spoken by those with whom he had to deal, nor did he have friends or relatives within several thousand miles. His only hope in being delivered from his rather serious position lay in the possibility of calling Harry Ryder to Mexico City so that he could identify his drawings and explain how they came to be in the possession of some other person. But Jack was not altogether certain that this could be done, or if it could be done, whether his captors would be willing to take that much trouble to prove him innocent. At first he had taken the arrest more or less as a joke, but as he reviewed the various stories he had heard of the Mexican idea of justice,

he became very much worried. He knew the punishment meted out to a spy and he wondered whether that would be his end. With such thought parading through his brain, he had little chance for sleep that night. Indeed he heard a big clock beyond the barracks walls toll every hour from midnight until dawn.

At seven o'clock breakfast was brought to him by an uncouth looking private in a dirty white uniform. The meal consisted of *tortillas*, made of corn flour, and *frijoles*, which are black Mexican beans. There was not even a cup of water with which to wash it down. Though Jack had had very little to eat the day before, the sight of the mess brought by the soldier sickened him, and he put the tin plate aside untouched.

An hour later an officer with four privates came into the guardhouse and unlocked the door of Jack's cell. The lad observed that each of the soldiers carried a shining rifle at port arms and the officer entered with sword drawn. At this he became speechless with horror. Was this a firing squad! Was he going to be executed without the formality of

trial? He was almost too weak to walk when the officer spoke to him in Spanish and motioned for him to come forth. Silently the soldiers formed behind him and urged him forward out of the guardhouse and on to the parade grounds.

His heart-breaking suspense ended there, however, when he noted the direction in which the soldiers turned him. Instead of marching out into the center of the enclosure they headed directly for a building that looked very much like a large dwelling. To the young American it appeared as if it might be the home of the commander of the barracks. He hoped it was, for in that case he could be certain of some form of trial at least, during which he could doubtlessly explain about the drawings.

The boy was ushered before the austere old General by the officer alone, the guard remaining on duty before the door. The commander was seated at a desk in the center of a well-lighted, cheerful-looking room, a uniformed orderly at his elbow. The other occupant of the room was the Secret Service man who had arrested him the day before. Both were por-

ing over the drawings of the lightning arrester which the detective had confiscated, while on the corner of the officer's desk was Jack's traveling bag which had been forced open, possibly for the purpose of finding other evidence against him.

The detective and the officer looked up as the youth entered. Jack's officer escort saluted and retired to the rear of the room, leaving the lad standing in the middle of the floor alone. The detective cleared his throat and spoke.

"I shall be what you call the interpreter. I spik Mexican, I spik also Inglis. Shall you be content?" he queried.

"I will be contented if you will believe what I tell you," said Jack rather curtly. "It is ridiculous to arrest me as a spy. I am an American citizen and those drawings are not war plans or details of a 'war machine,' as you suggested yesterday. They are plans for an electrical appliance that is to be built by Mr. Harry Ryder, in order to give better light to Mexico City."

The detective looked at him with doubt plainly written on his countenance. Then he

turned and in rapid fire sentences imparted Jack's story to the general. The officer also appeared to doubt the youth's statement. He was silent for a few moments, however, while he pondered the situation; then through the interpreter he asked:

"Why does Mr. Ryder trust his valuable papers to you?"

"Because he didn't care to trust your unreliable mail service," said Jack vindictively.

The wrath of the detective was stirred immediately.

"Mexico is a great country. She has a dependability of mail service. You are a gringo who spies for the revolution. Do not tell me not. I saw you with my own eyes pass some secret something to a sympathizer in the plaza at Vera Cruz. Ah, but he are arrest already and your secret is now known."

Jack was startled at first. Then as he recalled the whining beggar in the plaza he laughed heartily.

"Why, he was only a beggar. I gave him a few coins. You are making a mountain out of a mole hill, Mr. Detective. Why not have

done with all the foolishness by summoning Mr. Ryder from Necaxa? He will prove that the drawings are his and that I am no spy."

The General and the Secret Service man debated this suggestion for some time. Evidently they thought it a good idea, for the officer presently began to use the telephone at his elbow while the detective talked to Jack.

"We will call Señor Ryder. General Rodriguez say the great electrical engineer is in Mexico City now. He spoke with him in the café last evening. He will come maybe, and then if you can prove, you must prove. If you don't, you will be shot to-morrow."

The commander ceased his telephoning after a few moments and spoke to the interpreter, who, turning to Jack, announced:

"Señor Ryder is at the office of the Compañia de Luz y Fuerza Montriz in Calle de Tetuan. He will be here quite soon."

The General and the Secret Service agent spent the next fifteen minutes smoking numerous black paper cigarettes and talking quite excitedly to each other while Jack was left standing in the center of the room. The

waiting was ages long for the American. But finally there sounded the tooting of an automobile horn and roar of a motor from the parade ground outside and a moment later a tall fine-looking American, clad in linen trousers and soft shirt, entered the commander's office.

Jack stepped forward instantly and held out his hand.

"Mr. Ryder," he said, "I am John Strawbridge, Dr. Moorland's messenger. I have been arrested and am being held as a spy because I happened to have your drawings in my wallet. You see it excited the curiosity of the customs inspector yesterday and the result is I am in the hands of the Mexican Secret Service to-day. I sincerely hope that you can get me out of this rather disagreeable position; otherwise I'll furnish the target for a firing squad to-morrow morning."

"Why, this is ridiculous," said Mr. Ryder as he saw his drawings spread out before General Rodriguez. Then he began to talk in Spanish to the natives. A few moments conversation was all that was necessary to con-

vince the Secret Service agent and the officer that a serious mistake had been made, and each was profuse in his apologies to Jack Straw.

“It is a great regret that I arrest so honorable friend of Señor Ryder,” said the detective with a sweeping bow. “I hope you will pardon, Señor.”

And Jack showed the sort of stuff Americans are made of by stepping forward and warmly shaking hands with the Secret Service agent and the commander.

CHAPTER VII

OFF FOR NECAXA

JACK was not long in discovering that Harry Ryder was a prince of companions. After the little incident at the barracks they were fast friends. Of course the engineer was somewhat older than the boy from Drueryville, having just turned twenty-nine, but withal he was decidedly boyish in spirit. The big gray motor car that stood in front of the commander's house was the engineer's latest toy and nothing would do but that Jack should accompany him on a tour of the capital of "this benighted country," as he termed Mexico. And he made an excellent guide.

Until long after midday they went flying up one street and down another, while Mr. Ryder pointed out all the places of interest. First they visited the Plaza Mayor, or Zocalo, as it is frequently called. And while Jack was

noting each interesting detail about the imposing public buildings, the Cathedral and the National Palace, the engineer explained the history of that remarkable section of the City of Mexico.

“This,” he said, “was the heart of the Aztec capital four hundred or more years ago. Indeed, that building over there, the National Palace, was constructed on the very site of the splendid palace of the old Indian ruler Montezuma. And as for the Cathedral, that is built on the very foundation stones that held the wonderful Tecalli, the Aztec temple, where from twenty to fifty thousand lives were sacrificed annually to the powerful Indian deity Huitzilopotchli. The present Cathedral with its towering spires was erected in 1573 and is the most imposing edifice of its kind in the whole of North and South America.”

From the Plaza Mayor they turned to other interesting portions of the community. The famous tree under which Cortez is said to have wept was pointed out by Mr. Ryder; also the various monuments and buildings associated with the old Spanish adventurer. They trav-

ersed the causeway over which Cortez retreated and ultimately visited Chapultepec where the Indian rulers once maintained magnificent dwellings.

It was nearly one o'clock when the car rolled into the heart of the city again and stopped before the door of the American Hotel. There Jack and the engineer climbed out, but before Mr. Ryder entered the hotel he inspected his new machine thoroughly.

"That's a great plaything," he said enthusiastically "I bought it a month ago, and I usually arrange to get into the city every Sunday to take a drive. You see I have to leave it here because there is no roadway out to Necaxa, only a pack train trail and our narrow-gage railroad. I couldn't very well use it out at the power plant anyway for it's a trackless wilderness there."

On entering the hostelry the two Americans lost no time in finding the dining-room, for the drive had given them both a ravenous appetite. They ate in silence for a time, for the business of satisfying their hunger was of great importance. But when coffee was finally served

and each felt that they had done credit to the ample portions afforded to them, Mr. Ryder began to talk.

“You know, Jack, I think it was mighty lucky for you that I happened to be in Mexico City. Otherwise you would probably have been compelled to spend several days in jail. And it is even possible that they would not have taken the trouble to send to Necaxa for me. A Mexican’s idea of justice is rather crude. Frequently they shoot a suspect and then debate his guilt or innocence over his body. Old Rodriguez and his Secret Service friend were quite positive that you were a spy, and I am afraid that the cartridges with which you were to be executed had already been dealt out, figuratively speaking.”

Jack shuddered as he thought of his narrow escape.

“I guess that I *was* very fortunate having you so near at hand,” he said.

“Well, I’ll be quite honest with you, Jack, this visit to Mexico City was not a matter of choice with me. I was requested to appear before the officials of the company and old

Huerta himself. You see things have been in a devil of a mess at the plant recently and we have had some trouble in keeping the old city supplied with enough light. I fancy it has been getting on Huerta's nerves and he has been calling the company's officials to account. They in turn pass the calls along to me.

"You see some of the hundred or more workmen at the plant have developed revolutionary ideas. They seem to be Zapata sympathizers and they are doing all they can to make things unpleasant for Huerta. They have been crippling machinery from time to time, tampering with the searchlights, putting dirt in the bearings of the generators and raising the dickens in general. Of course this reflects on my management and I feel rather ugly about it all. But the men who do it keep pretty well under cover. I wish that I could find out just which of the greasers are the trouble makers. I'd have them line up against the station wall and drilled through with some of their own soft-nosed bullets. That may sound a little inhuman, but honestly one cannot afford to treat them otherwise. As a matter of fact

their fate is not in my hands. The moment we discover a sympathizer the rurales stationed at the plant as special guards take the matter in their own hands and all that we hear of the case after that is the report of the carbines. Oh, they make very little bones about human life down here. And that reminds me, have you provided yourself with a protector in the form of a revolver? If you haven't we'll see that you are supplied with one before we start back for the plant this afternoon."

"I have my father's big blue steel Colt," said Jack with pride. "It's right here in my traveling bag. But I haven't much ammunition, only the cartridges in the belt."

"Well, you'd better buckle it on your hip when we start. You will probably find a great deal of comfort in having it handy all the time you remain in Mexico. Why, you should see our plant. It's a veritable fortress with its rows of trenches, its barbed-wire barriers, its squadron of rurales and detachment of infantry. And our working force is drilled to do some fine defense work too. We are all equipped with Mauser rifles and we have a

battery of new French rapid-fire guns and a three-inch fieldpiece that can throw a shell clean over the top of the nearest mountain. We know it will do that for not long ago we had occasion to bombard a handful of Zapatistas from a position on the cliffs a mile away. The rats had an old fieldpiece and they managed to get a couple of solid shot down through the roof of a storehouse near the plant. Oh, we have had an interesting time out there for the last eight or ten months. The Zapatistas have been hovering around like a swarm of bees. They haven't managed to do much damage, however, but we never know when they will be joined by other mobs of guerilla soldiers who are operating in that section of the mountains. When that happens then I guess we can look for real trouble.

"I arranged with General Rodriguez last night to have another detachment of infantry accompany us to the plant this afternoon. I think it would be wise to strengthen the guard out there at any rate. We are going out on a train of flat cars that will be ready to move shortly so I guess we had better be getting

ready. I'll drive you over to a gunsmith's and you can get all the ammunition you want, then we'll start for the railroad."

At the gunshop Jack laid in five hundred rounds of ammunition. This seemed a ridiculously large amount but Mr. Ryder assured him that it was wise to be on the safe side in such matters. Several other stores were visited where Jack purchased some clothing suggested by Mr. Ryder for service at the plant. The most important purchase was one of the huge sombreros such as the natives wear. This was secured at a little hat booth on one of the side streets. Jack was amazed at the size of some of these hats and while he was looking over the assortment offered, Mr. Ryder explained that the natives were very vain about their hats. He said that in former days the wealthy Mexicans vied with each other to see who could wear the hat with the largest brim and the most costly embellishments. This competition reached the point where it finally became a public nuisance, for the big hat brims were decidedly objectionable on crowded thoroughfares or street cars. The

federal government finally took the matter in hand and imposed a tax of a certain amount for every four inches of brim over a stipulated size. This ordinance put the hat brims at a universal width.

After the shopping they hurried back to the hotel where Mr. Ryder always maintained a room. Their clothes were changed and garments of the rough-and-ready sort adopted. Jack felt very self-conscious as he buckled on the heavy revolver and donned the high-crowned sombrero, but he did his best to hide it from his companion. On his way out of the hotel, however, he surreptitiously glanced at his reflection in one of the large mirrors and found to his great satisfaction that such togger was not at all unbecoming. He secretly resolved to have some photographs made which he intended to take back to Drueryville when he returned.

The train that was to carry them out to Necaxa was, as the engineer had said, nothing more than a string of flat cars with a yellow caboose at the end. It was a narrow gage railroad that was built especially to carry sup-

plies to the power station, one hundred and twenty-five miles back in the mountains.

Two of the flat cars were heaped high with boxes of provisions and barrels of flour, all on the way to the little community at the power house. Three other cars were occupied by the detachment of infantry from the barracks. The soldiers were not a prepossessing lot, Jack thought, as he viewed them. They were uniformed alike, of course, and for the most the uniforms were in rather good order though somewhat dirty. Their hats were not unlike the forage caps of the United States troops during the Civil War, with the exception that they were higher in the crown. The men were all dark skinned and ugly looking, and the young American was quite certain that as enemies they would probably be decidedly vicious customers.

Three officers accompanied the detachment but they held themselves aloof from the rest of the soldiers, sharing the caboose with Jack and Mr. Ryder. They were tall, fine-looking specimens of Mexican manhood, very jaunty in their gold-braided uniforms, and Jack found

them very companionable after they became acquainted, for they could speak English after a fashion and some of the war stories they told helped to make the slow journey into the mountains less tedious.

On leaving Mexico City the train started to climb immediately for the way was entirely up grade, the plant being situated at a higher altitude than the capital. As a result of this and the unusually heavy load, the little engine made slow progress. Indeed, at some points in spite of its snorting and puffing it could not go on and the men were forced to get down from the flat cars and walk, thereby lessening the load. Because of this slow progress it was long after nightfall when Jack discovered a long pencil of light reaching out across the sky. It looked weird and uncanny off there in the solitude of the mountains. But as he watched it began to move along the ridges, searching out each valley and depression. Then Jack understood. It was the huge searchlight at the plant, looking among the hills for lurking bands of Zapatistas.

The lad watched the light travel from point

to point until finally it located the supply train, which it escorted all the way to the station, illuminating the tracks just ahead of the engine.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRIPPLED GENERATORS

IT was a veritable fortress that Jack entered when he left the caboose of the supply train. Before him, on a slight eminence, was the massive building of the power station with the searchlight mounted on the roof. The grassy slope below was marred by a double line of trenches unoccupied, of course, save for one or two white-clad sentinels who paced back and forth restlessly. On the lawn between the first trench and the station, the lad noted a bulky object covered with canvas. This he immediately decided was the three-inch field-piece about which Mr. Ryder had spoken. To the north of the station was the irregular outline of many small cottages. As the searchlight threw its rays in that direction, the boy observed that nearly all of them were constructed of wood and erected after the fash-

ion of the cottages furnished to the quarrymen in Vermont. There were also several long low shed-like structures which he learned later housed the soldiers. The entire community did not occupy more than five or six acres and was entirely cut off from the surrounding country by barbed wire barricades. Indeed, the place looked well-nigh impregnable to the American. To approach from the north, south or west, invaders would have to get through the mass of barbed wire first and carry two lines of trenches before they reached the station, and as far as the east side of the plant was concerned, approach in that direction was made impossible by the roaring mountain stream that furnished water to the station's turbines.

The enclosure became a perfect bedlam a few moments after the supply train rolled in. To the roar of the river and the grumble of the huge generators inside were added the shouts of the soldiers detraining and unloading the supplies. The entire barracks had turned out to welcome the reinforcements, for it happened that they composed two companies of the same

regiment. Altogether Jack estimated that there were more than 200 men ready to defend the place against the rebels, not including the squad of twenty-five rurales who were stationed there to patrol the surrounding country. The rurales, the lad learned, were not soldiers in the stricter sense of the word. They are maintained by the Mexican Government to do practically the same work as that required of the famous Canadian mounted police; which is to rid the country of bandits, smugglers and bad men, and run down the outlaws that hide in the mountains. They are far better drilled than any of the Mexican troupes and are well equipped with clothing and firearms. Their horses are the best that Mexican dollars can buy. These men ride exceptionally well, shoot almost as accurately as the Texas ranger and are brave and fearless. A Mexican president who believed in the old saying that "it takes a thief to catch a thief," organized the rurales years ago when the country was infested with bandits and bad men. Every time one of these men was apprehended he was forced to join the rurales and hunt down bandits. In this

way his vicious nature was well satisfied and at the same time he was able to consider himself a law-abiding citizen, which usually appeals to all individuals who have been outlaws for any length of time. To Jack these soldier-policemen were very picturesque as they swaggered about in their dark-green, tightly fitting uniforms and broad-brimmed hats. He noticed, however, that they did not associate with the white-clad regulars, but stood apart in a little group by themselves and watched the other men unload the cars.

