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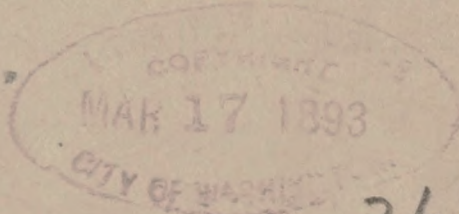
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PUBLISHERS' NOTICE.

IT may be doubted whether any writer for boys has written more valuable and instructive fiction than has Captain MAYNE REID, of whom Dr. LIVINGSTONE, the African explorer, once said: "His books are of the kind to turn boys into travellers." "CHRIS ROCK," one of Captain Reid's most meritorious stories, is a tale of perils, captivities, and escapes, with Mexico and the Gulf coast for its scene. Effective use is made of a romantic and historic tropical setting. The adventures of the hero in the mountainous heart of the Mexican republic are of a peculiarly strange and absorbing nature.

CRIS ROCK.



CHAPTER I.

VOLUNTEERS FOR TEXAS.

“I'll go !”

This short speech issued from the lips of a young man who was walking along the levee of New Orleans. Just before giving utterance to it he had come to a sudden stop, facing a dead wall, that was enlivened, however, by a large poster on which were printed, in conspicuous letters, the words :

“VOLUNTEERS FOR TEXAS !”

Underneath, in smaller type, was a proclamation, setting forth the treachery of Santa Anna and the whole Mexican nation, recalling in strong terms the massacre of Fanning, with the butchery of the Alamo,

and other like atrocities, and ending in an appeal to all patriots and lovers of freedom to arm, take the field, and fight against the tyrant of Mexico and his myrmidons.

“I’ll go!” said the young man at the first glance given to the printed document; and then, after a quick reading of it, he repeated the words with an emphasis that told of his being in earnest.

The poster contained intimation of a meeting to be held that same night at a certain “rendezvous” in Poydras street.

The young man only lingered to make a note of the address, which was the name of a noted café. Having done this, he was turning to continue his walk, when his path was barred by a specimen of humanity that stood full six feet six in a pair of alligator-leather boots.

“So ye’re goin’, air ye?” was the half interrogative speech that proceeded from the individual thus confronting him.

“What’s that to you?” bluntly demanded the young fellow, his temper a little ruffled by what appeared an impertinent obstruction on the part of a huge, swaggering bully.

“More’n you may think for, young un,” answered the booted colossus, still standing square in the way—
“more’n ye may think for, seein’ it’s through me that ere bit o’ paper’s been put on that ere wall.”

“You’re a bill-sticker, I suppose?” sneeringly retorted the “young un.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the giant, with a cachination that resembled the neighing of a horse. “A bill-sticker! Wal, I likes that. An’ I likes yur grit, too, young fellur, for all ye are so sassy wi’ me. But ye needn’t git riled, an’ I reckon ye won’t, when I tell ye who I im.”

“Who are you?”

“Maybe ye mout a heern o’ Cris Rock?”

“What? Cris Rock of Texas? He who at Fanning’s—”

“At Fannin’s masacree was shot dead an’ kim alive agin.”

“Yes,” said the young man, whose interrogatory referred to the almost miraculous escape of one of the betrayed victims of the Goliad massacre.

“Jess so, young fellow. An’ since ye ’pear to know somethin’ ’bout me I needn’t tell ye I aint no bill-sticker, nor why I showed the impartinence to put in

my jaw to ye, when I heern ye say 'I'll go.' I thort it wouldn't need much introduxshun to one as I mout soon hope to call kumarade. Yer comin' to the rendy-voovoo to-night, aint ye?"

"I intended doing so."

"Wal I'll be thar myself; an' if ye'll only look high enough I reck'n' ye kin sight me. I aint the shortest in a crowd," he added, with a smile that bespoke pride in his superior stature. "Tho' ye'll see some tall uns too 'mong them as'll be thar. Anyhow, ye look out for Cris Rock, an' when foun' that chile mout be o' some sarvice to ye."

"I shall do so," said the young man, whose good temper was now quite restored.

The Texan, to bid good-by, held out a hand as broad as the blade of a canoe paddle. It was freely taken by the stranger, who, while shaking it, felt that he was being examined from head to foot.

"Look hyar," said the colossus, as if struck by some thought which a closer scrutiny of the young man's person had suggested. "Hev ye ever did any sogerin'? Ye've got the look o' it."

"I was educated in a military school—that's all."

"Whar? In the States?"

“No. I am from the other side of the Atlantic.”

“Oh! a European. It don't make no difference in Texas. English, I kalkerlate?”

“No,” promptly responded the young man, with a slight scornful curling of the lip. “I'm an Irishman, and not one of those who deny it!”

All the better for that. There's a bit o' the same blood somewhere in my own veins, out o' a grand-mither, I b'lieve, as kim over the mountains into Kaintuck 'long wi' Dan Boone an' his lot. So ye've been eddycated at a milintary school. D'ye unnerstan' trainin'?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Dog-gone me, if ye aint the man we want! How would you like to be a officer? I reck'n ye're the best fit for that.”

“Of course I should like it; but being a stranger here, I shouldn't stand much chance. You elect your officers, don't you?”

“We elect 'em; an' we're agoin' to elect some o' 'em this very night. Lookee hyar, young fellur, I like yer looks, an' I've seed proof ye've got the grit in ye. Now I want to tell ye somethin'. I belong to a company that's jest formin', and thar's a fellur settin' his-

self up to be its captin'. He's a sort o' half Spanish, half French Creole, o' Noo Orleans hyar, an' we old Texans don't think too much o' him. But then thar's only a few o' us, while many o' these Orleans city fellows as are goin' out wi' us hez got into a big popularity by standin' no eend o' drinks. He aint a bad lookin' sort for sogerin', an' hez seed milintary sarvice, they say. F'r all that thar's a hang-dog glint 'bout his eyes this chile don't like; neyther do some o' the others. So, young un, ef you'll kum down to the rendyvoo in good time, an make a speech—you can speechify, can't ye?"

"Oh, I suppose I could say something."

"Wal, you stump it, an' I'll put in a word or two an' then we'll propose ye for captin', an' who knows we mayent git the the majority arter all? You're willin' to try, aint ye?"

"Quite willing," answered the young Irishman with an emphasis that showed how much the proposal was to his mind. "But why, Mr. Rock, are you not a candidate yourself? You have seen service, and and would make a good captain, I should say."

"Me kandydate for captin'! Wal, I'm tall enough, thet's true. But I haint no ambeetion thet way.

Besides, this chile knows nuthin' 'bout drill ; an' thet's what's wanted bad. Ye see, we haint had had much reg'lar sogerin' in Texas. Thar's whar the Mexikins hev the advantage o' us, an' thar's whar you'll hev it if you'll stan'. You say you will?"

"I will, if you wish it."

"All square, then," said the Texan, once more taking his protégé by the hand and giving it a squeeze like the grip of a grizzly bear. "I'll be on the lookout for ye. Meanwhile, thar's yit six hours to the good afore sundown. So you go purpar' your speech, while I slide roun' among our fellurs, an' do a leetle for ye in the line o' canvassin'."

After a final bruin-like pressure of the hand, the giant had commenced striding away, when he came to again, with a loud "Hilow !"

"What is it?" inquired the young Irishman.

"Seems that Cris Rock air 'bout one o' the biggest nummerskulls in all Noo Orleens. Only think it ! I war startin to take the stump for a kandydate 'ithout knowin' the first letter o' his name. How war ye cris-sened, young fellur?"

"Kearney—Florence Kearney.!"

"Florence, ye say ? Ain't that a girl's name?"

“True; but in Ireland many men bear it.”

“Wal, it do seem a little kewrious, but it’ll do right slick, an’ the Kearney part soun’s well. I’ve heern speak o’ a Kate Kearney; thar’s a song ’bout the girl. Mout ye be any connexshun o’ hern?”

“No, Mr. Rock; not that I’m aware of. She was a Killarney woman. I was brought up a little farther north on the green island.”

“Wal; no matter what part o’ ’t, yur all welkim to Texas, I reckon, or the States ayther. Kearney; I like the name. It hev a good soun’, an’ it’ll soun’ a bit better wi’ ‘Captin’ for a handle to ’t—the which it shall hev afore ten o’clock this night, if Cris Rock aint astray in his reck’nin’. Now, young un, see as ye kum early to the rendyvoo, so as t’ hev time for a talk wi’ the boys. Thar’s something in that; an’ if ye’ve got a ten-dollar bill to spare, spend it on drinks all roun’. Thar’s a good deal in that, too.”

So saying, the Texan strode off, leaving Florence Kearney to reflect upon the counsel so opportunely given.

CHAPTER II.

A LADY IN THE CASE.

Who was Florence Kearney? And what was his motive for becoming a "filibuster?" The reader shall be told without much tediousness of details.

Some six months before the encounter described, he had landed from a Liverpool cotton ship on the levee of New Orleans. A gentleman by birth and a soldier-scholar by education, he had come to the New World with the design to complete his boyhood's training by a course of travel, and prepare himself for enacting the part of a man. That this travel should be westward, over fresh, untrodden fields, instead of the hackneyed track of the European tourist, was partly due to the counsels of a tutor who had himself visited the New World, and partly to his own inclinations.

In the course of his college studies he had read the romantic history of Cortez' conquest, until his mind had become deeply imbued with the picturesqueness

of Mexican scenes; and among the dreams of his juvenate one of the pleasantest was the thought of one day visiting the land of Anahuac, and the ancient capital, Tenochtitlan. After leaving college the dream had grown into a determination, and was now in the act of being realized. In New Orleans he was so far on his way. He had come thither expecting to get passage in a coasting vessel for some seaport in Mexico—Tampico or Vera Cruz.

Why he had not at once continued his travels was not due to any difficulty in obtaining this passage. There were schooners sailing every week that would have accommodated him, but still he lingered in New Orleans. The cause of his lingering was one far from uncommon: It was a lady, with whom he had fallen madly in love.

At first his detention had been due to a more sensible cause. Not speaking the Spanish language, which is also that of Mexico, he knew that while travelling through the latter country he would have to go as one dumb. He had heard that in New Orleans he might easily obtain a teacher. He sought and found one in the person of Don Ignacio Valverde, a refugee Mexican gentleman, a victim of the tyrant Santa Anna, who,

banished from his country, had been for several years resident in New Orleans—as an exile. And an exile in straitened circumstances—perhaps the hardest condition of life. Once in his own country a wealthy land owner, he was now compelled to give lessons in the Spanish language to such stray pupils as might chance to present themselves ; and among the rest, by chance, came Florence Kearney, to whom he taught it.

And while the young Irishman was learning the Andalusian tongue he also learned to love one who spoke it more sweetly than his teacher. This was his teacher's daughter.

The young Irishman advanced along the levee, his head now bowed forward, with eyes to the ground, as if examining the empty bivalves that bestrewed the path ; anon giving his glance to the river, as though suddenly stirred by its majestic movement. But he was thinking neither of the shelled pavement, nor the flow of the mighty stream, nor yet of the speech to be delivered that night at the rendezvous of filibusters ; but of a tumult of the heart, from which he had been for some time suffering.

To make known his situation to the reader, it is

necessary to repeat what passed through his thoughts, after parting with Cris Rock.

“There’s something odd in all this,” soliloquized he, as he stood looking after the Texan, now rapidly striding off along the levee. “Here am I going to fight for a country I care nothing at all about, and against one with which I have no cause of quarrel. On the contrary, I have come four thousand miles to visit it, as a peaceful and friendly traveller; and now I propose to enter it, sword in hand, as an enemy! The native land, too, of her who has hold of my heart! Ah! therein lies the very reason: I have not hold of hers. I fear—I feel—I am certain of it—certain from what I saw this morning. Bah! what’s the use thinking about it, or about her? Luisa Valverde cares no more about me than the score of others—these young Creole bloods, as they are called, who flit like bees and butterflies around her. She’s a sweet flower from which all of them wish to sip. Only one will succeed, and that’s Santander. I hate the very sight of the man. I believe him to be a cheat and a scoundrel. No matter to her. The cheat she won’t understand; and the scoundrel would scarce disqualify him in the eyes of a woman, much less one of her race. Merçi-

ful Heavens ! to think I should love this Mexican girl, warned as I've been about the coquetry of her countrywomen !

“'Tis a fatal fascination, and the sooner I get away from her presence the better my chance of escaping the peril. It will be a sort of satisfaction to think that in fighting against her country I may in some way humiliate her. Texas ! if you should find in me a defender, it will not be from any purity of patriotism, but solely to seek oblivion from bitter thoughts.

“Is there not something ominous in my meeting this Texan giant?” continued he, after a break in the train of his reflections. “Destiny seems to direct me. Here am I scheming to escape from the thralldom of a siren's smile, and, to do so, ready to throw myself into the ranks of a filibustering band ! On the instant a friend is found—a patron—who promises to make me a leader ! Shall I refuse the favor.

“Why should I ? It is fate, not chance, seems to offer it ; and this night, at their rendezvous, shall I know whether fate means the offer in earnest. Canvass your best, Cris Rock ; and I shall do my best at making a speech. If our united efforts prove success-

ful, then Texas shall gain a sword, and Luisa Valverde lose a lover.'

At the conclusion of this soliloquy—half boastful, half bitter—the young Irishman walked away from the spot where he had parted with the Texan, and went slowly sauntering along the levee.

CHAPTER III.

OFFICERING THE FILIBUSTERS.

It was in a tavern, then known by the name of "Coffee House," in the street called Poydras. The room for the time chartered by the filibusters was a large one, capable of containing three hundred men, drawn together by the printed proclamation that had stopped Florence Kearney on his morning stroll, two-thirds of this number had come together; and of these, two-thirds were determined upon going to Texas.

It was a crowd composed of heterogeneous elements—such as ever have been, and ever will be, the men who volunteer upon a military—more especially upon a filibustering—expedition.

Among them were representatives of almost every civilized nation upon earth. Even some that could scarce boast of having seen much of civilization; for, among the faces seen around the room were many covered with beard and bronze that told of long association with the savage.

In obedience to the counsels of the Texan, Florence Kearney—a candidate for command over this motley crowd—made early appearance in their midst. Not so early as to find that, on entering the room, he was a stranger to its occupants. Cris Rock had been there before him, along with a half score of his confreres—old Texans of the true grit, who, having taken a part in most of the struggles of the young republic, had strayed back to New Orleans, partly for a spree, and partly to recruit fresh comrades to assist them in propagating that principle which had first carried them to Texas—the “Monroe Doctrine.”

To these the young Irishman was at once confidentially introduced, and stood drinks freely. He would have done this without care of what was to come of it, since it was but the custom of his kind and his nation. Nor would it of itself have given him any great advantage; for, not long after entering the room, he discovered that not only drinks, but dollars, were freely distributed by the opposition party, who seemed earnestly bent upon making a captain of their candidate.

As yet Kearney had not looked upon his competitor, and was even ignorant of his name. In a short time it was communicated to him, just as the man

himself, escorted by a number of friends, made his appearance in the room. The surprise of the young Irishman may be imagined when he saw before him one already known, and deeply detested : his rival for the affections of Luisa Valverde !

Yes ; Carlos Santander was the candidate of the opposition.

To Kearney it was a double surprise. He knew Santander to be on terms of very friendly and intimate relationship not only with Don Ignacio, but other Mexicans he had met at the exile's house. Strange that the Creole should be aspiring to the leadership of a filibustering band about to invade their country—for it was invasion the Texans now talked of, in retaliation for the late raid of Woll to San Antonio. But these Mexicans being refugees, and enemies of Santa Anna, it was not so unnatural. By humiliating the dictator they would be aiding their own fallen party to get back into power—even though the help came from their natural enemies, the Texans. These reasons came before the mind of the young Irishman, though not quite to satisfy him. He still continued to think the thing a little strange.

But he had no opportunity for indulging in con-

jectures—only to exchange a frown with his rival, when a man in an undress uniform—a Texan colonel—who acted as chairman of the meeting, mounting upon a table, called, “Silence!” and after a short, pithy speech proposed that the election of the officers should at once take place. The proposal was seconded, no one objecting, and without further parley the polling began.

There was neither noise nor confusion. Indeed the assembly was one of the quietest, and without any street crowd outside. There was reason for observing a certain secrecy in the proceedings; for although the movement was highly popular all over the city, there were some compromising international points, and there had been talk of government interference.

The election was by ballot, in the most primitive and simple fashion. The names of the candidates were written upon slips of paper and distributed throughout the room—only the members who had formed the organization having the right to vote. Each of them chose the slip bearing the name of him he intended to vote for, and dropped it into a hat carried round for the purpose. The other he threw away or slipped into his pocket. When all had

deposited their votes the hat was capsized, and the bits of paper shaken out upon a table. The chairman, assisted by two other men, examined the ballots, and counted them. There was then a short interval of silence, broken only by an occasional word of direction from the chairman and the murmuring hum of the examiners, and then came the announcement in a clear, loud voice—that of the Texan colonel—“In favor of Kearney! Florence Kearney elected captain by a majority of thirty-three votes.”

A cheer greeted the decision, in which the voice of Cris Rock could be heard loud above all others; while the giant himself was seen rushing through the crowd to clasp the hand of his protégé, whom he had voluntarily elevated to a rank over himself.

During the excitement, the defeated candidate was observed to skulk out of the room. Those who saw him go could tell by his sullen look of disappointment that he had no intention of returning, and that the filibustering cohort would not have the name of Santander any longer on its roll-call.

He and his were soon forgotten, for the lieutenants were yet to be elected. One after another—first,

second and brevet—were proposed, balloted for, and chosen, in the same way as was the captain.

And then there was a choice of sergeants and corporals, and the organization was pronounced complete. Then came congratulations, and drinks all round, and for several successive rounds. And there were patriotic speeches in the true spread-eagle style, and applauding cheers, with jokes about Santa Anna and his cork leg, and the company at length separated after singing the Star Spangled Banner.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INVITATION TO SUPPER.

Florence Kearney, parting from his new friends, sauntered out into the street.

On reaching the nearest corner he came to a stop, as if undecided which way to turn.

It was not that he had lost his way. His hotel—the St. Charles—was but three blocks off ; and he had, during his six months' sojourn in the Crescent City, become acquainted with almost every street. It was not ignorance of his locality which was causing him to hesitate, but something very different, as the train of his thoughts will tell.

“Don Ignacio at least will expect me—wish me to come, whether she do or not. I accepted his invitation, and cannot well—ah ! had I known what I do now—seen what I saw this morning—Bah ! I shall go back to my hotel and never more go near them !”

He did not go back to his hotel, but still stood irresolute—considering.

What was causing him to do so? Simply the belief that Luisa Valverde did not love him, and, therefore, would not care to have him as a companion at supper, for to this had her father invited him. It was on the day before that he had received the invitation and accepted it. What had he seen on that morning to make him repent the acceptance? A man standing beside the woman he loved, bending over her till his lips almost touched her forehead, whispering words to her that were apparently heeded. He had seen this and nothing more. He had not heard the words and knew not their nature; but he too easily guessed it from the situation and the circumstances antecedent.

He had no right to call Luisa Valverde to an account. During all his intercourse with her father he had seen her scarce half-a-dozen times; and then only while passing out and in, to or from his lessons. Now and then a few words of conversation upon any chance theme—the weather—the study of the Spanish language—how he wished she had been his teacher—the peculiarities of New Orleans life, to which they were both strangers, and other like topics. Only once had she seemed more than ordinarily interested in his

speech. It was when he talked of Mexico—of his having come from his own far land solely for the sake of visiting it—of his intention soon to go there in continuance of his design—saying that he had heard about Mexican banditti, but more of the beauty of the Mexican ladies; and naively, or perhaps adroitly, wondering whether he would not be in less danger of losing his life than his heart.

Only on that occasion had she seemed to listen with peculiar attention to what he said, even looking pensive as she made reply :

“Yes, Don Florencio, you will see much in Mexico that will no doubt give you gratification; and it is true what you have heard, that many of my countrywomen are fair—some very fair. Among them you will soon forget—”

Kearney's heart beat wildly, hoping he would hear the word “me.” But the monosyllable was not used. In its place only the phrase, “us poor exiles,” with which somewhat commonplace expression the young lady concluded her speech.

And still there was something in what she had said, or rather in her manner of saying it, that had made a pleasant impression on his mind—something in her

tone that touched a chord already making music in his heart. If it did not give him hope, it for the time hindered him from despairing.

It was the last interview he had had with her ; and for days the sweet thought kept possession of his soul—now cheering him with hope, now torturing with doubt. But the doubt was the stronger. Luisa Valverde—the daughter of the exiled Mexican, known in his own land to be a gentleman of high rank—Luisa Valverde, the belle of many a ball—the talk and toast of many a young Creole “blood,” how could he, Florence Kearney, a stranger in his own eyes, a youth of modest pretence—how could he expect her to prefer him over so many splendid competitors—above all, over that one he had seen most reason to dread—Carlos Santander ! His hopes had been at best but slight, and only intermittent up to the morning of that day. Then had they ceased altogether, crushed out by a terrible spectacle. It was that already spoken of—a man stooping over Luisa Valverde and whispering in her ear words that seemed to find a response from her heart. That man was Santander. Kearney had seen this, himself unseen. It had driven every pulsation of hope out

of his heart, and sent him in wild, aimless strides along the levee—just in the right frame of mind for being caught by the call: “Volunteers for Texas.” So was he caught, and as described, became their captain.

It was a day of strange experiences, varying as the changes of a kaleidoscope; more like to dreams than realities. At dawn, hopes soft as the dawn itself; at ten o'clock, a spectacle producing the bitterest despair; at noon this partially checked or alleviated by what promised to counteract its fatal influence; shortly after sunset, a triumph sufficient to thrill the most aspiring ambition of a youthful mind; and now at night, once more upon the street—alone and again painfully reflecting!

Thus ran his reflections:

“Shall I see her again, or not? Why not? If she's lost, she cannot be worse lost by my going to take supper with her. Nor can I feel worse than I do now—even with a laurel of triumph fresh set upon my brow. What if I go and tell her of it—tell that I am about to enter her native land as an invader—a filibuster! Ha! I have a thought! If she cares for

me, that will not distress her. If not, then it may spite her. I shall go !”

Quick as the words passed from his lips, he started along the street in the direction of the “third municipality,” where dwelt most of the people who spoke the Spanish tongue.

CHAPTER V.

A STUDIED INSULT.

In a small wooden house in the street of Casa Calvo dwelt Don Ignacio Valverde and his daughter. It was a frame dwelling, built French Creole fashion, of one story, with casement windows opening on a front piazza, the latter nearly level with the street. Only one other individual occupied the house along with them—their servant, a young girl of Mexican *mestizo* race,—that is, half Spanish, half Indian. The straitened circumstances of the exile forbade any more expensive establishment.

The signs inside were not those of absolute poverty. The sitting-room, if small, was tastefully furnished. Besides other articles telling of refinement, a harp stood upon the floor, and a guitar lay on a *crusole* table.

The strings of both the daughter of Don Ignacio knew how to touch with the skill of a practiced player.

On the same night on which the election for fli-

bustering officers had been held, her father, alone with her in their little sitting-room, had asked her to play to him, as also to sing. She played and sang songs of their native land, that despite their banishment both still loved. It was not the land that was in fault in causing them such suffering, but the tyrant Santa Anna, who so grossly misgoverned it.

On that night the mind of the young lady was not with her music. At intervals she sought the opportunity, while her father became otherwise engaged, to steal out into the piazza, and glance through the trellised lattice-work that screened it from the street. She was evidently expecting some one to come that way.

And one, at length, came. The tinkle of a little bell touched outside summoned Pepita, the little Mexican servant, to the door, and soon after a heavy foot-fall on the planking of the porch told of a man stepping upon the piazza.

One of the hinged casements thrown open discovered outside a tall, well-proportioned figure with a face of olive complexion furnished with a becoming beard, and mustaches that curled up on each side of his nose.

Figure, face, beard, and mustaches, all belong to Don Carlos Santander.

“Pass in, Señor Don Carlos,” said the owner of the house, appearing at the open casement, while the servant placed a chair for him. “Though we did not expect to have the honor of your company this evening, you are always welcome.”

Notwithstanding this polite speech there was a certain hesitancy in the way it was spoken that showed insincerity in the speaker. It was evident that on that night at least the Creole was looked upon by Don Ignacio in the light of an intruder.

And the evidence was still stronger on the countenance of Don Ignacio's daughter. Instead of a smile to greet him, a quick glance of disappointment flashed forth from her large, liquid eyes as he made his appearance on the piazza. It could not be for his coming she had repeatedly sought the piazza and looked through its lattice.

To say the truth, both father and daughter seemed disturbed by his presence, as if both had been expecting some one else whom they did not desire him to meet. If Santander noticed any repugnance on the part of either host he showed no visible sign of it.

Besides being handsome he was a man of many accomplishments, among others a power of concealing his thoughts under a veil of imperturbable coolness. Notwithstanding this, his demeanor on that night was different from its wont. He looked flurried and excited, his dark eyes flashing with some rage that had late passed, but whose sting still rankled in his bosom. Don Ignacio and his daughter both noticed it, but said nothing. The former seemed to fear him, and the latter perhaps a little ; but only on account of her father, over whom the Creole exercised some mysterious influence. Indeed there was not much mystery about it. Santander, though by birth an American—a native of New Orleans—was of Mexican parentage, and still considered himself a citizen of the country of his father. He was secretly supposed to hold a high place in the confidence of its dictator. He had declared as much to Valverde ; and for motives which may be easily guessed, he held out hopes of being able to effect for him terms of return to his native land, including a restoration of his estates. The exiled patriot, wearied with long waiting, had at length become willing to lend an ear to con-

ditions that in other days he would have spurned as humiliating.

It was to talk of this Santander had now presented himself, and Don Ignacio, suspecting it, gave his daughter a side look that told her she might leave the room.

It was not desirable to either that the young lady should be present, though more than any other might she be affected by the conclusions to which they might come.

She was only too glad to discover that she was not wanted. Just then she preferred being in the piazza; and into it she silently glided, leaving her father alone with the guest who had intruded so inopportunately.

It is not necessary to repeat what passed between the two men. It was intended to bring to a conclusion a bargain that had been already talked over, though only in vague, general terms. It was to be an exchange between the exile's daughter and his confiscated estates—the former to be given to Santander on condition of his obtaining permission for the exile to return to his native land, and a cancelling of the edict by which his estates had been confiscated.

Of course there was some discussion of the terms and talk of a proviso affecting the consent of the lady; on one side carried on with a haughty, bullying overbearance, on the other in submissive vacillation, alone due to the spirit of Don Ignacio being subdued by a prolonged and bitter banishment.

But the bargain was not destined that night to reach a conclusion.

Before any proposal was accepted, or promise given, the conference was interrupted by the tread of a booted foot, heard ascending the steps and then sounding along the piazza.

It was followed by an exchanged salutation, in which the voice of Don Ignacio's daughter was heard answering to that of a man.

To Don Ignacio it was no surprise. He knew who had come. But when the voice of Florence Kearney fell upon the ear of Santander, first in the exchanged salutations, and then apparently in a tone of triumphant confidence, he could no longer keep his seat, but springing up, exclaimed :

“That cur of an Irishman !”

“Hish !” continued his host. “The Señor Kearney will hear you.”

“I wish him to hear me. I repeat the expression, and plainly, in his own tongue. I say, dog of an Irishman !”

Outside was heard a short, sharp exclamation, as of a man startled by a sudden but powerful surprise, followed by some word of appeal spoken in a woman's voice. Then the door was drawn open with a quick jerk, and two faces were seen turned toward the room. The one in front, and frowning, was the face of Florence Kearney. A little in the rear was Luisa Valverde, her countenance pale, no longer appealing. It was too late : she saw that a collision was inevitable. She made no movement to prevent it. She felt it would be in vain ; for the air was filled with the electricity of anger.

Without waiting for a word from Don Ignacio, Kearney stepped across the casement sill and stood inside the room. The host, as his Creole guest, was now also on his feet, and, for a second or two, the three formed a strange triangular tableau—the Mexican with fear on his face, the Creole an expression of insult, the young Irishman one of defiance. Still outside on the piazza kept the young lady, with hands

clasped across her bosom that rose and fell in quick but silent palpitation.

Kearney broke the silence. His first words were addressed to Don Ignacio in a calm, dignified voice. They were an apology for having entered the apartment unbidden.

"You are here by my invitation," promptly returned his host. "My house, sir, is at your disposition."

"Thanks," said the young Irishman. "And now, sir," he continued, turning to the Creole and confronting him with a look still perfectly tranquil, "having made *my* apology, I require *yours*."

"For what?" asked Santander, counterfeiting ignorance.

"For using language that belongs to the slums of New Orleans, where, I doubt not, you have been born and bred. Cur of a Creole, you must take back your words."

"Never! It is not my habit to take, but to give; and I give this!"

So saying, the Creole stepped close up to Kearney and spat straight in his face!

Kearney's heart was on fire. His hand was

already on the butt of a pistol, but glancing behind his eye fell upon a pale, appealing face ; with an effort he restrained himself, and said calmly to Santander :

“I hope you will favor me with your address. Tomorrow I shall have occasion to write to you. If a scoundrel such as you can boast of having a friend, you may as well give him notice he will be needed. Your card, sir !”

“Take it !” hissed the Creole, flinging his card on the table ; and then glaring around the room, as if his glance would annihilate all, he seized hold of his hat, bowed haughtily to Don Ignacio, looked daggers at Luisa, and strode forth into the darkness of the night.

Santander had succeeded in his intent—a design long cherished—in making Kearney his challenger. It would give him the choice of weapons, insuring to him safety and success. Without certainty of this he would have been the last man to provoke a duel ; for, despite his warlike pretences and bold bearing, Carlos Santander was a coward.

CHAPTER VI.

WANTED, A FRIEND.

On the following morning, Florence Kearney started up from his couch under a strong impression of having something to do—even before eating breakfast. There was a card upon his dressing table that bore the name, "Señor Carlos Santander." It was a sufficient reminder.

Swallowing a cup of coffee brought in by one of the hotel waiters, he set about reflecting what was the best course to be pursued. Of course he intended to fight; but before taking the field there were some preliminaries required by the exigencies of the duello. A combat according to the code calls for both principal and second. He was himself the former, but where was he to find the latter? A stranger in New Orleans, he had made but few acquaintances, and among them not one of such character as to be selected as the assistant in an affair of honor. What was he to do?

This interrogatory, or something close akin to it,

he had put to himself half a score of times, both before and after swallowing his coffee; and each time without receiving anything that looked at all like a satisfactory answer.

He lit a cigar, in the hope that the fumes of the nicotian weed would assist him in reflection. They did. Before he had blown a dozen puffs from the tip of the Havana his thoughts reverted to a scene of the night before—that which had transpired at the rendezvous of the filibusters. They became concentrated on Cris Rock. Not that he considered the Texan giant the correct style of man to be his friend in an affair of this nature, but that he could probably help him with his counsel. And then he remembered the lieutenant who had been elected his “first,”—a dashing young Kentuckian who looked as if he could not only stand fire, but eat it. Cris had given him his own address, and could no doubt find the Kentuckian.

New Orleans is comparatively but a small place, and it would not take long to get an answer to a message.

He hastily scribbled a note, and ringing for one of the waiters, sent it to the Texan.

While waiting for the return of his messenger

more than one reflection passed through his mind ; in fact, a good many. Some were pleasant, others of a painful nature. Among the pleasant was an impression he had brought away from a scene of the preceding night—not that noisy one occurring at the rendezvous of the Texan filibusters—but in the quiet cottage of Don Ignacio Valverde. Nor had it been made during the tranquil time while he was eating that farewell supper, but in the excitement preceding it.

If there be any time more than another when man may know woman's heart—whether it beats for him or not—that time is when his courage becomes tested in her presence.

Florence Kearney saw, or thought he saw, sympathy in the eyes of Luisa Valverde, with smiles of approval as to how he had borne himself ; and before taking his departure from the house he fancied himself dear to her. There was not much demonstration on her part ; still there were pleasant words, and a slight hand-pressure at parting that had thrilled through his frame like a current of electricity. And along with this pressure was a glance of sadness, and some words of regret that he was so soon to leave

New Orleans. He had told of his intention, and related some of the events of the evening. His triumph among the filibusters explained the apparently unprovoked hostility of Santander. But he knew it was not altogether this; and she, too, may have secretly ascribed it to a different cause. He believed that she did, and the belief gave him gladness. Up to that day he had been in doubt about her affections—or rather in despair; for he believed them to have been bestowed upon Santander. It was a luxury of joy to think he had been mistaken. This was his pleasant reflection—and the only one.

The painful were many; and, foremost, the thought that he would now be compelled to part from her. The die had been cast. He was booked for a filibustering expedition—honored by having been chosen as its chief. He could not now retreat from the trust that had been so generously reposed in him. It would be sheer dishonor to abandon it. Even the selfish lure of love was not strong enough to entice him to recreancy. He only thought of it to feel regret for having so rashly entered upon the enterprise. Had Luisa Valverde pressed his hand six hours sooner he would never have been elected a captain of Texan

volunteers. A word, a touch, even a glance of the eye, often determines the destiny of men and of nations.

While Florence Kearney paced his apartment, thus philosophically, and somewhat sadly, reflecting, his regrets were suddenly checked by a sound heard outside the door of his room, which was closed. There was a footfall in the corridor that resembled the tramp of a rhinoceros, and along with it a voice that might have been compared to the bellowing of a buffalo bull.

“Whar is he?” asked the voice, in a tone truly stentorian.

Before any reply could be made, the young Irishman had thrown open the door of his chamber, calling upon Cris Rock to come in.

The giant was not alone. Along with him was the young Kentuckian—lately elected an officer of the Texan volunteers, as Cris let every one know by calling him “lootenant,”—occasionally appending his name.

This was Crittenden, a name proving him of best Kentucky blood, which was further evinced by his at once placing himself at the service of his newly-elected captain, as the bearer of a challenge to the defeated candidate.

Before midday the terms were arranged between Crittenden and the second of Santander—the duel to take place at an early hour of the following morning.

There was need for this special promptness. On the evening after, the Texan volunteers were to take their departure for the land of the Lone Star, and for certain reasons of an international character they were to start at a late, lone hour of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

ALONG THE SHELL ROAD.

The thick swamp fog still hovered above the house-tops of the Crescent City, when a carriage, drawn by two horses, rolled out through one of its suburbs adjoining the "swamp," and on along the Shell Road, in the direction of Lake Pontchartrain.

There were two men upon the driver's seat and three inside. Of these last one was Captain Florence Kearney, and another Lieutenant Crittenden. The third, by the cut and color of his dress, evidently belonged to a more peaceful profession than that lately taken up by his companions. In fact, the case of instruments carried upon his knees showed him to be that individual who usually makes a third in a duel—in others words, the doctor. He was a young surgeon, who, in this capacity, had attached himself to the Texan volunteers.

Besides the mahogany box balanced upon his thigh, there was another lying on the spare bit of cushion beside him, opposite to where Crittenden sat. It was of

a slightly different shape, and no one who had ever seen a case of dueling pistols could mistake it for anything else. It was one.

What could they be wanting with pistols, since it had been arranged that swords were to be the weapons, and when a pair of these were seen standing up in a corner of the carriage?

It was Kearney who put this question, he for the first time having noticed what seemed a superfluous armament.

The question was asked of Crittenden, to whom the pistols belonged, as might have been learnt by looking at the initials on the indented plate of silver.

“Well,” answered the Kentuckian, “I’m no great swordsman myself. I usually prefer pistols, and thought it might be as well to bring these along. I didn’t much like the look of your antagonist’s friend, and it’s got into my head that before leaving the ground all four of us may have to fight. If it come to that, I shall take to the barkers.”

Kearney smiled, but said nothing more—feeling satisfied that in case of any treachery he had the right sort of man for his second.

He might have felt further secure, in still other

support, seen without the carriage on the box by the side of the driver. This was a man carrying a long rifle that stood straight up, its butt between his heavily booted legs.

It was Cris Rock, who had insisted on coming along, as he said, to see that the fight was all "fair and squar." He too had conceived an unfavorable opinion of both the men to be met, from what he had seen of them at the rendezvous, for Santander's second had also shown himself there. With the usual caution of one accustomed to fighting Mexicans and Comanches, the Texan always went more than half armed; since in addition to his rifle, he always went warned.

On reaching a spot of open ground alongside of the road, and near the shore of the lake, the carriage stopped. It was the place of appointed meeting, as arranged on the preceding day by the seconds.

Though their antagonists had not yet arrived, Kearney and Crittenden got out, leaving the doctor busied among his bandages and cutlery.

"I hope you won't have to use them, Doctor," remarked the young Irishman, with a laugh, as he sprang across the drain that separated the road from

the piece of open ground selected for the arena of the combat.

Crittenden followed, carrying the swords, and the trio took stand under a tree.

Rock remained on the box of the carriage, still seated by the side of the driver. As the field was all under his view and within range of his rifle, he knew that, like the doctor, he would be near enough if wanted.

Ten minutes passed—part of the time in silence, and part in ominous thought.

No matter how courageous a man may be—however skilled in weapons, or accustomed to the deadly use of them—he cannot, at such a crisis, help having some pulsations of painful thought—a tremor of the heart or conscience. He has come here to kill, or be killed ; and either prospect should be sufficient to disturb the coldest equanimity. At such times he who has not natural courage had needs have a good cause as well as skill in the weapon to be used. Florence Kearney possessed all three ; and though it was his first appearance in the dueling field, he had no fear for the result. Even the still, sombre scene, with the long white moss hanging down from the dark cypress

trees like the drapery of a hearse, failed to inspire him with fear. If at times a slight tremor threatened, it was instantly checked by the thought of the insult he had received—and perhaps, also, a little by remembrance of those dark, Spanish eyes that he fancied would flash proudly at his triumph, and weep bitterly over his discomfiture. This thought, if naught else, was enough to give him courage for the encounter.

It was now near at hand, for the rumbling of wheels heard through the drooping festoonery of the trees proclaimed that a carriage was coming along the Shell Road. It could only be that containing the antagonists.

It was. In three minutes after, it stopped upon the road about twenty paces to the rear of the other. Two men got out, who, although shrouded in cloaks and looking colossal through the thick mist, could be recognized as Santander and his second. There appeared to be a third man, who, like the doctor, remained inside the carriage—himself, no doubt, a doctor, making the parties complete.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO THE SALUTE.

The new-comers took off their cloaks, and tossed them back into the carriage; then, turning toward the wet ditch, sprang across it.

Santander leaped awkwardly, coming down upon the bank with a heavy tramp. He was a large, heavy man—unlike one possessing the activity to be a good swordsman.

Kearney might have augured well from this apparent clumsiness on the part of his antagonist, but for what he had heard of him. He was well known among the Creoles of New Orleans as a dangerous adversary in a duel—having twice killed his man. His second, named Duperon, enjoyed a somewhat similar reputation, having been several times engaged in affairs that had resulted fatally. At that period New Orleans was emphatically the city of the duello—for this bad speciality perhaps the most noted city in the world.

The young Irishman knew the sort of man he had to meet, and knowing it—besides its being his first time to attempt taking life—he might well be excused for having some uneasiness about the result. It was but slight; not enough to show itself either in his looks or gestures. Confiding in his skill, proved in many an encounter with buttoned foils, supported, too, by a tried and courageous second, he felt nothing that could be called fear. And as his antagonist advanced towards the spot where he was standing, a glance at the handsome yet sinister face—a thought of Luisa Valverde, and the remembrance of the insult put upon him in her presence, restored his nerves to their wonted tranquillity and strength. The confident, almost swaggering air with which the Creole made his approach, instead of shaking them—the effect, no doubt, intended—only stiffened them like Bessemer steel.

As Santander and his second advanced towards the centre of the inclosure, Crittenden, leaving his stand under the tree, stepped forth to meet them, Kearney following a pace or two behind.

A sort of quadruple bow was all the salutation

made, when the principals stood apart, the seconds coming nearer and commencing the conference.

A few preliminary words passed; only a few were required; the ground, the weapons, and the giving of the word had been all prearranged.

There was no talk of apology—no thought of such a thing being either offered or accepted. Challenged and challenger both, by their looks, showed full determination to fight. Duperon did not seem to care, and the Kentuckian was not the sort to seek peace when insult demanded war.

After the preliminaries were fixed and agreed upon, the seconds again separated—each to assist his principal in stripping.

The young Irishman simply took off his coat, turning his shirt sleeves up to the elbow.

The Creole, throwing off his coat, discovered a red flannel shirt, the sleeves of which he rolled up to the shoulder-blade, displaying a pair of strong, sinewy arms.

All was done in silence, not a word passing on either side between second and principal. Everything was silent: the horses in their carriages, the drivers seated on the box, the doctors inside, the gigantic

Texan, looming doubly large through the still lingering mist—all kept silent as the tomb. And the fog drifting around, and the long, silvery Spanish moss, resembling funereal shrouds, hanging from the dark limbs of the cypresses—each seemed a pall spread over the scene. And the forms of the four men, magnified by the mist, and moving silently over the ground, presented a weird, ghost-like tableau, as if they had been demons preparing to do some deed of dark horror.

In the midst of the tomb-like silence a voice broke in, coming down from the top of the tall cypress. Its strange, wild intonation was sufficient to startle and quail the stoutest heart. It was a shrill, long-continued cachinnation that could be likened to nothing human, unless to the laughter of a maniac.

It frightened no one there, for they well knew what it was. All of them had heard, and often before, the cry of the white-headed eagle. The young Irishman was least acquainted with it; still he knew what it was.

The sharp cackling ceased, but before its echoes had ended their reverberations through the trees, another sound, equally frightful, and far more lugu-

brious, fell upon the ear. It was the whoo-whoowhooa of the great Southern owl, that came from below, seeming like a groan from the dark depths of the forest in answer to the laugh of the eagle.

This is a sound that in all countries, and throughout all ages, has been superstitiously regarded as an omen of death. It might have dismayed the duelists had they been men of only ordinary courage. But neither seemed to be, for as the owl's hooting ceased, with bared arms and rapiers upraised, they advanced upon one another, with but one look and one thought—*to kill.*

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE DEATH.

For a moment the duelists stood confronting one another in the position of "Salute," both hands aloft grasping their swords at hilt and point, the blades held horizontally above their heads. The seconds were duly in their places, each to the left hand of his principal and half a pace in advance. It was but a moment, waiting for the word. The challenger had the right to give it, and Crittenden was not the man to "keep the stage waiting."

"Engage!" he pronounced, in a firm, clear voice, stepping a half pace forward, Duperon doing the same. The step was a precaution against foul play, sometimes, though not always, intended. In the excitement of such a moment, and under the impatience of angry passion, one or other of the principals may close too quick. It is the duty of the seconds to prevent it.

On the word, both came "to guard" with a col-

lision that struck sparks from the steel. It proved the hot anger of the adversaries ; had they been cooler they would have crossed swords quietly ; and when, the instant after, they came to " tierce," both appeared more collected, their blades keeping in contact, and gliding around each other as if they had become one. For nearly five minutes this cautious play continued without further sparks from the steel. Of these enough could be seen shooting from the eyes of the combatants. And then came a counter thrust, quickly followed by a counter parry, with no advantage to either.

Long before this an observer skilled in sword exercise could have seen that Kearney was the better swordsman. In changing from *carte* to *tierce*, or reversely, while the Creole bent his elbow, exposing his forearm to the point of his antagonist's weapon, the young Irishman showed himself possessed of the power to keep a straight arm, doing the work with his wrist.

It is a rare accomplishment among swordsmen—when present, insuring success, other circumstances being equal.

In Kearney's case, it perhaps proved the saving of

his life, since it seemed to be the sole object of his antagonist to thrust in upon him, regardless of his own guard. The long, straight point, from shoulder far outstretched, and never for an instant obliquely, prevented him.

The Creole felt surprise—astonishment, something approaching fear ; and for the first time in his dueling experience, since it was the first time he had encountered an adversary with a *straight arm*. From the way he played with the rapier, it was evident he cared but little for his guard, placing his sole dependence on the thrust. And it was just in his guard he found his adversary superior—beyond his expectation—beyond any one he had fought with before.

But Florence Kearney had been taught tierce as well as carte, and knew how to practice it. In the first few passes he was prevented from trying it, owing to the impetuous thrusts of Santander keeping him all the time on guard. But as the sword-play proceeded, he discovered the weak points of his adversary, and with a well-directed thrust, sent his blade through the outstretched arm, impaling it from wrist to elbow.

A suppressed cry of triumph escaped the Ken-

tuckian's lips, while his looks, directed towards Duperon, seemed to ask :

“Are you satisfied?”

The question was then formally put.

Duperon looked at Santander, though without much show of interrogating him. It was evident he knew what the answer would be.

“*A la mort!*” [To the death!] cried the Creole, with deadly resolution in his eyes.

“To the death be it!” was the response of the young Irishman, now for the first time showing anger. And no wonder. He was fighting with a man determined on taking his life.

There was a momentary pause, of which Santander availed himself, hastily whipping a handkerchief around his wounded arm.

It was a permission not strictly according to the code, but granted by his gallant antagonist.

When the two closed and came to guard again, the seconds were no longer by their sides. At the words “*a la mort,*” they had immediately withdrawn—each to the rear of his principal—as is the rule in a duel to the death. Their *rôle* now was simply to look on, with no right of interference unless there should

be foul play. But this could not occur. It was no longer a question of sword skill, or who drew first blood. In the words *a la mort* is conveyed a peculiar meaning—well known to duelists. It is a challenge that gives free license to kill—as you can.

It was followed by silence, if possible more profound than before, while the attention of the spectators, in deep earnestness, seemed to redouble itself.

For a time the only sound heard was a whirling of wings. The fog had drifted away, and several large black birds were seen circling in the air above, looking down with stretched necks, as if they, too, were interested in the spectacle passing below. No doubt they were, for they were auriculated vultures, and saw, if they did not smell it, that blood was being spilt.

And once more from the tree-tops came the mocking, maniac laughter of the eagle, and out of the dark depths, through long, shadowy arcades, the hootings of the owl.

Disregarding these ominous sounds, each a death-warning in itself, the combatants once more closed, crossing their sword-blades with a clash that frightened owl, eagle and vulture into silence.

CHAPTER X.

FOUL PLAY.

Though the combat recommenced, on both sides, with increased anger, there was not much outward sign of it. On neither side was there any rash sword-play. If both had lost temper they still kept control of their weapons; and their guards and points, though perhaps more quickly succeeding, were given with as much skill as ever.

Again Kearney felt surprised at the rapidly repeated thrusts of his antagonist, keeping him all the time on the defensive; while the Creole appeared equally discomforted by that far-stretching arm with an elbow never bent. Six inches more added to the length of his rapier blade, and in less than six seconds the Irishman would have had it in his heart or between his ribs.

Twice or three times its point touched him, penetrating the flesh upon his breast and drawing blood, till his shirt bosom showed red almost as that of his

antagonist. But blood was now nothing; both were bedaubed with it. Even the grass over which they trampled looked as if the skies had been raining red.

For over a quarter of an hour, the sanguinary struggle continued, without any marked advantage to either, though terrible to behold. The combatants themselves had become thus to look upon. The shirt of the young Irishman, of fine white linen, showed butcher-like in its crimson blotching; his hands, too, were ensanguined, grasping the hilt of his rapier—not with his own blood, but with that of his adversary's that had run back along the blade. Still his face was unstained save by some thinly scattered drops dashed over it by the play of the sword-blades.

Not so that of Santander. Bending too far forward to put in a point the Creole had given Kearney a chance, resulting to himself in a punctured cheek, the scar of which would be certain to disfigure him for life.

It was this that brought the combat to an end, or, at all events, to its last concluding strokes.

Santander was a man proud of his personal appear-

ance, and, as already admitted, with reason. On receiving the thrust, and feeling his cheek laid open, he suddenly lost all command of himself, and with a fierce oath sprang towards his antagonist, seemingly regardless of the consequence.

He succeeded in making a thrust, though not the one intended. He had aimed for his adversary's heart, but, missing it, his blade passed through the buckle of Kearney's braces, and for an instant was entangled in the tough leathern strap.

Only for a second; but this was all the skilled swordsman wanted. For the first time since the fight began his elbow was seen to bend. It was done to obtain room for a thrust, and the thrust was sent, to all appearance, home.

Every one on the ground expected to see Santander fall. The sword-blade should have passed through his body, splitting the heart in twain; for it was a thrust sent direct and in full force from the shoulder. Instead, the point of the rapier did not appear to penetrate—not even an inch. As it struck there was heard a sound like the chinking of coin in a purse, and almost simultaneously the snap of a breaking blade.

And this it was. As seconds and spectators looked

on, both alike surprised, they saw the young Irishman holding a half sword in his hand—the other half gleaming among the grass at his feet.

Only a dastard would have taken advantage of the sinister mischance, as Santander did, or attempted to do. Quickly drawing back his blade, he brought it once more to tierce, and was rushing forward to thrust his now defenceless antagonist, when Crittenden, calling out, "foul play," sprang forward to prevent him.

The Kentuckian might have been too late, and in a moment more Florence Kearney would have been stretched lifeless along the sword, but that another saw foul play—one who had been suspecting it all along. The sword of Santander flying off, as if struck out of his grasp, his arm dropping down by his side, with a stream of blood pouring from the tips of his fingers, were things simultaneous with the crack of a rifle, a cloud of blue smoke puffing up over one of the carriages, and half-concealing a colossal figure seated on the box, from whom, quickly following, came the cry :

"Take that, darn ye, for a treetor an' a coward ! Strip the skunk ! He's got sumthin' under his shirt ; I heerd the clink o' it."

While giving tongue to this strange talk, the giant had sprung down from the driver's seat, and the next instant was seen emerging out of the smoke of his own shot, and coming at a run towards the spot occupied by the combatants.

In a dozen long strides he was in their midst; and before either of the parties, both alike surprised, could interfere, he had caught Santander by the throat, and torn open the breast of his shirt.

Underneath these was another shirt, not of flannel, not cotton, but *steel*!

Yes: there, sure enough, was a covering of chain armor incasing the chest of the duelist, as impenetrable to a sword thrust as a targe of solid iron!

Pen cannot describe the scene that succeeded.

"Shall we kill or duck him?" shouted the indignant Texan.

"Both!" responded the drivers of the two hackney carriages, who, seeing what had transpired, sprang simultaneously from their seats and came on into the meadow.

"Let's duck him first, and then hang him arterward," suggested the jehu whose vehicle had been chartered by the Texan.

“Agreed!” was the response of the other young man.

It came near being done. But the other parties were not vindictive. Cris Rock alone had to be restrained from taking summary vengeance upon the duelist who had perpetrated such a deception. He would have drawn his bowie-knife and slaughtered him on the spot had he not been restrained by Crittenden.

“Mr. Rock, let the scoundrel go,” counseled the Kentuckian. “If he’s got a spark of conscience left, it will punish him worse than either shooting or hanging.”

“Conscience!” scornfully answered the Texan. “The skunk don’t know what it means. But you’re right, Lootenant Crittenden. I won’t pisen the blade o’ my bowie by stickin’ it into his cowardly karkidge.”

“You, sir!” said Crittenden, turning suddenly towards Santander’s second. “Have you got anything to say or do? If you have, I’m ready for you.”

“Nothing,” answered the man, with a look of ludicrous resignation. “I must admit there’s been something of a mistake, that’s given me as much surprise

as it has you. I'm sorry, but my principal is alone responsible for it."

"Take my advice, then," whispered the Kentuckian. "Get yourself and your principal off the ground, quick as possible. If you don't, I shan't answer for it that in less than ten minutes you'll both be strung up by the neck to the branch of one of these cypresses. For Heaven's sake, go quick!"

The admonition did not need to be repeated. Neither the Creole nor his second waited for their carriage, the driver of which refused to take them back. Along the Shell Road they were compelled to return, Santander still weighted with his steel shirt. But this was only a feather compared with the disgrace he might expect from the exposure.

CHAPTER XI.

RETURNED FROM EXILE.

The roofs of most Mexican houses are flat, with a parapet, three or four feet in height, running around them. This is for protection against falling off, as well as for privacy. It screens them against the gaze of persons passing along the street. Thus shielded, they become favorite places of retreat for the members of the family. Indeed, the roof may be deemed the pleasantest part of a Mexican dwelling, especially after the sun has got low down in the heavens, and the clear, pure sky of Anahuac arches over them like a concave hemisphere of stained glass.

At such an hour, and from such point of view, the scene on all sides around the City of Mexico is one of wonderful attractiveness. It is a circular panorama, showing upon its field almost every object of interest known to the earth: vast green plains surrounding large sheets of water—placid lakes that reflect the shadows of high, towering mountains whose

summits terminate in snow—cultivated fields bristling with the grand maguey plant, its spinous leaves radiating in every direction—towers and their turrets—the domes and spires of churches—the more massive structures of monastery or convent; encircling all, as suitable frame for such a splendid picture, the grand Cordilleras of the Andes, their slopes darkly shadowed with forests of the long-leaved pine, their summits shining, in strange contrast, under a mantle of never-melting snow.

Who could look up to Popocatepec without feeling an inspiration of the soul? or gaze upon Ixticihuatl, the white nun, recumbent upon her back, without being touched by the sublimity of the scene?

And yet upon one of the housetops of Mexico—one of its most palatial residences—there stood a young lady whose thoughts were but little in unison with the scene. For her the snowy cone of Popocatepec had no attraction, and if she looked at the white nun, it may have been to reflect that she, too, might be happier wearing the veil and vestments of a convent.

It was Luisa Valverde who thus solemnly

reflected. Her father returned from his long period of banishment, his estates restored, herself re-established as one of the reigning belles of the Mexican metropolis—all this, and yet she was not happy!

And why? Because her heart was not there. It had been lost in the land where she had lived in exile. Neither was it now there; for he who had it in his keeping, like herself, had left that land, and she even knew not whether he still lived. She knew that Florence Kearney—for it was he who had her heart—had gone to Texas to fight against her own country. She had heard all about the issue of the ill-fated Mier expedition—of the gallant struggle made by the devoted band, and, also, the terrible havoc their ranks had sustained—of the after-march of the survivors as chained captives towards the City of Mexico—of the cruel treatment and tortures they endured on the long, toilsome journey—of their daring attempt at escape from their guards—its successful achievement—their sufferings among the mountains, compelling them to a second surrender—and, lastly, the vengeful decimation that succeeded their recapture—in short, everything that had happened to that noble band of

filibusters in which Florence Kearney was a captain.

She had been in Mexico most of this time ; for it was shortly after the departure of the Texan volunteers that her father had received his pardon, with permission to return. She had watched the expedition through every step of its progress—had eagerly sought and collected all information that could be obtained about the Texan filibusters, as they were called, and with anxious thoughts had perused every list of the slain that had been published by the papers of Mexico. All her inquiries tended towards one object, and were made for the sake of one man—the only one belonging to the expedition whom she knew, and, of course, the only one she could care for.

She had not succeeded in hearing anything of him. There was not even the mention of his name in any of the official reports, but these were scant and but little reliable. Now and then names had been given, and there was the list of those shot by decimation at Salado.

Luisa Valverde's heart throbbed apprehensively as she read it over. It was more tranquil after she had finished reading, and was assured that Florence Kear-

ney was not one of the seventeen who had been so cruelly executed. Still she was only tranquilized, not satisfied. He might have been among those who fell upon the streets and housetops of Mier, or those who succumbed to a still more horrible form of death among the mountains.

The time had at length arrived when she would ascertain his fate to a certainty. The Mier prisoners, after months of weary marching, fatigued and foot-sore, had at length reached the capital of Mexico. Upon that very day had they been installed in one of its strongest prisons; but on the moment of their arrival she had sent a trusty messenger to make inquiries and ascertain if among their number was one named Florence Kearney.

It was time for this messenger to have reported; and in the solitude of the housetop, with a heart full of anxious doubts and fears, she was now awaiting his return.

She stood by the front parapet, looking over into the street. It was the street called Capuchinos, by which the messenger must come. Crowds of people were passing to and fro along the footwalk on both

sides ; but among them was not the man she so eagerly expected.

There was a step on the stone stairs behind her—some one coming up to the roof. She heard, without heeding it; for it was light, and she knew it was not the footstep of a man. She did not even turn round till accosted by a voice soft and sweet as her own, and on turning, saw a face almost as fair as her own.

There was no surprise. The new-comer was her cousin, Ysabel Almonte, at the time staying with her. And yet, after regarding the latter for a moment Luisa Valverde did feel something of surprise. The face was that of a sparkling brunette, habitually wreathed with smiles, but now wearing an expression of sadness.

“What is it, Ysabel?” she quickly inquired. “You have news that is not good?”

The answer was looked for with anxiety. She who put the question was thinking only of her own affairs, and Ysabel was the sharer of her secret. Had her messenger come back unobserved, and imparted some sinister tidings to her cousin, dreading to tell them directly to herself? If so, they were of death.

It was a relief to her when Ysabel fell sobbing upon her breast, crying out as she did so :

“Ill news indeed ! O, Luisa—Luisita—they have taken Ruperto a prisoner !”

“Only that ?” muttered Luisa to herself. “I wish that he, too, were a prisoner ; then there would still be hope.”

The words were not intended for the ear of Ysabel ; and she heard only the last of them.

“There is a hope !” she exclaimed, suddenly raising her head from the bosom on which she had rested it. “He shall be set free again, if I have to sacrifice my whole fortune—my life—in giving him his liberty. O, Luisa, you don’t know how much I love Ruperto Rivas. Enough to die for him—at his side—aye, even by the *garrote*. You cannot understand a love like mine !”

“Can I not ?” answered her cousin, looking a little displeased. “You forget, Ysabel, how I have suffered for Florencio.”

“Pardon me, dearest Luisa. I scarcely know what I say, I’m so distressed about Ruperto. And, what makes it worse, they’ve taken him under the accusation of being a robber ! Pepita has been out upon

the streets and heard them say so. Only think of it! my brave, beautiful Ruperto to be called a common robber! False, degenerate Mexicans! The purest patriot among them all is Don Ruperto."

"Where and how was he taken?"

"The night before last—in the village of San Augustin. I haven't heard how—it's Pepita who's told me all; she heard that some false friend had betrayed him to the soldiers of Santa Anna. He must have been betrayed, for my Ruperto is not the man to be— Ha! look there along the street! José! He may be able to tell us more."

Luisa did look along the street, and saw the individual thus indicated. She saw him with an eye that expressed a deeper interest in his approach than did that of her cousin; for he was the messenger she had been so anxiously expecting.

José was only a domestic in Don Ignacio's establishment, and but a young man, though a servant of old standing, loved and trusted. He was at the time acting as coachman, having charge of the carriages and horses. In two minutes after being seen on the street he had ascended to the housetop and stood in the presence of the young ladies—both confronting

him with questions that called for quick answers. Those put by his proper mistress were first replied to, though she heard little besides the response given to her first interrogatory.

Florence Kearney was one of the Texan prisoners that had just been brought in.

This was enough for all. He still lived, and there was a hope of saving him. She, too, would sacrifice fortune—even life—to set him free. The same sentiment but the moment before expressed by her cousin was equally strong in her mind. She could die for him—at his side—even by the garrote.

It was only after a time that she felt calm enough to listen to all the information José had collected during his absence. Nor was it much beyond that already imparted. He had gone out to Tacubaya, where the Texans had been taken—most, not all of them. His inquiries had been attended with some difficulty, owing to the surliness of the soldier who still guarded the prisoners ; but José's young mistress had prudently provided him with a purse, by which he had found a way to remove all obstacles and obtain the information sought for. It was, that two of the Texan captives, one a man of gigantic stature,

and the other, who had been an officer in the expedition, and whose name was Florence Kearney, had, before entering the City of Mexico, been separated from the rest, and taken, as it was believed, to the prison of the Acordada.

“To the Acordada !” exclaimed Luisa Valverde, in a tone that told of some misgivings. “O, mercy ! Separated from the rest and taken to the Acordada ?”

José could not say why ; but even had he known the reason he would not have found time to tell it, unless in the hearing of two other individuals who, at that moment ascending the stone stairs, joined the ladies on the housetop.

CHAPTER XII.

A CARD FOR THE STATE CARRIAGE.

The two personages who had thus ill-timedly intruded, were both men—and men to whom neither of the young ladies would have thought of intrusting the secrets about which they had just been conversing. On the contrary, one of them was, above all others, the very individual from whom these secrets should be kept.

The first who came up was an elderly gentleman, habited in a costume that proclaimed him of the diplomatic corps, and looking as if he had just left a council of the cabinet.

This was in reality the case, and the gentleman so identified was no other than Don Ignacio Valverde, who had not only received restoration of his property, along with his civic rights, but was now holding a somewhat important office, of a ministerial kind, under the regime of the Provisional President.

His companion, dressed in a splendid uniform that glittered with gold lace, and wearing a plumed chapeau

upon his head—which of course he had taken off in the presence of the ladies—was a younger man, and, as his uniform showed, a military officer. Certain insignia in the way of shoulder-straps and buttons further told him to be of the staff, and still other indications declared it the staff of the Commanding General of the Mexican Army—in other words, the staff of the President-Dictator.

This gorgeously got up individual was no stranger to the ladies of Don Ignacio's household; nor yet to the reader, since he was no other than Carlos Santander, the Creole, and duelist of the steel shirt. None of the above-named parties knew aught of this last, save and excepting the reader. In the eyes of Don Ignacio and his daughter, Carlos Santander was still unblemished so far as his bravery was concerned. They but knew him as a prosperous soldier, and a favorite with the man by whom at the time all favors were dispensed.

“Come, girls!” said Don Ignacio, as he mounted the last step of the stair. “To-morrow you may get yourselves ready for a grand drive. And you are to dress in your grandest style, too. I have an honor for you, for which you are indebted to our friend Don

Carlos here. His excellency, the President, sends us an invitation to accompany him to the Paseo. We are to ride in the State carriages. See here! It is actually written by himself."

Don Ignacio held in his hand a note, upon which appeared certain insignia that showed it to have come from the palace. Opening it with some flourish, he handed it to the ladies. His daughter only glanced at it, and a careful observer might have detected a slight curl of disdain upon her lip as she passed it into the hands of her cousin.

The latter read it with more care, but only out of curiosity. She, too, held the honor lightly—her heart still heavy with the thought that her Ruperto was in prison, in peril of his life from the hostility of him who was bestowing the favor.

Neither of the two made any observation, nor showed sign of being overjoyed. Santander was chagrined by their silent reception of him; but, skilled in concealing his thoughts, he gave no visible evidence of it. Don Ignacio was, perhaps, the most embarrassed of all.

Fortunately, at that moment came relief in the tinkling of a bell below; and at the same time a

domestic stepped out upon the roof to announce, "Dinner upon the table."

Of course, there was a cover set for Santander. There always had been in the house of Don Ignacio—ever since his return to Mexico; the Creole being a frequent guest, and almost looked upon as a member of the family.

To explain this familiar relationship it may be necessary to return a little upon the track of our story, though the reader may have already surmised the circumstances that led to it.

The change in the fortunes of Don Ignacio, or rather their restoration, was due to Santander, though only to a certain extent.

After the duel the tutor had seen nothing more of his pupil, Florence Kearney, the supper having been the last scene of intercourse between them. The day after had been devoted by Kearney to the mustering in of his men, and the day and night following his fight he had been engaged in getting them on board a steamer, that before midnight was gliding stealthily down the river, with steam up, for Galveston, Texas. Without risking arrest he had not had the chance of bidding adieu to his friends in the street Casa Calvo;

nor had they heard any account of the duel beyond that given them by Santander himself, who, knowing that all the hostile witnesses were now out of the way, had vouchsafed a version of it altogether different from the real occurrence, and highly favorable to himself. Three flesh wounds in his arm, which for some time after had been carried gracefully in a sling, proved that he had fought; and although he had not as much as drawn blood from his antagonist, he hinted at having given him a dangerous wound, that in all probability would end in his death. He said this only after the filibustering expedition had departed, and he knew there was not much danger of the falsehood being exposed.

At the time of which we write there was very little intercourse between the Creoles of New Orleans, whether French or Spanish, and the citizens of Saxon or American blood. They dwelt in different districts or "municipalities," as they are called, respectively named, First, Second, and Third; and an event occurring in the First must be a grand affair indeed to become common talk in either of the others. Something of this peculiarity still exists, but not as it was more than a quarter of a century ago.

Santander, then, having succeeded in sealing the lips of his own witnesses—his second and the doctor—the story of the steel shirt never became much known in the lower municipalities, and not at all to the Mexican exile or his daughter. With the latter he may have stood even better than before. Blood shed for woman's sake, whether in her defence or only to win her favor, rarely fails to find it. It was on her account he had challenged, or rather insulted, his antagonist. She had witnessed the insult, and could not be ignorant of the cause of the rivalry that dictated it. For her he had fought this rival, and, according to his own account, defeated him. A tale told in the ears of a Mexican woman that rarely fails to find favor.

For all this it made no impression upon Luisa Valverde, or only a painful one.

But it was far more painful to her to think that he who had been defeated had gone away without calling upon her to say a word of adieu. He had told her of the filibustering expedition, and his late-formed connection with it. She was sad to think he was going away, and yet proud to know he was to be one of its leaders. But why had he not come to speak that

parting word? How could she know that at the last moment there was a design of putting a stop to the expedition and arresting those engaged in it! It never occurred to her that her lover had to leave New Orleans at an hour of the night when she was asleep, perhaps dreaming of him.

The result of all this was that the duel, which should have disgraced Santander forever in her eyes had she but heard the true account of it, so far only seemed to his advantage, and perhaps still more in the eyes of her father. The exile, weary with waiting for a change to come up in his favor—some turn of the political wheel—saw in this strong, bold duelist the man who might benefit and befriend him; and who, for the sake of his daughter, would do both.

It ended in the procuring of a conditional pardon from the despot of Mexico, which Santander easily obtained, and the return of Valverde to his native land.

It did not at first give him full restoration of his estates, nor the diplomatic honors he was now enjoying. A portion of the first, and all of the last, came after the dictator had set eyes upon his daughter, and

saw that she was fair. Those who know the character of Santa Anna will need no more minute explanation of why Don Ignacio Valverde was now in favor at court.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER DINNER.

The dinner passed without anything particularly disagreeable. Indeed, Luisa was more cheerful than her wont. Don Ignacio attributed this to the honors she was expecting to receive on the morrow. It was but natural that a young girl should feel pride in being displayed as one of the belles of the court, in the train of a dictator, for Santa Anna was now really such. He little dreamt what was the true cause of that slight exhibition of gayety. It was because she now knew her lover to be a prisoner, which was better than to think that he was dead.

Ysabel, contrary to *her* habit, was the reverse of cheerful.

She, too, was thinking of her lover, a prisoner ; but this was not better than to believe that he was free, even with the reputation of being a robber.

The ride in the State carriage was not much spoken of.

Don Ignacio perceived that the subject was not so congenial as he had anticipated. No doubt the young ladies were both overjoyed at the idea; but, woman-like, they did not wish to make exhibition of their vanity in the presence of a stranger—the gallant and gorgeous officer who sat by their side.

Santander did most of the talking. He was a good talker—too good, in fact—for he did not always confine himself within the limits of truth.

His talk this day was of the greatness and glory of his master, Don Antonio de Santa Anna; how his power had been strengthened by the two last victories over the Texans—alluding to the Santa Fe and Mier expeditions, which had followed each other within a year. The staff officer hinted at an event that might soon be expected—an empire, with, of course, Don Antonio as the wearer of the imperial purple.

“Then,” added he, “we shall have a real court, with all its ceremonies in proper splendor, as they should be. The Mexicans were made for an imperial form of government. Montezuma trained them to it three hundred years ago; and they will never be happy till they return to it.”

The doctrine was not pleasing to Don Ignacio.

The old republican element was still at the bottom of his heart, though he dared not declare it. His long, painful exile was two freshly before him. To himself he did not seem yet so much confirmed—for Santa Anna was at this time still holding the reins of government under the title of Provisional President. But the title meant little now. Under the "Plan of Tacubaya," he held supreme dictatorial power, and ruled in true dictatorial style.

Santander talked much of the Texans—especially the Mier prisoners, who had just reached the city. He called them by all sorts of contemptuous names and made merry at their expense.