Mr. Ryder and Jack lingered long enough to see that the unloading was well under way before they turned toward the station.

"I've a strange premonition that the trouble-makers hereabout have taken advantage of my absence," said the engineer as they approached the office. "I would not be surprised to find the plant dynamited some day. These rebel sympathizers will go the limit to make it disagreeable for old Huerta."

The office of Ben Nedham, first assistant engineer, was vacant. When Mr. Ryder saw this he looked worried. Immediately he

bounded up the spiral iron staircase to the balcony-like control room where the switchboards were located. Allen Lyman, a tall light-haired American in charge of that section of the plant, advanced to meet him, and his face also bore a troubled look.

"They've been at it again, Mr. Ryder," he exclaimed. "We haven't been able to carry the load all evening. Machines five and six are out of commission. Couldn't even start them. Nedham and a gang are down there on the generator floor now trying to patch them up."

"What is the trouble?" demanded the engineer, his brow wrinkled by a perplexed frown.

"Well, some one got in after two o'clock this morning, evidently, and threw a bucket full of fire sand into the gears of both machines. Nedham has had only one watchman here and he must have gone to sleep."

"Have you heard from Mexico City yet?" demanded Mr. Ryder anxiously.

"No, not yet, but we can gamble that the lights are mighty dim there. Shouldn't won-

der but what we'll get a call before the night is over."

He had hardly completed the sentence when the telephone bell on the desk in the center of the room jangled sharply.

"Dollars to doughnuts that's Mexico City now," exclaimed Lyman as he removed the receiver. A moment he talked with the man on the other end of the line; then he beckoned to Mr. Ryder.

"It's President Huerta himself," he said, holding his hand over the transmitter. "He's as mad as a Mexican bull too. Wants to speak with you."

For fifteen minutes the chief engineer attempted to explain the situation to the country's executive, and in the meantime Jack busied himself trying to puzzle out the reason for all the switches, knobs, handles and indicators on the huge marble switchboard that extended all the way around the circular room. He knew that all the machinery in the station was controlled from that board, but just how it was done he had not the slightest idea. He decided, however, to take advantage of the first

opportunity and learn the function of each of the mysterious looking black rubber handles.

Mr. Ryder left the 'phone apparently thoroughly angry. He paced the narrow room for some time before he uttered a word. Finally, pausing before the desk again, he brought his fist down with a resounding blow.

"By Jupiter," he thundered, "this *must* stop or I'll know the reason why. The old man is as peeved as a wet hen and I don't blame him. He informed me that we had made a failure out of the most important state function of the year simply because the palace was so poorly lighted. They had to resort to smoky oil lamps to help out. He was furious. Told me the city looked like an Indian village, it was so dark. Oh, if I could only get my fingers on the villains who did this work!"

Thus did he storm to Jack and the operator until he became thoroughly out of breath and was forced to pause. Then turning he called Jack and started down the spiral stairs again. Three flights they descended until they reached the floor of the generating room. Six huge generating units occupied the space. They

were great black monsters of steel that looked like so many mastodons chained to the floor. Water was roaring down from the forebay through four of the massive penstocks that supplied the turbines, but the other two were silent. Around each of these silent machines was gathered a group of workmen. They had unbolted the steel protecting plates and were assiduously wiping the sand from the delicate armature bearings. Some of these workmen were Americans but there were a number of Mexicans among them, many of whom were distinctly of the peon class, with bared feet and shabby garments.

As Jack and the engineer hurried across the floor a short, dark-haired American advanced to meet them.

“We’ve trouble on our hands this time!” he exclaimed. “The two machines are full of sand and we won’t be able to get them cleaned until long after midnight.”

“Well, how did it happen, Nedham?” demanded Mr. Ryder. “You were in charge while I was away and you are responsible. Are you going to let this plant go to the devil?”

I got a good blowing up yesterday from the board of directors and here to-night President Huerta himself had me on the long distance telephone. Told me flatly that things would have to go smoother; and I propose to see that they do go smoother hereafter."

"How do I know how it happened? Maybe I was in charge, but they manage to work the same tricks when you are here too, so you can't altogether blame me," said Nedham indignantly.

"Well, I suppose not," replied Mr. Ryder in calmer tones. "I didn't mean to accuse you of neglect of duty. I know they work the same tricks on me too. I hope you'll pardon my temper."

The chief engineer extended his hand in cordial apology and Nedham grasped it, his anger disappearing immediately.

CHAPTER IX

JACK PROPOSES A TRAP

NEDHAM was right. It was some time after midnight before the big generators were in condition to operate again. For hours the men toiled to get every vestige of the gritty substance out of the machines. Mr. Ryder went at the task with the rest, and Jack, unwilling to remain idle, rolled up his sleeves and seized a piece of cotton waste also. With the steel jacket removed, an excellent opportunity was afforded the lad for a better acquaintance with the mechanism of a water turbine generator, and as he worked beside Mr. Ryder, the engineer briefly explained the details.

“This is not really a generator that we are working on, Jack,” said Mr. Ryder, “because a generator is supposed to create energy. This does not do that. The real energy is in

the water that turns the turbine, and this machine merely converts that energy into electric current, so you see the word 'generator' is a misnomer in this case. It is the same in a steam plant. Steam furnishes energy which is converted into electricity by the so-called generators. In fact, man-made electricity is nothing more or less than some other kind of energy in a new and more useful form. I guess you follow me."

"I understand all right," said Jack, "for it is very simple, though I must confess I had never considered electricity in that way before."

"The energy here comes from the water that plunges over the dam we built across the river about a mile back in the mountains. The dam is sixty-odd feet high and the water that is stored up behind it is carried down to the plant here through a very large flume. The flume is built at the same level as the dam and brings the water around the mountain to the north of the plant and into the big forebay or reservoir just back of the station.

"The water in the forebay is kept at about

the same height as the dam also, so it can get a sixty-foot direct drop to the turbines here in the building. The stream rushes down through the large penstocks, or feeders, and strikes against the mass of concaved blades on the waterwheel or turbine. The blades are set across the drum of the wheel and at a slight angle, thus giving the turbine the full benefit of the force of the water striking against them as well as the suction of the water after it leaves the blades. This is known as the reaction type of turbine and is only used in plants where the fall of water is less than 100 feet. There is another type of waterwheel on which buckets take the place of blades. This is known as the impact type and is driven entirely by the pelting of the water against the bottom of each cup. This wheel is used chiefly where the fall of water is more than 100 feet.

“The armature of the generator is also mounted on the shaft or axle of the turbine. The armature, you know, is composed of coils of wire wound very close together on an iron frame, or spider. Since the turbine whirls around very fast the armature is bound to

turn at the same rate of speed. Now, the armature is surrounded by electrically excited magnets, which are the positive and negative poles of the generator. And as the coils of wire on the armature rush past the magnets the attraction or lines of force between the poles are cut abruptly and immediately electricity is created. By means of those brass collecting rings which you see on the armature the coils are connected to the transmission lines and the electricity flows through them to the lights in Mexico City.”

Mr. Ryder’s description of the hydro-electric plant was so simple and so easily understood that Jack was able to follow the entire process of converting water power into electrical energy. The conversation had also helped to lighten the rather disagreeable task of cleaning the generator and it was midnight almost before they realized it.

At this hour Mr. Ryder gave up all hope of using the generator that night, for, as he explained to Jack, the lights were fast being put out in the houses and stores of Mexico City, thus cutting down the load on the power plant

to a point where the supply could be easily furnished by the remaining four machines. That being the case, he suggested they quit work and leave the task entirely to the peons and other workmen under Nedham. Jack's arms were black to the elbow with dirty oil when he finally tossed his piece of waste away, and Mr. Ryder's condition was little better.

"Come on, we'll wash up a bit and start for the cottage; I am rather tired and I fancy you are too."

Together they proceeded to the washroom and a few moments later left the station building and started up the short dusty street that led between the two rows of cottages. The searchlight was still playing from the roof and here and there a lonesome sentinel could be seen silhouetted against the skyline. Otherwise the little community was quite lifeless.

Mr. Ryder's cottage was at the very end of the short street. It was a one-story affair but somewhat more prepossessing in appearance than the rest of the dwellings. The engineer lived there entirely alone save for Tom Why, his aged Chinese cook. In fact,

each American at the plant had a separate cottage, which was usually taken care of by some old Indian woman. There were only two white women in the village. One was the wife of Allen Lyman and the other was Mrs. Harriet Clifford, the wife of a young American foreman in the plant-maintenance department.

Mr. Ryder's cottage was no better furnished than any of the rest. The main room, which was living room, dining room, library and study all in one, was equipped with several heavy wooden chairs, a square table and a flat desk littered with old magazines and papers. The remaining three rooms boasted small iron beds and washstands. Just in the rear of the cottage was a little house in which Tom Why and his American cookstove were quartered. Tom was acknowledged to be the best cook in the village, excepting, of course, the two American women.

Though it was very late, Tom was up and waiting for the engineer. He had prepared a rather substantial midnight luncheon and when Jack caught the odor of steaming coffee he suddenly realized that he was extremely

hungry. Neither he nor Mr. Ryder had tasted food since their dinner at the American Hotel in Mexico City, and they were both ready to do justice to Tom's tempting spread. Between mouthfuls, however, they did find time to talk over the recent trouble at the plant.

"I must get at the bottom of this and find out who the rebel sympathizers are. Of course they are among the peon laborers, at least I think so, for none of the white employees have the slightest interest in Zapata and his gang of cutthroats, as far as I know. Still, the way the trouble makers have tampered with the big switches and other dangerous machinery that most of the peons are afraid of, makes me believe sometimes that the culprits are white men or natives who know a little more about electricity than the peons."

"I should think then, that you would try and find out whether you are dealing with peons or Mexicans of another variety," said Jack.

"Find out!" demanded the engineer sharply. "Do you think I have been sitting with my hands folded all this time? I've had the place watched. I've done everything I could to dis-

cover who is up to this crooked work. You see, after two in the morning things slacken down at the plant. There isn't much of a load to be carried, only the street lighting in Mexico City, and one or two generators are enough to take care of that. At that time most of the men leave the plant. There is only the night operator and two or three watchmen in different parts of the building, and they are not always as alert as they might be. Well, between two o'clock and the time the day force comes on at six o'clock in the morning, the meddlers get in their best work. The day men usually discover the trouble, though in a case like to-night, when one of the big machines have been tampered with, the disturbance isn't noticed until the operator tries to start up at nightfall.

"We've watched everything and everybody, but when we are in one place trouble turns up in an entirely different part of the plant. The thing that worries me the most about the whole business is that some night after the meddlers have been at work the rebels out there in the mountains might take it in their heads to at-

tack. Suppose the searchlight generator was crippled. In that case we'd have a serious time, wouldn't we? Indeed, I would like to find out whom we are dealing with. But how can I?"

"Well," said Jack after a moment's reflection, "at least we can learn whether we are dealing with peons or white men. Here's a suggestion. Why not sprinkle a little powder or dust around the machines, switchboard and other apparatus likely to be tampered with? Sprinkle it at two o'clock every morning and sweep it up again at six. In the meantime if any one has tampered with these contrivances they are bound to leave footprints. If the prints show naked feet we'll know it is one of the peons, and if we find the trouble maker wears shoes then we'll know it is a white man."

"By Jove, that's a corking idea," said Mr. Ryder enthusiastically; "we'll do it. We'll sprinkle cement dust on the floor. Let's try it out to-night and keep it up religiously until we get an imprint of the villain's feet. We'll saunter over to the plant after those workmen clear out, which I judge will be about three

o'clock; meanwhile, if you care to, you can snatch an hour's sleep."

To Jack sleep sounded particularly good and as soon as Mr. Ryder pointed out his room he tumbled into it without even removing his shoes. But it seemed to him however that he had only closed his eyes when he felt the engineer's hand upon his forehead.

"It's after three o'clock," said Mr. Ryder, "and the workmen have all left the plant. What do you say to setting our trap now?"

Jack was on his feet in an instant, for he was as eager as the engineer to see how his plan would work out. First they visited a tool shed where they secured a bucket, then Mr. Ryder ripped open a bag of cement with his jack knife and by the light of an electric pocket flash lamp supplied himself with a pail of the fine gray powder.

As they passed the front of the plant they could see Nedham in his office working over some papers. They continued on around the corner of the building where Mr. Ryder opened a large door that let them in on the generator floor. Two of the big machines were running,

but there was not a soul in sight. Through the glass front of the control room, high up among the girders, they could see Lyman watching the switchboard.

“Is there any wonder that the rebel sympathizers can tamper with the machines?” said Mr. Ryder; “there isn’t a watchman in sight, and Lyman would not be likely to see us down here unless he made a point of looking out of the window, which is not necessary, for he can see how the machines are running by looking at the indicators on his board. Nedham is in his office and the only other man on duty is the engineer and he is probably in his office watching for signals from Lyman. There should be a watchman here on the floor, but I guess when no one is looking he steals off and takes a nap. I’ve fired at least five men for doing that, but you can’t teach these Mexicans anything. They’ll do exactly as they please in spite of you.”

In fifteen minutes Jack and the engineer had set their trap and returned to the cottage again. They were both thoroughly tired and Mr. Ryder began to take off his things the

moment he entered the house. As he unloosened the front of his shirt, however, a rather bulky yellow wallet slipped out and fell to the floor.

“There are those drawings,” said the engineer. “I’d almost forgotten them with all our activities to-day. Here’s your wallet, I guess I won’t need it any longer.”

He removed the envelope of blue prints as he spoke and opening the top drawer of his desk dropped it inside, at the same time handing the wallet to Jack.

“I’ll be up at six to look for results,” said he as Jack started for his room, “but I really don’t expect to find any footprints right off. I rather think the trouble maker has done enough damage to satisfy him for several days at least.”

CHAPTER X

FOOTPRINTS

IN spite of the fact that he had been able to get but a few hours' sleep, Jack was awake before six o'clock. The noise Mr. Ryder made in the adjoining room aroused him, and when he realized that the engineer was getting ready to start for the power plant, he dressed with all speed. But though they were up early, old Tom Why had been awake fully half an hour before them as a steaming breakfast testified.

The two did not linger long over their coffee, however, for they were too eager to reach the station before the day men arrived and tracked through the cement powder. Indeed, they left the cottage still munching the last of their meal. The sun had been up two hours, but the mountains across the river were

so tall that its rays were only just getting down into the broad valley that held Necaxa. Jack's first view of the place by daylight pleased him greatly. As Mr. Ryder had said, the country was wilderness, the only evidence of civilization being the tracks of the narrow gage railroad and the steel poles that carried the four black serpent-like transmission lines across the clearing and into the forest toward Mexico City. Necaxa was completely shut off from the rest of the world by mountains, the nearest community being a little nameless Indian village down the river.

However, the lad had no time to gaze at the scenery just then, for in a few minutes the workmen would be on the way to the plant. Jack and Mr. Ryder hurried to the side door they had used but three hours before, and in a few moments they were looking at their recent handiwork. From one machine to another they hurried, closely inspecting the dust on the floor, before sweeping it into the pail again. Though they did not expect to find traces of a nocturnal visit by the mysterious trouble maker they were keenly alert for every

little clue. They inspected each appliance in the main room but all seemed to be in good order, nor did the cement powder reveal a single telltale mark. There remained only the small generators of the exciter sets to be inspected. Jack hurried forward to brush up the dust about these machines, for the men were already entering the plant and he did not care to let them know of the trap.

And as he stooped over, his eyes caught the distinct outline of a foot close to the base of the generator! Another and still another were discovered close by. He could scarcely credit his eyes. But Mr. Ryder, who was directly behind him, saw the imprints also.

“By George, we’ve a clue at last!” he exclaimed, leaning forward and examining the tracks. “They have been made by naked feet too! What do you think of that!”

“And I’ll be hanged if that isn’t the mark of a scar on the left heel!” he ejaculated, as he dropped to his hands and knees and scrutinized the tracks. “Oh, our task is an easy one now! I’ll guarantee to have the meddler in the hands of the rurales by sundown with this

evidence to work on. But look how they have riddled the exciter!"

As Jack bent closer he too could see the mark of a scar. The foot had removed the concrete dust completely except for a little ridge diagonally across the heel. This showed plainly that there had been a sharp indentation in the flesh at that point. And as the same mark showed in every other imprint of the left foot there was small room for doubt.

"Well, it looks as if our trap had worked far better than we expected," he said jubilantly, as they prepared to obliterate the track by sweeping up the dust.

"Indeed it did," replied Mr. Ryder. "Here's positive proof that the culprit is a peon, and with this telltale scar to help out it is only necessary to inspect every peon in the plant and pick out the guilty individual. We'll have them lined up immediately."

Together they hurried out of the station and across to the quarters of the army officers. The captain in command of the post was on the front porch of his cottage washing his face in a tin basin when Mr. Ryder interrupted him.

The engineer spoke a few words in Spanish and the officer hastily reached for a towel, at the same time calling loudly for an orderly. That individual arrived from behind the cottage as if produced by magic, and after listening to the captain's brief orders saluted and hurried to the barracks building, from the door of which the soldiers were just emerging in various stages of attire.

He returned presently, to be followed five minutes later by a young officer in charge of a squad of ten soldiers. Curt instructions were issued by the commander and the soldiers broke ranks immediately and went hurrying here and there about the plant, rounding up every peon in sight.

Some of the native laborers protested violently against being hustled into line along the south wall of the station, for they were afraid that they were about to be shot, this being the spot where all the executions in Necaxa were staged. But their protests were of no avail, for the soldiers took keen delight in hurrying them along with the sharp point of their bayonets or the flat stock of their guns.

In less than no time two score natives were facing the gray stone wall. They were a heterogeneous assortment of half-breeds and full-blooded Indians with ragged garments and hair long and unkempt. None wore shoes or even sandals.

When every native had been located and the line was complete the soldiers withdrew a short distance and the captain then turning to Mr. Ryder, spoke nervously and with great concern:

“Here are they, Señor, maybe now you find them sick mans, yes.”

“Why did he say ‘those sick men,’” asked Jack, somewhat puzzled.

“I told him there was a rumor abroad that one of the peons had leprosy and that we wanted to find him and put him in a pest house. Though I know very little about the disease I understand it shows first on the face, palms of the hands or soles of the feet,” answered the engineer.

“But why did you tell him that?” demanded the lad.

“Well, for the simple reason that I do not

care to let any one know what we have discovered. I think the less said about the scar the easier it will be for us to catch our man. If we keep it to ourselves he will never suspect that we set a trap for him. Now for the search."

Mr. Ryder, Jack and the captain began a tour of inspection. Each Indian was commanded to lift first one foot and then the other, while Jack and the engineer scrutinized them closely. The engineer in addition examined their hands and face as well, though not with as keen an eye as he watched the feet. The peons all submitted to the inspection meekly, but it was quite evident from the expression on their faces that they could not understand the whole proceedings. One by one they were passed and as Mr. Ryder neared the end of the line his brow wrinkled in a perplexed frown. Finally when the last man was allowed to go he turned to the officer in charge of the squad and demanded:

"Are these all the peons there are about the plant? There must be more!"

"No more are here, Señor. But maybe

those sick mans you look on is here in the night men. There are—ah—*diez hombres*,” said the officer excitedly.

“Jack,” said the engineer, “that fellow may be right. It is possible that my man *is* on the night force or he may be a strange peon who gets into the plant somehow. I think the next move for us to make is to go down to the Indian village and do some detective work there. Most of the peons we hire live down there and it is more than likely that we will find the man with the scarred heel among them.”

“That sounds reasonable,” said Jack, after considering the question. “Why not go down there while the trail is hot?”

“All right,” said Mr. Ryder, “but let me warn you that we will have to travel through about five miles of country infested with rebels and, as you know, they do not look upon any of the white men from the plant with very great favor.”

“I am willing to take the chance,” said Jack, laconically.

“Very good, only be sure your gun is in working order and your cartridge belt is full.”

CHAPTER XI

SEARCHING FOR THE MAN WITH A SCARRED HEEL

A DROVE of thirty or more horses and half as many pack mules were quartered in the large corral behind the barracks for the use of the rurales stationed at Necaxa. From among them a rather docile mustang was selected for Jack. While a native was saddling the horse, a *mozo*, or Indian servant, arrived with the engineer's steed, a beautiful creature that had cost Mr. Ryder nearly three hundred Mexican dollars, which is a very high price indeed to pay for horse flesh in that country. Three of the rurales were detailed to accompany them as a special guard and before leaving the enclosure the entire party made a careful inspection of their firearms.

For the first two miles the trail skirted the high bank of the river and was wide enough

to permit the men to ride two abreast. The three soldier-policemen took the lead while Jack and the engineer brought up the rear, and as their horses jogged along Mr. Ryder explained briefly the life of the Mexican Indians since the conquest of the country by adventurers from across the sea.

"These natives," he said, "have been veritable slaves since their ancestors yielded to Spain's warriors. The peons, who are all Indians or half-breeds, are the lowest type of Mexicans. They are uneducated and uncivilized and for that reason they rarely advance above the class of servants and laborers. Since the day they were conquered they have been without opportunity, however, so we cannot blame them altogether for their condition. There is every reason to believe, from the relics that are left to-day, that the Mexican Indians were semi-civilized at least. They erected magnificent temples, they laid out large cities, and they even built aqueducts and sewer systems. Indeed, they were much farther advanced than the North American Indian of the plains, but with the advent of the Spaniards

they began to deteriorate for the simple reason that they were not allowed to progress. As you already know, a man or a nation cannot stand still. It must either develop or retrogress. The Spaniards made slaves of the Indians and while they are not slaves in name to-day they might just as well be, for they have not as much freedom as the negro had in the United States before the Civil War.

“The peons live as tenants on *haciendas*, or large farms, where they till the soil and raise crops. For this work they are paid a few *centavos* a day which in American money does not amount to five cents; with this pittance they are supposed to buy food and clothes. But the hacienda owners sell them food and clothes at a figure far above their daily earnings and as a result the Indian is always in debt to his master. And since it is a capital offense in Mexico for an employee to leave an employer while still in debt to him, the peon is bound to the hacienda on which he is born for the rest of his life. He can never leave and he can never cease working for the same man. Whole communities of natives

are often controlled in this way by Mexican farmers."

"It seems ridiculous that such conditions can exist to-day," said Jack, very much surprised at this revelation. He had always considered the Mexican Indian as a shiftless being who did not work and lived from hand to mouth simply because of his own laziness.

"Do not get the idea that these natives are blind to their present condition or that they do not care to elevate their general plane of existence," continued Mr. Ryder. "They are just as eager for a chance to advance as is the Jew or other foreigner who immigrates to America. That is the reason why the present revolution is being waged in the north by Carranza and Villa, and that is why our blood-thirsty friend Zapata has so many peon followers.

"The only trouble is the moment one of these revolutions is successful and the new leader is in power all pledges to the peon are forgotten and the native goes back to exactly the same condition that he has been fighting to clear himself from. It is a very unhappy

situation, but some day, perhaps, a leader will keep his promise to his people. Then the huge *haciendas*, which often embrace hundreds of thousands of acres, will be confiscated and this land with the millions of acres of government land will be cut up into small farms and sold to the natives at reasonable terms exactly as our country opened up the great West. When this happens Mexico will develop into a wonderful nation. Give these people public schools and the other advantages of civilization and you will soon see what kind of stuff they are made of. The old Indian blood is strong in them and Indians, properly trained, often make excellent men."

Mr. Ryder's talk had changed Jack's opinion of the peons a great deal. Indeed, he soon found that instead of despising them he was sympathizing with them. He could not understand, however, how the engineer could feel kindly disposed to the natives when they were causing him so much trouble. He was on the point of mentioning this thought when Mr. Ryder spoke again.

"I feel very sorry for the peons even though

I am an agent of Huerta. But as I have weighed it out, my duty to my employer comes first no matter whether the employer is a scoundrel or not. It is not for me to judge. I am asked to keep Mexico City illuminated and I will keep the lights burning no matter who is in the National Palace, and, moreover, I'll do it in spite of this man with the scarred foot, whoever he is."

Thus recalled to their mission, Jack instantly became attentive to their surroundings. He found that the trail had narrowed and that the rurales ahead had formed in single file. His little mustang was patiently picking its way through rough places and underbrush to keep beside the animal ridden by the engineer.

"I guess we have been talking too much and paying too little attention to our horses, Jack," said Mr. Ryder. "Push ahead and get in single file. This is a section of the trail that carries us over the shoulder of a mountain and it is rather narrow."

Soon the shoulder was topped, however, and the horses began to descend in single file to-

ward the Indian village. The community was somewhat larger than the villages Jack had seen from the train window on his way to Mexico City, otherwise it was the same collection of dilapidated huts that looked as if they had been literally thrown together by their builders.

As they drove down through the single street a regiment of barking dogs and screaming naked Indian children greeted them. Robust, dark-skinned men lounged about before the huts (most of them clad in pajama-like cotton garments), while their women folk worked hard at grinding corn between stones or carried water from the river in tall earthen jugs which they balanced deftly on their heads. Down at the river bank Jack could see other women busy washing clothes. This laundry work was accomplished by pounding the garments between stones much to the detriment of the garments, for the hard stones rubbed innumerable holes in the cloth as Jack found later when he gave his linen to a native washerwoman.

In the village Mr. Ryder took the lead and

Jack followed, leaving the rurales to their own diversions. The engineer drove toward a more pretentious hut than the rest, where a very much wrinkled old Indian sat sunning himself before the door and idly watching a half dozen scrawny razorback pigs rooting in the dirt almost at his very feet.

The two Americans reined up before the house and viewed the picture that the old fellow made as he sat there staring absently at the animals.

"That," said Mr. Ryder, "is Señor Yuai and his pigs. Pigs and vultures, as you know, are the scavengers of Mexico. But for their able services the country would be unfit to live in because of its filth and carrion. And Señor Yuai, though he is neither pig nor vulture, is also a very useful inhabitant. He is the Indian doctor who attends to all the natives in this vicinity. The old fellow is very much looked up to and every one comes to him for advice. He is aged and very nearsighted but his mind is as keen as ever. He knows every peon for miles around and I've an idea that he can identify our trouble maker with the

scarred foot if he wants to. Come, we'll hear what he has to say on the question."

The Americans dismounted and after kicking their way through the drove of grunting pigs confronted the austere old Indian. Señor Yuai peered up at them with eyes bleared by age and demanded in Spanish to know whose shadow fell across his doorway. (The following conversation then took place which Mr. Ryder translated for Jack's benefit.)

"It is I, Señor Ryder, from the electrical plant," said the engineer.

"Gringo friend come over mountain to see me?" asked the old Indian.

"Yes, I've come to see you, Señor Yuai, but not because I am sick of *calentura*. It is another reason. Tell me, in all your years do you remember a peon ailing of a cut heel. Did you ever cure a very deep wound that would leave a scar across a peon's heel, thus?" Mr. Ryder illustrated his question by drawing his finger diagonally across the old man's heel. The Indian was silent a long time and while his memory went slowly back over the many years he had been doctoring the natives, Mr.

Ryder slipped a cigarette between his lean old fingers, saying, "Here, Señor Yuai, perhaps a little smoke will make you remember better."

The Indian accepted the roll of brown paper and tobacco with a grunt of satisfaction and lit it on the glowing end of Mr. Ryder's own cigarette which the engineer held for his convenience.

For five minutes the old native puffed in silence, exhaling great clouds of blue smoke from time to time. Finally he spoke.

"As many years ago as I have fingers came a young man to see me. He had stepped on a *machette* and the flesh of his foot was laid open to the bone. My medicine cured him. Soon he could walk, he could run, he could swim. He was a fine big fellow. He could shoot well, he could ride well and he was a good boy except he liked *pulque* too much. One day he went away. Two summers later he came back in clothes as green as the banana palm. He was then a rurale. He went away again and never came again. His name—ah—his name went with him." Here the Indian touched his forehead with his finger as

he spoke and this action told the American plainer than his words that he had forgotten the young man's name.

Jack and the engineer looked at each other significantly when Señor Yuai finished speaking.

"Can it be that we have traitors among our rurales!" demanded Mr. Ryder incredulously.

CHAPTER XII

THE DRAWINGS ARE STOLEN

“WELL, this is a mighty serious state of affairs,” said the engineer as they returned to their horses and prepared to remount.

“Yes, indeed, and from all appearances we have a real enemy to contend with,” replied the lad.

“You are right, we have,” confirmed Mr. Ryder. “If our man with the scarred foot is a member of the rurales, we are going to have the devil’s own job locating him too. We cannot accuse at random and moreover we cannot take our troubles to the captain, for the reason that where there is one traitor there are likely to be many more. The captain may be a revolutionist himself, and if he is, heaven help us when he finds out that we have a way of identifying the trouble maker. We would

be murdered in less than a week. I think we had better feel our way very slowly before we make an arrest."

"But why should a rurale go traveling about in his bared feet at night?" queried Jack, suddenly discovering a puzzling question.

"I thought of that myself," confessed the engineer, "and the only reason I can give is that the culprit is always afraid that the jingle of his big spurs will attract attention and rather than remove them he removed his boots instead and goes about his work silently. That sounds perfectly plausible, doesn't it?"

"By George, that's capital reasoning! I believe you've hit it exactly right," exclaimed the lad enthusiastically.

"I see our three guards over on the river bank," said Mr. Ryder, abruptly changing the subject; "we'll drive over and join them there, for I've an idea that our horses could stand a drink before starting for the plant again.

"And by the way," he warned as they urged their mounts forward, "I wouldn't say much about our friend of the scarred foot in the

presence of the rurales either here or at the plant, for you never can tell just how much English some of these fellows understand. I'm a little worried over the impression that our search among the peons created, even though I did tell the captain the falsehood about the suspected leper. Who knows, perhaps the very man we are after was looking on all the time. In that case our lives are in danger every moment. He would kill us rather than run the chance of being identified."

It was quite evident to Jack that the engineer regarded the business at hand as rather hazardous and the lad from Vermont could not help feeling slightly concerned about his own safety. He put on a bold front before Mr. Ryder, however, for he did not care to have the engineer think that he was the least bit worried.

The river's course through the valley was broad and the stream ran sluggish and shallow where it passed the village. Indeed, just below the point where the women were washing on the rocks was a ford, with a sloping sandy beach on either bank. Here it was that

the pack trains leaving the valley toward the north crossed the stream. On the bank opposite, Jack saw several large alligators sunning themselves, and here and there on the surface of the water he also saw the scaly backs and heads of others that had come up to rest awhile and get a fresh supply of air. Some of them were fully ten feet long.

But in spite of the presence of these reptiles, the horses did not hesitate to wade belly deep into the stream and cool themselves while they slaked their thirst. Jack noticed this and remarked about it to Mr. Ryder.

“Alligators are not disposed to attack anything very large,” said the engineer, “although sometimes they do make away with sheep and small calves that come down for a drink. The 'gator is not as ferocious as his cousin the crocodile and I have never heard of any natives being devoured by one, in spite of the fact that the Indians wade the ford here daily.”

Mr. Ryder had hardly finished speaking when a young Indian appeared on the opposite bank followed by a full-grown hound dog.

The native was clad only in abbreviated canvas trousers and slung across his back was a tiny mail bag. Jack learned later that his first name was Miguel and that his last name was almost unpronounceable, also that he was the official runner, or messenger, of that section of the country, and that his forefathers had been runners as far back as the days of Montezuma.

The native stood knee deep in the river a moment and emitted several loud whoops at the same time churning the water furiously with his feet. At this the alligators on the bank slipped into the water with a splash and every scaly back and head disappeared. Then the Indian plunged into the stream and waded across, at the same time coaxing the dog to follow. The hound stood whining at the water's edge, however, and the messenger reached the opposite shore before the animal found sufficient courage to follow. Finally, after much coaxing, he took the plunge and swam toward his master. But he had scarcely passed the middle of the stream when he began to whine again, half raising himself out

of the water with his frantic efforts to swim faster. The next instant there was a swirl just behind him and an ugly head appeared on the surface. The dog fairly leapt out of the water at this but he could not avoid the reptile whose dripping jaws closed upon one hind leg.

The native shouted wildly and plunged back into the river again to rescue his pet. But before he had gone two steps, Jack, with great presence of mind, whipped out his revolver. Twice he fired and each bullet found its way into the scaly body. Instantly the water was lashed into foam by the death struggle of the monster. The great jaws opened wide and the reptile awoke the echoes in the hills with a bellow like that of an angry bull. Then it sank out of sight.

Half drowned and with one leg dangling limp and useless the hound dragged itself from the river. The young Indian lifted it in his arms and caressed it gently, at the same time talking effusively to Jack. Of course the American could not understand the messenger, but it was quite evident from the expression

on the red man's face that he was very grateful to Jack and that he admired his quick and accurate shooting.

"What is he saying?" asked the Vermonter, turning to Mr. Ryder.

"He says that you are a very good marksman and that you have a warm heart for a gringo. He promises never to forget your kindness."

Jack smiled his acknowledgment and prepared to remount his horse, which with the others had withdrawn from the river when the struggling alligator began its frenzied lashing of the water.

It was past midday when the five riders started on their return journey toward the power plant, and the heat was intense. However, as soon as the horses had climbed out of the valley the trail led through a dense forest where huge trees and thickly matted vines shut out all sunlight and all heat as well. Travel, under such circumstances was thoroughly enjoyable, and the five riders swung along in single file until they reached the open country in the vicinity of the great hydro station again.

"Well," said Jack as he reined in beside Mr. Ryder at the gate in the barbed-wire barricade, "I thought you said the woods were full of rebels. We haven't seen a sign of one all day long. What do you make of it?"

"It is more than likely that they are off in some other section of the hills, burning and pillaging. But don't think that they haven't an eye on us, for they have and you'll see signs of them again before long, I'll warrant."