While doing this he closely watched the countenance of Luisa Valverde. He could see nothing there to give him a clew to her thoughts, though it cost her a terrible effort to conceal them. She only succeeded by remembering how much he was their enemy—especially the foe of him who was in her thoughts all the while. She knew that any sign of sympathy on her part would shut closer the prison doors upon Florence Kearney.

Santander did not make mention of his name.

Perhaps had he done so she would have been unable to control herself.

When dinner was over the ladies withdrew from the dining-room; and the gentlemen at the same time, both having business that called them back to the palace. Hearing this was a relief to the young girls, who both wanted to be alone.

But before leaving, Don Ignacio had a private interview with his daughter, which, though short, was of the utmost importance.

Then, for the first time, did the ex-preceptor of the Spanish tongue learn that his old pupil, Florence Kearney, was a prisoner in the Acordada.

The object of the interview, on Luisa's part, was to ask her father's intercession in the prisoner's behalf—to entreat it if necessary.

It needed not this. The good in Don Ignacio's nature was not all gone. Despite the glories of his new career he still remembered the noble young Irishman, who, in his hour of adversity, had to some extent befriended him. And despite the danger to himself—the peril to his position, not very securely established—he promised to do all in his power to set the prisoner free.

In that very hour he was to see Santa Anna on business connected with the affairs of Texas. Owing to the experiences of his North American exile, in such matters he was often consulted. He would bring this special question before the Provisional President, and urge it with all the arguments he could think of.

With this promise they parted.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ACORDADA

One of the most noted sights is the City of Mexico—in short, one of its greatest “lions”—is the prison of the Acordada. Few strangers visit the capital of the Montezumas without also paying a visit to this celebrated penal establishment; and few leave it without having seen something of an unpleasant nature, and ever after to be remembered with pain.

Perhaps there is no prison in the world where one may witness so much that is repugnant to the senses—both moral and physical—as inside the jail of the Acordada.

There are cells set apart for every kind of crime known to the criminal calendar; the cloisters—for the Acordada was once a monastery—filled with thieves, forgers, murderers, highway robbers—in short, with criminals of every kind—some of them strong and daring in their villainy, others weak under the wear of some loathsome disease. But they are not at all times

shut up in their cells ; there are open court-yards, where they can all meet in common ; where they squat down upon the flagged pavement, play cards, cheat and curse one another.

Into the midst of this mass of degraded humanity were thrust the unfortunate prisoners captured at the battle of Mier.

Only a few of them were excepted from this degradation, and for reasons that need not here be told, sent elsewhere, the greater number to Tacubaya. But the young Irishman, Florence Kearney, and the Texan, Cris Rock, were not among the exceptions. Both, after a short stay at another prison, were taken from it and became inmates of the Acordada.

It was some consolation to them being permitted to share the same cell, though they would have liked still better to have had it all to themselves.

They had not. Although it was only about six feet by nine—the cloister of some ancient monk, who, no doubt, led a happy life in spite of his circumscribed quarters—it was deemed by the jail governor too big for his brace of Texan “birds ;” and two others, not Texans, were made to share it with them. The third and fourth inmates of the cell were both native Mexi-

cans, and, of course, up to this time unknown to either of their prison "chums."

One was a man who, under more favorable circumstances, would have presented a fine appearance. Even in his prison habiliments, with all the squalor attached to them, he looked as if he had once been a gentleman, and still was—a man. It was a figure of full middle size, with the limbs tersely set, and strongly conjoined together; while his face was of the rotund type, bold in its expression, and yet with something of gentle humanity lying half hidden at the bottom of a dark, penetrating eye. There was no mustache on his lip—only the promise of one from a few days of neglected shaving, which told of the time at which he had become an inmate of the prison.

If permitted to grow, it would have been coal-black, as was the short whisker on his cheek and the thick mass of hair bushing down over his ears and half concealing them. His skin was of that clear olive tint peculiar to the Monico-Spanish race.

Cris Rock "cottoned" to this man at the first glance, and liked him not much the less when told he had been a robber. Cris knew that a robber in Mexico may sometimes be an honest man; or, at all

events, may have taken to the road as the result of some terrible wrong, personal or political. Freebooting becomes less a crime, or one easier of extenuation, in a country whose chief magistrate is himself a freebooter ; and such, at the time, was the chief magistrate of Mexico.

For this reason could Cris Rock, the Texan, look with less repugnance and more leniency on their prison companion, Ruperto Rivas—for such was the name of the incarcerated robber.

Beyond the fact or belief of his being a robber, little seemed to be known of him among the other inmates of the Acordada. Only his name had leaked out, coupled with some reminiscences that proclaimed him to be no common cutthroat, but the chief of a band.

Altogether different was the fourth sharer of the cell ; unlike Ruperto Rivas as the satyr to Hyperion ; mentally unlike, for there was nothing in the robber's face to denote sinister thought ; while the countenance of the other was an epitomized title-page of criminality.

And physically was the contrast even greater ; an actual comparison of extremes. No two human

beings could have been more unlike than the handsome Ruperto Rivas and the horribly deformed dwarf and hunchback who counted No. 4 in the cloister.

Among his fellow-prisoners of the Acordada this last was known by the name of *Zorillo*, or the "little fox," though he was also spoken of as "dwarf hunchback."

Previous to being joined by their new cell-mates the two Mexicans had been chained together, forming a strangely contrasting partnership. For some reason of his own the jail governor now separated them, uniting the dwarf to Cris Rock, the Texan giant—if possible, a still greater contrast of couples; while Florence Kearney and the robber became sharers of the same chain.

A singular tableau was offered in the prison cell after this new assortment. It would have been ludicrous but for the weird wildness that pervaded it; and neither of the two new-comers was in a mood for being merry.

Least of all did Cris Rock like the situation. His heart was big enough to have sympathy with the most wretched specimen of humanity, and he would have pitied his deformed fellow-prisoner but for a deformity

worse even than his physical ugliness. It was that which had made him an inmate of the Acordada ; for Cris Rock soon discovered that the hideous creature to whom he was united by a strong iron chain had committed the most atrocious of crimes—premeditated murder. And this, too, by the most abominable means—by poison. That the wretch had twice taken life by poison was known or generally believed throughout the prison. That he still lived was due to the proofs not being satisfactory ; and the crime for which he was now incarcerated, under a sentence of imprisonment for life, and along with it hard labor, was altogether a different affair.

At first contact with his chain-companion, the Texan had recoiled from him, without knowing aught of his past. On learning this, the proximity became revolting, as no wonder it should. And not the less so, that he knew it was done to punish him for having flung some defiant language at the governor of the jail, besides striking one of his guards.

Vengeance could not have devised a more effective mode of torture. The Texan groaned under it, at times gritting his teeth and stamping his feet as if he

would have crushed the deformed creature beneath them into a still more shapeless deformity.

Kearney could understand why Cris had been thus spitefully punished ; but not why he was himself so ingloriously linked. The other Mier prisoners had not been submitted to this kind of degradation ; only a few had been brought to the Acordada. It is true, they were also chained two and two, but to one another, and not to Mexican criminals. He could not understand why he had been made an exception. He only learnt it on the second day of his being brought to the prison, and just before being compelled to submit to a still further act of humiliation.

It was still early in the morning when the door of the cell was flung open, and by the side of the jail governor, who had ordered it to be opened, was a man Florence Kearney could not fail to remember. It was an officer in full staff uniform, buttoned, be-dizened and beplumed—evidently an aid-de-camp of the Dictator Santa Anna.

In this brilliant personage Kearney recognized his steel-shirted antagonist in the duel at New Orleans.

“Santander—the scoundrel !” involuntarily fell

from his lips, while through the teeth of the Texan were heard expressions savoring still less of respect or politeness.

“Ha-ha! my Yankee friends!” saluted the Creole, in a sneering tone. “A strange place I find you in! Queer company, too,” he added, glancing at the dwarf and then at Rivas, whose back, however, was towards him. “Not quite so pleasant, Monsieur Kearney, as that you used to keep in the Crescent City. But the lady is here now, and one of these days you may have an opportunity of seeing her, and perhaps renewing your acquaintance, though not under quite so favorable circumstances for love-making. The Señor Valverde has given up teaching languages. I presume, however, you are by this time sufficiently acquainted with Spanish not to need further instruction in that fine tongue.

“And you, my giant,” he continued, with a tantalizing sneer at the Texan—“how do *you* like the atmosphere of a Mexican prison? Not quite so pure as that of a Texan prairie; but, then, you are in such interesting company. Ha! ha! ha!”

Rock's eyes appeared as if they would start out of their sockets, while the great arteries upon his throat

seemed swelling to the thickness of cables. But he felt he was powerless, and said nothing.

“Who have we here?” asked Santander, stepping a little inside the cell, and craning his head over the shoulders of the robber in order to get sight of his face. “Ah, indeed! You it is, Señor Ruperto Rivas, who make the fourth comer to this interesting quartette! How strange to meet so many of one’s old friends thus closely united in such a small space, and leading such a quiet, anchoritic life! It beats the old monks—former occupants of this pleasant apartment—all to pieces. Ha! ha! ha!”

Again his laugh rang scornfully through the court, as he turned towards the jail governor, apparently to give some direction. An angry light leaped out from the robber’s eyes, and crossed that glaring from the orbs of the Texan; though neither said a word.

The dwarf seemed rather pleased than otherwise. It gratified him to see this torture inflicted on those who had shown some scorn for him.

“Come, Señor Governor,” said Santander. “These gentlemen—three of them at least—are old acquaintances of mine. It pains me to see them so closely confined. The atmosphere of the Acordada is not

over-salubrious. They want fresh air and exercise. May I ask you, as a personal favor to myself, to give them a turn in the streets? A little promenade would do them an infinite deal of good. What say you?"

"To oblige you, Colonel Santander," replied the jail governor, with a bow, "most certainly your friends shall have the promenade you speak of."

"Thanks, Señor Governor. Good-day, gentlemen! I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you outside! Ha! ha! ha!"

And with a third scornful cachinnation, the plumed poltroon turned away from the cell, whose door, closing behind, hid him from the sight of the infuriated but helpless butts of his cruel jesting.

"What does he mean by this promenade in the streets?" asked Kearney of his chain-companion.

"I think I understand," rejoined the robber. "It will be in the streets—only a little *below* them."

While the young Irishman, mystified by the ambiguous speech, was looking to the Mexican for an explanation of it, the door was once more thrown open, showing a file of soldiers outside."

"*A los zancas!*" cried one, addressing himself to the prisoners inside,

“What do the skunks want?” asked Rock, in Spanish sufficiently good to be intelligible to his Mexican fellow-prisoners.

“Just what I expected,” was the reply of the robber. “They are going to take us to the sewers!”

CHAPTER XV.

A SPLENDID COLONEL.

Carlos Santander, the defeated candidate for a captaincy of Texan volunteers, was now a colonel in the Mexican army, with full pay and appointments. He was, besides, upon the staff of the President-Dictator, with permission to adorn himself in gold lace and ostrich feathers at discretion. Santa Anna always liked a surrounding of gorgeously attired satellites, and the stylish Creole was just the man to please him in this respect. No trogon in all the tropical forests of Mexico was more gaudily brilliant than he; and seen almost daily on his splendid black charger caracoling through the streets, or riding in the retinue of his excellency the President, his fine military appearance prepossessed many people in his favor, and won the secret admiration of more than one dark-eyed señorita.

Under such a full tide of prosperity he should have been supremely happy, or at the least contented.

He was neither one nor the other; but, on the contrary, at times rather miserable. His misery came from that same cause which has apportioned it to millions, and still continues dealing it out to thousands a day.

Love was his disease, and his sorrow the doubt of its being requited. Even his base nature could be stirred by love, and his hard heart tortured with jealousy.

His passion for Luisa Valverde had only become strengthened by time, and he seemed as far as ever from having his heart tranquilized by her consent to become his wife.

He had endeavored to make this the condition for his agency in procuring her father's pardon. He had failed in the bargain, as she had remained firm in the refusal to enter into any such humiliating contract. But he had sought and obtained Don Ignacio's amnesty all the same, hoping that by a show of generous friendship he might yet overcome her resistance to his suit.

There was no positive repugnance on her part, at least none openly exhibited. On the contrary, knowing her father's indebtedness to him, she was ever

affable and polite. Santander had early discovered that with a high-bred and high-spirited girl as she was there could be no badgering nor dictation. He had not attempted either. Anything of this kind had been only communicated in innuendos to her father, who, after long years of depression, had become less sensitive to his patrician dignity.

Such was the relative situation of the parties on their return to Mexico. Santander supposed that then he would still continue to exercise the influence that in New Orleans he had held over the exile, and that in time Luisa would yield. He had hopes that the splendor of his life in the Mexican capital, so different from what he had been able to assume in the mercantile city of the Mississippi, would have its effect upon her, and that, sooner or later, she must surrender to his fascinations.

He was just beginning to discover his mistake. Day by day, and little by little, his power over both father and daughter, instead of increasing, seemed to be upon the wane. Not only did the young lady pay less attention to his complimentary speeches and passionate appeals, but Don Ignacio appeared less

to feel the subservience he had been wont to show him.

The change in the father—if there was any—could be explained easily enough. Don Ignacio, an old Mexican hidalgo, once restored to place, was also restored to an influence with Santa Anna, equal if not greater than that of Santander himself; and therefore stood no longer in need of the latter's support.

The staff colonel was at times reminded of the fable of the Fox and Goat, as also of the husbandman who had so imprudently thawed the snake; though there was, in reality, no reason for him to cogitate thus, for there was no ingratitude on the side of the restored exile. Only that, in any matter with the master of both, Don Ignacio no longer felt the necessity for seeking an intercessor, and therefore did not seek it. Otherwise, he did everything to make acknowledgement of his indebtedness—among the rest, every-day acts of hospitality.

It was the daughter's conduct that gave Santander the greatest chagrin. She, too, treated him with perfect politeness, but at the same time with an air of independence that plainly said, "Hands off, sir, till you are permitted to touch me."

He felt his impotence, and was at times maddened by it.

He endeavored to account for her indifference. He saw her every day surrounded by admirers—by lovers—many of whom would gladly have become husbands. But he could detect no sign that any of them was specially favored any more, or even as much as himself. She appeared to listen to them all alike; to treat all with equal indifference. Had Luisa Valverde determined on dying an old maid? He might have come to this conclusion but for some souvenirs of the past, coupled to certain observations of the present. Since her return to her native city he had frequently noticed her abstracted air, at times approaching to melancholy. He had observed it more especially at such times as mention chanced to be made of the old life in New Orleans, or when anything was said about Texas, or the Texans. He drew his own conclusions. She must still be thinking of his antagonist in that duel, the memory of which never came uppermost in his thoughts without causing a feeling in his heart as if it were weighted with lead. What would she think of him if she but knew the truth of that affair, to him so disgraceful? The

gold lace with which he was now decked and bedizened would have but a dull shine in her eyes.

He had watched with as keen interest as she every move made in the Mier expedition, and knew all along that Kearney was among the captives coming to Mexico. He did not sorrow that he was not one of the decimated at Salado; for he did not wish him dead—not there. His wish—the keenest of his heart—was to see him alive in the City of Mexico, where he would have the opportunity of taking a delicious revenge. And in this wish was Cris Rock included. Brave young Irish gentleman, and brave Texan backwoodsman, could you have known upon your weary march who was awaiting you in the capital of the Montezumas, and what was his determination towards you, you might have had but a faint heart to struggle on to the end of your journey.

And now at last both his intended victims were upon the spot, and his vengeance was soon to be accomplished. It was to end with their death; but not until he had satisfied his spleen by putting them through a course of torture. With regard to Kearney it was something more than spleen; for he had also a policy in it. He intended that the young Irish gen-

tleman should suffer a humiliation in the presence of Luisa Valverde, in hopes that by humbling him before her eyes he might also degrade him in her heart.

For this purpose he had contrived a scheme as base and cunning as that of fighting a sword duel in a steel shirt; and it was in the furtherance of this scheme he had paid that visit to the prison at the Acordada.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VAIN INTERCESSION.

Once more upon the roof of Don Ignacio's dwelling stood Luisa Valverde and her cousin Ysabel. It was on the same day on which Santander had dined at the house, but at a later hour—just as the sun was imprinting his last roseate kiss upon the snowy brow of the "White Sister." It will easily be surmised what they were talking about. It could only be the prisoners, Florencio and Ruperto, and the means of setting both free.

Using all the political influence in their power—that was naturally their first thought.

"It should be easy enough for you," said Ysabel, "so far as your *Tejano* is concerned. What difference can it make to the government, one more or less of these poor fellows! Surely they have enough of them—several hundred, they say. Your father's influence with Don Antonio—that should be sufficient for such a slight favor."

“It is not so much as you think, Ysabel.”

“Well ; there’s that of another to supplement and strengthen it. On your account I know he will do his best.”

“You mean Don Carlos, I suppose ?”

“Of course I do.”

“Dearest cousin, how much you are mistaken. If there was a chance of setting Don Florencio free, Don Carlos would use his influence to prevent it. It is that I am most in dread of. You know not what has passed between them.”

“Indeed ! What ?”

“A duel—and one that ended without reconciliation. I scarcely know how it ended, except as Don Carlos has told us ; but that has proved false, since he led us to believe that Florencio would not long survive it. He had hinted to us that he had given Floriencio a wound that would end in his death. Ah me ! many a sad thought has that story cost me ; for I’d often believed him to be dead. He lives, thanks to the Holy Virgin !”

As the young girl thus spoke she drew from her breast a silver image of the Virgin, and dropping down upon her knees, fervently kissed it.

“Well, cousin,” said Ysabel Almonte, after Luisa had again risen to her feet, “I believe in the Virgin too ; but I’ve also got faith in the influence of men ; and I think your father can do much for you in the matter of Don Florencio. He may also do something for poor Ruperto ; but if both man and the Virgin fail, I mean to try another influence that’s good for something here in Mexico—that’s money. Though I am an orphan, I have the luck of being a rich one—thank Heaven or the Virgin for that.”

The conversation of the two young ladies was here interrupted by a noise heard down stairs. It was merely a voice speaking in the tone of authority used by a master to his servant. It was that of Don Ignacio, who had just returned from the palace, giving some directions to his domestics.

“You go down, Ysabel, and tell father I am up here. And stay below. I would rather see him alone.”

In obedience the amiable Ysabel tripped down the stairs, and communicated the message of her cousin ; which, as soon as he could ascend the long stairway, brought Don Ignacio to the roof. As he reached the last step his daughter flung herself on his breast.

“Well, what news, papa?” was the question put, quick after the affectionate salutation.

“Not so good as I expected, my dear child.”

“What! Do they refuse to set him free?”

“They do, or *he* does; for you know, my daughter, it is altogether at *his* pleasure. If Don Antonio wills it, it must be done. But, alas! he does *not* will it. I don't know why; for surely it can be but little concern to him. What difference can it make about one poor prisoner where there are so many? Besides, Don Florencio is not an American—and, I told his excellency, only a traveller in the United States, who had joined these filibusters, as I urged it, out of a sheer spirit of adventure.”

“O, father! For what reason were you refused? Did he give you any?”

“Only that it would not be compatible with the safety of the State, or, as he said, its dignity. He spoke bitterly against the Texans, and, I honestly believe, would have every one of them hanged, or garrotted, if it wasn't for his fear of their powerful protector—the United States.”

“But Don Florencio is not a Texan—not even an

American. Why should Santa Anna feel spite against him?"

"Ah, why? There, my dear daughter, you approach a point. You forget the duel between Don Florencio and the Señor Santander. I have reason to suspect that Don Carlos is at the bottom of this refusal. I learned that he had been before me, and it is quite natural his influence should be greater than mine. As you know, he is an older friend and favorite than I."

"Papa! did you tell his excellency *I* wished it?"

There was a strange cast upon the countenance of the young girl as this question passed from her lips.

"I did, Luisa."

"What said he in reply?"

"He was sorry he could not concede what you requested—made many apologies for not doing so, and dismissed me by saying that he was willing to grant you an interview, and hear what you had to say upon the subject."

"Indeed!"

The exclamation was in a suppressed tone, spoken to herself more than to her father. It ended the conversation on the housetop: for at that moment some

one entering below requested an interview with her father.

Don Ignacio went down first. His daughter lingered for a few seconds at the head of the stairway, as if she had stopped to reflect.

She had ; and soon after, the reflection took the shape of a resolution, expressed in six short words :

“I shall go to him myself !”

The phrase came emphatically from her lips, and as if at once to carry out the determination it referred to, she descended the stone stairway with a quick, firm step, turned aside into her own chamber, then flinging a shawl hood-fashion over her head and shoulders, and without saying a word to any one, came forth once more, and descending the lower stair, passed silently out into the street.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE SEWERS.

In all cities, great or small, there is a main line of traffic—a street where the shops sell richer goods, and show them in finer front windows—in short, the fashionable street.

In the City of Mexico this is the *Calle de Plateros*, or “Street of the Silversmiths,” so called from the fact that there the jewelers and dealers in silverware do most congregate. It is of an afternoon the favorite promenade of the pedestrian, where the gilded youth of Tenochtitlan sport patent-leather boots, and smiling señoritas flirt fans over cheeks blushing like the blossoms of the grenadine.

These pedestrians of the Calle de Plateros are only on their way to the Alameda, a beautiful park-like garden, which is the goal of their afternoon expedition. On reaching this they saunter along smoothly-gravelled walks, or sit under grand shade-trees around a circular fountain whose waters are supplied by the

springs of the Chapultepec—watching its crystal jet—the golden youth twirling tiny canes between kid-gloved fingers, the dark-eyed señoritas still continuing to flirt their fans—both, by these respective actions, speaking a language to each other only understood by the initiated. It is usually the language of love, and not unfrequently the silent but expressive tongue of intrigue.

The “Street of the Silversmiths” ends at the gate of the Alameda ; but only in name. The same line of causeway and curbstone is continued nearly a half mile farther on, to the fashionable drive of the *Paseo* called Bucarelli ; to distinguish it from another “paseo,” that of *Los Vigos*, away on the opposite side of the city, and only fashionable during the days of Lent. At all other seasons the street leading to the *Paseo Bucarelli*—at a certain hour in the afternoon—is the channel of a stream of carriages, some drawn by mules, some by Mexican mustangs, and a few by large American horses known as “grisonés,” each carriage with its bevy of dark-eyed and bareheaded señoritas, their raven locks sparkling with jewels, or bedecked with fresh flowers. And alongside the carriages go prancing steeds, carrying high-peaked

stamp-leather saddles, and ridden by smartly equipped cavaliers, each apparently using the utmost strength of his arms to control his horse, while with spurred heels he is, at the same time, doing his best to render him uncontrollable.

Every day in the year—except during Lent—such a scene may be witnessed in the street of Plateros, and further on in that of San Francisco, which continues it—the latter so-called from the grand old convent alongside whose cloistered walls for several score of yards runs the curbstone.

But in the same street, and in front of the same convent, may often be observed a spectacle less resplendent, and with groupings anything but gay.

Along the centre of the street runs a sewer; not, as in Northern cities, permanently covered up, with here and there gratings to give access to it, but a drain, loosely flagged over, the flags being removable at will. It is, in reality, not a sewer, but a “zanca,” or sink—a place of deposit for the sewerage of the city, to be emptied, not by drainage—a thing impossible where there is neither slope nor water-shed—but by human hands—by scoops, shovels, and carts.

At periodical intervals this sewer-sink requires

cleaning out, else the City of Mexico would be buried under the overflow of its own mud, foul with the filthiest of odors. At such times of necessity the oblong flags are taken up and rolled to one side, the mud is first exposed to view, and then, with all its sickening perfume, tossed out upon the street.

Who performs the disgusting task? In the mild climate of Mexico there are but few men compelled to work or starve, and even the pauper shrinks from such employment. It has to be done by the *condemned* convict.

And when these are scarce—which is not often the case—the task devolves on those prisoners who may still be awaiting their trial without reference to their condemnation or acquittal.

So was it allotted to Florence Kearney and Cris Rock, with their fellow-prisoners.

Though at first a little mystified by the command, “A los zancas,” they were soon inducted into its meaning by being marched to the street of San Francisco, and there compelled to descend, over waist deep, into a sewer, and with shovels thrust into their hands, told to toss out its inky contents upon the pavement.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when they were first brought out, just as the wealth, beauty and fashion of the Mexican metropolis had awakened from its noonday repose, and now, lolling in carriages or seated on capering steeds, were making their way towards the Paseo, to enjoy the afternoon drive.

Down the street of San Francisco glided the gay stream—a current composed of many varied and strange forms of equipage. Here the splendid barouche, imported from England, or the States, and drawn by its pair of high-stepping horses, also an importation, with liveried driver upon the box; there rolled lumberingly along the old family coach that looked as if it had come into the country with Cortez and his conquistadores, a double team of large mules dragging it along, and a huge-hatted Mexican servant mounted *a la postillion* on the off leader. There, too, was the hack, with its sharp-witted driver, as seen all over the world; the “calero,” bearing some resemblance to a Rockaway wagon; and here and there an English Stanhope phaeton, carrying a brace of “bloods” of the kind not peculiar to Mexico.

Interspersed with the carriages, or riding alongside of them, were horsemen of different styles and costumes, most of them mounted on the small Mexican horse, ever curveting, though here and there might be seen a sober, senatorial gentleman astride an animal of the imported breed, less prone to prancing. But the greater number were of the light, fiery Andalusian race, their little, jacketed riders, by a sly prick of the spur, keeping their fire up in order to exhibit their horsemanship before the dark eyes flashing like coals of fire from the inside of the carriages. These cavaliers were the "gilded youth" of Mexico, though looking far less like it than several "rancheros" (men from the country) who were also seen riding in the crowd, some of them accompanied by their wives or daughters, who had come to see city sights; these last with broad-brimmed, masculine hats upon their heads, and seated in their saddles after the fashion set by the celebrated Duchess de Berri.

It was, in truth, a curious and attractive cavalcade, or procession, it might be called, though it possessed little attraction for the shackled prisoners who toiled in the sewer below.

And as little curiosity had the gay sparks on horse-

back or the languishing lollers on carriage cushions about the jail-birds from the Acordada, chained two and two, one standing neck deep in the zanca, scooping out its fetid filth, the other shoveling it aside, with their soldier guards standing over them, as like jail-birds as themselves. This was no new sight to the pleasure-seekers bent towards the Paseo. If it caused a reflection, it was when the dainty nose was turned askant to escape the disagreeable odor; and then it was a wish that the dirty work could be dispensed with, and a wonder that it should not be performed at some other time than when the votaries of fashion and pleasure were on their way to the afternoon drive.

If there was any curiosity exhibited by the passing crowd it was at sight of two Texan prisoners, now seen for the first time in company with Mexican convicts cleaning out the sewers of the city.

Cris Rock and Florence Kearney were the two, the Texan giant still coupled to his dwarf, while near at hand was the young Irishman with the robber at the end of his chain. The former couple, so strikingly contrasted in size, at times drew the attention of the dames and cavaliers, and a look of wonder, an ex-

clamation, or a whispered word, would pass between them ; but the carriages rolled on, the steeds prancing beside them as before, and the manacled and mud-stained toilers were soon forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MUTUAL RECOGNITION.

For over an hour the tide of gay and glittering humanity kept flowing on, each party in passing making some remark about the strange group seen toiling with the chain-gang of the Acordada. Cris Rock was down in the sewer, and therefore did not seem so gigantic, except to those acquainted with its depth, while his chain-partner worked upon the edge. Within a few feet of them were Kearney and the robber.

But without the additional attraction of the dwarf the Texan was a sight in himself. He was bespattered all over with black mud, though it was little blacker than the scowl upon his brow. Nearly every shovelful thrown out by him was accompanied by a curse sent hissing through his teeth, with now and then a muttered threat—such as that if he should ever get “cl’ar o’ that scrape and back agin to Texas, the Mexikins mout look out for partickler forked lightnin’,”

The young Irishman was not less impatient under the infliction. He was silent; but it was that sort of silence that told how deeply he felt the degradation to which he was being submitted.

And why? There was cause for the question. Only they, of all the Texan prisoners, were being so treated, for they had heard of none other. But indeed Kearney knew the cause without asking the question. Santander's presence in the prison explained all.

But far more disagreeable than even the disgusting task—far more afflicting to his spirit, were reflections and conjectures of another kind that had been passing through his mind ever since that interview with his old antagonist. The information given by the latter had startled and pained him. Luisa Valverde in Mexico, and the taunt about his having the opportunity of again seeing her—of “renewing the acquaintance under circumstances less favorable for love-making.”

Had she come back to the country along with Santander, and as his willing companion? He (Kearney) had known the story of Don Ignacio's exile, and something of its cause, but nothing of his future plans and prospects. He remembered him speaking of Santa Anna as his greatest enemy. Santa Anna was still in

power. Had Don Ignacio been pardoned, and permitted to return to his country, his daughter along with him? or had she returned alone in the company and under the protection of Santander? Had she married the wretch, and was she at that moment his wife?

In this form the conjecture was a fearful one. Nevertheless he could not avoid giving credence to it. It became almost a conviction, as he pondered on that taunting, triumphant speech, and his spirit groaned within him.

While flinging out the mud, and thus gloomily reflecting, there came a murmur along the street, such as usually precedes some exciting incident or occurrence. Almost on the instant arose the cries, which we translate :

“Long live Santa Anna, the illustrious !”

And then a carriage came slowly along, gilded like the coach of a London lord mayor, and preceded by a troop of splendidly uniformed cavalry, with another troop behind, forming its escort. It was an open barouche, with two men inside seated on the back cushions. In him of dark complexion—doubly dark from the habitual frown upon his face, the prominent,

nearly aquiline nose, and quick, sharp glance, sinister and sensuous, the Texans recognized the skulker of San Jacinto—he who, when taken prisoner on that famed battle-field, had promised, by his honor and upon his oath, never again to question their claim to independence. False to both honor and oath, to the sworn parole—by which he had been permitted to return to his country, instead of swinging, as he should have done, from a Texan tree—he had since not only questioned, but assailed it. Their presence in the sewers of Mexico was sufficient proof.

Cris Rock knew the traitor well—his countenance, person, everything. Kearney could tell who it was by the surroundings and the cries sent forth.

But the young Irishman only glanced at him. His eyes and his thoughts were upon the other man—the venerable looking gentleman who sat composedly by Santa Anna's side. Despite the change of dress—the coat of diplomatic cut—he recognized his old New Orleans tutor, Don Ignacio Valverde!

He had scarcely time to reflect on the unexpected apparition when it passed out of his sight—the carriage, its occupants, and its escort. And before he could recover from his astonishment at the strange

companionship thus presented to his view, another spectacle far more painful, if not more surprising, was passing before his eyes.

A second carriage came along, closely following the rear-guard troop of dragoons. It was also an open barouche, with two ladies reclining against its cushioned back, while an officer in full uniform, gaudy with gold lace, rode on horseback close alongside it, and bending over as if in conversation with the ladies.

One of these Kearney did not know, nor did he spend a thought upon her.

For he knew the other, and the officer alongside—both of them too well. The former was Luisa Valverde, the latter Don Carlos Santander!

His heart sank within him at the sight. His darkest conjectures were all true. His rival—his cowardly antagonist—had indeed triumphed, and if Luisa Valverde was not yet his wife she seemed in a fair way of soon becoming so.

As they came on, Kearney could see that they were in conversation. It did not appear very animated. She sat in a listless attitude, as if careless of what was being said or what was passing around her. But on the carriage getting nearly opposite to where Kearney

stood—he was on the edge of the sink, the robber taking his turn below—the escorting cavalier whispered some words in her ear that caused her suddenly to sit erect, at the same time directing her glance towards the sewer-cleaners below.

Kearney saw that her eyes were upon him, and by the start she gave, knew that he was recognized. He saw her glance quickly over his person, as if taking in his pitiful appearance; but before he could meet and read in it either sympathy or contempt, the carriage had passed, and its hood concealed her from his sight. He could only see the grand tortoise comb rising in volutes above the masses of her raven hair, and he watched it far away—keenly, intently watched for the turning of that crested head.

But the carriage kept steadily on—so, too, the towering tortoise shell. The only thing that turned back was the face of Santander, who with beard upon his shoulder, and eye triumphantly shining, seemed grandly satisfied with the scene he had himself contrived—both its tableau and spectators.

“I unnerstan’ it all now,” said Cris Rock, calling out of the sewer to Kearney. “Altho’ ’twar plain enough to me when he showed his ugly countenance

in the prison. The skunk's at home hyar, and only made belief to j'inin' us in Orleans to git the chance o' betrayin' us. But for you he'd a been the captin' o' the company, an' then—wal, then it couldn't a been wuss than it is, an' it mout a been better. Preehaps somethin' mout a turned up— Darnat! what's the use o' spekilatin' now? We're hyar—hyar in the sewer o' Mexico—whagh!"

The Texan had no more words to expend upon the subject. This last exclamation filled up the measure of his indignation, and its echo became mingled with the clinking of his shovel and the clanking of his chain.

And the chain upon the ankle of Florence Kearney seemed to clasp closer than ever. It felt as if crunching the bone.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FAIR PLOTTERS.

“What is to be done, Luisita?” [*Luisita* is an endearing diminutive of Luisa.]

The question came from Ysable Almonte, addressed to her cousin. The time, just after the return from the ride in the State carriage; the scene, once more upon the roof of Don Ignacio's house; the subject the reader can conjecture for himself. He will guess that it related to the setting free of certain prisoners seen at work in the street sewer, and in so guessing he will be correct.

Miss Valverde made no reply. She had thrown herself upon one of the cane chairs that formed part of the roof furniture, while with her head drooping and pressed between her tiny jeweled hands, she seemed to have yielded herself to something bordering on despair.

But it was not so. Between those gemmed and glittering fingers there was a brain busy with active

thought, for she was engaged in a profound reflection.

“There is no hope, you say, from the palace?” continued Ysabel, without waiting for an answer to her first question. “I know there is none for Ruperto. He was one of the strongest opponents to the Plan of Tacubaya, which you know brought back our present ruler. Santa Anna will never forgive him. Ah! there’s no mercy in high quarters for poor Ruperto.”

“Nor for Florencio either,” said Luisa, at length withdrawing the jeweled hands and showing pale, bloodless cheeks. “He, too, has an enemy in the palace more implacable than the President himself.”