The soldier on guard at the gate had unfastened the intricate lock by this time and the cavalcade entered. The rurales hurried off at top speed to their long low barracks hall where they hoped to find the remains of the noonday mess. And as for Jack and the engineer, they were not slow in reaching the cottage, for they knew that faithful old Tom Why had something tempting waiting for them.

A *mozo* met them as they reined in before the door and when they had dismounted he took charge of the horses. The few hours in the saddle had been rather tiresome to the lad, for he was not accustomed to that form of exercise. Indeed, the shaking up he had re-

ceived on horseback and the lack of sleep the night before had made him so thoroughly fatigued that even the cartridge belt and holster weighed heavily on his hips and as he walked toward the cottage he started to unbuckle the leather girdle. Just as he was mounting the steps the buckle opened suddenly and the belt swung free, upsetting the holster and toppling the revolver to the ground.

Hastily Jack stooped to pick it up. But as he reached down he caught sight of a naked footprint in the dust! He bent closer, hardly able to believe what he saw! The footprint bore the mark of a deep scar diagonally across the heel!

“Hi! Mr. Ryder! Look! Our man with the scar paid a visit here as well!” he shouted to the engineer, who had already entered the cottage.

Mr. Ryder hurried out and examined the footprint with Jack.

“By George, you’re right! What could he have wanted up here!” exclaimed the engineer.

Jack did not wait to answer the question. He bolted into the house and rushed to the

flat-topped desk, for he had suddenly thought of the precious blueprints. Eagerly he drew open the top drawer into which he had seen Mr. Ryder drop the yellow envelope the evening before. But the compartment was empty! The drawings were gone!

CHAPTER XIII

A WEAKENED GARRISON

WITH the disappearance of the engineer's drawings the mystery that surrounded the man with the scarred foot was doubled. Neither Jack nor Mr. Ryder could be quite positive of the clue they had been following. To them the fact that the trouble maker went about without shoes argued that he was a peon, and they could well understand why a peon, imbued with the spirit of revolution, should seek to make conditions as uncomfortable as possible for President Huerta, against whose rule they were revolting. That the person in question should undertake to wreck the power plant, or portions of it, seemed quite natural. But when it came to stealing drawings that were absolutely useless to them the whole affair took on a different complexion.

Who was this individual with the scar on

his foot? Was he a peon or was he some one of the other employees about the plant? Or again, was he a soldier, or a member of the band of rurales, or was he some one of the bandits in the mountains who ran the guard at night and accomplished his trickery under the very eyes of soldiers and employees? The whole situation was thoroughly muddled and Jack and Mr. Ryder spent days trying to fathom the knotty problem. To a technical man the drawings were of the utmost value, for they laid bare to him the secret of an invention that would make him wealthy. But on the other hand it would seem that the man was moved more by his sympathies with the revolutionists than by his desire for personal gain, since it was quite apparent that the person who was so industriously engaged in making things disagreeable for President Huerta and the man who stole the drawings was the same individual.

“It is a mighty peculiar situation,” said Mr. Ryder one evening, after he and Jack had been puzzling over the matter for several hours. “This is my only conclusion. The man must

be a peon, or a soldier, for they are the only persons hereabout who are interested in the revolution at all. He has heard of the drawings somehow, and believing that they would be of value to Zapata or Carranza (or whoever else he favors), he stole them. Later on he will probably turn them over to some one of these leaders with the hope, perhaps, that he will be given a commission or some other form of recognition for his service to the cause.

“But after I have reached that conclusion,” he added, “I am not absolutely certain that I am shooting in the right direction.”

For some time after the disappearance of the papers everything ran smoothly at the plant. But in the meantime disconcerting rumors were coming in from the mountains about bands of Zapatistas who were gathering at all points. The rurales who went out to patrol the hills and in particular to ride the transmission line to see that it was not disturbed were the first to bring in reports of skirmishes with these rebels. Almost daily several of the soldier-policemen would locate a handful of armed natives somewhere in the

hills. Always a fight followed which resulted in at least one or two fatalities. More than once these green-clad riders came into Necaxa with dead or wounded comrades in their arms. And on several occasions they appeared at the power plant with prisoners bound hand and foot and tied to the backs of horses or burros like so many sacks of flour.

Short work was made of these men. Their fate was sealed the moment they were captured by the rurales. As a matter of form they were given a drumhead trial; that is, they were taken before the chief officer of the rurales and asked a number of unimportant questions. No matter how these questions were answered the sentence was the same. The natives were always condemned to be shot at sunrise the following morning.

Jack was present at the trial of one of these unfortunates and after the rebel was taken to the guardhouse the lad and Mr. Ryder went to visit him. It gave Jack a rather uncanny feeling when he realized that the man with whom they were talking would be dead and cold in ten hours. The Vermonter was up be-

fore sunrise to see the prisoner led out and placed against the gray wall of the power plant. The firing squad was composed of five men and an officer who stood with sword drawn while a soldier bound a handkerchief about the eyes of the victim. When this was done the executioners took careful aim and waited for the abrupt command to fire.

The five guns roared simultaneously, and Jack grew sick as he saw the blindfolded figure sway backward first, then recover its balance only to pitch forward with a groan and become an inert and lifeless mass. When the smoke had cleared away the officer walked calmly up to the dead man and drawing his revolver emptied the entire six chambers into the already lifeless body. This, Jack learned, was prescribed by the military regulations of Mexico, which state that an officer in charge of a firing squad, is held responsible for the certain death of the victim.

The rurales, however, were not the only ones to bring in word of the gathering of the Zapatistas. One day three men left the plant on a handcar trip of inspection along the nar-

row gage railroad track. One took a Winchester rifle with him while the others carried their revolvers. On their return journey they were met at a bend in the road by six rebels. One had a rifle but the others were armed only with *machettes*, or long brush knives. The men from the plant were ordered to stop, of course, but they did not obey. Instead they started to pump the handles harder and since the tracks were down grade at that point their car had gained tremendous headway by the time they reached the natives. Fortunately the peons had not had forethought enough to plug the railroad tracks or loosen a rail in which case the car would have been wrecked and the inspectors killed immediately. As it was they ran past the natives at top speed. The Mexican with the rifle opened fire and the man with the Winchester replied, but he was only able to get in one shot before the handle of the car knocked the rifle from his grasp. One of the other men drew his six shooter and emptied it as he went flying past. It was a narrow escape and the three inspec-

tors were glad when they reached the power plant.

Shortly after this experience some excitement was created at the station when Lyman noticed that one of his indicators recorded a grounded transmission line. Two linemen and a squad of rurales were despatched to locate the trouble. Five miles back in the mountains they found a dead peon clinging to one of the steel transmission poles and the story of the ground was revealed instantly. This peon had climbed the pole and with his steel *machette* tried to cut through one of the transmission lines. The moment the blade came in contact with the cable a circuit was formed and the entire 88,000 volts were sent through the man's body. His companions, seeing his fate, had fled without even attempting to rescue him.

These demonstrations on the part of the rebels did not add to the peace of mind of the men at the power plant. Indeed every one began to feel the strain, for the station was veritably in a state of siege. Rumors came

into Necaxa by way of the peons from the Indian village down the valley, that José Cerro, one of the fiercest of the mountain bandits and a strong ally of Zapata, was in charge of the horde that was gathering in the hills in that vicinity. After that no one felt inclined to leave the station except when accompanied by a guard of rurales and all inspection of railroad and transmission lines was done with the aid of soldiers.

Then one day in the midst of it all the officer in charge of the infantry reported to Mr. Ryder that he had been in communication with General Rodriguez and had received orders to move his entire detachment back to Mexico City. The engineer could not believe his ears. With all haste he called up the capital on the long-distance telephone.

“Why, you won’t need soldiers out there any longer,” said the military officer after the engineer had protested vigorously to the removal of the guard. “You don’t need soldiers because Zapata is moving his whole army toward the Atlantic coast. He’s evidently heard of the shipment of arms coming in on

the German steamer and hopes to intercept them on their way to the capital. If he takes the railroad we are lost. That's why we want your soldiers. We must have them. The rebel chief has withdrawn all his men from your section of the country so I'm sure you won't need them."

"Oh, is that so," said Mr. Ryder, thoroughly angry. "Well, there are a few hundred lurking out here in the woods just now and I am expecting an attack almost any time."

"You are mistaken, I am sure," said the officer; "there may be a few bandits about in the mountains but the Zapatistas have all followed their leader. I am very sorry, but we need all the soldiers you have at Necaxa. However, if you are at all alarmed I will leave you a detachment of twenty-five infantrymen who, with the squad of rurales you have stationed there, will be able to defend the place against a few bandits. Good-by."

The soldiers entrained that very afternoon, much to the chagrin of Mr. Ryder and the other Americans.

"By George, this is the queerest piece of

work I have ever seen," said Mr. Ryder. "If Zapata has moved his men, José Cerro did not follow his leader, for he's out there in the mountains with two hundred men and he'll swoop down on us in short order when he hears how weak our garrison is. Just watch how bold those greasers get when they learn that the infantry has been called back to Mexico City."

CHAPTER XIV,

THE NIGHT WATCH

MR. RYDER'S prediction came true. It was not two days later when a half dozen peons appeared on the edge of the forest and occupied their time shooting out the windows in the workmen's cottages and sending leaden greetings to any one who appeared out of doors. They remained in their positions until the soldiers mounted a light machine gun in the window of the barracks house and poured a rain of steel-jacketed bullets in their direction. But José Cerro's followers were not the only ones who were made bold by the withdrawal of the troops. The traitor inside the power plant became active too.

One evening while Jack and Mr. Ryder were partaking of one of Tom Why's elaborate meals, Phil Underwood, the young American whose duty it was to take care of the huge

searchlight, rushed into the dining room.

“Mr. Ryder,” he exclaimed with a savage note in his voice, “there’s a peon in Necaxa I’d like to lay hands on. He’s that blasted sympathizer. If I knew who he was I’d choke him to death. What do you think he’s done now to help that bunch of cutthroats out there in the mountain? He’s put the big searchlight out of business! He’s wrecked the entire outfit and there isn’t a place this side of New York where we can get the broken parts replaced! It looks as if we were up against it for sure.”

The engineer looked thoroughly worried.

“When did it happen?” he demanded.

“The light was all right up to dawn this morning. I shut it off promptly at four o’clock, put the canvas jacket over it and went to bed. When I tried to start it a few moments ago I found the whole mechanism gone to smash.”

For a long time Mr. Ryder was silent. His brow was wrinkled and it was evident to both Phil and Jack that the situation was causing him some deep thought. Finally he spoke.

“Look here, Phil, this condition is mighty serious and I am at a loss to know exactly how to proceed. I think the best plan is not to mention this last piece of treachery. Merely go to Lieutenant Hernandez and tell him that the searchlight suddenly became out of order and until we can repair it or make better arrangements he must keep a double guard along the barricade and the first trench. If we spread the news about this broadcast we can't tell what sort of an effect it will have on the soldiers. Mexicans are a peculiar lot, you know, and for that reason alone I think it would be far better for us to keep this incident secret. In the meantime you and Jack and myself can keep a watchful eye on everything in general and I'll try to work out a plan for an improvised searchlight.”

“Very good, sir,” said Phil, as he hurried off to the military barracks.

When the youth had gone Mr. Ryder turned to Jack and said: “I trust you are still willing to help me in this difficulty, my boy.”

“You're right I am,” exclaimed Jack enthusiastically, “I am as much interested as if

I were employed here and I'll do anything I can to be of assistance."

"Very well then, Jack, I'll look to you to do a man's share of the watching around here until we can get things straightened out. This trouble with the searchlight may mean that a night attack is impending. I purpose doing some guard duty myself to-night and I should like to have you help me out. Will you?"

"Only tell me what you want of me and I'll do it without a word of protest," said Jack loyally.

"Well, suppose you buckle on your revolver now and start patrolling the village. Keep an eye out for anything that does not look absolutely normal. At midnight report back to the cottage here and wake me up. I'll do my trick between midnight and dawn, for I do not intend that this traitor shall get in any more of his underhanded work without being caught at it."

"That's a capital scheme," said the young Vermonter and finishing his coffee he hurried to his room. There he secured his belt and

holster which he had tossed on his bed an hour previous. Also before he left he rummaged through his traveling bag until he had located a tiny electric pocket flash lamp which he had brought with him all the way from Drueryville. Ten minutes later he was sauntering down the single narrow street toward the power plant.

Darkness was just coming on as the sentries were changed and the lad watched the small squad of regulars leave the barracks and take their places at various points around the tiny village.

"I wonder," mused the boy, "how many actually keep awake all night? I'll warrant half of them find some sheltered spot and go to sleep after midnight."

For an hour or two the little community resembled the quarry towns of far off Vermont to such a degree that Jack actually became a little homesick as he viewed the scene. Every cottage window glowed with cheerful light and the day men, free from their tasks for a while, were indulging in the only sociability Necaxa afforded: that was to gather in twos and

threes on cottage porches and spend the evening in telling stories and smoking. Now and then some one of these groups would burst forth in songs and what the tunes lacked in harmony was made up for in the enthusiasm of the singers. Most of the songs Jack recognized as having been popular back in the States two years before.

At half past nine the groups began to dwindle, the men going off to their various cottages. One by one the lights went out and by ten o'clock the place was in total darkness, save for the lights in the power plant. Jack felt very lonesome then. Except for the steady grumble of the generators inside the big gray building, not a sound disturbed the stillness. From place to place about the village the youth roamed, peering here and there for signs of trouble. But mostly he watched in the vicinity of the power plant.

This constant vigil was very tiresome, however, and several times he paused in a secluded angle of the building and flashed his electric lamp on the face of his watch. He was thor-

oughly glad when the hands pointed out the hour of midnight.

He made one more tour of inspection after that, then started up the street toward Mr. Ryder's cottage. He had almost reached his destination when suddenly his attention was attracted by a gray shadow moving between two cottages some distance to his left. Jack remembered that both buildings were occupied by Mexican linemen and his suspicions were aroused immediately. As softly as a panther he moved across the roadway and gained the corner of one of the buildings. The shadow still lingered in the alley and the youth softly slipped his revolver from its holster. But just as he was on the point of calling to the man to throw up his hands he became aware of another gray shadow moving about. This one was coming stealthily up the roadway he had just left and Jack thanked his lucky stars that he had hidden himself when he did.

It was quite evident to the Vermonter that the two shadows intended to meet, but in or-

der to accomplish this either one or the other must pass within six feet of him. For a moment he scarcely knew what to do, for he realized that he could not handle two men at once.

The man in the alley had paused, but the one in the roadway came forward softly and swiftly. When he was within fifteen feet of the crouching youth Jack could see him quite distinctly. He wore a very broad hat and the tight jacket of a rurale. Of a rurale! Instantly the old Indian doctor's story about a rurale with an injured foot flashed upon him! This must be the man of the scarred heel!

Throwing all caution to the wind, Jack dropped his revolver and leapt toward the shadowy figure. It was a perfect flying tackle and the man came down with a crash, his legs pinned tightly together, exactly as Jack had pinned the legs of many an opposing fullback on the field at Drueryville.

The attack was so sudden that the man lay stunned for a moment. Then as if he suddenly realized that it was a human being and not a vice that had gripped him, the soldier began to struggle. He tried to kick and squirm

his way out of the boy's arms, at the same time thrashing about with his fists and cursing lustily in Spanish. He was a big man and exceedingly powerful and Jack had all that he could do to hold him on the ground.

The lad had the advantage, however, since the native was almost flat on his stomach. By careful maneuvering and the help of two or three wrestling holds that are known to every American boy he was soon able to work himself astride the prostrated one and pin the refractory hands down as well. This accomplished, the youth began to shout for help at the top of his voice.

Mr. Ryder was first on the scene. He came running across from his cottage, a revolver in one hand and an electric flash lamp in the other. The Mexican linemen came tumbling out of their cottages a few moments later and immediately after two Mexican regulars arrived, all out of breath.

"Well, I think we've captured our man," said Jack, panting in his excitement. "Here, lay hold of this fellow, so I can stand up."

The soldiers seized the prostrated one but

they still kept him pinned flat on his stomach, in spite of his protests.

"Mr. Ryder," said Jack, "I think this is the man with the scarred foot. Turn your light this way until we have a good look at his feet. He hasn't any boots on, that's certain, for he moved about like a cat."

Hurriedly the engineer turned the light on the native's naked feet and there, standing out plainly in spite of the dirt and dust, was a long scar that extended across the heel and partly up the side of his foot toward the ankle. The wound looked exactly as if the man had at one time stepped on a very sharp stone that had laid the flesh open to the bone.

"By George, you're right! He's our man!" exclaimed the engineer jubilantly. Then to the soldiers in Spanish he said:

"Hustle him off to the guardhouse, men, and put a double watch over him, for he's a traitor. I'll pay a peso a day to the men who watch him, but I'll have the scoundrel shot who lets him get away."

Without any ceremony the regulars jerked the big man to his feet and marched him off

down the street, Mr. Ryder and Jack following directly behind with their revolvers cocked and ready for action. But the heavy door to the prison pen had hardly been bolted behind the rurale when the town was aroused by another sensation. From down along the line of barbed wire fence came the sharp report of a rifle. The first report was followed by two others in quick succession.

“What is it! An attack!” gasped Jack as he rushed forward with Mr. Ryder. The sound of firing aroused every man in the camp and in an instant half-clad soldiers and workmen came tumbling from barracks hall and cottage.

“An attack! an attack!” was the cry they all uttered as they hurried into the trenches.

But after the third shot the sentry’s guns were silent so long that Mr. Ryder and Jack and Lieutenant Hernandez and Captain Alvarez went to investigate.

“What was the trouble?” they demanded of the first soldier they met.

“Shadows came along the fence. Three, four, five of them all came to try and cut the

wire. One dropped this," said the sentry as he held up an ugly looking *machette*.

"That's mighty bad news," said Mr. Ryder, "for it looks to me as if the rebels are planning an attack. But we'll fix these wire cutters to-morrow night. In the meantime you fellows keep awake and on the lookout until dawn."

But when the news of the shadowy wire cutters was spread about among the men there was little need for extra vigilance on the part of the sentries, for every man in the village stayed up until daylight discussing the possibilities of an attack. Indeed, the sun was just rising as Jack and Mr. Ryder turned in for some much-needed sleep.

CHAPTER XV

IMPROVISED SEARCHLIGHTS

“VELLY vell, on’y me no likee losee dlish pans, Misleryder. Me no velly much can usee pails to washee dlishes in some-times. Jus’ samee me no likee losee dlish pan.”

Tom Why’s voice accompanied by the clatter of tin pans awoke Jack next day, from a very sound sleep. The lad at first was thoroughly mystified, for it was rarely that good natured Tom ever objected to anything either he or Mr. Ryder did. It was evident, however, from the pitch of the Chinaman’s voice that he was slightly indignant.

“Me can no savvy leason to put holes in him dlish pan. Him alle samee no glood then,” continued Tom.

“Well, I want to put wires through the bottom of the pans and make searchlights out of

them. What if your old pans are spoiled, Tom. When the next train comes up from Mexico City I'll have a carload for you if you want them," said Mr. Ryder.

"Me no wantee carload. Me wantee tlu ddishe pans, and me no wantee liars put thlu him bottom, too."

"All right, Tom," laughed the engineer; "you shall have two of the finest dishpans south of the Rio Grande if you'll only let me have these two."

"Velly vell, velly vell," said Tom somewhat appeased at such an attractive offer.

The conversation had done more than amuse Jack. It had made him thoroughly curious, for he could not understand how Mr. Ryder could make a searchlight out of a tin dishpan. He lost no time in tumbling out of bed and dressing, and five minutes after the engineer had left the house the youth was ready to follow him. Just as Jack entered the main room, however, Tom Why came in at the back door.

"Hello there, Tom, did Mr. Ryder confiscate your dishpans?" asked the boy.

"No him no dloo lat. Him just takee him dlish plans. Him get Tlom Why tlu fines likee clums to Melexeclo," said Tom with a grin. Then he added, "Allee samee Jack want him dlinner now?"

"Dinner?" exclaimed the boy, "why, what time is it? Well, by George, if it isn't three o'clock. I've slept nearly ten hours. How long has Mr. Ryder been up?"

"Him alle samee come from him room an' slay, 'Tom, glet my bleckflast!' Then him look at him clock him slay, 'Gleat Clats, him one o'clock. Tom, glet me my dlinner!' " Tom tried to imitate the engineer as he quoted Mr. Ryder's remarks and the result made Jack laugh heartily.

In a surprisingly short time the Chinaman had the table spread and a steaming hot meal before the young American. But the lad hurried every mouthful (much to Tom's displeasure), for he was eager to reach the plant and witness the operation of converting tin dishpans into searchlights. Also, he was curious to know what had transpired since dawn that morning.

When Jack reached the little machine shop on the north side of the power plant he found Mr. Ryder in the center of a pile of wire, pieces of iron pipe, electric light bulbs and all sorts of odds and ends. The engineer was busily engaged with one of Tom's precious tin dishpans.

"Oh! there you are, I thought you were due to sleep all day," said the engineer banteringly as Jack arrived. "You are just in time to witness an attempt to build a genuine spotlight out of the cook's most cherished possession."

"I heard all about it when you were trying to persuade Tom to be generous with his pans. What do you mean to do anyway?" said Jack.

"Why, I intend to spring a little surprise on our wire-cutting friends this evening if they should happen around, which I expect they will. I'm going to put a cluster of electric bulbs in each of these tin dishpans, and put them up on iron rods in position so that they will sweep the line of barbed-wire defense. I'm going to keep them dark until the sentries see the 'shadows' that visited us last night, then I'm going to switch them on and have a firing

party ready. Oh! the wire cutters will receive an ideal reception, I'll warrant. You see, fairly bright tin shaped in this manner will magnify the light beam from three to five times and that will throw a spotlight as far as necessary. Tin is an excellent reflector for all ordinary purposes. With the ten thirty-two candlepower lamps which I intend to use in each cluster, I will get a beam of light 1600 candlepower intensity. Of course that amounts to very little when compared with the huge thirty-inch searchlight of ours that magnified a light several hundred times.

“These searchlights will be operated by remote control; that is, a wire will be run from the lights to the roof of the power station where Phil will be on duty as usual. The moment he gets a signal from the sentries he will throw on a switch which will connect with both wires and the line of fence will be lighted from either direction at once. The firing squad will be just beyond the lower trenches and behind the lights, so that they will not be blinded by the sudden glare. The bandits on the other hand will be surprised and made tem-

porarily blind by the sudden flash of light and before they get away the riflemen will discourage any idea of future wire cutting parties."

"It sounds like a first-rate scheme," said Jack appreciatively. Then suddenly remembering the prisoner of the night before he queried: "How is our friend, the rurale? Have you seen him to-day?"

"Yes, I've seen him," said the engineer as he paused in his work of fitting a group of lamp sockets inside the tin pan. "He's a mighty meek individual too just now. I guess his thoughts are on the trial he's to have tomorrow morning. The chief witnesses overslept this morning or he would probably have faced court-martial before this. It was a lucky thing for him that we did oversleep too, for it gives him a few hours longer to live at any rate."

"What does he have to say for himself?" asked the lad.

"Well, in the first place, he's the man whom Señor Yuai described. He did live in the Indian village over the mountain, and he did

cut his foot by stepping on a *machette*. His name is Alfonso Perro. I asked him why he was sneaking about the place last night and he said that he had made arrangements with the peon who keeps the cottage for the lineman to get some *pulque* for the troopers. *Pulque* is the Mexican drink, you know. It is made from the sap of the century plant or *maquay* plant and when properly prepared is a very fiery and highly intoxicating drink. Don't ever touch it, my boy, for it has ruined the chance of more than one American who acquired a taste for it. We do not allow it to be brought into Necaxa at all, but the rurale says that every time the linemen's peon goes to the village he smuggles in several jugs of the stuff. Some was smuggled in yesterday and the rurale said he was on his way to get it and bring it back to the barracks when you captured him. Of course I have had the peon arrested also. He too is in the guardhouse, but he swears that he has never smuggled *pulque* into Necaxa.

"I accused Perro of having tampered with the machinery in the plant from time to time

and also of stealing my plans, and I must say he is a very good actor, for he feigned surprise wonderfully well. But when I told him how we set a trap for him and discovered that he had a scar on his foot he looked even more surprised, and that surprise was genuine. I think Captain Alvarez, of the rurales, is decidedly angry over the whole affair and he is determined to have the prisoner face a firing squad as soon as possible."

"Well, I can't help feeling a little sorry for the man," said Jack, who felt rather unhappy when he realized how much he had helped in sending the man to his end.

"I feel sorry myself," added Mr. Ryder, "and if he would only tell the truth about the plans and give me some idea where they are I'd do my utmost to save his life. However, the best that I could do would be of little avail, I'm afraid, for Captain Alvarez takes charge of all prisoners and the man's fate is entirely in his hands."

The two searchlights were completed late that afternoon, but Mr. Ryder did not make

an attempt to erect them until after dark, for as he explained to Jack, "Those bandits may have lookouts stationed on the mountains, and to have them see our new lights would knock the little surprise party into a cocked hat."

It required but a very little time to put the lamps in place, for the engineer had fastened each tin pan to a section of iron pipe and this was easily strapped to a tree at either end of the clearing in front of the plant. The sentries were carefully coached that night before they were sent to their post, and most of the men in the village as well as the extra soldiers and rurales, gathered in the trenches to watch for developments.

But hours of waiting under such strained conditions was far from comfortable and after a while the men grew restive. In twos and threes they began to leave for their cottages, quite disappointed that nothing spectacular had happened. Jack, who was in the first trench, began to grow tired of the suspense too. Indeed, he was just on the point of going back to the cottage himself, when sud-

denly a rifle shot rang out at one end of the clearing. This was followed by another further up the line of fence and instantly Phil Underwood, on the roof, jammed home the switch.

The flood of light that swept along the barricade revealed almost a score of bandits, with *machettes* and big wire nippers. Some were discovered in the very act of snipping strands of wire while others, thoroughly frightened, were turning to flee, but they had scarcely moved two steps before the roar of a dozen rifles burst forth.

Jack saw two men toss up their hands and pitch forward in the grass. Another staggered a few steps, then he too fell in a limp heap. Other shots rang out, but the rebels got beyond the range of the improvised searchlights and were lost in the dark before any others were brought down.

It all transpired so quickly that Jack could hardly believe his eyes. He felt as if he had been looking at a motion picture of something that had taken place in a far-off land. But he

realized the horror of it all when several soldiers crawled under the barbed wire fence and picked up the three lifeless forms. Indeed, he was forced to turn away, for the whole scene became very repulsive to him. The idea of trapping human beings like rats and slaughtering them, was hideous. But the other men laughed and joked over the occurrence exactly as if they had but recently witnessed a performance at a theater.

CHAPTER XVI

A WARNING

“**H**I there, Jack, is that you?” called Mr. Ryder as the lad entered the cottage.

“Yes, but what on earth are you doing here with all the rumpus down at the plant?”

“Oh, I’ve been here for the last hour or more. To tell you the truth, my boy, I did not have the heart to remain and see the outcome. I knew the trap would work; in fact, I was afraid it would work too well. How many men did they kill, Jack?” There was a note of anxiety in the engineer’s voice as he asked the question.

“Three,” replied the boy.

“Well, thank heavens it wasn’t more,” said Mr. Ryder somewhat relieved. “The riflemen would have had no compunction if the number had been thirty-three, but I have. It seems wicked and inhuman to sacrifice three

lives in order to teach the beggars a lesson. It makes me very unhappy.”

Jack was glad to find that Mr. Ryder took this attitude in the matter. If the truth were known he had secretly felt a little bitter toward the engineer for concocting such a diabolical trap. But when he saw how unhappy it had made the man his bitterness turned to sympathy.

“It does seem mighty hard to kill three men in order to teach the rest of them a lesson, but I suppose it was absolutely necessary for our own safety,” said the youth in an effort to relieve the engineer’s feelings.

“You are quite right, my lad. It is hard, but it had to be done. Sometimes, you know, the lesson is almost as disagreeable to the teacher as it is to the pupil. I hope to goodness we’ll have no more of this slaughter, but the way the rebels are acting I am very much afraid that we will be in for a real battle before the trouble is settled. I sincerely hope I’m wrong.”

The engineer was sitting at the table in the center of the room, a mass of blueprints, draw-

ings and typewritten data spread out in front of him. His shirt was open at the throat, for the evening was very warm and his revolver and cartridge belt had been removed and tossed carelessly on the table before him.

“What are all the plans?” queried Jack as he sat down opposite the engineer.

“These are the original sketches and preliminary drawings from which I worked out my lightning arrester,” replied Mr. Ryder. “It begins to look as if the stolen papers weren’t going to turn up. Our rurale with the scarred foot denies all knowledge of their whereabouts, which means that he will never tell where they are, even if he does happen to know, for a Mexican can be mighty stubborn when he feels disposed that way. Under the circumstances, I fancy I’ll have to dig a new set of blueprints out of these old plans.

“And that isn’t going to be the easiest work in the world, let me tell you. I have paid very little attention to the preliminary papers since I worked out the final plans and the consequence is many of the more important sketches and formulas have disappeared. I am mighty

sorry that I did not make duplicate drawings before I sent the plans to Drueryville. The worst feature of the whole thing is the fact that I have not yet applied for patent rights either in this country or the United States. I could not take this step until I had secured Dr. Moorland's formula, you know, because that was one of the fundamental features of the new appliance. In that case whoever has the plans can very easily apply for patents in his own name and then all my work will have been for nothing. Indeed, if I wanted to use my own invention after that I would probably be forced to pay a royalty to some one else. That would be a fine how-de-do, wouldn't it?"

Though the boy could be of very little assistance to the engineer, just then, he remained at the table. Somehow, plans and blueprints had a certain fascination for Jack, who hoped to become an engineer some day. He spread one of the more simple charts before him and tried to work out the details for himself. How long he had been absorbed in this task he did not know, but suddenly, just outside the cottage,

sounded a patter of naked feet, then some one sprang upon the porch in front of the door, shouting as he did so:

“Los Zapatistas! Los Zapatistas! Viene Ellos!”

“The rebels, they are coming! What can he mean!” shouted Mr. Ryder as he leaped from his chair and reached for his revolver. The next instant the door was pushed violently open and an Indian exhausted and with blood dripping from an ugly wound in his shoulder, plunged into the room.

“It is Miguel the Indian runner, and he’s wounded,” exclaimed Jack, immediately recognizing the red man as the one whose dog he had saved from the alligator several weeks before.

Clutching the end of the table for support, the native began to talk very rapidly, and as the engineer listened, his face took on a startled and somewhat puzzled look.

“He says that he has run ten miles to warn us that José Cerro and his band are planning to attack us to-night!” explained Mr. Ryder when the native finally ceased talking. “He

says that they are on the way now and that we must hurry and prepare to meet their attack or we will be overwhelmed!"

"How does he know this?" demanded Jack, thoroughly excited.

"He carried mail to Los Angeles to-night," said Mr. Ryder, "and while he was lingering in the village a native told him that the famous bandit José Cerro was there. The native pointed out the very house where José Cerro was drinking *pulque* with some of his lieutenants. He became curious to see a man of such a villainous reputation and crept close to the shack and peered into the window. He not only saw the villain but he heard most of their conversation. He was startled, for he realized that he was overhearing the plans for an attack on the power plant. He heard José Cerro say, 'The fence wires are all cut by now and the big searchlight crippled. Everything is ready for the attack. Our men need only to rush in, seize Señor Ryder and carry him off. Then I will collect three thousand pesos from our benefactor before we start to join Zapata and capture the railroad. Then if we play our

part right we can hold this great electrical engineer for a ransom from his friends in America perhaps. If we can't do that we can kill him at least, though I'd much prefer to hold him and collect gringo gold for his release. How say you, men?' At this there were many cheers.

"Miguel became less cautious for he wanted to hear more. The result was that José Cerro saw him through the window and fired his revolver at him. The bullet hit him in the shoulder. The town was in an uproar immediately but the runner did not wait. As fast as he could he ran toward the power plant, glad, he says, of an opportunity to be of service to the gringo who saved his dog from the alligators."

The Indian had stood by the table during Mr. Ryder's recital, his face distorted with the pain of the wound in his shoulder, and as the lad looked at him he realized just how much hardship the red man had withstood to repay a debt of kindness.

"We must prepare to meet the attack immediately," said Jack calmly, "but before I move

a step I am going to bind up this poor fellow's wound and see that he is comfortable."

"Fine! Take care of him and I'll go and spread the alarm. Hurry down to the trenches when you're through," said Mr. Ryder as he seized a rifle and rushed out the door.

Although Jack could not talk to the Indian, he soon made the red man understand by motions that he wanted to take care of the bullet wound. The native smiled gratefully at this and sat down in Mr. Ryder's chair while the young American hastened out to Tom Why's cook house. The lad routed the worthy Chinaman out of bed and bade him heat some water immediately. In the meantime, he found some clean linen with which to make bandages.

Tom Why was a willing assistant and in short order all blood stains had been wiped from the runner's chest and arm and the wound bathed. Then Jack bound a bandage tightly about the injured shoulder and after preparing a cup of steaming hot coffee, showed

the native to one of the bedrooms and insisted that he lay down and rest for a while. During all this, the tawny yellow hound which had followed the Indian into the cottage, kept close to his master's side. The animal seemed to appreciate everything that Jack and Tom did for the redman, for his tail wagged furiously all the time. And when the runner lay down upon Jack's bed the hound curled himself up in the doorway as if to keep guard while Miguel was sleeping.

When the Indian was comfortable, the Vermonter buckled on his own revolver, and slinging a heavy cartridge belt over his shoulder seized one of the rifles in the corner and hurried out to the trenches.

At the plant every one was in a state of excitement. The ugly-looking, three-inch field-piece had been unjacketed and made ready for action. The battery of French machine guns, those death-dealing instruments that fired more than four hundred shots a minute, had all been mounted and manned, and soldiers and workmen alike all fully armed, waited crouching in the trenches. The two improvised search-

lights were still burning and by their light the whole scene looked weird and uncanny.