“I know who you mean. It is true. I saw it in his eye as we passed them in the sewers. Dearest Luisa, I saw death in his eye. After looking at it, I felt more than ever what great danger hangs over my Ruperto.”

“My Florencio!”

“Oh, Luisita! what can we do to save them? We must take steps.”

After this interrogatory there was silence for a while, each becoming absorbed in her own thoughts, both struggling to conceive some plan by which the

rescue of the two men so dear to them might be effected.

Ysabel, partly from having been of late more at home in Mexico, and therefore more freshly familiar with its ways, and partly that she was naturally of quicker and bolder conception, was the first to think of a scheme.

“Cousin,” she said, “I believe I have hit upon a plan that promises.”

“Let me hear it, Ysabel !”

“Are you ready to run a risk ?”

“For Florencio, any risk—even of my life. I know that his is in danger—nay, will surely be sacrificed if something be not done to get him out of the prison. Something must be done.”

“Well, there is risk even for our own lives in what I’m going to propose, though more for the lives of our lovers.”

“O, Ysabel ! tell me what it is. Let me, too, be judge of the danger.”

“First tell me, cousin—can you place confidence in José ?”

“José ?”

“Your father’s coachman.”

“Any confidence. He was brought up on our estate, I may almost say in our family. Pepita, my little maid, who shared with us our long exile, is his sweetheart. In anything we do, we need have no fear of José. His honesty will be proof against anything.”

“Do you think we could equally rely on his courage?”

“For what? And how far?”

“Well, at least to some risk of his life, and a little more of his liberty.”

“I believe the brave youth would risk either, or both, for my father or myself.”

“I think so too, from what I have observed of him, And if he will, I know a way by which he can serve us in this matter. It’s a little bit wild, I admit, and may get us both into something worse than a dilemma—in fact, into terrible trouble—perhaps a prison. I, for my part, don’t care so long as there’s a chance of getting my dear, brave Ruperto out of his.”

“Neither I, if I can but rescue my dear, brave Florencio. You know I don’t, cousin! Oh, Ysa.! at once tell me what you are aiming at!”

“Well, then,” said Ysabel, speaking half in soliloquy, “though our brave beauties are no longer in the

sewers to-night, it is as good as certain they will be there again to-morrow ; and we must find the means of communicating with them. Under ordinary circumstances this could be done through the door of their prison by the aid of a golden key. But from what I saw, and what we know, there will be special vigilance in their case, and even a bribe might fail. Is José adroit at delivering letters ?”

“I cannot tell, cousin. I have never made use of him for such purpose. But I know one that is—”

“Who, pray ?”

“My maid Pepita.”

“Ah ! Pepita. I did not think of her. She will do infinitely better. Now, what I propose is this : You write a letter to Florencio, or I one to Ruperto, or we can both write, and put them in the same envelope, and let Pepita get close to them when they are at work in the street, and deliver it. She must contrive to drop it within reach of one of them, when the sentry is not looking on. She can do this much better than José. Men are so clumsy in such matters.”

“But what is this letter to contain ?”

The answer could not have been given without being overheard ; for at that moment Don Ignacio,

with a number of gentlemen guests—Santander among them—was heard ascending the stairway, already close to its head.

But before they had made their appearance on the roof Ysabel placed her pretty lips close to the ear of her cousin and whispered :

“I’ll tell you all about it, Luisita, after they have gone—when we’re going to bed.”

And, true to her promise, she did. That night, before the two cousins separated to seek rest, Pepita and José were admitted to their counsel, and a plan was discussed and matured for giving freedom to their friends in the Acordada.

It was a bold design, fraught with perilous consequences to all four as well as to the prisoners. But neither of the young ladies dwelt upon the danger to themselves; and they knew that the peril already impending over the heads of their sweethearts could not be greater.

CHAPTER XX.

A LETTER ADROITLY DELIVERED.

At an early hour the next day the prison gang was again marched out through the massive gates of the Acordada, and set to work in the sewer of San Francisco street.

As on the day before, Kearney and Cris Rock, with their respective chain partners, formed two of its files.

Neither submitted to the degradation without making protest. But their words were idle, and only drew upon them the jeers of their jailers, and the mocking laughter of the brutal soldiers set over them as sentinels.

To men of ordinary minds there would have appeared no possible hope or chance to escape from the torturing situation. And yet they talked of such a thing. It was, in fact, the sole subject of their thoughts, as the only topic of their conversation. Men of Cris Rock's character and experiences never surrender themselves to despair. So long as life is

left them they believe in its chances, since their lives have been illustrated by those hair-breadth escapes that beget and foster such belief. Even the decimation of Salado, still fresh before his memory, did not hinder the Texan from dreaming of some loop-hole that might be still left open—some effort to be made, however desperate, rather than submit to the ignominy now put upon him.

As for the young Irishman, he was equally restless in his chains, and reckless as to how he might get clear of them. The spectacle of yesterday had rendered him indifferent about his life. All that would have made it dear to him seemed hopelessly lost; for he doubted not that Luisa Valverde was lost to him forever. She might not be married to the man he had seen by her side. It did not appear as if this last final act had been consummated. But it was all the same. She was evidently on terms of good understanding with Santander, and he himself had been long since forgotten, or now only remembered to be scorned and sneered at.

If, at any moment, he and the Texan could have got rid of the chains that attached them to their fellow-prisoners, they were both desperate enough to

have run a mad muck through the streets of Mexico, trusting to any chance that might turn up for a change—even should it end in the laying down of their lives.

At every turn they talked of this to one another. And they had ample opportunity for holding such a discourse without any one around being the wiser for what they said. Neither the sentries placed over them nor the prisoners who shared their chains understood a word of English; and they could, therefore, freely discuss any plan without the necessity of speaking in whispers, or being near to one another.

They did so, both while at work in the sewer and at rest in the cell; but the miserable hours dragged slowly on and still no feasible scheme presented itself. Their ankle “jewelry,” as Rock in bitter jocularly termed it, was sound and strong, their guards ever vigilant, and, besides, each carried, as it were, a millstone around his neck in the criminal attached to his leg. They had no hesitation about communicating their thoughts to him who was Kearney’s “couple.” The young Irishman, who spoke Spanish sufficiently, had already sounded him, and found the robber ready and reckless as himself. He, too, chafed at the indignity put upon him, and, furthermore, believed that

his life was in danger. He had given Kearney his reasons for this belief, which somewhat surprised him. They were sufficient to make him brave any danger, and take share in any chance for escape that might offer itself.

About the other individual all three had their doubts. They were based on some knowledge which the robber already possessed of him, also confirmed by certain observations they had made since sharing the cell with him.

Deep-dyed criminal as this creature was, something had been seen by them leading to a suspicion that he would play traitor in any attempt they might make. His aspect told of a man who could not be true, even to companions in misfortune. Condemned to a life-long imprisonment, with hard labor attached, he might expect some shortening of the term, or commutation of the punishment, for doing the State a service. He was the sort of tool for such ignominious service, and the other three could not help having a thought that he had been placed in proximity with them to report upon their words and actions.

“Durn the varmint!” Cris Rock would repeatedly

exclaim. "If't warnt that they mout still leave his ugly karkess to the eend 'o the chain I shed double him up wuss than he air now, so as he kedn't git the breath through that crooked thrapple o' hisn. I guess, Cap, I kin see how the cat jumps. This meanest o' all skunks haint been jined to me for nothin'. He's put at my feet thar—aint he a nice-lookin' Gamalyeel!—for no other purpuss than to play spy on the hul lot o' us. I wish I hed him ten minnits on a Texas puraira, I'd gie the turkey-buzzards such a banket as none o' 'em ever hed afore. But I don't believe as thar's a carrion crow in all Texas as ud stick a bill into him! Wagh!"

The final exclamation told that Cris had nothing more to say. It was his usual way of winding up. It was the closing speech of a discussion that had been carried on triangularly between the three—Kearney interpreting Rock's words in whispers to his chain companion.

The subject was, of course, about the means to make their escape. They could think of no plan, but for all this they entertained the idea, hopeless though it seemed. Ruperto Rivas was less despairing than either of his Texan fellow-prisoners. In fact, the robber was the only one of the three who had reason to

have a hope, and this was based on some expectation of help from without. Men of dark, sinister aspect, with broad-brimmed slouch hats, and serapes muffling them up over the chin, might have been seen exchanging glances with him as he passed out of the prison ; while the same men, or others very like them, stood at street corners or in shaded nooks, regarding him as he shoveled the dirt out of the sewer. He was not ignorant of who these men were—for he knew them to be confederates—members of his own band. But up to this time he had found no opportunity of exchanging speech with them, much less of planning a way of escape ; not even the simple preliminary of being provided by them with a file.

There was an unusual watchfulness on the part of the guards—both turnkeys and sentinels. There must have been an unwonted cause for it ; and this was of itself enough to make the robber doubly apprehensive. He read in it the action of an unseen hand ; which he had at first suspected to be that of his old enemy, Santander—and he now knew it was he. The knowledge gave him good cause for anxiety.

Santander, who had once also suffered humiliation from him, was again in high place and power, and

therefore, Rivas could not tell the day or the hour in which his neck might be grasped by the garrote. No wonder he should feel alarmed at his situation, or that in passing along the streets he should glance inquiringly and beseechingly towards his disguised confederates, who could only return his glances with grim smiles of despair.

It was thus on the second day, when linked to his Texan fellow-prisoner, he was once more taken out to the sewers.

Kearney was down below the robber at work on the pavement alongside. The length of the coupling chain permitted this freedom of action. They took it turn and turn, not through any understanding of their own, but by order of the guards ; and it had come to be the Irishman's turn below. While thus occupied, he did not perceive that a young girl was standing with her eyes fixed intently upon him.

She had been, to all appearance, passing carelessly along the street, and had come to a stand upon the pavement, as if prompted by curiosity to watch the chain-gang at their work. She was a dark-skinned damsel, belonging to the lower order of the people, as was evident from her short, sleeveless skirt, bare

ankles, and the bluish gray scarf thrown over her head and shoulders. This, with its peculiar folding, so concealed her face that but one eye was visible; and Ruperto Rivas, who was looking at her, saw only one. In this, however, he detected an expression telling him, plain as words could have declared it, that the owner of that eye had not stopped there to use it from mere motives of curiosity.

“What’s your wish, Miss?” he asked, working his shovel close up to her pretty little feet, and speaking so that the sentinel might not overhear him.

The muffled wench did not make immediate answer; on the other hand, she did not seem intimidated at being accosted by a convict. For a moment she regarded him with the half concealed eye, as if interrogating herself whether he could be trusted. It was evident her business was not with him, but with his companion in the sewer.

The connecting chain spoke a whole volume, and with an eloquence not to be misconceived. Two men thus linked together could not well be of two minds. The girl seemed instinctively to arrive at this conclusion; for glancing towards the sentinel—a glance that spoke her suspicion only of him—she gave a nod of

her head that seemed to say "My business is with the man in the sewer."

At that moment Kearney stood erect, with a full shovel poised in his hands. He saw the girl standing above. The liquid mud rolled back upon his wrists, as in that half concealed face, now thrown a little open to his gaze, he recognized a countenance well known to him. Only with a difficulty did he restrain himself from exclaiming aloud :

"Pepita !"

He muttered it in a low voice, loud enough for her, but not for the sentry to hear him.

The girl made no rejoinder in words. There was no opportunity for her to do so. She had only just time, before the guard turned his face towards the group, to dart her little brown hand outside the folds of the blue-gray scarf, and from her fingers project a bit of paper that looked like a letter, and which she dropped into the sewer right between Kearney's feet.

Craftily and quickly, but with care, he took it up, as quickly concealing it under the bosom of his shirt. He had the opportunity of doing so without being observed, as, at that moment, a row was raised between Rivas and the sentry, drawing the attention

of all around. It was a *fracas* cunningly contrived and well executed.

Ere the wordy strife had come to a termination, the paper missive was safely stowed out of sight ; while she who had so adroitly delivered it was passing away, with back turned upon the convict gang, as unconcernedly as if they were but ordinary crossing sweepers !

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARING EPISTLE.

To Florence Kearney for the rest of that day the sewer-work seemed light. There was lying alongside his heart that which acted like a preventive against all pain—a balm to his keenest sorrows.

He knew not what the precious epistle might contain, but it was enough to know whence it had come ; for he felt assured it was from Luisa Valverde. In the slight glance he had got of the superscription, he saw only that it was in a feminine hand, but what other than hers could have written it ?

And what could she have written that would not be pleasant for him to read ? If otherwise, she would not have communicated with him at all. Nothing could be clearer than this, and it was reasoning that both satisfied and gratified him.

The letter lay like a sweet solace against his heart, and he felt as though her own soft fingers were pressing upon his bosom, thrilling him with their magic

touch. How he longed for the day to be done—until, in the silent corner of his cell, he might draw the precious epistle forth, and devour its contents.

His chain companion shared his longings, for although the robber had not seen the ladies in the carriage—being at the time of their passage head down in the ditch—he had been told something of them. He had seen the messenger, and conjectured from whom the missive had come. He had surmised something of the nature of its contents, or at all events that they might be in some way or other conducive to a plan for the escape of his prison “chum,” which could not fail to have a bearing upon his own fate.

Rock was equally interested in what the letter might be about, and better informed as to who had written it.

During their long march across the prairies of Texas, and while encamped by the midnight fire, his captain and friend had confided to him the story of his acquaintance with the Mexican exile, and more than hinted at his affection for the exile’s daughter. It was needed to explain the cause of that strange duel of which Rock had been a spectator, and come so

near playing a tragical part in. He had on the day before seen the two beautiful ladies in the carriage, and noticed the recognition between one of them and Kearney, with the effect it had produced upon the latter. Since, while in the cell, Kearney had whispered to him who she was. Rock, down in the sewer beside him, had seen his old comrade picking up the paper that had been dropped at his feet, which by good fortune the hunchback had not, the latter being at the time taken up and greatly delighted with the angry altercation between Rivas and the soldier.

And the Texan quietly concluded that the letter thus received must have come from the lady in the carriage—for who but she could have sent it?

He, too, conjectured that there might be something good in it, and something better to come out of it, and for this reason he was as impatient as Kearney for the hour to knock off work.

It came at length, and the convicts of the chain-gang were conducted back to their gloomy quarters in the Acordada, and the Texans, with their coupled companions, once more shut up in their cell.

There was still a difficulty. The letter could not be read in the presence of Zorilla, nor even shown to

him. Its contents could not be other than compromising—perhaps not so much to them as to the writer. They all dreaded the dwarf's betraying them, and some scheme must be devised to keep his eyes out of the way. Rock thought of smothering him up in a serape, and by force holding him thus blindfolded till the reading could be done. But this would beget suspicion, and a better plan suggested itself to the robber.

The crooked creature, like every other Mexican, whether straight or crooked, was a keen and accomplished card player, and cards are not denied even to condemned criminals.

The dwarf carried a pack in his pocket.

“A game of monté with you, Zorillo,” proposed Rivas.

“Agreed, Don Ruperto,” was the ready reply.

The cards were drawn out, and the queen and Jack placed face upwards on a blanket that had been spread upon the floor, and the play began.

The dwarf was dealer; and Rivas so contrived it that he should sit with his back to the window—in fact, the only way that would give him sufficient light for his performance.

Thus seated, with the huge frame of the Texan flanking him on one side, and Rivas on the other, a screen was obtained that left Kearney free to pursue his epistolary studies.

Getting close to the window, the latter at length unfolded the long-concealed letter and hastily made himself master of its coveted contents.

It was, of course, in Spanish ; but this presented no difficulty to one who had been so well instructed in that language by the father of the lady who had written it :

“O, DON FLORENCIO!—You cannot know how happy it made me to see you yesterday—distressed only to see you in such a situation. But this makes no difference to me ; for nothing they may do to you could ever disgrace you in my eyes. What would it have been to have looked upon you dead, as I had been told you were long since, and have endured all the suffering from believing it, same as if it had been true? He led me to believe it—you know who I mean—saying that in that duel he had given you a death-wound, or one that must kill you in time! What a joy it is to find that I have been deceived, and know

you yet live, though a prisoner in chains! I knew you were alive before I saw you yesterday; for I had made inquiries, and learnt that you were among those who had been lately brought in. As soon as I heard of it I lost no time in trying to procure your deliverance. I have done everything, and so has my father; but, alas! we have both been denied. I went myself to solicit for you, and saw the President—Santa Anna—in person. Don Florencio, I cannot tell you what passed. He spoke of letting you free, but upon conditions that were impossible for me to accept. I would rather die by your side; and I know you would rather see me dead, and yourself perish in your chains, than accept your freedom at such a sacrifice.”

Kearney's breast heaved high with indignation as he read this passionate but womanly appeal. Had the chain been around his ribs instead of his ankle, it would have had a strain upon it to test its strength. He only quieted himself through fear of attracting the attention of the dwarf, and on perceiving that the sheet he held in his hand contained yet other writing.

He read on :

“I will not conceal from you, Florencio, that I

have great fears for your safety. Your old enemy is here—you must have seen him yesterday. I know how he hates you, and will do everything to have you destroyed. He has the power to do so, and will use it. I tremble for you every hour that you remain in prison. You must be got out of it, Florencio, and I have a plan for your escape. I have a cousin who is to help me. You saw a lady with me yesterday in the carriage, did you not? That is my cousin. There is a man chained to you, whom I do not know, but she does. It is Don Ruperto Rivas. Tell him that Ysabel Almonte is the one who is contriving with me for your escape, and he will do all he can to help us and you. And now for what we intend doing: To-morrow we two will drive down the street of San Francisco, past where you are at work. We shall be in a carriage with two horses. There will be no suspicion, as we go down that street every day on our way to the Paseo, only that to-morrow we shall go earlier, before the street gets crowded with other carriages. The horses will be put at a slow pace—a walk—while passing you. We have arranged all with our coachman, José, who is Pepita's sweetheart—you remember Pepita? If you and Don Ruperto will spring up into

the carriage, we two will be terrified and rush out on the opposite side. You understand, Florencio? You need not fear José. Ysabel and I have given him money, though he did not need this, and he has provided some implements, which you will find under the cushions. He will drive you, but one of you must lean over and appear to force him. He says he can easily get through the gate, as the guard often lets him pass without stopping, knowing it to be father's carriage. Once beyond, you can leave him with the carriage and take the horses on. My cousin says that Don Ruperto will know where to go when you get out into the country.

“Florencio, there will be danger—very great danger—and I know it. But I know also there is more in your staying in prison. We have heard there are more Texan prisoners to be shot ; and I need not tell you who would be the first. To-morrow, then, look for two ladies in a carriage coming down the street of San Francisco. Look for them at one o'clock, and pray for success to our attempt. To-morrow at one. Till then, dearest, adieu.”

When Kearney communicated the contents of this

singular epistle to the man yoked to him, the emotion of the latter seemed almost uncontrollable. The name of Ysabel Almonte acted upon him like a spell, and from that moment he became as one inspired by some supernatural energy.

Both were equally excited and alike gratified. To both it was a sudden change from gloomy doubts and fears to a quick rekindling of hope. But an hour ago they looked upon death as almost certain, for it was foreshadowed by the presence of Santander. And now in the letter of Luisa Valverde they recognized the hand of Providence, who was sending two of his most beautiful angels to deliver them from their cruel captivity.

They took counsel together, of course determining to abide by the programme so skillfully traced out for them. Only in one particular would they depart from it; they would take Cris Rock along with them in their flight. Kearney would have consented to stay in his chains rather than leave the Texan behind—that brave comrade who would not have left him.

The dwarf would have to be taken along too. But a carriage drawn by two strong horses should

have room enough for all ; and though the additional weight might be some obstruction it could not eventually hinder their escaping—if escape could be made at all. It was still a doubtful thing ; but it was a doubt they would use to the best possible advantage.

During the half hour that preceded the bringing in their supper of black beans, Kearney found an opportunity of communicating to Cris Rock the contents of the letter, and the plans of action proposed. While doing so, the Texan was seen to chew something that might have been a quid of tobacco, but which when expectorated upon the floor of the cell presented a white, pulpy appearance. Rock did not say what it was, but Kearney knew that it was the letter of Luisa Valverde. There was no longer any danger that it would betray them.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHASED OUT OF THEIR CARRIAGE.

Once more in the street sewer toiled the chain-gang, its files stretching several hundred feet along the street. For this day, at least, three of the sewer cleaners seemed to be working with a will. Two of these were the Texans, Kearney and Cris Rock, the third was Rivas, the Mexican robber.

They appeared to work almost too willingly, and had the sentry set over them been at all of an observant turn he might have noticed their extra exertion and had some suspicions about it. He might have observed, moreover, as it came near the midday hour, that they often looked up from their work, darting quick glances along the street in the direction of the Plaza Grande. All three did this ; now one, and then another. Whatever it meant it was evident that all three of them were in the secret. The dwarf alone seemed ignorant of what the others were watching for, though once or twice his weasel-like eyes sparkled

with suspicion as he saw his companions looking so frequently in the same direction. These glances grew more frequent as it drew nearer to the hour of one, and when at length the great convent bell tolled out the unit they had become almost continuous.

But the sewer cleaning was not discontinued. The men thus acting were not childish exhibitionists, and they kept on in the performance of their task with as much counterfeited industry as ever. The sentry, having found them all day so docile and well-behaved—a thing rather unusual—had withdrawn to some distance to get a light for his cigarrito. It seemed a propitious omen; and as if fate had so intended it, at that very moment a carriage came in sight, rolling down the street of the Silversmiths into its continuation of that along San Francisco. There was a splendid stepper on each side of the pole—both being large, fine-blooded American horses—with a coachman seated on the box, in whose swarth, half-Indian features, Kearney conjectured that he saw the sweetheart of Pepita. But no conjecture was needed; for in five minutes after, the carriage was near enough for him to see two ladies inside whom he easily recognized.

His chain partner saw them at the same time, and with emotions not very dismal. Both were looking upon sweethearts that, by a sinister fate, had been long separated from them, and each recognized his own.

As it drew near where they stood, the carriage gradually slackened its rate of speed. It seemed necessary—and a precaution on the part of its driver to avoid bringing the wheels in contact with the mud heap cast out from the sewer, as also the huge stone blocks used in bridging it. These, rolled to one side, occupied one half of the causeway, leaving but a narrow passage between them and the foot-path. At this point a coachman driving slowly, was doing just what he should; therefore no one could wonder, or even think it at all strange, that a splendid equipage, with a liveried coachman on the box, and two fashionably-dressed ladies inside, should observe due caution in passing the defile.

It did, and, soon after, something that might have seemed more than necessary; for by the time it came opposite to the spot where the Texan prisoners were at work, it fairly crawled. A bystander might have supposed that its driver had gone to sleep, and he

looked as careless as if he could. Different far looked the lady riders inside. In the eyes of both there was a strange sparkle of excitement which they seemed trying to suppress. It was as if they were being driven along the edge of a precipice, fearing at every turn of the wheels to be hurled headlong over it.

And there were eyes watching them—three pairs—that showed as much strangeness of expression as theirs—only that it was different. It was that of fixed resolve, a determination to do or die.

The carriage came directly opposite and for an instant to a dead stop. The horses, despite their fine appearance, which should have bespoke fine training also, showed a disposition to balk, and there were signs of an incipient quarrel between them and their driver.

“Now!” muttered Kearney, reaching down to assist Rivas out of the sewer, while Cris Rock heaved up out of it at the same instant. “Now’s our time. Come on and keep close to me!”

There was as much originality as strangeness in the scene that ensued—at least so thought those pass-

ing along the street and who chanced to be spectators of it.

Two men, frightfully besmeared with mud—scavengers belonging to the prison gang of the Acordada—chained leg and leg together, and together rushing from the side of the sewer in which they had been at work towards a private carriage passing along the street and occupied by two elegantly-dressed young ladies—seizing the handle of the carriage door that came easily open, and one after another springing up the steps into it, the young ladies, frightened by the brutal approach, both together slipping out on the opposite side, and standing for a moment, without cry or scream, as if too much paralyzed to speak! All this was strangely original and held the beholders in surprise.

Not less strange was the scene being simultaneously enacted a little farther along, towards the front of the carriage, where a man of gigantic stature, with a deformed dwarf upraised in his arms, was seen to bound up to the box of the carriage, bearing his strange burden along with him; as soon as he got there, chucking the latter between his feet, jerking whip and reins from the hands of the liveried driver,

and with a liberal use of both starting the horses, first into a trot, and then urging them on to a gallop.

The whole scene resembled a dream rather than a real occurrence—some fantastic figuring of the imagination. The spectators might have fancied it such—even after the carriage had been whirled out of sight, but for two personages who had figured in it, and who were still there before their eyes. These were the two young ladies who had been forced from their pleasant seats, and who now stood upon the side of the street, proclaiming, by their piteous cries, how real they at least believed it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RUNAWAY SPAN.

On tore the carriage along the street, with no one making any attempt to obstruct it.

The escaping prisoners chanced to be at the end of the line of sentinels—the last being he who had especial charge of them. Busy with his paper cigar—just rolling a fresh one between his fingers, as the rush was made—the soldier was taken completely by surprise. Before he could recover himself and bring his firelock to the level, the carriage had swept past the spot where he stood; and when, with unsteady aim, he at length pulled the trigger, it was to see only a flash of powder from the pan of his old flint-lock musket. The gun had missed fire.

His cries, sent along the street in shrill accents of alarm, drew the attention of his fellow-sentries, several of whom raised their guns simultaneously; but not knowing at what to aim, they reserved their fire, shouting and interrogating one another along the whole line.

Meanwhile the barouche, drawn by its splendid pair of bloods, was making way down the street, in the direction of the Acordada! It might seem strange in the prisoners thus returning towards prison; but they had no intention to stop there. They were only making to pass it, in order to get to one of the gates leading out into the open country.

In that quarter there are two of them: San Cosmé and the Niño Perdido.

They are *garitas*, or custom-house stations, where the poor peasants, coming to market, must pay a tax on their commodities, called the *alcavala*. Each *garita* has its guard of soldiers—usually a sergeant or corporal, with some half-a-dozen men—and one or other of these gates had to be passed.

The Niño Perdido was the nearest, and yet it was not the one chosen by Ruperto Rivas, whose knowledge of the routes made him full manager of the flight.

“Through San Cosmé!” he cried, addressing himself to the driver; and to San Cosmé was the carriage whirled along the smooth track of the Paseo, which they soon afterwards entered.

It was odd to see a fashionable equipage out at that

early hour—strange to see it going at such speed, as if the horses had run away—and stranger still the grotesque tableau on the box. But the Paseo was not yet occupied by its afternoon promenaders; and while the carriage was rolling along the deserted drive the Texan found an opportunity of, to a certain extent, taming down the grotesqueness, so that the group upon the box became less likely to attract attention.

This was effected by means of a striped blanket, or *serape*, belonging to the coachman, that had been folded up and carried on the cushion underneath him. Spread over Cris Rock's shoulders, it formed a partial disguise; while the dwarf, jammed in under the seat, and there held by the massive limbs to which he was chained, was no longer seen, and therefore no longer in danger of betraying them by his hideous presence.

The garita of San Cosmé is close to the end of the Paseo, beyond which runs the aqueduct extending on to Chapultepec, without any houses. The carriage-road is parallel to the stone structure, the arches of which rise up out of the causeway. If they could once get past the garita, they would have the clear country road before them, without anything in front to be afraid of.

They had got close to the garita, and still heard nothing of the pursuit behind. The soldiers lounging about the gate saw a carriage coming along, but without any suspicion as to the character of its occupants. They only thought it a little strange that any one should be on the drive at that hour of the day, and they noticed that the horses were going at an unusual rate of speed.

As it drew nearer, the livery and horses were recognized by the sergeant of the guard, who had often seen it while on duty at the palace. He knew it to belong to a member of the government, and his conclusion was that it was *en route* for Tacubaya, where the President had a country-house, and where he perhaps was at the time. Under such an impression he would have permitted the carriage to pass unchallenged; but just at that crisis a gun was fired from the Acordada, which was quickly responded to by another from the Citadela, the latter standing contiguous to the drive of the Paseo. They were guns of alarm and warning, and soldiers and sentinels understood them as a signal for them to treat everything with suspicion.

In an instant the San Cosmé guard was under

arms ; and as the carriage was the only thing in sight, upon it the eyes of all became concentrated.

Perhaps, had time been allowed them for closer scrutiny, it could never have passed the gate. There was not. Only the guard sergeant and another had caught sight of something to arouse their suspicions, and the two together sprang out from the line, intending to seize the heads of the horses. Before either could lay a hand upon the reins, there came a double crack from the inside of the carriage, and both sergeant and soldier went tumbling over in the middle of the road !

Paralyzed as much by the sudden surprise as by fear, their comrades stood for a time without any action ; and then irresolutely, and without taking aim, discharged their pieces. Most of the shots were delivered in the air—two only striking the carriage and shaving its panels. But none of its occupants received any injury, and the horses were unharmed.

The carriage swept on through the garita, the wheels bounding over the prostrate bodies that seemed struggling to get out of the way, while the horses, sniffing the fresh country air, and as if sensible of having escaped from some terrible danger, together

gave out a shrill neigh as they tore on along the road towards Tacubaya.

“How thoughtful of our sweethearts to put these pistols in the carriage,” said Ruperto Rivas. “But for them we should have been stopped to a certainty. It’s just like my quick-witted Ysabelita. Hi! here’s something more! Only think of it! The dear creatures! Heaven bless them both!”

The allusion was to a large hammer—a sort of sledge—the handle of which was seen protruding from under a cushion, with another implement beside it which proved to be a cold chisel!

“Indeed,” rejoined Kearney, with delighted surprise, “they have thought of everything. Hadn’t we better make use of these implements at once?”

“A little further on; we haven’t got start enough yet. If the dragoons get mounted at the citadel they’ll be hot after. There goes another gun—and hark! there goes a gun from Chapultepec! I didn’t think of it. They’ll get down from the castle in time to head us off. *Carrambo!*”

The exclamation was uttered in a tone somewhat despairing. No wonder. The road along which they were running passes close under the hill upon which

stands Chapultepec castle—at the time a military school as well as fortification. The alarm guns from the city had set its garrison on the alert, and from its high ramparts a view could be had of the whole aqueduct road, with the carriage coming upon it. The officers on duty could scrutinize the latter through their glasses, and see that it was not carrying a peaceful diplomatist.

They seemed to have come to this conclusion already, for the shrill notes of a bugle could be heard sounding the “assembly,” and soon after the “forward.”

“There’s a troop coming down upon the road,” said Rivas. “They will be certain to intercept us.”

“What’s to be done?” inquired Kearney, while Cris Rock at the same time called out that he saw signs of danger ahead.

“We must leave the carriage and take to the fields. Drive like the demon for two hundred yards farther. I know a cross path, where we can take the horses along with us. It’ll be better, any way. Whip up!”

Rock jerked the whip out of the hand of the coachman, and laid it vigorously upon the horses.

The splendid animals scarce needed this incitement; they were going fast before, and now fairly flew.

“There! pull them up. There’s the cross road. Out, every one, and off with the harness!”

In an instant the carriage was empty, Rock having sprung down from the box, dragging the dwarf along with him. The coachman also alighted, seemingly obeying the orders of the Texan, without daring to make resistance. In a few seconds the horses were set free from the pole, and the harness whipped off, all except the bridles.

“There’s no chance to get parted here,” said Rivas. “It will take too much time to cut these heavy chains. We must go on as we are, in hopes of finding a better opportunity.”

As he spoke he handed the hammer to the Texan, who stuck it behind his belt, Rivas himself appropriating the chisel.

“One thing before we leave, for appearances,” he whispered into Kearney’s ear, at the same time nodding towards the coachman. “We must leave *him* bound.”

It was but the work of a moment, for the hint was given to Rock, who, as a Texan, was handy with

ropes. The long carriage rein was detached, and in ten seconds after, the Mexican coachee, with half a dozen coils of it around him, stood like Ixion fast bound to a wheel.

“Mount!” cried the robber. “You, Señor Cristoforo, take the off horse, and keep close after us. Now, Don Florencio, are you ready to ride double?”

“Ready,” was the reply ; and both sprang together to the back of the horse.

At the same moment Rock straddled over the other, jerking the dwarf up behind and flinging him like a bundle across the croup.

“Stick like a cat!” he cried. “And, durn you, if you gie trouble I’ll brain you wi’ this hammer.”

“All ready!” cried Rivas. And at the word away went both horses at a gallop, no longer along the main road to Tacubaya, but by a bridle-path leading in the direction of Coyoacan.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOUBLE MOUNTED.

The peaceful laborers in the maize fields of Coyoacan, and the lone *thachequero* extracting the sap from the maguey, saw a sight that surprised and startled them. Two large horses, each with a couple of men upon its back, going in full gallop along the quiet country roads as if running a race. And such horses, and such men ! What could it mean ?

They had scarce time to ask the question before the strange racers had passed and disappeared behind gigantic cacti and straggling pepper-trees, into a thicket-like tract of which last they at length entered.

“Thanks, blessed Virgin !” exclaimed Rivas, now for the first time breathing freely. “I think, comrades, we may consider ourselves safe. Five hundred yards farther on and we shall change horses.”

“What, have you a relay ?” asked Kearney.

“Not exactly that,” answered the robber, with a

laugh ; “ something that will prove quite as serviceable to us. You shall see.”

Kearney was surprised, or rather mystified, by the speech: Could his chain-companion have had communication with any one outside the prison other than that known to him ? Perhaps some of his band had been by the sewer, at an earlier hour of the day, and received telegraphic signs. It seemed as if there had been something of the kind ; and yet why should his fellow-prisoner not have told him of it ?

Could it be that the ladies had prepared further plans—some sort of under-ground train by which they were to continue their journey towards freedom ?

They had not said a word that Kearney had heard ; but it might be that one of them had whispered something to his companion, or signalled it. The dark damsel, who desired to be remembered to him, might have done this.

Kearney could no longer restrain his curiosity.

“ Where are you making for ? ” he asked. “ To the mountains ? ”

“ To the mountains, of course ! ”

“ I fear we shall not be able to reach them before

they overtake us. The nearest mountain slope appears to be miles off."

"It is miles off. Our horses will soon break down. Weighted as they are, they can't keep up this pace much longer. You hear that bugle behind us?"