Mr. Ryder was as active as the rest, directing the position of the defenders and arranging other details. But in the midst of it all he found time to call Jack aside and hold a brief conversation with him.

“That Indian’s story has me thoroughly puzzled. If all he says is true, and I have no reason to believe otherwise, some one is certainly plotting for my downfall. Whom do you suppose José Cerro’s ‘benefactor’ is anyway? This is the most mysterious situation I have ever been mixed up with in my life. It certainly has me guessing. I wonder if—Look! Look! See that flash over there! On the mountain! Listen! Hear the roar! It’s the rebels! They’ve lugged their old fieldpiece up there again. They are trying to drop shells down here! Ho, boys! Bill! Joe! Did you see that flash! Throw a shell or two up there the next time they fire!” The last was addressed to the men in charge of the three-inch gun.

Again came the flash, then the far-off roar

and Jack heard the shell go humming high in the air above the plant and burst against the mountain across the river. But this time the gun on the mountain was answered by the one at the plant. The battery belched forth a cloud of fire and smoke and a moment later Jack saw a flash of fire in the woods across the valley where the shell exploded. The field-piece at the plant was of the quick-firing variety and four shots were hurled up on to the mountain before another one was sent toward the station.

Twice shells burst within the inclosure about the plant, one carrying away a section of the rurales' barracks hall and setting fire to the rest of it. The flames added to the excitement of the occasion but were quickly extinguished by two men with a hose, held in readiness for that very kind of emergency. Until just before daylight, the firing kept up, then the gun on the mountain became strangely silent and the men at Necaxa concluded that their shells had put it into disuse forever. But when the first golden streak of morning showed above the mountain tops, and the valley

became light enough for the men to see any distance, a new terror took the place of the gun on the mountain. From here and there in the underbrush across the valley bottom came tiny jets of smoke, and Jack for the first time in his life heard the ominous hum of bullets fired with deadly earnestness. José Cerro's sharpshooters seemed everywhere and the flying pellets of lead and steel kicked up the dust in all directions. For a long time the rifles in the trenches were silent, for the men could locate no one to fire at. The fieldpiece, however, kept shelling the forest but with little effect, for the gunners could not see the enemy.

Then suddenly two natives showed themselves on the edge of the wood. Instantly, a volley rang out from the defenders and the French machine guns began to rattle viciously. The battle was on!

CHAPTER XVII

“WHO WILL BE FOOD FOR THE VULTURES!”

OF the two men, one advanced. The other lay writhing in pain on the ground, but his place was taken by twenty more, forty more, eighty more, a hundred, two hundred. They emerged from every bush, from behind trees, they arose from the long grass, they appeared as if by magic. On they came, yelling, screaming; swarthy faces distorted, the lust of battle in their eyes.

“Here they come, boys! Steady! Keep cool and fight, *fight*, FIGHT!” screamed Mr. Ryder to the men in the trenches.

His instructions were answered by a mighty cheer; a war-cry that sent a thrill down Jack Straw’s back.

All thoughts of danger, all thoughts of everything but the fight, were driven from the lad’s brain by that cheer. In his hands he

gripped a rifle. About his shoulders were two hundred rounds of ammunition. With these he must fight, *fight*, FIGHT!

He was surprised to find how calm and collected he felt as he crouched there in the first trench, shoulder to shoulder with a rurale on one side and Harvey Carroll on the other. Over his head whistled a thousand screaming messengers of death. They plunged into the earthy embankment in front of him and threw dirt and pebbles into his eyes and mouth. They whistled past his cheeks and thumped against the wall of the power station behind him. Yet for all he was calm, insanely calm, it seemed to him.

Carefully and methodically he slipped a shell from his cartridge belt and held it between his teeth while he threw open the breech block of his rifle. Without any apparent haste he slipped the brass thing home, closed the breech and put the piece to his shoulder. Then with the utmost deliberation he selected one of those ugly distorted faces for his target and taking careful aim pulled the trigger.

Thus did the boy load and fire, load and fire,

a dozen times while the screaming mob came on. All along the double line of trenches, workmen and soldiers were doing the same as he. And behind him the battery of French machine guns, two on the roof and the others against the wall of the power station, spat vehemently four hundred times a minute. Yet with all this stubborn defense the motley mob advanced. They rushed, shrieking and screaming, across the valley bottom toward the barbed-wire barricade, pausing only to reload and fire. They came on, on, on, sombreros and jackets flapping, red lips parted and white teeth showing like a pack of blood-thirsty wolves. Two men reached the barbed-wire fence, one began to climb but he stopped at the second strand and his bullet-riddled body hung on the fence for the rest of the battle. The other hacked away with a *machette*, trying hard to sever the wires. Jack was surprised to see how long he remained exposed to the grueling fire before he fell.

Others reached the fence; one man clutched the top strand and vaulted clear, but he did not stand on his feet when he landed. Another

climbed a post only to pitch backward, bowling over two men directly behind him. But they came so thick and fast after that, that Jack could only see them as a mass. They pressed against the barrier like cattle; they raged, they cursed, they screamed, while the bullets from the machine guns mowed them down like rye before a scythe. But the press was too great! The fence came down with a crash and the way to the plant was cleared for them!

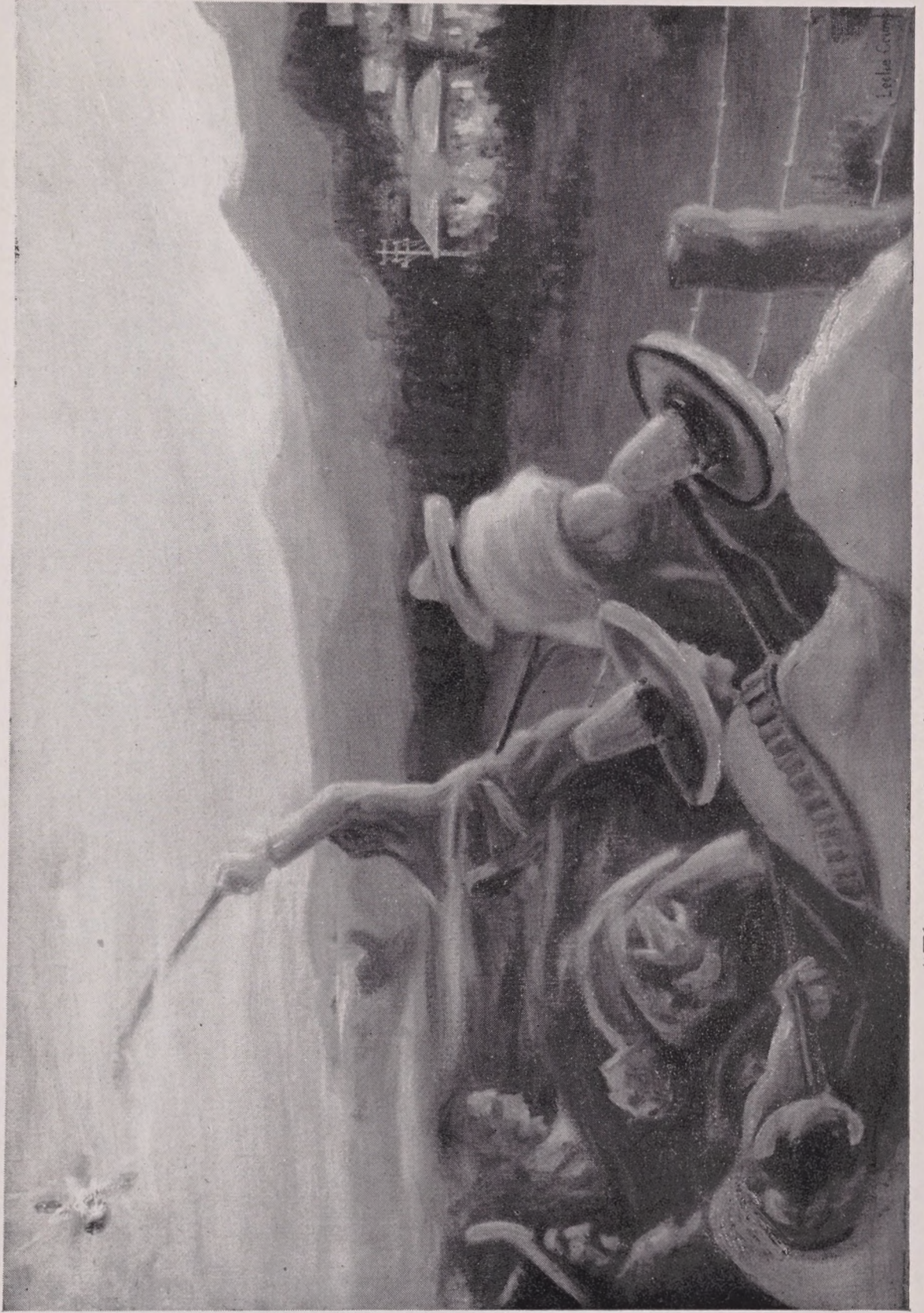
A groan arose from the trenches when the men saw this, for the Necaxa force was outnumbered five to one in spite of the havoc of the machine guns. Jack's spirit sank with the rest, for he realized that the end was near unless they could stop the rush of that blood-thirsty mob. But suddenly he heard a voice above the roar of battle and looking in the direction from whence it came, he saw Mr. Ryder standing exposed on the embankment of the first trench.

“Boys, boys!” he shouted; “look overhead! The vultures! Shall they feed on us or the greasers to-night?” Jack looked aloft, there in the blue heavens were two huge birds cir-

cling slowly around over the battle field. It was dramatic! It was hideous! Others looked, too, and the grim specter had its effect.

“The greasers! the greasers! let them be food for the vultures! Make them carrion, fellows!” was the cry that went up from the trenches, and some men in their anger stood bolt upright to load and fire. The rain of bullets that swept down the grassy slope was annihilating. The oncoming mob stopped! The rebels’ dogged rush was checked! For five minutes they tried to hold their ground against the withering fire. Then suddenly they broke and ran for cover.

At this a shout of triumph went up from the trenches. The men all stood upright then and pumped bullets after the scattered force of José Cerro. Jack discarded his rifle entirely and drawing his revolver leapt to the top of the breastworks and fired, round after round at the tattered brigade that was hurrying across the valley, until the last of the Mexicans was lost in the forest. Then he paused and as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, he remarked to no one in particular:



“They pressed against the barrier like cattle”

“By crackey, for excitement this beats all.”

Harvey Carroll overheard him and smiled.

“So it appeals to you, eh?” he queried.

“Appeals to me? No, not exactly, but nevertheless it’s exciting! How long did it last? About fifteen minutes, I guess.”

But Jack was disillusioned on this point when he looked at his watch. He could hardly believe it but he had been in the midst of death for two hours and had come through it all without a single scratch. This was not true of others, however. From here and there in the trenches came groans of anguish, telling plainly that more than one of the murderous soft-nosed Mexican bullets had found its mark. Jack saw many motionless forms too, and he knew that the power plant would be short handed for a while.

The lad did not have long to view the situation, however, for soon he heard the voice of the engineer giving commands in English and Spanish. These were to the effect that every man should get busy and repair the broken-down barricade before the rebels rallied and began another assault. Rifles were discarded

immediately and axes and shovels substituted. With these, soldiers and workmen alike began to reset the broken-down posts and restring the wires. Jack and Mr. Ryder did their part. They worked side by side with the rest, in spite of the fact that they had been longer than twenty-four hours without sleep.

Once Jack paused in his work and standing erect, viewed the valley. Dead men lay everywhere. They were piled thick along the line of fence and scattered broadcast from the bottom of the slope to the edge of the wood, and though the bodies were not yet cold the vultures were feeding. The scavengers of Mexico were already at work clearing the battle field.

As soon as the fence was repaired and reinforced with hundreds of feet of extra barbed wire which the workmen brought from the storehouse, Mr. Ryder appointed a hospital squad and a burial squad from amongst the infantry men. They were detailed to go across the valley gathering up the dead and the wounded. When this was well under way the engineer returned to the plant, to look after

the hospital work there. Lyman, Carroll and several other Americans who were not needed inside the plant at that time, had gathered up the injured and taken them inside a big well-lighted toolhouse.

Mr. Ryder glanced about the room; he studied the faces of the wounded and scrutinized the attendants closely. Finally, he turned to Jack and said:

“Say, son, have you seen my assistant? Nedham, I mean. I haven’t seen him since last night. I was looking for him in the trenches, but couldn’t find him. Thought maybe he was wounded early and brought here.”

Jack could not recall having seen Nedham. So Mr. Ryder called Lyman.

“Hi, Lyman, come here.”

Lyman made his way between the prostrated forms to his chief’s side.

“Have you seen Nedham, lately?” queried the engineer.

“Why—er—ah, why I think the last glimpse I caught of him was when the three-inch field-piece opened up. He came through the

operating room. Said he was on his way to the roof to look after some machine guns up there. Haven't seen him since."

"Well," said Mr. Ryder, "that's a peculiar place for my assistant when I need him alongside of me all the time. If you see him again tell him I want him. He'll find me here with the wounded."

Jack was surprised to find out how many had been injured in the battle. There were more than a score of workmen and soldiers stretched out on the toolhouse floor, and the few Americans available had all they could do to care for the wants of the wounded. Jack noted that one of the busiest of the attendants was the Indian runner whom he had left in his room before the battle started. The red man was going about among the wounded with a gourd of water in his right hand. His left was bandaged tightly across his breast and entirely useless because of José Cerro's bullet. Jack learned later on that the messenger had entered the trenches at the opening of the battle and all through the conflict had handled a

huge six shooter which he had found in Mr. Ryder's cottage.

The youth and the engineer turned to with the rest and tried to make things more comfortable for the sufferers. They had not been at work long, however, before Arthur Strong, the tall, light-haired day operator, came rushing in. The moment he saw Mr. Ryder he began to shout:

“The lines are down! The lines are down! Mexico City's service is cut off.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WIRES ARE DOWN

THE news was staggering! Mr. Ryder stood blinking at the man for fully a minute before he could comprehend the situation. Then as he realized that his one desire, to keep the current flowing uninterruptedly into Mexico City, had been thwarted, his face grew very white and tense, but instantly this expression changed to one of determination.

“We’ll put these lines back again in the face of every obstacle,” he thundered. Then, turning, he addressed the men in the room.

“Boys, the lines are down! For the first time since I’ve been in charge of Necaxa, Mexico City is without juice! I’m going to open the service again! Who is going to help me!”

“I am!” came the chorus and every man who could stand crowded about the engineer and

pleaded to be taken along. Even some of the wounded men raised themselves on their elbows and begged to be permitted to help in the crisis.

Quietly and methodically Mr. Ryder went about picking out his assistants. Two burly Mexican linemen were the first selected, then Harvey Carroll of the maintenance department under whose jurisdiction came all the repair work along the transmission line, and last of all a swarthy rurale, known among the men as the best rider and best marksman of all the Necaxa troop.

“You five will be enough. Carroll, you and the linemen get your repair kits and have the *mozos* saddle five horses. We’re to start immediately.” Then as the men were turning to go, the engineer called them together again.

“Perhaps I should warn you boys of the dangers that face us. I have an idea that this breaking down of the transmission lines is nothing more or less than a trap. Where we find the trouble we will also find a swarm of rebels ambushed. They may shoot us from the poles just as they would shoot so many

pheasants. In fact, the more I think of it the more confident I am that they have pulled the wires down for the very purpose of luring some of us out into the mountains so that they can square accounts. Considering the situation in that light, do you all feel just as enthusiastic about going?"

"You bet we do," came the hearty response and the five men hurried out to get their equipment together.

"Fine," said Mr. Ryder, then turning and addressing the rest of the men in the toolhouse he said:

"It will be up to you fellows to guard the place from an attack until we return. I know your number is small now and some of our best fighters are out of commission, but just the same you must hold the place against any further assault. I don't expect you'll have much trouble after the way we treated José Cerro and his rebels this morning, but nevertheless you can't afford to have your eyes closed. Clear up the place and get everything shipshape and ready for instant action.

"And as for you," he continued, turning to

Jack Straw, "you've acquitted yourself well to-day and I must compliment you. Now, to top off all this, I want you to keep your eyes on the clock. It is exactly eleven o'clock. If we are not back or you do not get word from us by three this afternoon, arrange with Captain Alvarez, of the rurales, to have the whole squad ride the transmission line in search of us. They may get there in time to find our dead bodies, but anyway we can feel certain of a decent burial, can't we, my boy?"

"You're right you can, but I certainly hope that we'll be able to locate you before burial is necessary, if we have to look for you at all," replied Jack.

A few moments later the four other members of the repair squad rode up to the door of the improvised hospital, leading Mr. Ryder's mount. The engineer shook hands with all his friends and bade them good-by while his assistants did likewise. Then when all were mounted and ready, word was given and the five horses went racing across the enclosure, through the gate and on to the trail that followed the line of transmission cables.

For half an hour they pushed ahead at a steady canter, keeping a careful watch on the shrubbery and underbrush for signs of the enemy. They saw any number of dead rebels. All along the trail were bodies of men who had been wounded in the recent battle and who had followed their companions until they dropped from sheer exhaustion.