"I do; and I know well what it means. The troopers have got upon our track. Those corn-weeders have told them which way we went. I thought I'd made a turn that would have thrown them out a bit. No matter; we shall yet be in time. And here we are at our changing place."

The only sign of a changing place Kearney could perceive was a steep escarpment of rock covered with cactus and other spinous plants. It was certainly a stopping place, as it traversed the country right and left, and far as the eye could reach in a direction crosswise to that in which they had approached. They had been following no road, for they had left this on entering among the pepper-trees; nor was there sign of a path beyond. The wall of dark gray lava-rock rose twenty feet sheer above the level of the plain, though here and there its façade was fissured, some of the rents showing an inclination up which its summit might be reached after a scramble.

“The *Pedregal!*” exclaimed the robber, reining short up as he spoke. “It is to be our city of refuge—for the present. Dismount—all of you!”

He set the example by slipping off himself, simultaneously with his chain companion. Rock followed it, jerking the hunchback down along with him.

“I fear we won’t have time here either,” said the robber, glancing uneasily at the chain impediments. “No! There’s that bugle again. They can’t be quite half a mile behind us. We must go in couples a little further. Come, Don Florencio; keep close to me; and you, Señor Cristoforo, bring your handsome baby along with you. You’ll have to nurse it a little longer.”

He had faced towards the rock wall as if to scale it, when a thought suggested itself. It was a purpose he had conceived for throwing the pursuers off the track and so gaining a little time.

“It’s just possible,” he said, half speaking to himself, “that these *gringos* in pursuit of us may be delayed a little by our stampeding the horses. There’s no harm in trying it, since it won’t take us much time. Don Florencio, take hold of that bit rein and turn that horse’s head towards the opening you see

there along the base of the cliff. Keep him steady till I play a little prank upon him."

Kearney did as directed, though not knowing for what purpose. It was soon made manifest by the robber striking one of the great spinous lobes from a cactus plant with the butt of his pistol, and after a cautious approach, inserting it under the tail of the horse.

"Let go," he cried, and at the word the animal, startled into mad surprise by the pricking of the spines, set off in full career along the way it was intended he should go. The other, cruppered in a similar fashion by Cris Rock, was not slow to follow, and in a few seconds both were out of sight, though the clatter of their hoofs could be heard long after, telling that the poisonous sting of the cactus was still urging them to continue their wild gallop.

"Now, comrades, let us enter the Pedregal!" cried Rivas; and the next moment he was scrambling up the sloping rift of the rocks, Kearney close after him.

The Texan ascended next; but instead of waiting for his hunchback to follow him afoot, he lifted the deformed creature in his arms and swung him up to

the summit of the rock as if he had been a bundle of crooked sticks !

Over a surface that might resemble the hearthstone of some ancient Tophet, they for some time made progress, here climbing, there descending, now squeezing themselves between cracks in the cooled lava, anon worming their way through thickets of mezcal and mezquite.

When they had put some half mile of this tortuous track between themselves and the point where they had entered the Pedregal, Rivas came to a stop, his chain companion perforce doing the same. The Texan, close upon their heels, leading the dwarf like a cur dog upon his chain, at times compelled to carry him, was but too glad to think the disagreeable journey was about to terminate.

The spot where they had pulled up was in the bottom of a deep dell or rift in the lava-field, where some thin scattering of earth supported a growth of the singular species of acacia known as the "sensitive plant."

"I don't think they can hear us now," said the robber. "And as we've worn this jewelry long enough, suppose we get rid of it?"

“Agreed to that—this chile air,” said the Texan; and there was no one to dissent.

Cris had the chisel and hammer which had been so considerably provided—the latter no light geological implement, but a stout sledge-looking weapon, well suited for the work. Rivas and Kearney between them held the chain, placing its middle link over a hollow crevice in the rock. A cut or two of the chisel and then a heavy blow of the hammer bent it; and being turned, it was bent in the reverse direction, until after repeated turnings the iron cracked and came apart.

“Well, Don Florencio,” remarked the robber, speaking in a tone of mock gravity. I hope friendship’s chain between us will not be so easily parted.”

The young Irishman could not help reciprocating the hope.

It would have taken too much time to strike the fragments of the chain from off their ankles; each took his own piece in hand, stowing the loose ends away behind the waistbands of their trousers.

Rivas now handled the hammer, and by a similar process separated the giant from the dwarf. But Rock had taken care that the severed link should be

that nearest to his leg, leaving more than three-fourths of the fetter still attached to that of his late prison companion.

Not more than twenty minutes were thus consumed ; at the end of which time the fugitives recommenced their march, or rather scramble, across the Pedregal.

But now there were only three of them—Rivas, Rock, and Kearney. The hunchback had been left behind at the place where the chains had been severed, though not until the others had held a short consultation as to what should be done with him. There was no thought of taking him along—only a fear that by setting him free he might in some way damage their chances of escape.

“No,” said the robber, after reflecting upon it. “I don’t see how he can do us any harm. By the time our pursuers can get this far—if, indeed, they ever recover our trails—we shall be beyond reach of their pursuit. Leave him where he is.”

“Durn the reptyle !” exclaimed Rock. “I feel like scrunchin’ him under the heel o’ my boot. I know he’s a spy an’ treetor, an’ he deserves somethin’ done to him !”

“No, no, Rock!” remonstrated Kearney. “Leave the poor creature alone!”

“Wal, Capt’n, if you say so, I’m bound to comply, but—”

Kearney, following the robber, had started onward without waiting to hear the conclusion of the speech.

“But,” continued the Texan, now talking to himself, or rather to the deformed semblance of humanity at his feet, “before I go, you ugly varmint, I’ll gie you a bit o’ a kick, jest by way o’ makin’ you remember me. So hyar’s for it.”

The giant stood with his toe poised, intending to carry out his threat, when a thought seemed to strike him. It was not one of mercy—only a change in the ceremony of his leave-taking.

Suddenly stooping down, he caught hold of the piece of chain—some six feet in length—still attached to the ankle of the dwarf, and jerking him up at the end of it, he swung him round and round, like a gaucho getting ready his bolos for a cast. After giving him three or four gyrations, he let go the chain, leaving the human weight to carry itself where chance might direct. Projected several yards from its centre of cen-

trifugal force, it fell among the acacia bushes, whose branches, breaking down under the weight, covered it out of sight.

“You stay *thar!*” cried Cris Rock, as he let go the chain ; and then turning, he strode off over the rocks on the track taken by his companions.

CHAPTER XXV.

SKULKING AFTER.

Gathering his deformed body out of the bushes into which Cris Rock had swung it, the dwarf shook himself, and for a short while stood undecided how to act.

If his person was crooked and unprepossessing, his intellect was straight enough—keen and clear as if he had been the handsomest of men.

Quick flashed upon his mind various motives to inspire him to rapid action. Which was the best course for him to adopt?

Should he conceal himself among the bushes, or skulk into some crevice of the rock? By doing either he might avoid discovery by the pursuers, and so escape being recaptured and carried back to the Acordada.

On the other hand, by keeping his place, and standing boldly forth—by acting, moreover, as a finger-post to point the pursuit—telling the way in

which his late fellow-prisoners had gone—he might obtain consideration and mercy.

He could almost make sure of this. He had been himself but an involuntary fugitive, and could easily show it. He could tell something besides that would give him a claim to State clemency and a full pardon.

After a moment's consideration he felt quite convinced of this.

Another moment, and a thought suggested itself that gave promise of still further strengthening such claim—in short, of increasing it, so as to make him worthy of a reward. His late fellow-prisoners, after forsaking him, had started off along a track where the cavalry soldiers coming up could not follow them, not even if they dismounted and continued the pursuit on foot. Among the rocks and ravines of the Pedregal, pursuit would be impossible, or worse. If not absolutely dangerous, it would be at least ridiculous.

To the dwarf it would be different. He had passed through the lava-field before—more than once—many times. He knew all its paths and passes—its twistings and turnings. A labyrinth to others, it was to him a known ground, and he needed no clew to guide him through its mazes.

What, then, if he should follow the fugitives—follow and watch them to their final halting or hiding-place, then return and report it to the powers behind?

By doing so he would still be sure of free pardon, and might expect something besides. Considering the character of the prisoners, and the circumstances connected with their escape—some of the strangest only known to himself—he could not help knowing that he was the depository of a secret that would give him a certain power over more than one well-known individual.

It was only a question of the wisest way to make use of it.

Merely pointing out the direction in which the fugitives had gone, might not do much for him. If he could but follow and find out whither they had gone, and where they might be found afterwards, that would be information of a much more valuable kind, and more likely to bring him a reward.

For this reason did he desire to make himself capable of giving it, even had there been no other.

But there was another reason, and one ten times stronger. It was the prompting of a terrible revenge. He was angry with all three of his late prison asso-

ciates ; but especially so with him who had shared with him the chain now severed. He had long smarted under the scornful reproaches of Cris Rock, who was too honest to conceal the contempt he felt for him ;— but now, at the last hour, that parting fling ! The thought of it stung him to madness and determined him to take steps for obtaining revenge.

Revenge was now the first and uppermost thought in his mind, and how to accomplish it the chief exercise of his intellect.

“If I can but follow and find where they go,” was his reflection, as he watched them scrambling over the rocks ; “if I can track them to their hiding-place—”

He did not stay to finish the speech. It may have been finished in his thoughts ; but, whether or not, it prompted him in the action that resulted.

Gliding out from among the bushes, he sprang up to the impending rock, and far more easily than any of the others, lifted himself upon the ledge.

Then crawling over the crest of the cliff, he continued on through the Pedregal, here diving down into crevices and ravines, there climbing up steep escarpments with an agility far superior to that of those who had preceded him. A bird looking down

from above would have witnessed a strange scene on the scored and corrugated surface of lava. Three men hastening across it, making all the speed in their power—here springing across deep, dark clefts, or descending into them on one side and climbing out on the other—now running over smooth, table-like surfaces of naked rocks, anon creeping cautiously through thickets of thorny trees—behind them, at a distance of about two hundred yards, another form following, apparently pursuing, and evidently not wishing to be seen by the pursued ; a form only half human, but so much the more hideous and horrible. Was it a man dwarfed and deformed ? or was it a gigantic ape ?

But for some rags of clothing hanging over its hunched shoulders it might easily have been mistaken for the latter. Still was it human, stirred by human instincts, and guided by the promptings of a man's violent passion—revenge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON UP THE MOUNTAINS.

After leaving their deformed prison companion behind them the three fugitives continued on through the strange lava tract on which they had entered. The robber acted as guide and conductor. He seemed to know every crack and crevice that gave a path across the Pedregal. This was often so tortuous that hundreds of yards had to be traversed in making the distance of a stone's throw. The daylight still favored them, however, and they were no longer compelled to go skulkingly. Rivas assured them that there was no danger of meeting any one there—certainly no one would dare to molest them. They were upon ground where cavalry could not come; and even if their pursuers knew the route they had taken they could neither follow nor intercept them.

With enough of toil, but with no fears, they kept on during the remainder of the afternoon, still making for the mountains. These rose directly up from

the farther side of the lava-field, their highest summit, Ajurco, towering skyward before their faces. It was toward this mountain their robber guide was conducting them, promising them rest and refuge at some place high up on its wooded slope.

Night overtook them as they got across the Pedregal ; but there was a moon that enabled them to continue their journey, and under her mellow light they commenced ascending the slopes of the Sierra. It was an ascent that occupied them till after midnight, and up into the hours of morning. It was toilsome and devious, now upward along steep, slippery paths, now down into dark defiles, rock-bound and forest-shadowed, with hoarse torrents rushing along their beds.

But there was no uncertainty, conducted by such a guide. He appeared familiar with every track and turning, every rock and tree encountered along the route.

All at once, while they were walking under the shadow of a forest of the long-leaved pines, he came to a stop, signing to them to do the same. Placing his fingers over his mouth, he gave forth a sound that resembled the cry of an animal, and one that

Cris Rock knew well; for it was also to be heard amidst the jungles of Texas. It was the cat-like scream of the cougar, known throughout the North by the mistaken appellation of panther, or the "painter," as Cris would have called it. In the mountains of Mexico it is a "lion"—a name equally a misnomer.

Their robber guide, having imitated its call, stood listening as if expectant of an answer. None came; and he repeated the signal, and again stood silent awaiting the reply. There was a response, but it was not the call of the cougar. Instead, there was the voice of another wild animal to wake up the echoes of the woods. The bark of a coyote wolf, continued into a prolonged howl, came back through the trunks of the trees.

"All right!" said the robber, on hearing it. "My old comrades are still here, and I'm glad to find, still keeping up their discipline. Come on Señoras, we shall soon get rest and sleep."

Kearney and Rock followed without making remark. Both were by this time so terribly fatigued that they could have lain down upon the mountain side, and slept without thought of blanket to cover or roof to shelter them. They were overjoyed at the

prospect of having both—for both had their guide promised them.

In ten minutes after they found themselves following him through what appeared a weed-grown garden with terraced walks and tottering, decayed seats; then amidst ruined walls, half hidden under garlands of creeping convolvuli. Their footsteps rang upon a floor of flags that formed the pavement of an inclosed court-yard; and through this they were conducted into a large hall, with a long table and benches set in its centre, and a solitary lamp burning upon the table. The lamp, fed with oil, threw its dim reflection upon what appeared to be the remains of a supper of which many guests had partaken. Now the guests were gone to bed, and three or four shadowy forms flitted around the table, whose dress and demeanor bespoke them to be servants. Their dark skins also told them to be Indians. One differed from the rest. It was he who had received the fugitives on their approach to the premises—the same who had answered the signal. His skin was white, while his actions proclaimed him to be a comrade of the robber—one of his band.

On recognizing his chief, whom they had no

doubt given up as lost, he gave vent to a wild outburst of joy, continued in a loud apostrophe. The members of the band were asleep. Should he awake them to join his congratulations?

“No, Gregorio; not to-night,” said the restored chief; “my friends here are fatigued, and hungry too. Get us something to eat, and then all of us to bed. On the morrow we may talk over our escape.”

A fresh touch was given to the lamp, which, flaring brighter, showed still upon the table sufficient to satisfy the appetites of three of the hungriest of men. There were corn cakes, cold mutton, and the bones of a broiled turkey, which their predecessors at the supper table had not entirely stripped of the white, tender flesh.

The attendants produced a skin of *pulque* and a bottle of Catalan brandy; and the fugitives soon refreshing themselves, were ready for their couches.

To them they retired, the robber chief knowing his own, while Kearney and the Texan, consigned to the charge of two Indian attendants, were conducted to separate apartments, where in less than ten minutes' time both were buried in a slumber so profound that only an earthquake could have awakened them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

QUARTERED IN A CONVENT.

When Kearney awoke in the morning a band of yellow light slanting across the floor of his sleeping-chamber told him that the sun was well up in the heavens. It came through a narrow aperture more resembling the gun embrasure of a fortress than the window of a dwelling. There was enough of it, however, to reveal every object around him ; and still lying stretched upon the *catre*, or couch, he commenced an examination of the singular apartment in which he had passed the latter portion of the night.

It was a mere cell, of about nine feet in length by six in width.

But plainly it was not the cell of a prison. There was no furniture, excepting a rude wooden chair and the dilapidated leathern tester on which he lay. But where the plaster remained on the walls he could perceive that it had not only been smoothly laid, but had served as the ground for a series of scenic paintings.

They were defaced, and in parts missing where the mortar had crumbled off ; but saintly robes and bare, sandalled feet, here and there a crucifix, and at one end a full-length likeness of the virgin, Gaudalope, with the aureole around her head, still in a tolerable state of preservation, proclaimed the character of the chamber, and the use to which in past days it had been put. He was in the cloister of a monastery or convent.

That it was an abandoned one he could see. The dilapidation told this ; besides, he had been brought there by a robber.

There was a little grotesqueness in the reflection that he had just escaped from one monastery to find refuge in another ; for it must be remembered that the Acordada had been also once a dwelling of the Religious Brotherhood.

With no intention of becoming a monk, he was getting initiated into convent life in Mexico.

Though he had slept tolerably well, he yet felt fatigued after the almost superhuman exertions of the previous day and night.

His arms and legs were both painfully stiff, the first from scrambling over and scaling the lava ledges,

the last from the long climb of the steep mountain slopes.

His reflections were that it was no use getting up till he should be called. Some one would no doubt come in to summon him to breakfast. He was a little hungry, being too much done up on the night before to eat heartily of supper ; and he hoped that a matutinal meal would be forthcoming.

He remained on his couch, scanning the figures on the walls, and tracing their saintly outlines. It was a curious study, and he had strange thoughts. Here were niches, and in one were the fragments of a broken image—saint or sinner. It was so shattered he could not tell which. He wondered who had done devotion before it—whether man or woman, monk or nun. Perhaps some beautiful vestal had once occupied the cell, and reposed her delicate limbs upon the rude couch on which he was reclining. She must have been in a beatified state if she believed it soft, was his jocular reflection.

His eyes ever and anon rested on the picture of the patroness saint of Mexico, gracefully robed in a drapery of sky-blue, bespangled with silver stars. She is usually thus represented in Mexican paintings of her,

and always with a lovely countenance. Kearney, as he gazed upon it, fancied he could trace some resemblance to the face of Luisa Valverde. She seemed smiling upon him from the wall, as if saying: "You see how I have rescued and protected you."

It was happiness to know that he had escaped from a loathsome prison, with its dirt and degradation, but supreme pleasure to reflect upon the means by which he had been set free. If the portrait upon the wall had been Luisa Valverde in person, he could have fallen at her feet and poured forth his soul in a gratitude strong as worship itself.

He had fallen into a reverie of pleasant thoughts, from which he was aroused by hearing the door creaking back upon its rusty hinges. A man came in, who at first sight seemed a stranger to him. He was a splendid looking fellow, dressed in full *ranchero* costume; embroidered cloth jacket, trousers of green velveteen, slashed and buttoned along the seams, a scarf of scarlet China crape wound around his waist, and on his head a black glaze hat, with a heavy band of gold bullion.

But the man was no stranger to him. It was only the dress that had misled him. The face of olive hue

now clear and bright in all its classic beauty, was that of his late prison partner, Ruperto Rivas.

There was another man behind of darker hue, and evidently a servant, who carried over his arm what appeared to be a suit of clothes. And this it was—a full set of apparel of the true Mexican style of tailoring; not very dissimilar to that which the robber wore upon his own person.

“Señor Don Florencio,” said the latter, after bidding good morning to his guest, “if I mistake not you would not object to a change of linen, and a somewhat more becoming style of dress than what you’ve been wearing in the Acordada?”

The grin given by Kearney as he glanced at his ragged prison apparel was a sufficient answer in the affirmative.

“They are here, then; see if they will fit you.”

Kearney started up to try them on.

“A basin and some water, boy!” said the host, turning to the Indian who carried the clothes. “My friend requires a wash.”

The water was brought in a pan of red pottery, and along with it a coarse but clean towel. It was the first that had touched the young Irishman’s skin

for weeks, and as he performed his ablutions the sensation was delightful.

Instructed and assisted by his host, his toilet was soon made, and he stood clothed from head to foot in a suit of Mexican habiliments almost as rich and picturesque as those of the robber chief himself.

“Now, let us to breakfast,” said Rivas. “We holy brothers,” he continued, in a jocular tone, “eat together in the refectory. Come, Señor Florencio, let me introduce you to the fraternity—the monks of Mont Ajusco—and jolly friars, I fancy, you will find them. At all events, I think I can promise you more cheerful company than what we’ve both had in the last convent where we made stay. Come along, Señor.”

So saying, he led the way out of the little dormitory, his late fellow-prisoner following close upon his heels.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE JOLLY FRIARS IN THE REFECTORY.

A large, dilapidated hall, with a long slab table and wooden benches around it, was the breakfast room into which Florence Kearney was conducted. It was the same apartment in which they had eaten their hurried supper, though the table now exhibited a more attractive garniture. Kearney looked neither at the apartment nor its furniture. There was enough without these to occupy his attention, which was engrossed by the company assembled. Standing in groups over the floor, a few seated on the slab benches, were about thirty individuals—all men, though of different ages and many varieties of dress—though most of them were habited in the splendid costume of the country known as the *ranchero*. In the centre of one of the largest groups was a man who overtopped them all by a head, and the greater number of them by a portion of the shoulders as well. The face, visible even above the crowns of their hats—for some of them

were hatted—was not new to Florence Kearney, who at a glance recognized in it the countenance of his old comrade—Cris Rock.

The Texan giant had also got himself rigged out in a new suit of clothes. Upon his legs he wore simply the wide cotton under-drawers, since there could not be found a pair of the velveteen pantaloons that would admit his enormous limbs; and as the sleeve of the biggest jacket the robber wardrobe contained would not have allowed his fist to pass through it, he had to content himself with a blanket thrown loosely over his shoulders. But this was sufficient for Cris, and in the midst of his new associates he was swaggering about, swinging the blanket from side to side, and seeming happy as a king,

As Kearney came into the room he was in the act of smoking a Mexican cheroot, talking loudly, and evidently entertaining the company to the top of their bent.

“Mornin’, Cap!” he said, stepping out from the circle of his admiring audience and advancing towards his former captain. “Hope you feel all right an’ squar. This chile do, an’ no mistake. Durn it, these air a lot of fust-rate fellurs. I didn’t think thar was sech

among all the yeller skins o' Mexico. An' what do you think—they aint *robbers*, arter all."

"Not robbers?" asked the young Irishman, in a subdued voice, and with a surprised but pleased expression upon his countenance.

"Durn the robber among 'em !"

"What are they, then, Cris?"

"Wal, they call 'emselves monks and friars an' that sort o' thing. But thet's only by way o' fun. Durned strange, but there's a fellur among 'em I used to know in Texas, down by San Antonio. Not a bad sort o' a chap he air. He gin me the cloo o' the hul bizness. They're poleetikul refoogees—thet is, they air the *outs* while Santa Anner's party are the *ins*. They've been out for a good, longish spell, an' hev had to keep thar stummuks supplied best way they kud; but they're now lookin' forard to a purnunshamento, as they call it, the which they expect soon to kim on, and thet'll make gentlemen o' 'em again; so they sez. No, Cap, I don't think they air regoolar robbers—ne'er a one o' 'em. 'Tall events, they don't act or look like it. They hev been a treatin' this chile like a gentleman. Look at the outfit they've put me in."

Cris threw open his striped blanket, itself a superb

one, showing underneath a snow-white shirt, a scarf of finest scarlet crape, with gold fringe at its ends, and a pair of handsome pistols stuck behind it.

“If they be robbers,” he added, “this chile don’t objeck to enconter sech every day o’ his life—durned if he do !”

There was no opportunity for further conversation between Kearney and his old comrade. The long table had by this time become garnished with dishes—the savory product of the convent kitchen—served by waiters of dark, copper-colored skins—all of the Indian race. At a signal, which was given by the tinkling of a bell, the miscellaneous company became seated, Ruperto Rivas taking the head of the table, with Kearney on his right, and the huge Texan flanking him on the left.

For a time there was not much talk, only the rattle of cups and platters on the hard, unclothed table, and the smacking of lips, as of a host of hungry men partaking of a Homeric meal. It was, in truth, of this character. There were no knives nor forks—not even spoons. The pliable *tortilla*, twisted scoop fashion, served for all three, with an adroit manipulation taking up the hash, the stewed tomatoes and the capsic-

cum sauce, and leaving the platters as clean as if licked by a spaniel. A huge jar of *pulque* stood upon the table, from which the guests helped themselves—each being provided with a calabash cup ; and when the meal came near its ending several long-necked bottles were brought into the room, containing cordials, Catalan brandy, Burgundy, and some with silver tops telling of champagne !

“ A toast ! ” cried Ruperto Rivas, filling his painted gourd-shell with the effervescing vintage of France.

Kearney sat curiously listening. What would it be?—the toast of a robber !

Rock’s reasoning had not convinced him. He still believed himself in the midst of a band of brigands—the guest of their chief.

“ The toast ! ” shouted several around the table, filling their calabashes and holding them aloft.

“ *Dios y Libertad !* ” (God and Liberty !) thundered their chief in a tone that seemed strange coming from the lips of a robber—so earnest and so solemn was it.

“ God and liberty ! ” responded his comrades, in a

like serious tone; without any sign of jocularly or trifling.

It could not be mockery—evidently these men were in earnest; so thought Kearney and Cris Rock. Other toasts followed, of different kinds and various degrees of solemnity.

There was "Mexico," "The Republic," and "Death to the Dictator;" and then "Our Texan guests," whom they hoped they would see enrolled in their ranks and form part of the fraternity of "holy friars."

Kearney responded as a gentleman, giving satisfaction to his singular entertainers, but not enough to satisfy his Texan comrade, who, rising to his feet, and leaning like a bent colossus across the slab table, brought his bony knuckles down upon its timber like the stroke of a trip-hammer, vociferating and "swarnin'" that "them war Cris Rock's sentiments," and that whether his new friends were robbers or not he would stand by them "till death an' durnation."

A Mexican breakfast bears considerable resemblance to that of the French, and more like the dinner of other lands. The cup of coffee or chocolate and crackers after getting out of bed is only the *desayuna*

(dejeuner). The real breakfast begins at eleven, often lasting over an hour. That in the old monastery, where Ruperto Rivas was prior, with his jolly monks for companions, and the Texans for guests, continued on into the afternoon. And long ere the carousing had come to an end Florence Kearney was convinced that he had fallen not among thieves or robbers, but honest men. He had, in short, discovered that the revelers around him were "free lances,"—friends to liberty, as to himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUSPICIOUS TRACKS.

“Well, gentlemen!” said Rivas to his two guests, when the breakfasting was at length brought to a close, “after being so long shut up in a prison cell, with only the change into a sewer, I take it a breath of free mountain air will be agreeable to you. What say you to a turn outside? We bold friars don’t always keep close to our cloisters.”

Kearney signified consent to the proposal.

“I can’t promise you much of a promenade,” continued the prior; “the ground around our convent is not very favorable for laying out walks and avenues, though our sainted predecessors did a good deal in that line. I can show you, however, some views—among others that of the famous valley itself. The view of it from this point is said to be one of the finest that can be obtained. We can see the city, as also Lakes Chalco and Yezcoco; of course the grand city of Popocatepec and its snowy twin, the ‘white

sister.' On a clear day we can also make out the outlines of the volcano of Toluca, that also carries the eternal snow upon its shoulders. As you did not enter our beautiful valley exactly in the character of tourists, I take it you haven't as yet had much opportunity of admiring its scenery. But you shall now, and can judge whether its world-wide celebrity be a just one. Come with me, gentlemen." So saying the free-lance chief conducted the Texans out, Kearney going close by his side and Cris Rock striding loosely after.

Outside, the scene was strikingly picturesque. The convent had been erected on a little platform, only a small portion of which was left unoccupied by the building. This formed a bit of terrace in front that showed traces of having been once cultivated as an ornamental ground or garden. But the shubbery that had been once kept carefully trimmed was now little better than a neglected thicket, in which grew the wild maguey and other spinous plants.

Over all rose tall forest trees, evergreen oaks, and huge giants of the family of *Coniferæ*, among others the long-leafed Mexican pine, whose dark-green fascicles, nearly a foot in length, hung drooping down

like the fronds of the weeping willow. The convent was completely screened by them, so that it was not possible to see it from any direction until its crumbling walls echoed the sound of the approaching footstep.

Nor could the promised view have been had from any part of the building itself. To obtain this Don Ruperto conducted his guests some distance along a rocky ridge, terminating in a steep cliff, that shot down sheer at least two hundred yards beneath the spot on which they had come to a stand.

“MIRA !” said he. “*El Valle de Mexico!*” (Behold the Valley of Mexico !)

It is in truth one of the most splendid panoramic views on the face of the earth ; and the young Irishman thought so as his eyes wandered over it. The effect may have been heightened by contrast with the late gloomy scenes to which his vision had been confined. Whether or no, as soon as his gaze fell upon it, the exclamation, “Beautiful !” escaped from his lips with enthusiastic emphasis.

He turned to see whether Cris Rock shared his admiration ; but the Texan was not there.

It did not in any way surprise him. He knew his

old campaigning comrade had been too much accustomed to the wild scenes of nature to care anything for fine views or romantic landscapes; and he had, no doubt, loitered behind or turned aside, following some vagary of his own inclining.

It was true that he had turned aside and was following something, though not a vagary. He was *upon a trail*—the track of a human foot.

While passing from the convent ruin to the ridge, they had crossed a bit of boggy ground, caused by the out-flowing of a mountain spring; and in the soft mud the eye of the Texan, ever active, and instinctively bent toward the discovery of "sign," had detected in this a footprint, and one that seemed to him worthy of examination.

While the others passed onward, soon disappearing among the trunks of the trees, Cris stooped down and carefully scrutinized the footsteps in the mud.

It was the track of a shoe, made Mexican fashion, with a wooden-pegged sole. There was nothing distinctive in this had it been of the ordinary shape and size. But it was neither. In length it was not much greater than a child's, while in breadth it was nearly double. There was, besides, an obliquity strikingly

peculiar. The two footmarks—for both were present upon the mud—showed a turning of the toes inward even beyond that of the ordinary Indian. Besides, a Mexican Indian would not have worn shoes; his foot-gear being universally the Guaraché, or sole-leather sandal.

Cris Rock did not need to enter into any speculation, or make conjecture in such a discriminating manner as this. Almost on the instant of stooping over the track he rose suddenly erect again, exclaiming, as he did so, in a tone that betokened extreme surprise:

“Durn me ef 'taint the dwarf!”

For a short while he kept his place, now bending down a little over the track, now towering erect, and with keen, searching look sweeping the circle around him, as if taking the dimensions of every tree that grew upon the sides of the mountain.

But not another word issued from his lips, nor exclamation of any kind; not the slightest move was made by him; and scarcely any when he at length moved away from the spot, following the footsteps of the hunchback; for the Texan giant felt sure that the

short, broad shoe tracks were those of the Mexican dwarf Zorillo.

With body bent and eye keenly scanning them, he glided on along their trail, soon disappearing among the tree-trunks that grew thickly along the declivity of the mountain.

CHAPTER XXX.

PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT.

“You see yonder white building on the summit of an isolated hill, surrounded on three sides by a precipice, and on the fourth by a steep slope?”

“I do.”

“That is Chapultepec. It is said to have been in ancient times the summer palace of Mochzumio, while the grove of trees at the base of the hill on this side are the celebrated cypresses growing in what was the palace garden. Those trees are older than the conquest, and, as history tells us, Mochzumio used to repose under their shade, dallying there with his dark-eyed Aztecan girls. It is still kept as an ornamental garden, and is a favorite place of resort for the young girls of the city and their sweethearts.”

“But the buildings on the top of the hill, what are they? They appear to be laid out after the fashion of a fortress. I can trace the angles of a parapet, both

salient and re-entrant. There is a glacis and ditch. Guns, too ; those dark dots appear to be guns."

"They are ; and you are right about its being a fortress ; though not supposed of any great strength or importance. Its chief strength lies in its position. As you see, it is only possible to approach along the slope on this side. On the three other faces, it is a precipitous wall of rock, over a hundred feet in height."

"It is garrisoned as a fortress, is it not?"

"No ; it is occupied as a military college. Those white buildings you see are mostly the students' quarters. I know every wall and window of them, having spent three years perched upon the summit of that hill. I am a cadet of the military school of Chapultepec."

It was the robber Rivas who made this announcement, and his late fellow-prisoner, Kearney, who listened to it.

The young Irishman turned upon his companion a glance of half surprise, half interrogation. The other understood it and went on :

"Yes," he said, "I passed three years in the Castle of Chapultepec, and after that rose to be a colonel in

our army. Since then I've had several ups and downs, the last of them the lowest ; for I think you'll agree with me, Señor, there could be nothing below being a prisoner in the Acordada—unless, indeed, the cleaning out of the street sewers, at which both of us have taken a turn."

"By the way, Señor," said Kearney, as if giving way to an impulse of curiosity, "you won't be offended at my asking a strange question?"

"Ask any question you please, Don Florencio. There should be no secrets between fellows in misfortune."

"Then I ask why it is that you have become a *robber*?"

It certainly was a strange question. But it was not mere idle curiosity that prompted the young Irishman to put it. He was thinking of something antecedent to the escape—of the words in Luisa Valverde's letter that told of an interest felt by a certain lady in his prison companion—in this man, whom he supposed to be a common robber!

"A robber!" repeated the Mexican, with a loud but not angry laugh. "So, sir stranger, you really

believe me to be neither more nor less than a highwayman?"

"Well," replied Kearney, feeling a little regretful for the question he had asked, "I heard you called so by our prison associates, and you will admit, Don Ruperto, that you didn't deny it. If I've made a mistake it's a very grievous one, and I owe you a proportionate apology."

"Not a word of apology, Señor. How could you have thought otherwise? How can you now? But the time is come for me to explain—to tell you I am *not* a robber, as neither are any of these friends of mine with whom you have done me the honor of breakfasting."

The young Irishman looked interrogative, asking as plainly as if spoken in words:

"What are they, then? And you, as well as they?"

"We are *gentlemen*, Señor," was the answer to the unspoken question. "Gentlemen who chance, for the time, to be 'outs' in the present scheme of our country's government, and who have the misfortune just now to own estates that are confiscated. Lean a little this way, and look down past the projecting branch of that pine tree. Can you see a broad tract

of land covered with dark-green plants surrounding a very decent-looking dwelling-house?"

"Yes, I see the place you mean."

"Well, that is a maguey plantation; that yields *pulque* worth twenty thousand dollars a year. I was born proprietor of that little estate; and three years ago it was mine. But for three years I haven't touched a dollar of its rents, and never can so long as Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna remains ruler of this country. You see, Señor, I am more robbed than robber."

Kearney felt inclined to spring forward and grasp his late fellow-prisoner's hand. He was only restrained by the thought that he might be listening to a one-sided story.

"You have been grievously slandered, Señor," he said. "In the prison we were told—"

"That I was a hardened highwayman. Of course, that's what Santa Anna's party calls us. It serves their purpose to do so; and scores of our party have been taken and shot on this very plea. In most cases it was simple murder—political, if you like. There may be some real highwaymen among us, I admit; for where's the political party that hasn't been com-

pelled, upon occasions, to avail itself of the services of the thief and robber? And I admit that we have at times to live by a little freebooting, otherwise we should starve. Meat and drink don't grow in these mountains, no more does clothing; and we have to get these indispensables elsewhere—take them, in short. Once in a while we make a descent into the valley, but we are discriminating in our forays. We don't plunder our own parties—only the enemy; and there's one of them now who may shortly expect a midnight visit from us. We have a country house in our eye we intend plundering. Ha! ha! it's not a bad joke, either."