About four miles from Necaxa they located the break. The four large cables were completely down, but fortunately the parallel telephone wire was still in service. At first Mr. Ryder was at loss to know just how the peons had done the work until he examined the cable and discovered bullet marks.

"I have it," he exclaimed suddenly; "the greasers have pumped shot into the cables and insulators until the lines simply couldn't stay up. I guess the telephone wire was too small for them to hit. I'm mighty glad they are such poor shots. They have done very little damage for the cables are not cut to amount to anything. All that is necessary is some new porcelain insulators on the poles and a little patchwork on the lines and we will be able to

give Huerta his service in an hour. Come, boys, up the poles there and get the insulators in place. Cut in on the 'phone line and tell the station we'll have the work done in an hour."

The men became active immediately, even the rurale taking a hand in the work. From the four repair kits enough insulators were secured to equip the pole. The two linemen were sent aloft to install these while Mr. Ryder, Carroll and the rurale stayed on the ground to repair the lines. They were all so thoroughly busy and so absorbed in their work that none of them heard the soft patter of naked feet on the trail and in the underbrush about the pole. Indeed, they were surprised almost to the point of speechlessness when a wicked-faced little Mexican, revolver in hand, stepped into full view before them and requested them in Spanish to hold up their hands.

Mr. Ryder and the rurale jumped up simultaneously and reached for their guns but the ugly-looking Mexican merely smiled as he turned his revolver to cover them completely.

“Ah, Señor Ryder, I would not try to shoot if I were you, the woods are full of rifles,” he said very politely in Spanish. And it was true. Mr. Ryder could see a peon behind every bush and tree.

“It is José Cerro,” hissed the rurale as he put his hands above his head.

“Yes, it is I, José Cerro,” answered the Mexican calmly. Then turning to the engineer he said, “I hoped to get some of you in this trap, but I never expected to have the good fortune of capturing Señor Ryder, I am sure. I am indeed honored to have you as my prisoner. I am also pleased for other reasons, for your capture means three thousand pesos to me and perhaps more, who knows.”

“Three thousand pesos! Who will give you that amount?” demanded the engineer.

“Ah, señor, would it be loyal of me to reveal the name of my benefactor, especially when he does not want his identity known?” asked Zapata’s lieutenant suavely. Then he answered the question himself by saying, “No, no, that would not be kind. I cannot tell you, Señor Ryder, but I can tell you that

you must come with me. You must hurry too, before your rurales hear of this trap. For my force is far too small as it is, thanks to the excellent fighting of you gringos. Ho! men! come, take these monkeys from their perch on the pole. We must away with our prisoners. Come!"

A horde of battle-scarred peons appeared immediately, and with threatening speech and gestures managed to persuade the two Mexican linemen to climb down from the pole. Each of the five prisoners was commanded to mount his horse, then according to José Cerro's instructions, peons bound their feet together under the horses' stomachs and tied their hands behind their backs. This done the leader gave a few brief commands and the band started to move, striking off at right angle to the trail that followed the transmission line. They seemed to be following an invisible path through the thicket that led into a narrow ravine between the mountains in the direction of the broad valley where Los Angeles was located.

But they had hardly left the tiny clearing

about the pole when the figure of an Indian and a tawny hound crept out of the bushes. The redman was clad only in canvas trousers that were rolled up to his knees, and his left arm and shoulder was swathed in bandages. A moment he paused while his black eyes searched the ground and the surrounding shrubbery. Suddenly he caught sight of the narrow trail left by the cavalcade.

“Ugh,” he grunted, “they have gone toward the sunrise. They have no horses. We shall easily catch José Cerro.” He paused a moment longer to examine the trail, then, standing erect, he mused:

“I am right. Only so many horses as I have fingers, no more. Those are Señor Ryder’s.”

And he disappeared as silently as he came.

CHAPTER XIX

TO THE RESCUE!

IT was some time before Jack and the rest of the Americans were able to make the wounded comfortable in the makeshift hospital. When the task was accomplished, however, Phil Underwood and Lance Carpenter were put in permanent charge of the tool-house. Their first action was to bar every one else from entering the building and disturbing their patients.

Since nothing remained for Jack to do but obey these orders, the lad soon left the place and sought employment with the men who were engaged in eliminating the evidences of the recent battle from the vicinity of the power house. In the meantime, however, he kept careful track of the time and constant watch for some message from Mr. Ryder and the repair crew.

As a result of the industriousness of the

regulars, the dead and wounded were fast being removed from the valley. Those who still showed signs of life were carried to the toolhouse to be cared for by Phil and Lance. The dead men were carried into the forest to the west. This puzzled Jack for he could not understand why graves were not dug in the open. Indeed, he became so curious about the whole thing that he finally asked Lyman what the regulars did with the bodies.

“In Mexico,” explained Lyman, “they don’t bother to bury dead men after a battle. They merely gather them all in one pile, saturate them with kerosene and touch a match to them. You see, bodies must be removed quickly in the Tropics or serious disease will be spread immediately. The funeral pyre is the quickest and best method of avoiding this danger.”

“Goodness, but that’s a gruesome way of caring for the dead. But then, I suppose, it is best from a sanitary standpoint and it certainly is far better than leaving the remains for the vultures.”

“Si, señor, it es best zan ze vultures,” said some one in broken English, and Jack and

Lyman turned to find Captain Alvarez, of the rurales, addressing them. "I hear your remarks what you say about dead mens and I agree. Fire es best zan ze vultures. Oh; ze vultures zay are ah—what you call—ah—higeous, eh!"

"Indeed they are hideous. They are the most repulsive creatures I have ever seen," said Jack.

"Ah, you are right, Señor Jack, but it is not of vulture I wish to see you for. It is of my mans Alfonso Perro, the one wiz ze scar foot which is in ze guardhouse now. We mus give him ze court-martial soon and ze execution. Also his peon assistant must we shoot. Will you and Señor Ryder be ready for ze court zis evening?"

"I think so," replied Jack. "I will be ready and I think Mr. Ryder will—"

"Who is that," interrupted Lyman, pointing across the clearing in the direction of the trail that followed the transmission line.

Jack beheld a swarthy, long-haired individual clad only in white trousers running toward the power plant, a dog loping along at

his heels. The man's stride was long and regular, like that of an experienced distance runner, and the lad recognized him immediately as the Indian messenger.

"Why, it's the runner. I saw him here at the plant only an hour ago. I wonder where he's been? I'll warrant he has word about Mr. Ryder."

Together Jack and Lyman hurried to greet the messenger who by this time had crawled under the barbed-wire fence and was swinging up the slope. But while he was still some distance away he began to call in Spanish.

"What does he say?" queried Jack of Lyman, who had been listening intently to catch every word.

"Quick, call out the rurales!" replied Lyman; "he says that the repair crew has been taken prisoners by José Cerro himself!"

"But how does he know? How did he get the information?" demanded Jack.

"Don't know, he must have slipped out and followed Mr. Ryder and his men. Hurry, we've no time to lose. He will guide us."

But Captain Alvarez had followed them

down the slope and he needed no persuading. He had understood everything the Indian said and even while Lyman was urging him to hurry the officer drew a tiny silver whistle from his pocket and blew three shrill blasts upon it. A moment later an orderly appeared running toward the commander.

Brief instructions were given and the soldier hurried back toward the plant again. Five minutes later the clear notes of a bugle echoed and re-echoed through the valley, calling the troopers to saddle.

By the time the three arrived at the corral the rurales were ready. There were other horsemen, too, eager to go to the rescue of Mr. Ryder, for the news had been spread throughout Necaxa and all the Americans who could be spared and who could find horses or mules to ride upon had gathered with the troopers.

Mozos found mounts for Jack and Lyman and the Indian runner, and in less than twenty minutes after Miguel appeared upon the trail the troop was galloping out of the enclosure and along the path that followed the transmission lines. Captain Alvarez, the Indian, Jack

and Lyman were in the lead and the rest of the band was strung out behind, their position depending entirely upon the speed of their horses. And as they galloped toward the break in the transmission line the wounded Indian explained how he had left the toolhouse hospital and followed the repair crew at a distance, hoping to be of assistance in case of trouble. But soon he began to find traces of the presence of rebels along the trail. He tried to reach Mr. Ryder and warn him of the ambush, but he said that the woods in the vicinity of the pole on which the men were working were so full of José Cerro's men that he could not get through their lines without running the risk of being shot. Quietly he waited until he could be certain of the direction José Cerro and his men would lead their prisoners. Then he returned to Necaxa as fast as he could run.

Half an hour after the rurales left the plant they arrived at the point where the transmission line was down. Here the Indian dismounted and looked over the ground carefully.



"The horsemen in green swept down the valley"

"They are many peons," he said laconically to Captain Alvarez as he remounted and started toward the trail that led into the ravine. In single file the horsemen followed their guide, for nearly an hour before they reached the end of the rocky pass, from the mouth of which they could look down into the broad valley that held Los Angeles. Off in the distance Jack saw a line of soldiers winding its way toward the little community.

"There, there, over there! Those are José Cerro's men with their prisoners!" exclaimed Captain Alvarez in Spanish. "Come! At them, men!"

The call of the bugle trumpeting the charge sounded through the valley. José Cerro and his men heard it and began to hurry forward at double-quick time. But they soon saw that escape was impossible, for the horsemen rushed down upon them swiftly. All that remained for the peons to do was stand and fight. Hurriedly they formed a circle about their prisoners and with guns pointing on every side prepared to repel the rurales.

The horsemen in green swept down from

the ravine 'mid the thunder of hoofs and the shouts of infuriated men! Indian fashion the squad split, a wing skirting either side of the valley. On they came firing from their saddles with carbine or revolver and menacing José Cerro's men from every side. But the little knot of peons were courageous. They loaded and fired in lightning fashion and the rattle of their musketry sounded like a battery of machine guns in action. They were making a last and desperate stand and they fought doggedly!

Round and round the little group of men swept the calvary, making the circle ever narrower. Jack rode with the rest of them, lying close to his horse's neck and firing his revolver. But in the heat of it all he never took his eyes from the prisoners in the center of the circle of rebels. There were Mr. Ryder and his assistants exposed to the fire of the men from the plant. Jack expected to see one of them topple from his horse at any moment, pierced by the bullets of their friends.

But gradually the nerve of the fighting rebels began to go. Three of them left their

companions and tried to break through the line of horsemen. Jack saw a rurale ride one of them down. The other two were shot before they had gone a dozen yards. Two more tried to get through, only to be trampled down by the flying horsemen. José Cerro and his men were trapped. There was no way for them to get beyond the circle of horsemen. Some threw down their arms and cried for mercy while others broke and ran; ran as far as they could go before a bullet brought them to the ground or a horse trampled them under foot.

Then in the midst of it all, while Jack was still keeping a watchful eye on Mr. Ryder, the lad saw the engineer suddenly jerked down from his mount, and in his place on the horse's back appeared a wicked-looking little Mexican. The man set spurs to the horse immediately and tried to ride through the crush of humans about him. He cursed and shouted for his men to make way and those who did not move fast enough he beat over the head with the butt of his revolver.

"Look! look!" shrieked Jack; "their leader

is getting away! José Cerro is escaping!" Then rolling his spurs across his animal's flanks he gave chase. But others saw the escaping leader and more than one horseman turned his mount down the valley after the fleeing rebel.

It was a short race. José Cerro had hardly time to get his steed down to its pace before Jack and two rurales reached his side. One man seized the horse's bridle and threw the animal back up on its haunches. With a curse the Zapatista drew his revolver. But Jack happened fortunately to be on the right side of the rebel. His revolver spat fire twice before the Mexican could raise his arm. José Cerro shrieked with pain. The revolver dropped from his helpless fingers and he reeled in the saddle. The other rurale caught him as he was falling and steadied him on the prancing horse.

The fighting had ceased by this time for most of the peons, seeing their leader in full flight, had surrendered. The Mexican line-men and the Americans who were still tied to

their horses had been liberated immediately and the rurales were busy forming the remainder of the rebel band in a double line and disarming them.

Jack and Mr. Ryder greeted each other warmly when the former drove up, escorting the wounded leader.

“By George, boy, I’m mighty glad you got the rurales out when you did. It began to look to us as if we were in for a rather disagreeable time with José Cerro. José, you know, is a dangerous individual at best, and any one who is unfortunate enough to become his prisoner is very liable to suffer.”

“Yes, I am glad I arrived before it was necessary to superintend your ‘decent burial,’ but the credit is not due me. Miguel, our Indian runner, once more appeared in the nick of time. He saw you leaving for the mountains and all unknown to us he trailed you. He saw you captured and hurried back to the plant and spread the news. Where is he now?”

“There he is yonder on his horse, looking

like a bronze statue. I'm going over and shake hands with him. He's a brave boy," said Mr. Ryder.

To have the great gringo engineer shake hands with him and compliment him pleased the Indian runner a great deal in spite of the fact that he became very self-conscious when Mr. Ryder told him how brave he really was.

"I'm not brave," he said in Spanish. "I merely repay a kindness. Also, I am glad to see José Cerro captured. If he is not killed by the rurales I myself will kill him for this." The Indian pointed gravely to his wounded shoulder as he spoke.

But Mr. Ryder did not hear all that the Indian said for the grounded transmission line was worrying him. He looked at his watch then hurried off to where Carroll and several men from the plant were standing.

"Come, we've still time to fix up that transmission line before nightfall. Get the linemen together and we'll start back through the ravine. The Indian will lead us and if we hurry we will be able to put things in condition so that Mexico City can have light to-night."

CHAPTER XX

“SHOOT! SHOOT!”

IT was long after sunrise next morning when the cavalcade of horsemen and their prisoners appeared at the station. Though the wires had been restrung and service started at nightfall the previous evening, the rescuers and rescued as well were too tired even to make the four-mile ride back to the plant. They had all been without sleep for practically forty-eight hours and even while the lines were being repaired many of the rurales tossed themselves on the ground and promptly became unconscious. The result was a night camp along the transmission line trail with no guard except that maintained over the prisoners; and this was hardly necessary for the rebels had been awake as long, if not longer, than the men from the power house, and were equally as tired.

Necaxa was not awake either when the

rurales arrived. Aside from the few regular soldiers who were doing sentry duty, no one seemed to be stirring about the little town. The night men, who had been forced to stay awake longer than the rest, had already left the station and crawled into bed thoroughly weary. But the clatter of hoofs and the shouts of the soldiers greeting the returning fighters awakened many of them and attracted the attention of the men at work in the power station. Soon the community was alive with curious soldiers and workmen, all eager to hear of the adventures of Mr. Ryder and his repair crew. But when they saw the line of prisoners and beheld José Cerro, helpless on a stretcher made of one of the rurales' blankets, they cheered lustily, for the capture of the rebel leader meant that the country was rid of one of its most vicious bandits.

Arthur Strong, the day operator, was one of the first to greet the engineer. The moment he heard the soldiers arrive he left the control room in charge of his assistant and hurried downstairs.

“By Jove, we were mighty pleased to get

your telephone message last night,” he said to Mr. Ryder. “We thought that Cerro had done away with all of you. I am glad to see you again. You too, Jack, old boy.” Strong shook hands with his superior as he spoke. “And, say, perhaps you don’t think we’ve had one fine time around here since you left yesterday afternoon,” he continued, to Mr. Ryder. “Things nearly went to the devil until we locked that man Nedham up.”

“Nedham,” exclaimed Mr. Ryder; “what’s he been doing?”

“Doing?” exclaimed Long; “why the man’s been drunk on *pulque*! You know what that stuff will do with you. I hadn’t seen him since the battle until last night after the rurales cleared out. About eight o’clock he came stumbling into the control room. His eyes were bulging out and his face was red and ugly. I was on duty and I had about made up my mind to stick through the night, since Lyman had gone with the rescuers. Nedham came staggering in just when I was busiest. He said *he* was going to run the plant for the night. I could see that he was in no shape to

run anything nor to issue orders either, so I told him to get back home and sleep it off. Then he got ugly. But I knew he was drunk so I did not bother with him. Then he became insistent and noisy and when he tried to punch me I had to call in two soldiers. They took him to the guard-house. He was in there all last night. This morning I let him out. I think he is up at his cottage now, very much the worse for his spree."

"What a fine assistant I have!" said Mr. Ryder sarcastically. "Tell Lyman to go and rout him out. I want to talk with him."

While the engineer and the operator were talking, Captain Alvarez and his rurales arranged their prisoners in line along the south wall of the power station. This scene had interested Jack far more than the recital of Nedham's drunken actions for it began to look to the lad as if a wholesale slaughter was about to take place.

"Heavens, I hope Captain Alvarez doesn't intend to execute them all," said the youth to Mr. Ryder when the day operator ceased talking. "That would be hideous. It would be

brutal murder. You can't countenance such actions, Mr. Ryder?”

“Indeed I can't,” said the engineer, hurrying toward Captain Alvarez, “and besides I want to have a word with Cerro before any execution takes place. I think that man knows some things that will help clear up the mystery that surrounds all our recent trouble.”