"What aint?" asked Kearney.

"Why, about the house we design paying the visit to. Have you a curiosity to know whose it is?"

The young Irishman neither said yes nor no. He had no answer to make. He could not guess what his free-lance friend was driving at.

"Well," continued the latter, "you can't be much interested one way or the other, but you may be a little amused when I tell you whose house it is. Yonder you see it in the middle of those maguey fields."

Rivas drew aside the drooping branch and pointed to the same dwelling as before.

“Your own house !” said Kearney, now understanding the jest.

“My own house, Señor. It is now occupied by one of the favorites of Don Antonio. I believe the Dictator has bestowed it upon him for some rare service, or sold it cheap, or something of the kind. For a time he kept rather shy of stocking it—not knowing how long the present *regime* might last. But lately, since he knew that I had fallen into their hands, and fancied it was all up with me, he has made it his place of residence, and, as we have reason to know, has got it fitted up and furnished in a style of palatial splendor, mirrors, plate, and all the et ceteras. We sha’n’t disturb his mirrors, but if we find any plate that’s at all portable, we intend transferring it to our own mountain domicile here, along with the proprietor himself, if we can only lay our hands upon him. He’s not a bad-looking fellow, and would make a handsome ornament hanging from the branch of one of these mountain oaks.”

“What may be his name ?” asked Kearney, rather

from an instinct of curiosity than any suspicion of who the usurper might be

“You know both the name and the man, Señor. He is the same who had us degraded by being sent to the sewers.”

“Santander !”

“Don Carlos Santander.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SKULKER CAUGHT.

There was something very singular—and to Kearney and his new acquaintance it seemed so—that this man Santander should have such a sinister influence over the lives of both—constantly coming up to thwart or ruin them.

They were about exchanging thoughts on this subject when their conversation was interrupted by a voice that came reverberating along the ridge, ringing loudly through the trunks of the trees, and sending its echoes along the cliff upon which they stood.

They were surprised, but not at the voice. They recognized it as Cris Rock's. They only wondered why and for what cause it was so strangely attuned.

“Come along hyar, ye durned skunk!” it exclaimed, in a tone of angry menace. “Foller free, or I'll jerk you off o' yur feet an' chuck you right over the edge o' the clift. Step out smart now, an' don't gie me any more o' yur bother. Whar air you, Capt'in Kearney?”

“Here, Rock—up on the high ground here.

Who had the Texan encountered in a place where he had never been before, and where no one was to be expected save the free lances themselves? Had he quarreled with one of them, made captive of him with his strong arm, and was now dragging him into the presence of his chief for punishment or adjudication?

Kearney and Rivas listened. There was a brushing of feet among the dead leaves, the occasional snapping of a twig or rotten stick; but what was that other sound that resembled the clanking of a chain?

It *was* the clanking of a chain!

Rivas and Kearney had just time to turn with inquiring looks towards one another when Rock appeared from behind the screening of the trees, and close behind him an individual at once identified as the dwarf Zorillo. The Texan had hold of the piece of chain still attached to his ankle, and was leading him by it as a showman would a monkey or a bear. In a few seconds' time he led him forward to the edge of the cliff, and the four prisoners of the Acordada were once more united.

“I foun' this thing,” said Rock, giving the dwarf a jerk so as to draw him well out in front—“I foun'

him skulking about down thar among the trees. I wouldn't a foun' him ef 't hadn't been that I kum upon his track where we crossed the bit o' boggy groun'. I seed them, an' that's why I left you. As they war fresh, I soon tracked the skunk up an' laid my claws on him. Now, the question be: What's brought him hyar? He's told me a story. I don't believe a bit of it."

"What story?" asked Rivas.

"Señor Don Ruperto," said the dwarf, answering for himself, "I told nothing but the truth. May the Blessed Virgin deny me if I did!"

While thus uttering, the creature devoutly made the sign of the cross, extending his long arms over his breast like the tentacula of a spider.

"Tell it again," demanded Rivas.

"I only confessed, Señor, to having followed you up here. You can understand, gentlemen, that I—a condemned one—had as much to fear as any of you. If taken back to prison, I might expect the *garota*. When you all left me in the Pedregal, I knew there would be no safety there, as the soldiers would soon discover me; so I kept you in sight as well as I could,

and followed on after you because I knew that where you went there would be nothing to fear.”

“Wretch! do you mean to say that you followed us all the way up the mountain here?”

“I admit it all, Señor Rivas. I had no other hope of escaping from the soldiers, who were after all of us.”

“And you’ve been skulking about here all the morning without showing yourself? Why didn’t you do that?”

“Oh, your worship!” whined out the dwarf, in a piteous tone, “you may know why I did not. Señor Tejano here had threatened to take my life, and I was afraid.”

“I feel like takin’ of it yit,” interposed Rock, giving the chain a significant shake.

“And what would you have done if the Señor Tejano hadn’t caught you as he has now? You couldn’t have lived around here without coming inside the convent.”

“I intended that, your worship; only I was waiting till I could see some one and get leave to go in. But I would have risked everything, even your worship’s displeasure, rather than be taken back to the Acordada.

Ah! Señores, that might be death to me! Have pity, then, and don't drive me from your doors."

"His hul story air a durned imperobable supposition," interrupted Rock, speaking to the others. "There aint the color o' truth on the face o' 't. Ef he'd been afeerd o' the pursuers gettin' holt on him kedn't he a hid himself, like any other varmint, among the rocks o' that ugly bit o' ground we crossed, 'ithout comin' up hyar? He mout a screwed his ugly kar-kidge into a creviss not bigger than would a held a horned frog. Wagh! I don't b'lieve a word o' what he say."

The others looked equally incredulous as to the truth of Zorillo's story.

"He's kim arter us," continued the Texan, "jest to see whar we go. He war a makin' away when I set my eyes on him—stealin' off through the bushes like a coycoat. My opeenyun, gentlemen, air that the bessest way would be to swing him up in one o' these hyar pine trees—he wouldn't be much o' a 'dornment to it. Ef ye prefer it, I'll sling him out over the clift. Say the word, eyther o' ye, an' 't air done."

"O, mercy, Don Cristoforo!" cried the dwarf;

“mercy on a poor, accursed creature. I swear, Señors, I’ve told only the truth. I swear—I swear it!”

And the miserable wretch, dropping down upon his knees, repeated, over and over again, the sign of the cross.

“It does seem doubtful,” said Rivas to Kearney, speaking in an undertone—“odd he should have followed us up here, after the way we treated him; and not less odd he should have been able to keep us in view. He’s a singular creature anyhow; and it’s just possible he may have known the path before. Well, we can’t commit murder; and it would be doing that, I take it, to leave him much longer in the keeping of your colossal comrade. But it doesn’t seem safe to let him go; so I fancy we best hold on to him. We can shut him up in one of the cells of the old monastery, where he’ll be safe enough.”

Kearney, thus consulted, signified that he was of the same way of thinking.

“Bring him along, Señor Cristoforo,” said Rivas, sharply, to the Texan, as he turned to go back to the ruin. “Conduct him inside the monastery, and let us make a monk of him. Ha! ha! ha! We’ll

see that for some time he keeps close to his cloister."

All four commenced marching back toward the ruined convent, Rock evidently reluctant, and casting glances back towards the cliff, as if still desirous by that easy method to disembarass himself of the deformed specimen of humanity attached to the end of the chain. It seemed a cruel antipathy on the part of the Texan ; but it was not altogether that : only an instinct of self-preservation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE INVESTIGATION.

The escape of the two Texans, and along with them their yoked fellow-prisoners, made some noise in the Mexican capital. Still not so much as might be imagined by those unacquainted with Mexican affairs. In a country where pronunciamientos are put forth and revolutions arise on an average of one to every six months—where stage-coaches travelling on its most frequented roads are stopped and plundered by armed bandits every week, and almost every day; where men are “kidnapped” in their own court-yards, and carried off to the mountains, there to be held captive until released by ransom, and hanged or shot if they be not; where the footpad stalks boldly abroad in the streets, and the highwayman rides rampant along the roads; where there is blood-letting every day and every night by the dagger of the assassin—in a land like this, where “law secures not life,” it may easily be supposed that such a trifling event as the

escape of three or four prisoners would not constitute more than a nine days' wonder. Nor would it have done, even this much had the escaped prisoners been of the class of jail-birds ordinarily engaged in the Acordada. Only because of their being Texans had any attention been attracted to the affair, and a little perhaps from the mode by which they had succeeded in setting themselves free.

About this there was something so peculiar and original as to pique even the curiosity of a people used to startling events. Various accounts of it had been given, by those who chanced to be spectators, and all sorts of speculations were afloat as to how the thing had been done. Everybody acknowledged it to be a neat thing; and but for the tragical episode at the garita, where the sergeant and sentry had been killed—for both were shot dead—most people would have been disposed to applaud the skill and courage that had been displayed by the escaping prisoners.

The investigation that followed proved both to have been remarkable. There was originality in the design of selecting a private carriage as a means to escape by; adroitness in the way it was seized upon; while to run the gantlet of a whole line of armed

sentinels, and afterwards the guard at the garita, showed a degree of determined courage that invested the adventurers with something like a halo of heroism. The question arose, whence came the pistols? They could not have been obtained in the carriage, as ladies were not likely to have had such playthings beside them. Had they been procured in the prison, or passed to the prisoners on their passage along the streets by some act of prestidigitation on the part of confederates? Of course, the friends of the robber, Rivas, got credit for it, though there was a suspicion of connivance on the part of one of the jailers—he who had charge of their cell. The man was submitted to a severe examination, but nothing could be proved against him. On the contrary, it was shown that he had all along treated his prison wards with more than the usual cruelty practiced within the walls of the Acordada. He had in reality done so under orders from the jail governor, himself instigated by unseen pressure from behind.

The sentinel immediately in charge of them was next placed upon the stand. There was something suspicious in the fact of his gun having flashed without firing. But the piece was examined, and a *bona*

fide ball-cartridge found inside attested his attention to have sent the shot into the carriage. There were witnesses who saw him aim right into the windows. The touch-hole was found clogged, and this had caused the failure of the fire, while there was no reason to suppose that he had tampered with it. Besides, the soldier had been earnest in giving the alarm, having sent his cries along the street in loud, shrill intonation.

His examination only proved negligence in not "keeping his powder dry," and with a reprimand for it he was dismissed from the witness-box.

The coachman's conduct was also closely scrutinized. Joé's story was simple and straightforward. He swore that the driving on his part had been altogether involuntary, or rather compulsory; that, in fact, he had not driven at all. The great Texan had jerked the reins out of his hands, and, moreover, threatened him with a knife held close to his heart, if he should make either outcry or offer resistance. It would have been certain death for him to do either. A harmless young fellow—as Don Ignacio's coachman was known to be—could not, under the circumstances, have acted otherwise than he had done. He had suf-

ferred enough in the scare he had had, to say nothing of the risk of getting a bullet through his body while running the gantlet of the garita. This was the reflection that followed when the testimony of the coachman was given in. But if he did not drive, how came the Texan, who was a stranger, and could know nothing of the roads, to head the horses in the right direction for the country ?

This question asked of him certainly appeared to have something in it ; but his answer was ready, and seemed rational enough. Don Ruperto, he said, standing up in the carriage, had both with voice and gesture told the Texan which way to go and what to do. In short, Don Ruperto had directed everything, and it was he who, before riding off, had ordered him—the coachman—to be lashed to the wheel of the carriage.

Throughout all the investigation not a word was said about the hammer and chisel that had been discovered under the cushions of the carriage. Of course, no one thought of mentioning these things, for no one had heard of their having been found. Cris Rock had shown wisdom in disposing of them as he had done.

In fine, the military council intrusted with the affair came to the conclusion that no blame could be

brought home to any one beyond that of negligence. It was a bold, original attempt of three very daring men, and as such it had succeeded.

No one dreamt of calling the ladies to account. The idea that they could have in any way connived at the escape of criminals—all robbers, too, for the Texans were deemed no better—would have been scouted as preposterous. It was not thought of. People only sympathized with the “pobres señoritas” (poor young ladies). How terribly they must have been frightened when the fierce, mud-bedaubed convicts sprang into the carriage beside them! No wonder they had screamed so loudly! And what presence of mind they had shown in leaping out on the opposite side! If they had not done so they might have been carried off to some robber’s den in the mountains; and then what would have become of them?

There was one man, however, whose reflections did not altogether run in this sympathizing strain. This was Colonel Carlos Santander. For more causes than one the Creole had his suspicions that the Señoritas Valverde and Almonte were not blameless in the affair, but had both of them connived at the escape, and perhaps even planned it.

It was a suspicion that tortured him to the heart's core ; and he would have given a large reward to any one who could have proved their connivance. While eagerly directing the search after the three principal fugitives that for days occupied his whole time, he was equally desirous to recapture the fourth—the dwarf Zorillo—from whom he hoped to obtain testimony that would serve his most sinister purpose.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SUBURBAN VILLAGE.

The great National Road, running southward from the City of Mexico, is one of the most interesting highways on the continent of America. Although heading nearly due south from the Mexican capital, instead of in a westerly direction, it is the continuation of that road of the same name which, starting from Vera Cruz on the Gulf, terminates at the port of Acapulco on the Pacific. In its day it was regarded as a work of grand engineering skill, and would be even now, since it is carried across several chains of mountains that would seem almost impracticable for vehicles on wheels. Over these it is conducted by easy gradients that remain to this hour monuments of a master mind on the part of him who made it. It was the work of a Spanish engineer, under the inspiration of Revillagegedo, one of the most noted and energetic of the vice-kings of New Spain.

It is interesting, also, as having been, in old vice-

regal times, the grand highway over which passed much of the rich commerce of the Indies, coming across the Pacific Ocean, then passing, by land carriage, from Acapulco to Vera Cruz, thence to be transported over another great ocean to supply the shops and coffers of proud Spain, then steeped to the lips in luxury.

A thousand strange incidents—a thousand romantic episodes—have occurred on this old road, which has, at different periods, borne the two distinct names of Royal and National. Thanks to the spirit of republicanism that, despite the long-continued assaults of despotism, still survives in the country of Moctezuma, it is now again National, and likely to remain so.

There is no portion of this road more interesting than where it emerges from the City of Mexico, turning south towards the Pacific. And this section of it is less known. Thousands of travellers have made the journey from Vera Cruz to the capital, and scores have printed their impressions of it, all nearly in the same style and to the same tune. But few have described its continuation through the territories beyond. Passing out through the garita of San Antonio de Abad, it is carried by a wide causeway,

with water ditches on each side, along a level plain through meadows, maize fields, and plantations of the giant, dark-green maguey. Crossing the stream of Churubusco, by the bridge famed for its battle, it bends slightly to the east, and skirting the sedge-covered lagoon of Xochimilco, with the singular lava field of the Pedregal on its right, it enters the Mount Amires tract that shuts in the Mexican valley on the south, and ascending the Sierra of Ajusco through romantic passes, one of which, after Cortez himself, bears the name of Cruz del Marquez (the Cross of the Marquis), it drops to a lower elevation into the beautiful valley of Cuemavacel, Spain's gift to the great "Conquestador," which gave him his title of Marquis del Vallé.

In this history we do not intend following the road so far; only to the point where it penetrates the mountains about ten miles from the garita of San Antonio de Abad. There stands a town, or rather, a large village—one of the most beautiful in all the valley of Mexico. It is the "pueblo" of San Augustin de los Cuevos, (St. Augustin of the Caves,) but known also to the Aztec Indians—many of whom are its inhabitants—by its ancient appellation of *Tlalpam*.

The titles are partially synonymous, derived from certain curious caverns that exist in the adjacent Sierra.

San Augustin is to the metropolis of Mexico what Brighton is to London, or Long branch to the city of New York ; during a certain season of the year a place of fashionable resort. And yet it is not exactly comparable to either. Only for a very short period is it a place of pleasure, and this of a character and kind altogether different from what transpires at Brighton or Long Branch.

The "season" of San Augustin is during the days of carnival. Then the quaint suburban village—at other seasons of the year tranquil enough—becomes transformed into a crowded fair, with grand booths, tents, and other temporary camp-dwellings, most of them devoted to gambling. There, around *monté* tables, may be seen seated, or standing, gentlemen dressed in the latest style of Parisian fashion, alongside cavaliers in the picturesque costume of the country ; officers, military and diplomatic, bedizened in gold lace ; senators in more sober garb ; priests in their robes of black serge and coal-scuttle hats upon their heads ; leperos in striped serapes ; professional card-players and criminals of every class, among them

not unfrequently the robber and murderer. And in the midst of this motley crowd, and forming a considerable portion of it, ladies of fashion and *haut ton*, dressed in gorgeous silken apparel, and touching skirts with the wool-petticoated peasant girl and the more stylishly attired *poblana*.

On such occasions there is no distinction of class. The social aristocracy—termed the *familias principales*—has, for the time, to sink its pretensions to exclusiveness, and laying them aside with the best grace it can, becomes merged in the democratic mass. It is, in fact, a sort of annual saturnalia, such as may at times be seen in old Spain itself and other continental countries of Europe—especially among the Latinic races.

In San Augustin this mad fit is of brief duration. In a week or ten days it is all over; the mercurial crowd takes its departure; the tents and booths are pulled down; and the beautiful *pueblo* is once more restored to its normal condition of a quiet country village.

Still it is not deserted, for in and around it some of the “first families” have fine country-houses, where they spend a goodly portion of the year. These are

not villas in the New York or Brighton style, but grand dwellings, surrounded by high stone or "adobe" walls, on the tops of which flourish tall cactus plants, their fluted stems, like Corinthian columns, rising stiffly up among the drooping branches of the Peruvian pepper-tree.

And within these inclosures, under the shade of a semi-tropical foliage, are beautiful grounds and gardens; with arboreous seats, statues, fountains supplied from the crystal streams of the adjacent Sierra; in short, everything that seems needed to make country life an Elysium.

One of these pleasant retreats belonged to Don Ignacio Valverde. It was part of the confiscated property lately restored to him; and at intervals, when not occupied with state affairs in the capital, he was accustomed to make it the abiding place of himself and family, that now consisted of his daughter and that other young lady already known, standing to Luisa Valverde in the relationship of cousin, and to Don Ruperto Rivas, the reputed robber, in that of a sweetheart!

Such things may seem strange in the eyes of an American. They are quite common in Mexico,

where the robber is not always a cutthroat, but often only a gentleman driven to the "road,"—forced by political causes a little outside the pale of respectable society; and it might be that Ruperto Rivas was but telling the truth when he proclaimed himself as belonging to this category.

At all events, Ysabel Almonte so believed it; for in such matters love is ever merciful and lenient.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNDER THE QUINCE TREES.

It was about the sixth day after the escape of the two Texan prisoners, along with their chain companions, and near the hour of sunset. The golden orb—the god of ancient Tenochtitlan—was low down over the summits of the western Sierras, overlooking the plains of Toluca, his last beams kissing as with rose-colored lips the snowy cone of Popocatepec, and the spotless bosom of the “White Sister” recumbent by its side.

Along the gravelled walks of a walled garden—just outside the suburbs of San Augustin—and under the shadows of its quince trees, two ladies were strolling. They were both young, both beautiful, but of a style entirely different. Although cousins, there was no resemblance between them, except in the color of their hair—in both jet black—and a little also in the complexion. One was tall, of imperious, commanding mien, and features pronouncedly Spanish; while

the other was of less than medium woman's size—what is usually termed petite—of plump, rounded form, and a face that bespoke an admixture of Indian blood. The obliqued eyes and slightly aquiline nose were evidently Aztec; while the complexion was but a shade or two lighter than what might be seen all around Tlalpam in a people undoubtedly descended from the subjects of Moctezuma. Despite her purely Spanish name, Ysabel Almonte had the blood of Azteca in her veins—for one of the two ladies was she. The other was Luisa Valverde.

They were walking along a sanded path, under the shadow of trees, but not straying. They were going back and forward over the same ground, engaged in a conversation that seemed serious and earnest. It must have been about some subject that disturbed them, for the tranquil air of the evening, though laden with the narcotic fragrance of the *floupondios*, did not hinder them from being excited and also somewhat distressed. There was trouble on the countenances of both, though it was more plainly indicated in the looks of Luisa Valverde. The expression upon the features of Ysabel was rather that of recklessness, or a more

fearless defiance of some danger that both seemed to dread. Her speech pointed to it.

“And what if they should find it out? They wouldn't dare do aught to us. Consider, Luisita, that your father is high in office—part of the government itself.”

“Ah! dearest Ysa.,” rejoined her more serious companion, “you don't know to what papa owes his present elevation. If you did you might understand how little it would avail us, should it come to our being found out—me certainly nothing, but rather the reverse. I tremble more for father than for myself.”

“I think I *do* know, and *do* understand you, Luisita,” said the mixed blood, with a glance that seemed to take in the whole outlines of her splendidly beautiful cousin. “If so, why be troubled or affrighted? Surely the same influence that procured your father's pardon will get us out of such a trifling trouble as this.”

“Trifling trouble you call it! To assist in the escape of four prisoners, and two of them that are said to be criminals—”

“No! no! no! Only one criminal, Luisita. You speak too fast. I admit that Don Ruperto has

obtained the reputation of being a robber, but he is not a criminal. I am sure he is not, any more than your Don Florencio. He is outlawed, it is true, but that's for political reasons ; and if he has done some deeds—as they say he has—remember a man must live. His estates have been taken from him, as were your father's ; and Mexico isn't New Orleans, where he might get his bread by giving lessons in the Spanish language. Only one criminal, cousin."

"Forgive me, Ysabel. I had no thought of condemning Don Ruperto, or calling him a criminal. I only meant that he is so spoken of by others—of course, because he was in prison."

"Well, he is no longer there—thanks to you, dear Luisita, with a little help from myself—and it isn't likely he'll get back into the Acordada for some time to come."

"You think there's no danger, Ysa.? You know things better than I. It is so long since I was here at home, and everything seems so changed I almost forget the ways of my own country."

This earnest inquiry for the safety of Don Ruperto had no reference to him or his peril, only so far as it included his late prison companion.

“Not much danger,” responded the semi-Aztec—
“not much danger for Don Ruperto, nor your Texans
either, since, wherever he is, they will both be along
with him.”

“But you know they have sent out large bodies of
troops—both infantry and cavalry. I heard Don Car-
los say so. They are searching the valley in all direc-
tions, and are now scouring the mountain passes.”

“Let them search and scour!” cried the descend-
ant of the Moctezumas, with a contemptuous toss of
her head and a flash of old Aztec fire from her
almond-shaped eyes. “If these gold-laced military
heroes don’t take good care, some of themselves
may get caught in the mountain passes. And I
hope they will! Wouldn’t it serve them right? I
only wish this friend of yours, Don Carlos Santan-
der—”

“Friend of mine!”

“Well, your father’s friend.”

“Only in appearance, Ysa.: he is the enemy of
both of us—perhaps our greatest enemy—if you
knew all. But no matter now. I can only think of
Florencio. I wonder where they can have gone to?
They must have taken their fetters along with them,

and the hammer, too—everything! José says that nothing has been found.”

“That’s all the better for us. Don Ruperto would be sure to think of it. The tools would have surely betrayed us. How fortunate they did not find out about the pistols.”

“Ah! that grieves me. Only to think that we have been the cause of killing two men!”

“And what if we have? Rather think of the two other men whose lives have been saved by it. If they had not shot the soldiers out of their way, both might now be back in the Acordada, and shot or garroted themselves. I won’t fret myself about what they did with the pistols if it don’t come out where they procured them. That’s our danger, Luz.; but maybe it’s not much, since it is generally supposed that some of Don Ruperto’s people found a means of pitching them into the carriage as they were galloping along the Paseo. Good José says he threw out this hint as they were examining him, and he will swear to it if they press him further. Wasn’t it thoughtful of the brave fellow thus to befriend us? We can depend upon him for anything, I take it.”

“I have no fear of him, Ysa. He has been brought

up in our family, and Pepita says he would do anything for us. Besides, you know he is himself compromised, and would be in great danger if the truth should become known."

"How can it? There's no one to tell anything; and I'm sure we played our parts to perfection. I was really a bit frightened as they made the rush to the carriage, for I didn't know but that the horrid sentry might fire his gun after them, and hit one of us. Didn't I cry out beautifully? There never was a more natural scream heard on the streets of Mexico. It would have made the fortune of a stage performer. Ha! ha! Santissima!"

The laugh of the light-hearted girl was closely followed by the exclamation which terminated in a scream, as if a hysterical fit had suddenly taken possession of her.

Her cousin fancied she was giving an imitation of herself in the street scene; but on looking into her face, she beheld an expression that at once contradicted the idea.

Ysabel had turned toward the wall, and was gazing up to its top among the branches of a tree that overhung it from the outside. These were thickly

trellised by parasites and other climbing plants, forming a second wall of verdure, bespangled with blossoms, among which were the grand, bell-shaped corollas of the *floupundio*.

“What is it?” anxiously asked Luisa, seeing that her cousin had turned pale and stood trembling.

“Oh, Luisita, look there! Is it the face of a man?”

Luisa looked as directed. Not strange that the question expressed a doubt. There was a face seen through the lattice work of leaves, but scarcely the countenance of a man. It more resembled the physiognomy of the fabled griffin, or some grand African ape. And there was a grin upon it more demon-like than human.

No wonder that both were affrighted, that they trembled as they clasped one another by the hands, and still continued to tremble as they stood side by side, holding fast to each other.

“Don’t be alarmed, ladies,” came a voice, in sharp, squeaky tones from out a wide, thin-lipped mouth that traversed half way across the strange face. “Don’t be frightened of me. I’m only an old friend. You don’t remember my face? Maybe it will assist

your recollection if I show you my beautiful body ! It isn't so easily forgotten by any one who has once had the felicity to look upon it."

There was a shaking of the branches and a movement among the leaves, and presently a form displayed itself passing along a limb of the tree with the agility of an orang-outang ; to which, had it been covered with red hair instead of dark cloth garments, it would have borne a very striking resemblance.

Both had by this recognized it as the piece of deformed humanity they had seen in the sewer chained to the great Texan, and afterwards carried off by him on the box of their carriage !

Zorillo spoke the truth. They who had once looked upon, were not likely ever after to forget him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SURRENDER OF JEWELRY.

In a second after the dwarf had slung himself from the branch to the top of the adobe wall, where he remained squatted in a half-sitting, half-crouching attitude, grinning down at the ladies below.

It was a picture that might have been likened to Satan by the side of the garden of Eden, only that there were two Eves instead of one.

Despite her professed bravery, Ysabel Almonte felt fear, which might have ended in flight, had not her cousin restrained her.

The latter drew courage from a thought.

Hideous as was the creature before her eyes, she was thinking only of those with whom he had been associated ; and perhaps he now presented himself as the bearer of tidings from them. With this hope she kept her ground, restraining her companion.

“You remember me now—don’t you?” chuckled out the hunchback.

“Oh ! yes, we do. It was you—”

“I who, along with others, benefited by the well-

contrived scheme of your ladyships. Ah! wasn't it well contrived?"

"How, sir?"

"How! Pretty innocent doves! Surely I need not tell you. It should be enough for you to know how admirably your plan succeeded, which, of course, you do. Your friends, my late room-mates in the Hotel de Acordada, are now separated from me. No doubt it will rejoice you to know that they are beyond the reach of our common enemies, and hidden in a place where there is no fear of them being found."

The dwarf grinned gleefully as he saw the pleasure this assurance produced.

Luisa had it upon the tip of her tongue to ask, "where?" She was restrained by the fear of committing herself.

"You needn't be afraid to talk to me," continued the hunchback. "My name is Zorillo; at least that's the nickname people have given me, because they say I've got cunning. The fox, you know, has got that. Be it so. It's only talent, after all, and it's at your service, Señoritas!"

"What do you wish us to do? We know nothing

of what you are speaking about. Explain yourself, Señor Zorillo."

"Know nothing! Come, come, young ladies; this is only a poor jest; and somewhat ill-timed, too. You know all. And so do I. How well you played your part! Ha! ha! ha! They couldn't have done it better in the Iturbide theatre — those actress damsels there—not one of them. What foresight, too, in providing the pistols, to say nothing of the hammer and chisel! Both have been so useful to us. But for the first we might, after all, have failed, and the brace of unfortunate guards, instead of being now quietly asleep in their coffins, might have been smoking their cigarretos and drinking pulque at the garita, while the gallant Señores Ruperto and Florencio, to say nothing of the grand Señor Cristoforo and my diminutive self, might have been still clanking our chains in a cell of the Acordada. Instead we are all free, thanks to your worthy ladyships."

Clearly, the hunchback knew all. It would be no use attempting further subterfuge with him. So whispered Ysabel to her cousin.

"Well, Señor Zorillo," said Luisa, addressing the

dwarf in her blandest tone, "admitting what you say to be true, and supposing we did do something to assist in the escape of your fellow-prisoners and yourself, what do you want of us?"

"*Carrambo!*" exclaimed the dwarf. "I want nothing; that is, nothing for myself. I've only come here as the emissary of others."

"Don Ruperto has sent you?" asked Ysabel, quickly; while with like celerity the name of Don Florencio flew to the lips of Luisa.

"Both, ladies. I have the honor to present myself as the ambassador of both the gallant gentlemen you have named."

"For what have they sent you, Señor? Pray tell us at once!"

"Charming Señoritas, I should have told you long ago, but that the message I bear is of a somewhat delicate nature. I must premise, however, that it was not intended to be addressed to you, but to a gentleman in San Augustin, whom I have been so unfortunate as not to find at home. Your friends, I need not tell you, are up in the mountains, where there's no great plenty of provisions. They've been forty-eight hours without taking food, and have deputed your humble

servant upon a foraging or rather begging expedition."

The young ladies exchanged glances with each other. Florencio and Ruperto fasting for forty-eight hours!

"As I've said, Señoritas, they didn't send me to you. They don't know you are here. I was to come down into the valley, and do what I could to procure something for them to eat. As there is no money, I suppose I shall have to steal it. But that might end in my getting caught, and then the señores would run the risk of starving. Hearing by chance that your ladyships were out here, I thought it would be no offence if I should make my appeal to you. Why I didn't go in by the front gate, but have thus unceremoniously presented myself, will no doubt occur to your ladyships."

"You have acted right, sir," said the Señorita Valverde, interrupting him. "Ysa.," she asked, hastily turning to her cousin, "have you any money?"

"Not a bit, dear coz. You know I spent it all upon the pistols."

"And I have nothing. What's to be done?"

"If it's merely a question of coin, ladies, why

should you distress yourself? I observe that you've both got watches and jewelry upon your persons. That will do equally well. I fancy the shop-keepers of San Augustin will take them in lieu of the provisions we require. If not, I know a way of converting them into coin."

"True! true!" exclaimed the young ladies together. "Here, sir, are our watches. Do what you will with them, but lose no time in relieving your comrades in misfortune."

"Have no fear of that," rejoined the dwarf. "With your generous help I shall not be slow in releasing them from their distressed situation. And while you're about it, Señoritas—excuse me for the suggestion—you may as well add those rings and brooches. It may be some time before I dare venture down into the valley again. I can only come at the risk of my miserable life; which, strange as it may seem to you, is of as much value to me as if I were straight and handsome like the Señores Ruperto and Florencio."

The ladies glanced significantly at one another and sympathizingly towards Zorillo. Both understood the appeal, and responded to it by at once giving up their

jewels, stripping themselves of every article of value upon their person. They pulled the rings from their fingers and plucked the diamond drops from their delicate ears, and then, reaching up to the top of the wall, poured all into the palms of the misshapen monster, eagerly extended to receive them.

As his long fingers closed over the sparkling treasure like the tentacles of a tarentula a grin of demoniac triumph shot out from his sunken eyes ; and simply saying, "Gracios, Señoritas !" (thanks young ladies), he slipped down behind the wall, relieving them from a sight almost as painful as the having to part with their costly bijouterie.

"What matters it, Luisa ? We can get money and buy more."

"Oh, dearest Ysa., to think that my Florencio has been two days without tasting food !"

"And hasn't my Ruperto been the same ? Never mind ! They will now have a feast, with the additional pleasure of knowing who has provided it."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A TWILIGHT ENCOUNTER.

In the cities or towns of Mexico there is nothing that may properly be termed a suburb : that is, there are few straggling houses. Most of the cities, and even the country towns, are engirt by a wall, with gates intended for the collection of the inland revenue or tax upon all commodities brought to the market. These gates, or "garitas," as they are called, resemble the barriers in Paris, France, and are kept up for a somewhat similar purpose.

There are two other reasons for the compactness of Mexican cities—revolutions and robbers.

Although there is not a surrounding wall to the town of San Augustin de las Cuevas, its houses have no scattering suburb, but end abruptly as you pass out towards the country. In a score or two of paces you are among the fields, travelling upon a solitary road.

That leading to the City of Mexico skirts the Ped-

regal, whose rough rocks of lava approach within a few hundred yards of the entrance to the village.

On that same evening on which the dwarf appeared in the garden of Don Ignacio's country house, and about an hour later, a man was seen moving along this road, his face towards the town and less than a quarter of a mile from the outermost houses.

As he was in his shirt-sleeves, and bearing only a couple of halters in his hand, it was evident he could not have come from a very great distance. He had not—for it was only our old friend José, Don Ignacio's coachman, returning from a piece of town pasture to which he had been taking his master's horses—the same pair of high bloods that had so efficiently served the prisoners in their escape from the sewers. Of course, they had been afterwards caught and returned to their owner.

The faithful and heroic José belonged to that class of mixed-breed Mexicans who supply the houses of the "recos," or rich men, with their staff of domestic servants, and who for honesty, amiability, and many other good qualities, are not surpassed by any other servants in the world. They are usually of a contented and easily controlled disposition; withal hav-

ing a dash of independence, as becomes the children of a republic—even such a republic as Mexico. Not a fraction of flunkyism in their nature—of that kind felt and practiced among the Jeameses of aristocratic England.

José's fidelity may be guessed at from the readiness with which he entered into the scheme for setting free the Acordada prisoners at the bidding of his young mistress ; and his courage was proved by the same ; since he knew well enough the danger to which he would himself be exposed, not only from the chances of getting a bullet through his body, but from punishment should his connivance become known.

The immediate peril had passed ; still was he not yet clear. As already stated, he had been taken up and had gone through a process of examination, after which, though the intercession of his master, he had been set free, though only on bail. But he knew it would not end thus, or, at all events, he suspected it. Certain speeches let drop by his accusers and judges during the trial, caused him to conjecture that the case might be brought on again, when perhaps he wouldn't be the only accused, but that his young mistress and her cousin might be beside him. The faith-

ful fellow felt more uneasiness for them than himself ; for he had reason to know how much they had compromised themselves.

He had made up his mind to do all in his power to screen them, and would swear to anything that might favor this design—that black was blue, or white, if necessary ; and as he returned home slowly along the road, he was walking with eyes upon the ground, reflecting on what would be the best story for him to tell ; not for his own benefit, but that of the young ladies.

The road was deserted and lonely, not a solitary passenger appearing upon it ; and as the twilight was now on, and the darkness increased by the overshadowing of some tall poplar trees, he could not see more than a hundred yards ahead of him. Still what light there was fell in his favor, and against the chances of any one first seeing him who came from the opposite direction. Farther on towards town the rows of poplars terminated, and beyond them the causeway stretched clear of bordering trees, and was therefore under a lighter tinge of the twilight. It was there clear enough for him to see to a greater distance, and as he continued to advance he could distinguish a

dark form coming toward him as if from the town. At first this form had the semblance of a quadruped, but gradually, as it drew nearer, Don Ignacio's coachman could see that it was a biped and a human being, though one of figure so deformed as scarcely to deserve the appellation of human. It was the hideous hunchback, Zorillo.

The coachman having shared his box with him on that wild ride, recognized the dwarf at a glance; and it was only a question as to whether he should remain upon the road and encounter, or turn aside and shun him. He could tell that Zorillo had not as yet seen him, for the shadow of the poplars prevented it.

He stopped to consider, and a crowd of reflections rushed into his mind. They were most of them rather remembrances. He remembered the antipathy shown by Cris Rock to this strange creature, which seemed to be shared by his other fellow-prisoners. He remembered, too, how unceremoniously they had all three treated him, and their reluctance to take him along with them on leaving the carriage. Besides, in addition to his unprepossessing physical appearance, there was something sinister in Zorillo's glance that had struck José, leading him to believe that in some

way or another the hunchback was an enemy to his late fellows in misfortune.

How came he to be there? He was going along the road alone, it is true, but openly, and as if without fear of being molested. As a fugitive from justice he should have dreaded being taken back to his jail. Why was he not, like the others, in some place of concealment?

There was something in this to excite the coachman's suspicions and make him cautious about coming to an encounter. He could avoid it without difficulty by simply gliding in behind a rock or tree, and there staying till the hunchback should pass the spot. He was at a point where the road runs close along the edge of the Pedregal, and opposite to him was an embayment—somewhat resembling an old gravel-pit—into which he might in three steps retreat, and find concealment in one of its dark recesses.

He would, perhaps, have done this at once but for a reflection. He was curious to ascertain something of the fugitives, and whether they were still free. The dwarf must have accompanied them for some distance after parting from the place where the carriage had been abandoned, and could, perhaps, tell

him something about their present place of abode. José was desirous of knowing it; for he knew how very desirous were two young ladies whom he would gladden by giving them this information.

But would Zorillo give it, even supposing he could? He might or he might not. Perhaps he would say something to mislead. What was he there for—walking boldly and openly along the main highway to Mexico?

Reflecting thus, José thought it might be better to follow the dwarf a bit, and, if possible, ascertain where he was going and what he was doing. At all events, there could be no harm in dogging him for a short distance. The cripple-like creature could at any time be easily overtaken, and then—

José's reflections were interrupted, and by a sound that decided him as to the course he should pursue. It was the trampling of hoofs, which told of a troop of horsemen coming along the causeway in the opposite direction, from Mexico, and toward San Augustin. And mingling with the dull tread of the horses was the sharp, metallic tinkling of bits and the clanking of steel scabbards that told of the horsemen being sol-

diers—beyond doubt a patrolling party of dragoons or other cavalry.

Don Ignacio's coachman had no wish to await the coming up of these ; nor did the dwarf seem to desire an encounter with them : for, on the sounds first reaching him, he was seen to scramble off the road and conceal himself among some bushes by its side.

But just at that moment a voice came from among the party of patrols, speaking some words of command ; and the hunchback, on hearing it, scrambled out again into the open road, as if he had recognized the speaker and had no fear of an encounter with him, but rather courted it.

José also recognized the voice as that of Don Carlos Santander ; and just for this very reason did he, instead of desiring to be seen, make all haste to hide himself.

In another instant he had stepped back into the embayment of the rocks and squeezed his body into a dark crevice he had already observed, where he would have been invisible to an eye that he might have touched with the tips of his fingers.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A VOLUNTEER GUIDE.

Don Ignacio's coachman had just succeeded in safely secreting himself, when the body of horsemen came abreast, their leader suddenly reining up and commanding the others to halt.

José looked, as well as listened, to discover the cause, though he had a suspicion of what it was.

"*Carrambo!*" exclaimed Santander, "what is that on the road—a man or a monkey?"

"Whichever you please, Señor Don Carlos," answered a shrill, squeaking voice, which José knew to be that of the hunchback. "If your excellency will only condescend to take a good look at me, I flatter myself you will remember having seen me before."

"*Carrambo!*" again ejaculated the leader of the troop, which consisted only of a half score of men, evidently an escort. "As I'm a soldier, it's the little dwarf who was chained to the big Texan giant! Come, *Señor enano*, this is an unexpected encounter.

What's your trick, my fine specimen of humanity? You know you are an escaped convict, and therefore our prisoner! Say, why have you saved us a search by presenting yourself in this free and easy fashion?"

"Because, Señor Don Carlos, I am desirous to have a word with your excellency, and in truth was on my way to the city to seek this interview which fortune favors me with."

"Your journey's saved, then," gleefully returned the officer, who was evidently gratified by the encounter. "You shall have the interview now, and without going a step farther."

"I wish it to be a private one, Señor. For your sake I wish it so."

"Corporal!" called Santander to the soldier at the head of the escort, "take the men a hundred yards farther up the road; there halt and remain in readiness."

The corporal did as directed, leaving his leader alone with the ape-like figure alongside of him, who had drawn nearer and stood close to his toe in the stirrup.

But as if for greater security against being over-

heard, the dwarf sidled towards the opening in the rocky wall, the horseman necessarily following him.

“Now, my beauty !” demanded the latter, as soon as he had got his horse to stand at rest. “What’s your business with me ?”

“You have been searching for Señor Don Ruperto and the two Texans ?” was the dwarf’s rejoinder. “Your excellency has not succeeded in finding them ?”

“True enough, sirrah, if that be any satisfaction to you.”

“What would your excellency give to know where they all are ?”

“At this moment ?”

“At this very moment.”

“Do you know, my fellow ?”

“How could I help knowing, your excellency ? Wasn’t I carried off along with them, though greatly against my will ? I’ve been all the way to their hiding-place.”

“Ha ! but why did you not stay there ?”

“Because I’ve been treated scurvily by them. If, as they tell me, I’m not very nice to look at, that’s nature’s fault, not mine. But it’s their fault if I have

feelings of spite against them. To be candid with you, Señor Don Carlos, I want revenge, and that's why I've sought you."

"Well, that's all natural enough; and with these motives it shouldn't be hard to make a bargain with you for one who can give you revenge. You say you know where Don Ruperto and the Texans have taken refuge?"

"The exact spot."

"You will have no objection to tell me?"

"Not the slightest, even if your excellency could find the way to it. But you could not without me for a guide who's already been there. No directions would serve you."

"And, pray, where is this place so difficult to find?"

"It is up the mountains—on the side of the Sierra Ajusco. There is an old ruin—a convent it was once. Part of it is still fit for living in, and in it are now living the Señor Don Ruperto, his Texan friends, and nearly fifty others."

"Ah—fifty! Who and what are they?"

"Your excellency may easily tell that—robbers, of course."

Santander drew a long breath that seemed expressive of satisfaction.

“And you want a reward for guiding a party to the place?”

“Your excellency has said it exactly.”

“What reward? Don't be exacting. Remember you are again a prisoner, and must go back to the Acordada.”

“I know it; but your excellency should also remember that I've had my freedom and might have kept it.”

“You are a condemned criminal; will not a full pardon content you?”

“If the Señor Santander thinks that enough, it will. I must leave it to your excellency's pleasure.”

“Enough. If you guide our soldiers to where these brigands can be found, you shall have your pardon, at any rate. If they be taken, you can trust to my generosity for something more. Back here, Corporal, and bring a file of men along with you.”

The corporal came riding back along the road, two of the troopers close after him.

“Here, you men,” said Santander, “take charge

of this grotesque specimen of biped or quadruped, whichever it is, and see you don't let it get away from you. Stay upon this spot till I return."

Saying this, he wheeled his horse out into the road, and trotted off towards Tlalpam, followed by the clattering troop.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A GRUMBLING GUARD.

The two men left in charge of their strange-looking captive did not seem to be too well satisfied with the duty thus assigned to them. One, more especially, gave tokens of chagrin.

"I like this," he said, looking after the troop as it trotted off. "So we must stay with this thing till he returns, while they go to enjoy themselves in a very different kind of company. *Demonios!*" he added, with a growl, lifting himself reluctantly out of the saddle. "It's too bad! And when I was in hopes of getting the chance to have a chat with the pretty Pepita. Get out, you ugly imp!"

The concluding portion of the speech was to the hunchback, who, along with it, received a kick that came near sending him on all fours.

"Mercy, master!" he exclaimed; "don't be so cruel to a poor fellow-creature."

"Fellow-creature! That's good—ha, ha, ha!" and

the brutal soldier laughed till the rocks rang with his fiendish cachinnation.

“I’m sorry,” said the dwarf, “to be the cause of your disappointment. It isn’t at all necessary you should stay with me. You may know I have no intention to run away, else why should I have given myself up! You saw that I did it of my own free will.”

“That’s true enough,” remarked the second soldier.

“Well,” continued the voluntary prisoner, “if your comrade prefers to spend his evening with the pretty Pepita he speaks of, why should he not go to her? Don’t let me be an obstacle.”

José overhearing all this from out his silent recess felt a strange storm of pain. It was half fear, half indignation. He knew the Pepita spoken of was his own sweetheart, and also who was the soldier thus making so free with her name. The unpleasantness was but for a moment. It passed on his hearing what was said by the man’s comrade.

“Bah!” he contemptuously exclaimed, “what would be the use if you did see Pepita! You’re but bragging, Don Pablo. That sweet damsel looks to something higher than a poor soldier like me or you.

She would not let you touch the tip of her little finger."

A savage growl was the only response of him who aspired to the smiles of Pepita—to José, perhaps, the most gratifying answer he could have given.

But Don Ignacio's coachman now found himself in a dilemma of a different kind. The two troopers had dismounted and led their horses inside the entrance of the embayment where he had secreted himself, and into which the dwarf had already preceded them. They were evidently bent upon making it their place of bivouac till the escort's return.

The little cove was a triangular space, having no outlet at the back, and with its base resting upon the road. A wall of rock rose around it to a height of at least twenty feet sheer. The crevice in which José had concealed himself was at the inner apex of the triangle, while the troopers, with their horses on each side of them, and their prisoner between, formed a line that extended all the way across the entrance. How was he to get out? Had there been no other object than merely to return home he would not have much minded it. But now there was, and one of the greatest importance. The conversation between San-

tander and the dwarf told him two things—the place where the fugitives were, and the danger they were in of being retaken. It would be necessary to give them warning; and he knew that as soon as the young ladies learnt the situation of affairs he would be dispatched upon this very errand. By good fortune he he knew the ruin of which Zorillo had spoken. He had been brought up among the mountains, in a valley not far from the place where his father was a burner of charcoal. When a boy he had often visited the old monastery, and could still easily find the way to it. It was not likely that Santander would set out that night for it. There were fifty men mentioned, and he had not soldiers enough along with him. Still there was no time to be lost, as an expedition could be conducted thither at an early hour of the morning.

Don Ignacio's coachman saw that he was in a trap, out of which there was no chance of escape without discovering himself to the troopers. To do this might not have been dangerous, so far as the soldiers were concerned, though under the circumstances he would have preferred not coming in contact even with them.

But with their prisoner the thing was not to be thought of. Zorillo would remember him, and could

not help having his suspicions of the part he had played on that memorable occasion, when he shared with him the driver's seat. Moreover, the dialogue between Santander and the hunchback had taken place so close to his place of concealment that there could be no doubt about the latter knowing that he must have heard every word of it. To expose himself now would be worse than imprudence, and would certainly end in his being detained by the troopers, who would do this at the instigation of the prisoner already in their charge.

There seemed but one way that promised him immunity from arrest, and this was to remain in his place of concealment until Santander, with his escort, should come back ; when, in all likelihood, he would be at once disembarrassed of their dangerous proximity.

This was clearly his safest course, and having determined upon it, he kept in his crevice, silent as ever stood statue in its niche.

The position was by no means a pleasant one—to say nothing of the predicament. He had only simple standing room, with no chance of sitting down to rest himself. Of this, however, he would have recked but

little, had it not been for the thought of what he had just heard, and his anxiety about the safety of the men he had himself been so instrumental in assisting to escape.

Notwithstanding this anxiety, it was not destined he should stay there without some entertainment. He had not been ten minutes in his private box before a little comedy occurred, of sufficient interest to hinder the time from seeming tedious. As the first portion of it was performed in darkness, he was an auditor rather than a spectator; but as if to favor the spectacle, the moon at length rose up over the Pedregal, and shone down into the little embayment on its edge, pouring a flood of mellow light upon the performers.

The first act was a conversation between the two troopers as to how they were to pass the time until their chief's return.

"If we only had a pack of cards," said one.

"Yes; if we only had that and a bit of candle, a game of *monté* would be just the thing."

"As for the candle," said the first speaker, "I could easily find a substitute. There's torch-wood about here, if I'm not mistaken; and if there isn't, I've

played many an *albur* of *monté* with no other light than a cigarito. Well, let us have that, anyhow."

So saying, he commenced fumbling for his flint and steel, which, being found, there were sparks, and soon after a steady, red light that told of the coal upon the end of a cigar. His comrade, going through a similar operation, also exhibited a glowing disc, near the tip of his nose, from the ignited end of a *puro*, or Mexican cheroot.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PLUNDERING A PRISONER.

For a time the two troopers sat smoking in silence, lulled into contentment by the soothing influence of the nicotian. Not for long. Their beloved *monté* once more came uppermost in their minds and became the the subject of their discourse.

“What carelessness,” said one, “stupid, culpable negligence, not to have thought of bringing a pack along with us! After all who could have supposed we were going to be stuck up here?”

“No; you’d prepared yourself for spending the evening with Pepita. I noticed you giving an extra twist to your mustache as we came out of the quarters.”

“Bah! Don’t bother me about Pepita! I’d rather, just now, have a pack of cards. Haven’t *you* got such a thing, Señor enano?”

“No, Señor,” promptly answered the dwarf thus addressed.

“And why the deuce haven’t you?” retorted the trooper, fiercely, as if to satisfy his spleen by an attack upon their prisoner. “By the way, what have you got upon you? Come, comrade!” he continued, addressing himself to his fellow-soldier. “We haven’t been doing our duty in leaving the prisoner unsearched. Who knows but he may have some dangerous weapon concealed upon his person. Let us see what he *has* got, anyhow!”

“I’ve got nothing, Señores,” hastily protested the dwarf. “Nothing whatever, I assure you.”

“That’s a lie, you little monster; and if there was light, I could see it sticking right out of your teeth. But I know it’s a lie from your being so quick with your denial. We shall see. Here, Pedrito. Help me to search him. You take hold by the shoulders, while I run my fingers over the outlines of his ugly carcass. *Carrambo!* It’s like groping one’s way round the stems of a cactus plant.”

The soldier ceased speaking, for it was now Zorillo’s turn to talk.

He did so fluently, and in tone of protest, at the same time making demonstrations to prevent them from searching him. All to no purpose. It only

increased their eagerness, and perhaps also their cupidity.

There must be something of a valuable kind upon the prisoner, else he would not show such anxious opposition.

It but made them the more determined ; and laying hold of him, one by the shoulders, the other commenced searching his pockets.

“What’s this !” exclaimed the latter, pulling out a watch. “*Carrambo!* it’s a timekeeper, and by the feel it should be a gold one. Another, as I’m a soldier ! Why, comrade, the little wretch is loaded down with watches—gold ones, too—I can tell by the feel of them between my fingers ! This is luck—better than a pack of cards ! Thanks to the blessed Virgin for sending us such a treasure of a captive. Isn’t he a little beauty ?”

The dwarf no longer made resistance. He saw it would be idle. He was instantly deprived of the two watches he had obtained by “false pretence.”

Pablo, the chief despoiler, smoked his cigar till the end showed a glowing coal ; then holding the watches close to it, one by one, he examined the cases.

“I thought so,” he said, on perceiving that these

were of gold. "Both of the true shining metal, and both belonging to the gem *lady*—I've no doubt splendid timekeepers. So, Sir Dwarf, you've been driving a little business on the sly in the footpad line, I suppose? It seems your late spell of prison life hasn't spoilt your hand. *Carrambo!* I'm right glad of it."

"Half mine, remember," said Pedrito. "Lucky there's two of them—that will be a watch apiece."

Pablo seemed not quite convinced as to the justice of this claim. At all events he showed a reluctance to part with either of the watches.

"Stay," he said, as if struck with some idea of subterfuge. "Time enough to talk of sharing spoils when we know of what they consist. Where these shining eggs came from there should be something else. Even the droppings of such a fine bird ought to be worth picking up. Let's search his pockets to the bottom."

"Agreed," said the other; and they once more took hold of the hunchback and commenced groping all over him.

He still made no show of resistance, but rather aided them in their examination by unbuttoning his vest and turning his pockets inside out.

They found nothing more. This time he had been

too cunning for them. While they were scrutinizing the watch-cases by the light of their cigars, a motion of his long arm, ending in a quick jerk, told that he had flung something away. It was a little cloth wallet containing the rings and other jewelry stripped from the fingers and ears of the young ladies. He had chucked it behind him into a dark recess in the rocks, where he intended it should lie till he might have an opportunity of retrieving it.

The adroit act, though unperceived by the troopers, was not altogether unseen. José, crouching down, against the gray glimmer of the sky saw the movement of Zorillo's arm, and the next moment felt something strike him in the face, which fell through between his knees to his feet. He picked it up, and without staying to examine it, quietly slipped it into his pocket. But fancying it must be something of value he was now more than ever anxious to get away from the place. He perhaps had a fortune upon his person, and as it was a case of stolen property all round he did not see why he should not come in for a share of it.

Once more he rose erect and examined the rocks above his head. He groped with his hands and felt

there was a ledge. Looking higher, as the slanting moonlight allowed him, he could trace the outlines of another. If he could but reach this last he might climb up to the top of the cliff, and steal off through the Pedregal above.

José was a mountaineer by birth as well as by training. He could scale precipices, or swarm up the trunks of trees like a cat or a monkey. And he had now two distinct thoughts to move him to the utmost exertion—one, the prospect of an advantage to himself—the other, a desire to befriend his young mistress and her cousin by warning their lovers of the danger that threatened them.

Inspired by this double motive, he determined on climbing the cliff.

After a more careful scrutiny of its façade, he had less fear of failing to ascend it than of being heard while making the ascent. A slip backwards—even the scraping of his feet against the stones—might be fatal, and lead to his detection by the troopers.

Fortunately, these two gentlemen had commenced a quarrel about the distribution of the watches. They had agreed upon each having one, but there was a difference in the size and quality which led to a dis-

pute that had waxed hot, and was each moment growing hotter. The talk between them had become loud—the dwarf joining in, and apparently encouraging the quarrel. While it was still on the crescendo scale José silently dropped the horse halters at his feet, laid hold of the first ledge, and noiselessly raising himself up, reached the second terrace in a similar fashion. Thence gaining the top of the cliff, like a shadow he glided away through the dark, tortuous pathways of the Pedregal.

CHAPTER XL.

THE WATCHES RESTORED.

It was some time before the two troopers could come to a satisfactory understanding about the appropriation of the watches. He who had first proposed searching their prisoner, on that score, claimed the right of choice.

This doctrine was repudiated by the other, who said it made no difference about which of them had suggested the search, as he would himself certainly have made it all the same. It was only a question of time.

The dispute was, at length, settled—or, rather, suspended—by a proposal that the property should remain unappropriated by either party till they should have an opportunity of deciding the point by a game of cards, and then there would be no need to divide the spoils, since either one should have neither or both.

The dwarf had his own idea as to what would

eventually be done with the time-pieces, though he said nothing. He was silently, but not the less savagely, indignant with the two troopers, who, besides plundering, had treated him in every sense ungraciously. He had determined upon having his *revanche*, though it would cost him an exposure, along with some disturbance of a scheme he had not intended to act upon till a later period of time. Spitefully furious as he felt against the Texan, Cris Rock, he was now almost as angry with his own countrymen, the soldiers, who had acted toward him with a still more causeless brutality. There is no denying that nature had been unkind to the poor, misshapen wretch, in so misshaping him ; and it is not so much to be wondered at that his hand was against everybody, since everybody's hand seemed against him.

When they had arrived at an understanding about the distribution of the plunder the two troopers once more re-lit their cigars, and seating themselves upon some loose stones, waited for the return of the escort. The time did not now hang so heavily on their hands.

The prize they had so unexpectedly become possessed of reconciled them to their situation, and they could now pass the hours pleasantly enough reflecting

on the many fine things that could be procured in exchange for a couple of gold watches, both of which they knew to be valuable. What visions of enjoyment danced before their imagination! Cigars, cognac, cards, with the smiles of pretty sweethearts!

It never occurred to them that their prisoner would make any claim for the restitution of the property. He had stolen it, they felt certain, and should therefore be only too contented to say nothing about having had it in his possession. He ought rather to rejoice at their having given him the opportunity to conceal the evidences of his theft. They told him so, adding a terrible threat of vengeance if he should make any report about their having despoiled him. Their prisoner made verbal promise to this effect; but had there been light enough for them to have seen the sullen, reluctant look that accompanied his words, they might have had suspicions of that promise being kept.

Nor was it for an hour longer. In less than half this time the escort was seen returning along the road, Santander riding at its head, to whom, as soon as he arrived upon the ground, the indignant dwarf recounted the whole story of his despoilment.

“Your excellency,” he said, as soon as Santander came up, “I’m your prisoner ; but you will admit that I made a voluntary surrender of my person.”

“Your *person!*” repeated Santander, with a laugh at the idea of the dwarf so speaking of his deformed figure, that now in the clear moonlight was outlined in all its deformity. The laugh was loudly chorused by the escort, the two troopers alone taking no part in it.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Zorillo to the soldiers, in a tone savoring of reproach, ‘you may be merry if you like. I can’t hinder you from that no more than I can help being as God has made me. I think you’ll all acknowledge it’s more my misfortune than my fault?’”

The ribald laughter was checked, Santander himself feeling a little ashamed of the unfeeling remark he had made.

“You wish to tell me something?” he said, addressing himself to the dwarf. “What is it?”

“Only that these two worthy gentlemen you left to take care of me have taken better care of themselves. I could have got away from them half a dozen times since you left. But as you know, Señor

Don Carlos, I didn't want to go off ; and I am much less anxious now until my property be restored to me."

'Property ! What property ?'

'My two gold watches.'

'Two gold watches ! Where are they ?'

'They are now in the pockets of these worthy gentlemen. Half an hour ago they were in mine.'

"Scoundrels !" thundered out the officer, turning to the two men. "Is this true ?"

The dismounted troopers hung their heads without making response.

"Search them, Corporal !"

'It don't need that, Señor Don Carlos,' said one of the men in a sullen, dogged tone. "We admit having taken two watches from him, as we had the right from a prisoner. But we didn't intend keeping them."

"Deliver them up, on the instant !" was the quick, authoritative command.

It was like drawing a tooth from each from the two troopers ; but the watches were at length surrendered into the hands of Santander himself.

"You stole these ?" he said, turning to Zorillo.

“I did not. I swear to your excellency I did not. I came honestly by them, both of them.”

“Well; I shall inquire into that by and by. There’s no time for an investigation now. Here, Corporal, mount this monkey behind one of the men and bring him along to the city. See that he don’t slip off. Forward!”

Zorillo was swung up to the croup behind one of the troopers, and the escort proceeded on its way; but before parting from the spot the dwarf cast a searching glance into the shadowy embayment of the cliff, as if to mark in his memory the place where the precious bijouterie had been cast, and where he supposed it would safely remain till he should find an opportunity of retrieving it.

CHAPTER XLI.

TYRANT AND TOOL.

Don Carlos Santander stood in the presence of Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.

“Take as many men as you like. Take the whole army if it so pleases you ; only leave me enough troops to defend the capital in case of some fool getting up a revolution. Will that satisfy you, Don Carlos?”

“Whatever seems good to your excellency. If I may be allowed to suggest, I should say that it is not to the credit of the army that these Texans should so easily have escaped from a guard of its soldiers. They are your excellency’s bitter enemies, and so also is one of the men who went away along with them.”

“His name?”

“Ruperto Rivas.”

“Ruperto Rivas !” exclaimed Santa Anna. “That fellow, indeed ! I knew I had him in prison, and intended keeping him there. It was he who got away with these Texans, was it ? There was a fourth, was there not ?”

“There was, your excellency—a worthless, deformed creature—both hunchback and dwarf—by name Zorillo.”

“What, a dwarf and a giant! One of the Texans, I hear, was such. Were these two chained together?”

“They were, so the governor of the jail has informed me.”

“Ha, ha, ha! What a grotesque coupling it must have been! I should have liked to look upon such a contrast of humanity. Whose idea was it to string the two specimens together?”

“The jail governor’s, I presume. I believe the Texan had shown some insubordination—struck a sentinel, or something of the kind—and he was coupled to the dwarf by way of punishment.”

“Not bad—not bad! Well, Don Carlos, do as you like in this matter. Take as many men as you may need; only, as I’ve said before, don’t strip the capital of troops.”

Santander knew this was only a joke, for the Mexican Dictator, though generally grave and sometimes grim, at times indulged in light speech, and enjoyed a bit of cajolery.

His staff officer having obtained this full permis-

sion to make use of the troops, was bowing himself out of the presence, when a thought seemed all at once to strike the Dictator. By the sudden shadow on his brow, and the quick contraction of his thin lips, it had the look of a suspicion.

“Stay, Santander!” he said. “Something occurs to me. I wish to ask you a question.”

“Your excellency?”

“What are the names of the Texans who have escaped? I never thought of asking before.”

“The giant is called Rock; he only is a true Texan; the other is an Irishman. His name is—”

“Don Florencio Kearney?”

“That is the name, your excellency,” answered Santander, in some surprise at seeing Santa Anna so earnest.

“*Carrai!*” exclaimed the Dictator, springing up from his seat and stamping his cork leg upon the floor. “This is truly strange! Escaped in Don Ignacio’s carriage, you say? And the Señorita—Ha—ha! there’s more here than meets the eye! Go! Get troops! Take a whole regiment—two, if you need them! Scour the whole country—don’t leave a spot unsearched! Bring back this Texan, or Irish-

man, whichever he is, and at whatever cost ! Do so, and you shall have a reward ! I want him—I want him !”

And so did Santander want him, and for a similar reason, though neither knew the motive of the other. Both wanted to destroy him ; Santa Anna because he suspected that Luisa Valverde felt too strong an interest in this imprisoned stranger—her petition to himself was proof of it—and Santander from an older and more definite knowledge of the relationship that had existed between them.

And now the known circumstances of the escape—in the carriage of Don Ignacio Valverde, with his daughter present upon the spot—it could scarce be coincidence.

Santa Anna gritted his teeth like a tiger when the affair became thus fully revealed to him. Don Carlos Santander had done likewise at an earlier period. Both were aiming at the same end, or, at all events, something similar. The object of the tyrant was only more dishonorable than that of his tool.

“ Take all the troops you may need, Don Carlos,” said Santa Anna, after a short while spent in storming about the room. “ I needn’t urge you to be energetic

in your attempts to retake these Texans. I know you will be so—a very commendable patriotism on your part.”

There was a hidden sarcasm in the remark. Santa Anna was fond of it at all times, but now he had reason to suspect the motive for his subordinate's activity.

After his half sneering laudation, he continued :

“Have you heard anything about their supposed whereabouts?”

“I have, your excellency.”

“What, pray?”

“I know where they are at this very moment.”

“Ah ! that's something definite. If they be still in Mexico, and not gone up to the moon, I suppose we may hope to get possession of them again. Where?”

“It appears that there's an old ruined convent away up somewhere upon the sides of the Sierra Ajusco, and buried deep among the woods.”

“Yes ; I remember having heard speak of such a place. It was a monastery, I believe, of Carmelites, or some other sect of anchoritish friars, abandoned half a century ago. I've heard say it is in a singular situ-

ation, almost inaccessible. Is that the place you refer to?"

"Your excellency, I doubt not but that it is the same."

"Well—what of the old monastery?"

"I have learnt that in this ruin, which appears still to have some habitable chambers, a band of brigands have for some time quartered themselves; that they are not real robbers, but rather political refugees—enemies to your excellency's government as to yourself; who live as they best can at the expense of country people. At the head of this organization of conspirators, their chief, in fact, is the Señor Ruperto Rivas, and that he is at this present time, along with his late fellow-prisoners, under what remains of the roof of the old convent."

"You are sure of this, Don Carlos?" said the Dictator, after a moment spent in silent musing.

"I have certain information of it, your excellency."

"From whom?"

"From one who has been to the place; who followed them thither after their escape; who saw them enter the ruin, who entered it himself, and stayed there long enough to make sure that it is their per-

manent place of abode. Not only are Ruperto Rivas and his two Texan guests now dwelling there, but young Mireno, Yañez, Miranda, and the two Garcias. It's a regular roosting-place for your enemies. But now that your excellency has intrusted the affair to me, with troops sufficient for its execution, I think I can trap these birds in their snug nest."

"Take troops enough. Bring back the whole flock with you. A regiment—two if you require them; and whatever else may be needed. Do you want anything more?"

"Nothing more, only—"

"Only what?"

"I fear your excellency may be offended if I approach you upon a subject—"

"No fear; speak out, Don Carlos Santander."

"I am but a servant, who has given your excellency my sword—I may add my soul's devotion. If I succeed in ridding you of this gang of conspiring foes may I ask for a reward?"

"And have it, too. What reward do you wish? Money? I will give you five thousand dollars for the head of Ruperto Rivas. Fool that I didn't take it while I had him in my power! A thousand each for

the heads of the two Texans. Will that satisfy you, Señor?"

"It is not money I want, your excellency. Only a favor far more easy for you to bestow, and *you* can bestow it."

"Name it, Colonel Santander."

"The hand of the Señorita Valverde."

"What! The daughter of Don Ignacio?"

"Yes, your excellency; I wish to make her my wife."

The Dictator did not start. He was not surprised. He was not even altogether displeased. He did not want to make Luisa Valverde his *wife*. What difference to him whose wife she might be so long as he remained her husband's master?

"What can I do to assist you?" was the question he put, with an air of humble innocence. "The Señorita Valverde is the proper person to be consulted in such a matter, as also her father."

"Your excellency can do much—everything. To you Don Ignacio owes his present position."

"Rather say to yourself, Señor Don Carlos."

"I was but the humble intercessor—your excellency was good enough to be the giver. As you give, so can

you take away. Yes, Señor Excellenza, you can give me all I ask and want."

"And that is a wife."

"A wife."

"Who must be the Doña Luisa Valverde."

"She or none. I care for no other."

"Well ; I think I may promise, at all events, to do my best for you. So now get ready to start. Take what soldiers you may need. Bring me back the men you speak of—and if not themselves, bring me their heads, their ears, any evidence they have ceased to be my enemies, and what you ask for shall be granted."

Some twenty minutes more were spent between him and his aid-de-camp arranging plans for the capture of Ruperto Rivas and his *cuadrilla* of Free Lances ; and then Santander was dismissed from the presence. He left the palace armed with full authority to carry out these plans, and full determination to execute them.

Ever since his return to Mexico, and the restoration of Don Ignacio to his country and estates—all due to himself—he had been conscious of a declining influence over both the father and daughter. He knew it

without knowing why. And he did not yet know; for, blinded by his own evil designs, he had no suspicion of the still more sinister intentions of his protector.

CHAPTER XLII.

A COUPLE OF RECRUITS.

“You consent to be one of us, Don Florencio?”

“I do.”

“And you, Señor Cristoforo?”

“Durn it, you needn’t ask me. I go wharsever the cap goes ; an’ though I moutn’t jest like sech an affair *as sech*, seein’ as who it air you mean to plunder, I’m wi’ you heart an’ han’. For the chance o’ a shot at that shunk Santander, Cris Rock don’t mind risk o’ any kind—even to hangin’.”

“There won’t be much danger of that,” said Ruperto Rivas—for it was he who had put the interrogatories—“though they would hang us, or do worse, if they could only catch us. We won’t give them the chance. If there’s to be any hanging done we’re more likely to be the hangmen than the hanged.”

“Wall, Saynyor Reeves,” rejoined the Texan, “this chile never cared much to swing up any mortal critter—not even a Injun. I allers purfurs putting a bit o’

lead through 'em, But thar's two individooals in this hyar country I'd a most think it a sin to waste powder on, an' one o' them air Carlos Santander."

"Who is the other, Cris?"

It was Kearney who put the question, wondering what other individual had excited such a strong antipathy in the breast of his Texan comrade.

"The durned dwarf, in coorse. An' there air a third, now I think o' it," he added. - "That's ole game-leg himself."

Rock meant Santa Anna, who, in consequence of the loss of his leg, at the taking of Vera Cruz by the French under Joinville, was called by his countrymen "El Cojo," or the "lame one," translated by the Texans into the more jocular synonym of "game leg."