To do justice to the Mexican commander it must be said that he had not intended to have a wholesale execution. He explained this to Mr. Ryder quite frankly and stated that he merely intended to make the rebel leader face the firing squad while his followers looked on. He thought that it would be a capital way of teaching a lesson. After the execution he purposed sending the whole horde of prisoners to Mexico City, where they would be turned over to General Rodriguez to be confined in the military prison.

“If it is all the same to you,” said Mr. Ryder, “I would like to have a few words with Cerro before he is shot.”

“Certain,” said the officer, “only et ez not

so easy to mek him to talk, he is ah what you call—ah—to handle hard you know.”

The rebel leader was lying on the ground near the entrance to the guardhouse. His wounds had been bound up the evening before by one of his followers, but in spite of all efforts to ease him, it was quite evident that the man was suffering a great deal.

Mr. Ryder bent over the prostrate form and spoke in Spanish. “José Cerro, you are going to die. You will soon face the firing squad. Tell me who would give you three thousand pesos for my capture.” But in spite of his pain the little black-haired Mexican smiled grimly and shook his head.

“No,” he said. “I cannot tell, no, no.”

Mr. Ryder was about to press his question again, however, when Lyman appeared, leading a very white and very nervous-looking individual whom Jack recognized as Nedham.

“Here’s your assistant, Mr. Ryder; you said you wanted to see him,” said Lyman.

But before the engineer could speak Nedham caught sight of the man on the ground. He shrank back in terror and gasped.

“Oh, it’s José Cerro!”

Mr. Ryder looked searchingly at his trembling assistant, for he could not understand what made the man so frightened at seeing the wounded rebel leader. He did not have long to speculate on the reason for such strange actions, for Captain Alvarez came to speak to him.

“You could no make José speak?” queried the officer.

“No, he refused to answer my questions.”

“Ah-ha, did I not tell you zay all are so like that.” Then turning to José Cerro, he said in Spanish, “You are to die. Can you stand up to face the firing squad or must we prop you against the wall?”

“I shall die standing,” said the rebel proudly, “and you shall not blindfold me either.”

“All right, get up; we have not time to lose, two others are to be shot after you. Perro, our traitorous rurale, and his peon companion die to-day,” said Captain Alvarez brutally.

“Carlos! Jesus! come, help your leader to

rise; he must die standing," called José Cerro to two of the peon prisoners.

The faithful followers left their places and raising the wounded man to his feet, assisted him to the spot designated by the commander of the firing squad. That his effort to walk was causing the rebel excruciating pain was evident from the expression on his face. It took him some time to limp across the space in front of the firing squad even with the help of his men.

While he was taking his place before the five executioners, a hush fell over the scores of men that stood about. Every one was tense and silent. José Cerro's attendants shook hands with him solemnly and left him standing there alone. Slowly the five riflemen brought their guns to position and took aim. Then just as the officer was raising his sword to give the firing signal, José Cerro spoke.

"A moment," he said in Spanish, "just a moment. I wish to speak—"

"No! No! Shoot! Shoot! Don't let him speak," screamed a voice in English.

It was Nedham, trembling and on the point

of collapse. His face was distorted with fear and he was forced to cling to Lyman to keep from falling to the ground.

“So, Señor Nedham, you turn against me now,” hissed the rebel leader. “You would have me shot without speaking my last words. You thought me a traitor who would tell your plot. That was not intended. But now I will tell. Come, Señor Ryder, listen. It was Señor Nedham who plotted against you. He it was who offered three thousand pesos for your capture, I—I—was—.” The sentence was cut off abruptly for the wounded man, weak with the exertion of standing, suddenly pitched forward on his face.

The rebel leader’s two loyal followers hurried to his side to lift him back up on his feet, but he was only semi-conscious and it was evident to both that in a few moments more the firing squad would be cheated of its work.

In the meantime, Nedham, regaining some of his shattered nerve, tried to bolt through the crowd but Jack and Lyman seized him and threw him to the ground.

“Hurry, Mr. Ryder, take off his left shoe,” cried Jack. “I have an idea that this is the man who stole your drawings and tried to wreck the plant.”

The shoe and stocking were quickly removed and much to the engineer’s amazement a deep scar was revealed running diagonally across Nedham’s heel.

“But—but—why I thought we had the man with the scarred heel under arrest,” said Mr. Ryder thoroughly mystified.

“Yes,” said Jack, “but it flashed upon me a moment ago that the rurale’s scar was on his right heel, while the scar mark in the dust was on the left foot. Don’t you remember? Here comes the rurale now, go look for yourself.”

Two men were leading Perro from the guardhouse toward the firing squad. He was still barefooted for no one had been considerate enough of his comfort to return his cavalry boots to him since his arrest.

“Let me see your left heel,” said Mr. Ryder in Spanish, and obediently the rurale raised his foot.

“By George, there’s no scar there! Is it on the right foot? Let me see!” But it was not necessary for the rurale to raise his right foot for the scar extended half way up the man’s ankle and was plainly visible from the right side.

“Well, this came near being a fatal mistake,” exclaimed the engineer. Then to the rurale in Spanish he said, “I’m glad to know you’re not a traitor anyway, my man.”

And the Mexican grinned for he could see by the expression on Mr. Ryder’s face that he was not to be executed.

CHAPTER XXI

“YES, YES, I DID IT!”

NEDHAM'S *pulque* drinking had completely shattered his nerves and the effects of the liquor combined with the revelation of José Cerro had well nigh made a physical wreck of the assistant engineer. Indeed, as he stood in the center of the room in Mr. Ryder's cottage, where he had been brought by Lyman and Captain Alvarez, he swayed backward and forward, and if Jack had not brought him a chair in all probability he would have collapsed completely.

He looked at his inquisitors with staring bloodshot eyes, and his fingers worked nervously at the buttons on the front of his shirt. His condition was pitiable and Jack and Mr. Ryder both felt sincerely sorry for him.

“Nedham, where are those plans you stole

from my desk! You are the thief, aren't you?” demanded Mr. Ryder.

“Plans?” said Nedham, trying his best to feign ignorance. “What plans? I—I—know—”

“Stop,” roared the engineer, “don't lie, we know you are the guilty man.”

“I tell you—I—I—Oh, God, yes, yes, I did it! It's true.” Nedham could control his shattered nerves no longer. He broke down completely. “I stole the plans! I stole them! They are under the mattress of my bed! They've been haunting me ever since I took them! Curse the things! If I had had the courage I'd have burned them long ago! I did the rest too! I crippled the generators! I smashed the searchlight! I offered the three thousand pesos for your capture! I did it all—all—and now, thank goodness, I've confessed! It's all over! The strain! The strain! It was horrible! I had to get drunk—beastly drunk.”

Thus he raved until he was almost completely exhausted, and his physical self, unable to bear the strain any longer, caved in com-

pletely. His head dropped forward on his chest and his hands fell helplessly over the arms of the chair. He was unconscious for nearly a quarter of an hour and it was only by administering violent restoratives that Jack and the engineer managed to make the man himself once more.

For some time the four sat staring at the helpless engineer. Finally Mr. Ryder spoke.

"Why did you do this deviltry, Nedham?" he asked with a trace of disappointment in his voice.

"I—I—well I was ambitious—and—I guess a little jealous of you too," said Nedham weakly. "You know you only beat me out by two points in the competition for chief engineer and—well—I couldn't help feeling bitter toward you. I wanted your job, and I wanted it badly, and from the time you appointed me your assistant I started to scheme ways of getting you out."

"But what good would all your plant-wrecking have done? Why did you put sand in the generators and disrupt the place in general?" queried the engineer.

“Well, first off I hoped to frighten you into resigning. I—I—thought perhaps when you found you had traitors among the men at the plant you might fear for your own safety and resign, but when I learned how angry Huerta grew with each new occurrence and how often he called you on the telephone and raised the devil with you I saw a new way of getting your job. I concluded that if the trouble was kept up long enough the President would dismiss you entirely as an incompetent manager and put me in charge. The day they called you down to Mexico City and had you up before the directors I felt mighty confident that you would not last long.

“You brought this youngster back with you and from then on my plans began to go wrong. I saw you two pass the office the first night Jack was here. I followed you into the generating room and hid behind one of the machines. I saw you sprinkle the cement dust and I knew you were setting a trap. But as I watched it suddenly occurred to me that you were unconsciously giving me a capital opportunity of throwing you off the trail entirely.

Thereafter I decided to work with my feet bared so that you would think a peon was doing the damage. I forgot completely about the scar on my heel until it was too late."

"But the plans; the drawings of the lightning arrester. How did you even know of their existence? I kept my work on that appliance very secret indeed," interrupted Mr. Ryder.

"Well, after I watched you set your trap I followed you back to the cottage for I was curious to hear what you might have to say about the situation. I saw the bundle of drawings drop from your shirt. Also I saw where you put them. And although I did not have the slightest idea what the plans were about I decided that so long as I had gone that far I might just as well take a look at your private papers too. I thought perhaps they were orders or instructions you had received from Huerta that day.

"I waited until you were both sound asleep, and slipped into the room and opened your desk. It did not take me long to learn that the papers were drawings of a lightning ar-

rester of a type I had never seen before. Then it occurred to me that the appliance was one of your own invention. I looked for patent marks and could find none and on the impulse of the moment I slipped the yellow envelope into my pocket and went back to the plant. I figured that I had made a double coup, for if you were to build that lightning arrester and install it here you would win the favor of President Huerta and consequently my efforts would all be wasted. Also I was dishonest enough to think that perhaps I could easily secure a patent on the appliance in my own name when I finally got you out of the way.”

“Nedham! I never would believe it of you,” said the engineer reproachfully.

“Don’t, don’t, please don’t reproach me, Heaven only knows where my manhood has gone to,” cried Nedham in agony.

“And do you mean to say that you deliberately brought on battle and caused hundreds of lives to be sacrificed merely to get me out of my position?” asked Mr. Ryder incredulously.

“Yes, yes, I did. I offered José Cerro three thousand pesos to get you out of the way. I

did not want you killed. No, no, I was not as base as that. I merely wanted you captured and kept a prisoner so long that when you were finally released I would be safely entrenched here and in the favor of the President to such an extent that you could never regain your position. José Cerro thought an attack the only way to get you, and I smashed the searchlight and did everything else to help him. Oh, it was villainous work, I know. Heaven forgive me, I must have been mad."

The three Americans present were utterly amazed at the man's treachery, but Captain Alvarez did not understand fully, for his knowledge of English was so meager that he could not follow the strange recital in every detail. When the story was translated for his benefit, however, his fiery temper became aroused to such a pitch that the three Americans could hardly restrain him from rushing at the helpless assistant engineer and beating him senseless with his fist.

"The dog! The traitor!" roared the Mexican in Spanish. "*He* should be killed! *He* should face the firing squad! Come, drag him

out! We will shoot him! We will shoot him!”

“No! no!” shrieked Nedham, a look of horror coming into his ashen face. “No! no! you cannot kill me! You cannot shoot me! I am an American citizen!”

“He is right,” said Mr. Ryder. “We cannot execute him without bringing on international complications that would be distasteful to President Huerta. No, we can’t shoot him, even though he does deserve it. But we can expel him from the Republic of Mexico. Put him in the guardhouse, Captain Alvarez, and this afternoon we will ship him to Mexico City with the rest of our prisoners. We can turn him over to the authorities there and request that he be sent out of the country immediately.”

A look of relief spread over Nedham’s face when he heard Mr. Ryder’s opinion.

“Oh, never fear, I’m only too willing to be quit of this country. I can’t see how any man can keep straight in this hole of iniquity.”

“It was not a hole of iniquity until treacherous villains of your stamp came into it,” re-

torted Mr. Ryder. Then turning to Captain Alvarez he said, "Call in your trooper and have him taken to the guardhouse. The train for Mexico City will be made up as soon as possible. In the meantime you and Lyman stay here and sample one of Tom Why's excellent dinners. Things have gone so far to the devil lately that I haven't had time to enjoy a good dinner myself. After dinner I'll accompany you to Mexico City for I will have to make a report of this whole matter to our directors. I guess the plant will be safe enough in the hands of my new assistant, Mr. Lyman."

The night operator's face beamed when he heard, thus abruptly, of his promotion and he blushed like a schoolboy when Jack and Captain Alvarez congratulated him.

"I envy you," said Jack Straw heartily, "for there's nothing I'd like more than to be connected with a huge generating station like this."

"Well, we've room for a boy here, and we could teach you a great deal about the electrical industry. Why don't you apply for a position," said Lyman meaningly, at the same

time glancing in the direction of Mr. Ryder.

“Oh, no,” said the lad from Vermont, “I’ve already been away from Drueryville a month and I think it is about time I hurried back. In fact, I’ve decided to go in on the train this afternoon with Mr. Ryder. Some day after I have acquired a real training at ‘Sheff.’ or some other engineering school I may visit Necaxa again. Who knows?”

“Well, if we are still here you can be certain of a welcome, my boy,” said Mr. Ryder heartily.

CHAPTER XXII

GOOD-BY, NECAXA

THE string of flat cars and the snorting steam engine were waiting when Jack, Mr. Ryder, the new assistant engineer and Captain Alvarez arrived. Indeed, the soldiers and rurales were already hurrying their prisoners aboard. Wicked-looking regulars were stationed at each end of the cars and there appeared to be small chance of any of the peons escaping from the train during its journey toward the capital.

In half an hour everything was ready. Jack found that a large group of workmen had gathered to see him depart and he shook hands with each one of them before he finally swung aboard the platform of the yellow caboose and took his place beside Mr. Ryder and Captain Alvarez. Slowly the little train gathered headway and with the cheers of the men ring-

ing in his ears Jack Straw said good-by to Necaxa. But the string of cars had scarcely gone two hundred yards when a figure elbowed its way through the crowd of workmen and soldiers and came swinging down the narrow track at a rapid pace. His shoulder was banded about with white cloth and at his heels followed a tawny, long-eared hound. It was Miguel, the Indian runner, and his dog.

After some effort the agile messenger overtook the train and jumped aboard the steps of the caboose. Hastily he held out his hand toward Jack and mumbled something in Spanish. The lad from Vermont was greatly pleased that the redman was so eager to say farewell to him that he risked jumping aboard the moving train, and he wrung the Indian's hand warmly.

"What did he say?" asked Jack of Mr. Ryder when the messenger had swung to the ground.

"He said 'I am still in debt to you for saving my dog. Many thanks, many thanks,'" replied Mr. Ryder.

"Well, it strikes me that he paid that debt off several times during the last few days,"

laughed Jack as he waved to the Indian who remained standing in the center of the track watching the departing cars.

The news of the battle and the treachery of Nedham at Necaxa reached the capital over the long-distance telephone wire long before the train with the prisoners arrived and when Jack and Mr. Ryder entered the American Hotel after Nedham and the rest of the prisoners had been turned over to the proper authorities, they found the evening papers crowded with the news. Pictures of the prisoners that had been brought in, pen sketches of the battle and photographs of the plant at Necaxa occupied the front page of the dailies and scare headlines fairly shouted the details attending the capture of José Cerro and his band. Fortunately one of the papers printed an American as well as a Mexican edition and Jack was able to read the full account of his own adventures.

The capture of José Cerro was the subject of conversation in the dining-room of the hotel that evening too, and many of Mr. Ryder's friends sought him out and congratulated him

on the successful way in which he had handled things at Necaxa through all the trouble. Indeed, after a time the publicity that they were attracting became distasteful to the two Americans and they made haste to finish their meal.

But just as they were leaving the dining-room a tall sun tanned individual rushed up and clapping Mr. Ryder on the shoulder fairly shouted:

“Why, Harry Ryder, you old fighting engineer, I am glad to see you alive after such a mixup. And as I live here is my young friend, Jack Straw.” Jack instantly recognized the man as Mr. Warner, the marine engineer whom he had met on board the *Yucatan* on his way south to Vera Cruz. The lad was more than pleased to see Mr. Warner once more and shook hands cordially.

“Hello there, Jim Warner!” exclaimed Mr. Ryder; “what the dickens are you doing down in this part of the world?”

“Why, I’ve been tinkering with the old Lobo’s Island Light for nearly a month. To tell you the truth, I’ve just finished the job and knowing that you were within a few hundred

miles of me I decided to run in to see you. I was going out to Necaxa to-morrow and spend a week or two with you, but unfortunately that can't be done for I've just received a telegram from Washington instructing me to go ahead with a mighty big undertaking I've been figuring on. I'll have to hustle back to the coast immediately. And in view of the fact that you have been having quite a fuss out there I'm rather glad my plans have been changed. I'm not hankering to be drilled through by a soft-nosed bullet just now," concluded Mr. Warner with a smile.

"Oh! you would soon get used to those little things," said Jack banteringly.

"I suppose so," replied the marine engineer. "You must have had rather an adventurous month there."

"Indeed I did," answered Jack.

"Well, how would you like to have another month of thrills? If you feel inclined that way, come along with me. If you don't fight men you'll fight the elements. I am going to cruise the high seas for Uncle Sam."

"That sounds interesting," said Jack, "but

I am going north on the next steamer from Vera Cruz."

"So am I, and we'll get a chance to talk it over anyway," said Mr. Warner.

THE END

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