"I'd heist *him*," he added, the old Texan hostility with the memory of Fanning's massacre causing the words to come hissing through his teeth, "up to the fust tree that war tall enough; an' if there wa'n't no tree to be foun', I'd stand wi' one o' my own arms outstretched to make a scaffold for him. Thet wud I."

Neither of the others doubted what would have been Rock's course of action had the Dictator of

Mexico fallen into his power. The tone in which he declared himself told how much he was in earnest; and both knew of the inveterate and spiteful hatred entertained by every old Texan against Santa Anna.

But Santa Anna was not the man they thought of just then, nor even Don Carlos Santander. The mention of the dwarf had struck a chord in the memory of all there that vibrated with something like apprehension. The strange creature had escaped from them on the night of that same day in which Cris Rock had captured him. Somewhat carelessly watched in one of the old convent cells, he had managed to wriggle his spider-like form through the narrow aperture that served as a window, leaving not a trace behind.

They had searched all around, among the trees and walks—everywhere. They had examined the mountain paths, all of which were known to them; and more especially that by which he must have followed them up; but even the keen eye of Cris Rock could not discover the slightest “sign” to tell how their deformed captive had escaped.

It was strange, too; for there had been a heavy

shower of rain just preceding the time at which he must have stolen off, and the sloping paths were all moist and slippery. A rabbit could not have passed over them without leaving the imprint of its wooly paws in the mud.

Rivas and Kearney thought he might not have gone down the mountain at all, but was still near by hiding in some crevice or cave of the cliff. They were fain also to think he might have been only apprehensive about his life—frightened at the rough treatment he had received from the Texan—and that a mere instinct of self-preservation had led him to slip off as soon as an opportunity presented itself, and that once out of their power they would hear no more of him. Cris, however, held a different opinion.

He felt assured that the dwarf was acting from a preconcerted scheme, and that as there had been danger to be apprehended from his presence, now more than ever might it be dreaded by his absence. Why should he have followed them up to the mountain—undergoing all the fatigues and difficulties of that precipitous path? His story was far from being a natural one. The reasons he had given for rejoining his late fellow-prisoners were not at all like the truth.

And now that he had voluntarily forsaken them, their falsehood could no longer be doubted. Cris Rock had never doubted it from the first, and he now pronounced loudly and positively upon the treachery of the "gwarf," as he contemptuously called him.

"The ugly varmint aint in these hyar mountings no longer," said he, when consulted by the others. "He's got out o' them somehow; though durn me ef I kin tell how, unless he's swummed it over the tops o' the trees, an' I reckon he mout do that same, for, wi' them long arms o' his'n, he air more o' a ape than a human. 'Twar all sorts o' a mistake to hinder me from pitchin' him over the clift when I had him in my clutches. You, Cap, called out cruel. Thar warn't nothin' cruel about it, for thar kin be no cruelty in clarin' the yarth o' a critter that kud only cuss it. Wal, he's slipped us now, an' I shedn't wonder ef we hear o' him afore long—him or his doin's."

Rock's words fell suggestively upon the ears of Rivas, filling him with apprehension. He could not help acknowledging their truth. It looked every way likely that their late prison companion had followed them up the mountain solely to discover their place of concealment; and, having now succeeded in becoming

acquainted with all their ways, had gone back to put the pursuers upon their track, and guide them to that long undisturbed sanctuary of refuge.

The apprehension was shared by his fellow-patriots, the free lances ; and as soon as the search after their escaped prisoner had terminated in a failure to recover him, they resolved upon redoubling their vigilance. Some talked of abandoning the old convent, that had for years furnished them with a secure shelter and a home ; counseling a change of quarters to the steep sides of Popocatepec, under the shadows of whose sombre forests, within some deep volcanic clefts, they might find a safer abiding place.

“No, my brave friends,” said Rivas, in answer to these counsels of his comrades. “Not till I’ve paid a visit to my own old home, down yonder among the maguey plants. Let it be this night, then. These brave strangers have promised to accompany me, and be your fellow-guests. I’ve heard that my usurping tenant has a famous cook. If so, we shall have some chance of getting a good supper, and unless the major domo succeed in hiding the cellar keys we shall wash it down with something better than pulque.”

To the scheme of robbery—or, as it might more

appropriately be styled, retribution—there was no dissentient voice—not even that of Florence Kearney. It was not that the young Irishman—gentleman by birth and the like by education—had become hardened to crime, or in any way indifferent to the principles of humanity and honor instilled into him from the time of leaving his cradle till that when he parted from the walls of his *alma mater*. No; nothing of the kind. He now knew that he was not among robbers, but refugees—patriots such as in the history of his own nation had oft been compelled to take refuge on the side of the bleak, barren mountain, or seek shelter in some cold, cheerless cave, while ruffians in red coats were scouring the ravines and valleys around them like sleuth-hounds in search of their blood.

And there was another motive, of itself sufficient to stir him to concerted action with his new associates—the strongest that can act upon the human heart—perhaps more than all other incentive to deeds either of daring or crime—oft even to murder.

Florence Kearney did not mean murder; but he could not help thinking that if Carlos Santander ceased to exist there would be more safety for his own life, and the *honor* of Luisa Valverde.

With a thought like this on his mind, it is not strange he consented to be one of a band of house-breakers—ready for anything—even homicide—in case of their being resisted!

CHAPTER XLIII.

MOUNTED MEN ON THE MARCH.

About the same hour that Captain Ruperto Rivas and his band of Free Lances^m were scattering far and wide in search of their respective horses, a dark, moving line, denoting mounted men, might have been seen defiling through the *garita* of San Antonio de Abad, and taking the road towards San Augustin de las Cuevas.

It was a half regiment of cavalry, consisting of two squadrons—one of lancers, the other hussars. The latter were armed with carbines, though in the great darkness of the night—for the moon was no longer visible—one must have been close to them as they passed along to have noted any distinction between the two kinds of cavalry. So dark was it that the lancers, with their bright pennons flouting the night breeze, could only be seen very indistinctly against the dead, leaden color of the sky, meeting the still more

sombre pine-clad background of the mountains on all sides encircling the valley.

Though there were officers riding here and there along the line of the squadrons as they marched in half-sections of twos, after the fashion of the lighter French cavalry tactics, two at the head were conspicuous. These rode several paces in advance of the foremost files, conversing with each other.

Close behind them, and a little to the left, was a third individual, or at all events, a horse with a shape on his back almost indescribable. It could scarce have been called a man, nor yet was it a woman. Still was it a living thing, as might be seen by an occasional gesture, and a pair of long arms stretched forth as if for the purpose of guiding the animal it bestrode. That to which it bore the nearest resemblance was a monkey mounted on the back of a horse, as sometimes seen in the circus. When the cavalcade at length reached the hacienda of San Antonio, about five miles from Mexico, and torches brought out by the domestics of the establishment threw their glare upon the foremost files, it could be no longer doubtful what or who was this singular equestrian, for the light

flashed upon the sinister features of the hunchback, Zorillo. And the same light showed the more handsome, though not much more amiable countenance of Don Carlos Santander. It was he who rode at the head of the mounted force, the horseman by his side being the officer more immediately in command of it.

There was a halt at San Antonio, but only long enough to enable these two officers to drink a cup of Catalan brandy and get a light for their cigars, both of which were brought out to them by one of the servants of the establishment, which, besides being a hacienda, or country house, was also a roadside hostelry for the entertainment of man and horse.

This done, the order was given to forward, and the squadrons advanced in half sections as before.

“We shall have to dismount and do more than a mile of our marching on foot. So this devil’s imp tells me.”

It was Santander who made this remark, which was addressed to the regimental commander; the “devil’s imp” being the dwarf Zorillo, who was acting as guide to the expedition.

“I expected as much,” was the rejoinder of the officer

“These fellows don’t often make their lair where cavalry can get at them. However, I suppose there’s no help for it. If we must fight them dismounted we must, only if I’d known that, I should have advised our leaving these lances behind. They’ll only be in the way to the men acting afoot, and especially if it be among trees.”

“It doesn’t matter about that,” rejoined Santander. “We’re not likely to have much fighting, if any, and in darkness, too. We must manage to encompass the building and take them by surprise. As there doesn’t seem to be any probability that they have been warned about our coming, we ought to find them quite unprepared—perhaps snug asleep in their beds. We should get there about an hour before daybreak—just the time they’re likely to be in their soundest slumbers.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” dissented the officer, who, being an older soldier than Santander, seemed to have more knowledge of the subject about which they were conversing. “That isn’t always the hour for their sort to be caught asleep. We might stand a much better chance of finding them in their soundest slumber an hour *after* daybreak.”

“Yes ; but then they would have their sentries out, and we should have less chance of approaching them without giving alarm. At all events we must endeavor to draw a cordon so as completely to enfilade the old ruins. In the darkness we may do this easily enough, and if we find that we’ve got them inside, we can then either storm the place or lay siege to it. I wouldn’t mind keeping up a month’s blockade to catch three of these jolly friars, as it appears they call themselves. His excellency, Don Antonio, has set his heart upon having them ; and if we succeed, you, Major Ramirez, may expect promotion as well as some reward. Therefore, by all means let us first surround them in the ruin. After that we must trust to the chances that turn up.”

“You are sure we shall be able to find the place ?” asked Ramirez, who, although a Mexican born—a native of the capital city itself—had never heard of the old convent in question.

“We can have no difficulty in finding it,” was Santander’s response. “This handsome image of his maker says he can take us to the spot without the slightest deviation from the straight track, only that we shall have some climbing of cliffs, and balancing

along break-neck ledges. No matter. The reward may be worth all our pains and perils."

"I hope so," rejoined the hussar officer, who, being only a major, aspired to becoming a colonel, which, in the event of any new revolution, would give him greater power to *pronounce* for whatever chief promised to pay the highest price for his services.

Conversing after this fashion, and further maturing their plans as they rode along, Colonel Santander and Major Ramirez at length drew near to the town of San Augustin, the inhabitants of which all seemed to be asleep. There was no attempt made to awake them. On the contrary, the troops were not taken through the paved streets, but round by a road running through the outskirts, making the detour in silence, so as not to disturb the slumbering people. For among them might have been some that, if awakened, would themselves have taken to the road, and perhaps arrived at the old convent sooner than the expedition itself.

For this reason every caution was observed while they were riding past the town, and it was only after they had got back upon the main road and well up among the mountains, that they again resumed the

“double-quick” march, the troops, by command of their major, breaking into a rapid trot, that soon carried them to the base of Ajusco. At a point in the road where it wound around the foot-hills of the forest-clad mountain, a bridle-path was discovered, which thenceforth was to be their line of march. It was so narrow that even the formations by half sections of twos could no longer be kept up; and breaking into single file, the horsemen entered it one after another, each disappearing, as he did so, under the shadows of the trees, until having left the main road, save by the tracks of their horses still remaining in the mud, there was nothing to show that an armed expedition had passed along it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

NOT AT HOME.

Still guided by the dwarf, the soldiers continued the ascent of the mountain. At that point where the path was no longer practicable for horses, they dismounted, and proceeded onwards afoot, here gliding along ledges, and there climbing up slopes that were almost precipitous.

One by one had they to pass these obstructions ; and at several of them torches were required to show where the foot could be set with safety. It was near the hour of daybreak when the expedition arrived near the ruin—just the time desired by Ramirez.

Zorillo, during his brief sojourn among the merry monks, or rather before his involuntary introduction to them, had made himself well acquainted with the approaches to the place, and under his intelligent guidance the soldiers at length succeeded in completely enfilading it.

“I think we have these fellows in the trap at last,” muttered Santander to Ramirez, when they had finished drawing the lines of circumvallation and posting the men at every practicable path.

“I don’t like this silence,” remarked the veteran officer of light horse, who, in his time, had seen a good deal of this sort of service. “It’s strange that they should have had no pickets out. There doesn’t seem to be even a camp sentinel around the walls.”

“Not strange at all,” rejoined the staff colonel. “No doubt they feel secure in the old convent, and no wonder, considering what it has cost us to reach it. They’re all asleep—that’s evident—even to their dogs, if they have any. So much the better; we’ll be able to capture them with less risk to ourselves; and that’s something too, for these fellows would fight to the death, knowing what will be their fate, if taken. Every one of them will know that there is a rope ready for him.”

“Shall I pass round the word for the men to advance?” asked the major.

“Not yet,” answered Santander. “It may be safer

to send some one a little nearer to reconnoitre—this ape, for instance.”

“True—it may,” assented the major.

“Here, Zorillo !” called the staff colonel, in a subdued voice. “Crawl up closer to the walls. Go inside, if you can, without being perceived. See what may be seen. Then come back here and report. Quick !”

The dwarf, obedient to the order, advanced towards the ruin, half walking, half creeping. No one who might have seen his ungainly form, as he skulked in the obscurity, could have taken it for the figure of a human being.

No one saw it, for there was no challenge of sentry or hail of any kind, as he passed through among the masses of ruin, and at length paused before the great gateway leading to the interior court-yard.

He saw that the entrance was open. The massive wooden door was standing ajar, both folds of it ; and there was no light seen inside, either in the court-yard or shining through any of the windows. There was no voice, no sound, save a soft wafting of wings, and an occasional screech from the higher points of the dilapidated mason-work, and among the tall pines

shadowing over it. But these were the voices of the owl and other nocturnal birds, in pursuit of their ordinary prey. There was not a breath to indicate the presence of a human being, sleeping or awake.

After listening a few seconds to convince himself that there was no one on the watch, the dwarf glided in through the gateway, and into the grim court-yard. Here again he heard only the hooting of the owls, and saw nothing but darkness. The cloister windows that faced inward upon the court were all dark, as also the doors, and the dwarf saw to his surprise that most of these were standing open or ajar. Had the patriot birds taken flight and abandoned their place of refuge! It appeared so.

After remaining some minutes within the shadow of the wall, Zorillo saw a faint light that came through a long corridor running through the back portion of the building. He knew that this led to the great dining hall or refectory of the convent. While a prisoner in one of the adjoining cloisters he had observed the Free Lances go into and out of it at the hours of meal time.

Stealing along the wall he entered the corridor, and following it, soon found himself in the hall in

question. A wax candle burnt down into the socket of a brass candlestick that held it, gave out the last flickering flames of its light. By these he could distinguish the *debris* strewed over the table—the remains of the servants' supper—which he could see was but half consumed and must have been abandoned in haste.

Around the room were other evidences of a hurried departure from the place—articles of various kinds that had been brought forth from the sleeping-rooms, but thrown down again from being too cumbrous to be carried away.

While making these observations the candle flared up in its last expiring effort, and then suddenly went out, leaving him in utter darkness. Groping his way back through the corridor and across the deserted court-yard, he returned to Santander with his report, that the place was, or seemed to be, abandoned.

And so it proved when the soldiers, advancing, took possession. They searched every cloister and ransacked the old monastery from cellar to ceiling without making captive of a single creature. But for the beds, that showed evidence of having been lately used, and some other paraphernalia—no great stock

either—that proved recent occupation by the band of patriots, they might have believed that their guide had been deceiving them. Some suspicion of this crossed the mind of Santander, who, in the midst of his disappointment and chagrin, seemed all at once overtaken with a dread of betrayal. What if the misshapen wretch had been all along acting for Ruperto Rivas, and had led the troops up there to bring about their destruction? What if their horses left below should be found missing upon their return, and an attack made upon the men, dismounted and dispirited, while going back down the difficult passes of the mountain?

Zorillo was at once seized and questioned. He protested against any accusation of treason. The robber band had been there. Was there not evidence of that? He could not account for their having gone away unless some one had become aware of the approach of the troops and hastened ahead to give them warning.

The explanation was likely enough, and Santander had to be satisfied. But with the fear of an ambuscade still upon him, he lost no time among the ruins, but hastened back down the mountain to the place where the horses had been left.

These were found undisturbed. The men left in charge had neither seen or heard aught of an enemy.

Nor was any encountered in the mountain passes leading down to the main road. Along this, at early break of day, the squadrons returned, the major and Santander, as before, riding at their head—the former disappointed at having accomplished nothing that would give him promotion—the latter deeply chagrined at the failure of his plans and prospects of revenge.

CHAPTER XLV.

A DELICATE DUTY.

The usually quiet village of San Augustin de las Cuevas was enlivened by a division of cavalry, lancers and hussars. It was on the day succeeding that night on which Don Carlos Santander had made his bootless expedition up the sloping side of Ajusco, and it was the same cavalry with which he had made it. They were only halted in San Augustin to rest and recruit themselves and their horses from their fatiguing march up the mountains, also to obtain some sleep in lieu of that they had lost on the preceding night.

It was now in the afternoon of the next day, and the soldiers, having enjoyed a good, long *siesta*, were once more making appearance on the streets, hussars and lancers alike bent upon being merry. They were strolling along in twos and threes, here stopping to talk and drink at the dram shops in which San Augustin abounds, there to exchange jests—some of them

not over nice—with the dark-eyed damsels of Tlalpam.

It was still a little later in the afternoon when half a dozen notes from a cavalry bugle were heard near the lower end of the town, and some distance outside of it. It denoted the approach of a party, and presently this appeared in the shape of a band of horsemen coming along the road from the direction of the city.

It was a small troop of about twenty files, under a brace of subalterns, apparently only the escort of an officer of higher rank, who was seen riding at its head. The dust upon his uniform, with the sweat and froth upon the skin and trappings of his horse, told that he must have ridden all the way from the city, if not farther.

And he had ridden farther : for it was the Colonel Santander who not only the night before, but nearly all that day, had been in the saddle. After returning from his unsuccessful excursion to the old convent he had since been to the City of Mexico, on an errand of primary importance.

What this was will presently appear.

The old town, San Augustin, is a corporation,

having its alcaide and other magistrates. It has also a small "Cabildo," or common-council house, standing at the upper end of its plaza or public square. In this the officers of the cavalry division had their temporary quarters.

Santander only stopped for a second or two to address some communication to the major commanding, and then passed on up the street, and out again into the country along the road leading in the direction of Xochemilco. The same escort that had accompanied him to the city still attended him.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the outskirts of the town he and his men made halt in front of a handsome house, which every one knew to be the country residence of Don Ignacio Valverde. Here they dismounted, Santander himself stepping forward to the front gate, which was closed. On reaching it he made the usual demand for admission. A man inside, who was José, the coachman, put the never-varying interrogatory in such cases :

"*Quien es ?*" (Who is it?)

"Colonel Santander," was the response.

And the great door was drawn open upon its heavy iron hinges.

"Is Don Ignacio at home?" he asked, stepping inside the *saguan*.

"No, Señor ; he has gone to Chalco ; and is not expected home to-night."

Instead of disappointment, a gleam of satisfaction shot from Santander's dark eyes as he received this information.

"The Señorita Luisa?"

"She is at home, Señor, and the Señorita Almonte."

"So much the better," muttered Santander to himself. "I have some business with both," he added, in a louder tone, to the door-opener. "Give my name to the ladies, and say that I wish to see them."

José was about turning to take in the message when he saw that it was not necessary. The young ladies were themselves within earshot, standing by the fountain basin in the middle of the flagged courtyard. They had heard the request, which sounded more like a demand ; but notwithstanding its harsh tone they advanced to receive their visitor.

Luisa, as the mistress of the house, stepped forward, Ysabel keeping a little behind. Neither could

conceal a certain ruffling which their proud spirits had felt at the imperious manner of the man who thus impudently intruded himself.

“You wish to see my father, Colonel Santander?” was the interrogatory with which Luisa met him.

“No,” he said, with a look in which spite and triumph seemed equally blended—“no, Señorita, it is not with your father my business lies. It is with yourself.”

“I thought you had business with both of us?” here broke in Ysabel. “I heard you say so just now.”

“And so I have, Señorita Almonte; very serious business with both of you.”

“Indeed! What may it be, Colonel Santander?”

Santander appeared to hesitate about declaring it, or perhaps he was getting his thoughts into shape.

“Let us know, quick?” cried the impetuous mixed-blood. “If the news be so serious we can’t be told it too soon. So out with it at once.”

With all her bravado Ysabel was uneasy about what was to be the revelation. And much more her cousin, whose apprehensions pointed to something connected with the escape of the prisoners.

“Ladies,” said Santander at length, determined on

bringing the awkward conversation to an end, "I regret to inform you that I present myself in the performance of an unpleasant duty—a very unpleasant duty—"

He again hesitated, on pretence that the announcement was paining him,

"Pray go on, sir!" cried Ysabel; and don't also make it unpleasant by keeping us in suspense."

Although still keeping up her defiant tone the young girl turned pale, as had also Luisa Valverde. Both visibly trembled, and Santander could perceive it. It gave him pain as well; for in it he saw additional evidence of their complicity in the escape of the Acordada prisoners, the chief clew to which had been given to him by Zorillo. And this bitter thought found but poor compensation in the scheme of revenge he was now preparing to accomplish. Stung by the last speech he no longer delayed making known the object of his visit.

"Ladies," he said, still keeping up the pretence of sympathetic politeness, "I regret—deeply regret the nature of my errand. I am but an instrument, as you both know, and must carry out the commands intrusted to me. However repugnant to my feelings,

there is no alternative. I am the bearer of this decree, with strict orders to execute it. You perceive that it bears the signature and seal of his excellency, the President."

"We see all that," sharply spoke Ysabel. "But what is it about?"

"Señorita, I am sad to tell you it is a warrant for your arrest—both of you."

"Our arrest!" exclaimed Luisa in a surprise, that was more feigned than felt. "On what accusation, Colonel Santander?"

"I cannot tell. The document specifies no reasons for this very strange proceeding, as I may be permitted to call it. It only commands me to make you my prisoners and take you to the National Palace. Read for yourselves."

Ysabel half plucked the sheet of stamped paper out of Santander's hands, and for a moment stood silent while she ran her eye over the writing upon it. It was a mere dry, dictatorial decree contained in a few brief words, directing the bearer to possess himself of the persons of Luisa Valverde and Ysabel Almonte, and bring them before the alcalde mayor of the City of Mexico.

Ysabel communicated the contents to her cousin, who had already conjectured them.

In truth, neither of the two were at all surprised at the decree, however much they pretended it, and however strange it might otherwise have appeared to them. Since the night before, when José, returning home, had told them of what he had heard pass between Santander and the dwarf, they had more than half expected such a consummation. It had now come, and there could be no help for it.

“We are your prisoners, then, I suppose?” said Luisa.

“I regret having to use the word,” rejoined Santander, with a hypocritical smile. “It is very painful.”

“Of course we cannot blame you, sir,” retorted the Señorita Valverde, with a sneer of resignation. “As you say, you are but doing your duty. When, may I ask, are we to be taken to the city?”

“When it pleases *you*, Señorita,” was the reply. “But to avoid a public exhibition, which, no doubt, would be painful to you, I suggest that it be at a later hour—say after nightfall. It will be all the same to me.”

“It is all the same to us—but after night be it, Señor. I presume you have no objection to our now retiring, so that we may prepare ourselves for our prison?”

“Oh, certainly not,” returned Santander.

“Thank you,” was the curt reply ; and with a cold courtesy to the officer, and a sign to her cousin to follow her, Luisa Valverde walked off towards her own chamber, the door of which soon after closed upon them, leaving Santander alone in the court-yard.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE INTERRUPTED CAROUSAL.

When the ladies were fairly out of sight, and the door shut after them, Santander called in one of the lieutenants of his escort, and ordered him to station sentinels around the house.

This was soon done, but not soon enough to prevent the passing out of one who had overheard the whole conversation as above reported. This was José, the coachman, who, while the sentries were being set, might have been seen stealing out through the shrubbery that surrounded the dwelling, and afterwards making his way towards the mountains that rose up in its rear.

José was having a hard time of it.

On the night before, he had ridden a distance of over twenty miles, besides scaling the rugged slopes of Ajusco to the old ruins, and thence back to the road, where he had left his horse. After that he had galloped on to the hacienda of El Villa, arriving just in

time to take part in the bit of house-breaking done by Don Ruperto and his band, and to drink with them a cup of wine drawn from Don Ruperto's own bins, though not of his own buying.

He had warned the Free Lances of the expedition intended, and, of course, determined them on not returning to their old quarters in the convent. It would no longer be a safe asylum, and they had resolved to abandon it forever. But before dismissing their friendly messenger, José, they had given him a clew by which he might afterwards find them ; and it was the thread of this he was unwinding as he stole through the shrubbery surrounding Don Ignacio's dwelling, and set his face towards the Sierra.

Without any communication with his young mistress, for he had no opportunity, the intelligent *coachero* had conceived a plan that promised results beneficial to her and her cousin, as they might be disastrous to Santander.

He saw that the latter had only a small body of men acting as his escort, and although there was a whole division of cavalry in the village, there seemed to be no communication between them and the escort party, and might not be for the rest of the day. He

had heard Santander give the promise of not starting before night. There might still be time to prevent his starting at all. So reasoned José.

On getting out of the grounds and well away from the house, he turned again into the road running along the edge of the lake Xochemilco, and leading to the village of this name.

It is but a poor country road, barely practicable for wheels, but Don Ignacio's coachman did not keep long upon it. At a quarter of a mile's distance from the house, he left it, turning sharply off to the right, along a still narrower road—a mere path, in fact—running up a ravine, and which led in a cross or diagonal direction to the main Acapulco road, higher up among the mountains.

But he was not making to reach this last. When he had followed the ravine path for about a quarter of a mile, he turned into another ravine—a lateral one—down which there dashed a swift mountain stream, its banks heavily timbered with a variety of evergreen trees—the dark cypress predominating. Up this there was no path; but the eye could detect numerous horse-tracks that seemed to have been freshly made—

though in the hard, stony soil so slightly indented as to require the sharp glance of a professional trailer.

José's early training as a mountaineer served him in this crisis, and he did not need to waste much time in taking up the tracks. He did not even regard them. Wherever he was going, it was evident he went independent of their guidance.

And yet he was not going altogether alone. Though unseen by the sentries whom Santander had set around the house, he had not got off unobserved. As he passed out through the grounds, a pair of sharp eyes were upon him. They were those of a creature skulking under the shadow of some trees, whose form might have been mistaken for a stump, or a conglomeration of shapeless branches. It was the hunchback Zorillo, who, ever since his first proffer of service, had been keeping close to his patron, Santander, and was with the escort who accompanied the latter to Don Ignacio's dwelling.

Seeing José steal off, and knowing as he did all along, the part that Don Ignacio's coachman had been playing, the dwarf uncoiled himself from his crouching attitude and started after. It was an instinct that directed him. The movements of the domestic had

something suspicious in them, and by following him Zorillo conjectured that he might make some new discovery that would be still further beneficial to his own interest.

Along the Xochemilco road he skulked, keeping the coachman in view, now crouching among the bushes, now scuttling forward in a half erect attitude, never direct, but in zigzag shoots from tree to rock, or from angle to angle of the road.

The man he was dogging, himself keenly intent on what was before, never once thought of looking behind him, and this gave the dwarf an opportunity to keep within sight of him without being observed himself. José, however, as soon as he had got beyond eye-shot of the soldiers around the house, increased his pace to a quick run, and in this way entered the side-path leading up the ravine.

On reaching its mouth the dwarf saw that he was distanced. The coachman was out of sight; and at the pace at which he had been going, it was not likely he could be overtaken. But the topography of the mountain, known to Zorillo, told him that José must return by the same path to get back to Don Ignacio's dwelling; and reflecting upon this, the

dwarf suspended the pursuit, intending to wait for his return. Stepping a little to one side, and choosing a spot under a ledge of rock with some bushes in front of it, he squatted down like a toad, took out a cigarrita, ignited it, and commenced smoking—evidently determined to sit it out.

Meanwhile José was making his way up the lateral ravine under the shadow of the overarching trees, from the branches of which hung a festoonery of parasitical plants, giving a weird, wild aspect to everything around.

The farther he advanced up this mountain valley, the more shadowy it seemed, and the more lugubrious the sounds that fell upon his ear. The torrent, tumbling along its rocky bed, seemed like the constant groaning of spirits in pain, now and then giving voice to some increased agony in the screech of the great Mexican owl, or the sharp cry of the white-headed eagle, the last resembling the laughter of madmen.

As he advanced, however, other voices began to be heard, also in laughter, but more in the tones of human hilarity; and a little farther on he came

in sight of the men who were making this merriment.

In an open spot, partly shadowed with trees and partly cliffs that rose hundreds of feet overhead, a company was assembled.

There were in all about fifty of them, grouped over the ground, some seated upon rocks or fallen logs, others standing up, and still others bending over fires—apparently engaged in culinary operations.

A like number of horses, saddled and bridled, stood tied to the trees, whose sweating flanks and dusty caparison showed them to be resting after a march or a journey. Besides the horses, there were several pack-mules, upon whose backs could still be seen marks of the pack-saddles; while on the ground lay the cargoes they had carried.

These resembled no cases of regular merchandise, but packages of variously assorted articles, wrapped up in serapes, and, as if hastily corded, the protruding ends of some of the pieces proving them to be household goods of a valuable description. Here peeped out the branch of a silver candelabrum, there some other shining object that had adorned a dining or drawing-room.

The domestic of Don Ignacio Valverde, silently making approach, saw these things without surprise. He knew whence they had come, and who they were that now held them in possession. It was the bivouac of Ruperto Rivas and his band, who were here resting after that nocturnal raid in which he had harried his own home.

Just at the moment when José was stopped by a sentry, within sight of their camping places, the Free Lances were in the midst of a carousal. It was a scene of grand enjoyment. A sheep, brought away from the hacienda, with half a score of turkeys, and as many fat pullets, had already distributed their savory odors through the glen; and carved by the machetes of the men, were in process of being masticated. A skin of pulque, with a basket of wine, the bottles of which were out and set standing over the ground, attested that Santander's cellar had not escaped their attention any more than his poultry pens.

Rivas was, of course, master of this Homeric feast, and in high spirits was he performing the duties of host.

"Come, gentlemen!" he said, laying hold of one of the wine bottles and breaking off its neck with the

butt of his pistol. "Let us toast our new comrades, the Texans. I take it we drink them in good wine; for there was never any bad in the cellar from which it came—at least when I had the stocking of it. I hope my tenant, the Señor Santander, has not allowed it to lose character. So fill up and let us drink, 'LOS TEJANOS Y LIBERTAD!'"

"The Texans and Liberty!" vociferated the Free Lances, each clutching his cup and filling it from the nearest bottle.

Kearney was called upon to respond, which he did in a neat speech; and then a demand was made upon Cris Rock, whose gigantic size and odd, eccentric ways had already rendered him an object of great interest to every one of his new associates.

"I ain't much o' a speechifier," said he, "but as yo've drunk Texan an' Liberty, I'm boun' to say somethin'. So I gie ye in return, 'Mexiko unner a free form o' government, and death to her cork-legged tyrant!'"

"Death to him! Death to Santa Anna!" rang out on all sides, till the rocks reverberated only the echoes of "death! death!"

A handsome young fellow named Miranda—a sort

of lieutenant of that band—as if to introduce a more cheerful theme, next gave the toast :

“Sweethearts and wives !”

At which each of the Free Lances, according to their usual custom, called out the name of her he held dearest.

“Ysable Almonte,” came from Ruperto Rivas ; and Kearney, as if catching the cue from him, cried out :

“Luisa Valverde !”

The words had scarce passed their lips when the sentry stepped upon the ground, accompanied by Don Ignacio’s coachman. Of course, all knew him well, and Rivas, suspecting that he bore some important tidings, stepped briskly out to receive him.

“What is it?” he inquired, in an undertone ; “do you bring us some news, José?”

“I do, Don Ruperto. The two ladies whose names I have just heard are in danger.”

“In danger !”

“Great danger, Señor. They are prisoners in their own house, with Colonel Santander and his dragoons keeping guard over them. In less than an hour from now they will be on their way to the city—to the palace, I heard him tell them, for examination on some

charge, and it may be for punishment. Señor, no doubt, may guess what it is."

"Step this way, Don Florencio," said Rivas, addressing himself to Kearney. "Some news that concerns you as well as myself. Comrades!" he cried to the others; "quaff off your cups, and look to your arms and horses. We may have a quick march and some sharp fighting to do before midnight."

Tossing his own cup to the ground, he turned aside, and for some moments held converse with the coachman, Kearney taking part in it. It ended in Don Ignacio's domestic receiving a note, hastily written upon the table-top of a pack-saddle, and with this he hastened back as he had come.

The carousal at once came to an end, and in less than ten minutes after there might have been seen defiling down the valley a troop of fifty horsemen, no longer encumbered with spoils or delayed by pack-animals, but lightly pricking their steeds, ready for either charge or encounter.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DULL AFTERNOON.

Carlos Santander had spent many an afternoon in the country house of Don Ignacio Valverde, but never one that seemed so dull to him. He could not help knowing that he was an unwelcome guest; and in another short interview had with him, the ladies had made no effort to conceal from him the chagrin his presence caused them. He kept up his pretence of courtesy, and availing themselves of it they kept close to their room, there to await the hour when it should please him to transfer them to their prison in the city. He had signified his consent that they should ride in their own carriage, jocularly adding that he presumed he would not have to put any other bracelets on their wrists than those they already wore. This remark was made in a way that caused them to exchange glances of significance. There were no bracelets on their wrists. These had gone into the

hands of the hunchback, whom they had seen in the company of Santander's escort as they halted in front of the house. Had the dwarf told the story of their despoilment, making confession of the part he had himself played in it? It seemed almost certain that he had, or, at all events, that Santander had in some way discovered it. The thought was a fresh source of chagrin.

Soon after being arrested, the Señorita Valverde had asked permission to send a messenger to her father, and the further favor that they might be permitted to stay at the house till his return.

The first request was refused as politely as possible, on the plea that he—Santander—had orders not to allow any communication with them until they should appear before their accusers.

The truth was that a party of soldiers had been already dispatched to arrest Don Ignacio himself.

After making this request Luisa turned with resigned dignity and re-entered her own chamber, the door of which, as in all Mexican houses, communicated directly with the court-yard, only the piazza running between them. There Ysábel had already preceded

her, with the maid, Pepita, apparently as much affected as if she, too, was being made a prisoner.

Santander could not force them to keep his company, unless by behaving as a brigand, and he was therefore compelled to pass the time without them. And he must have felt very much as a brigand quartered in a mansion whose mistress he had made captive.

As he paced the court-yard, smoking his cigar, his thoughts were bitter enough. The cherished dream of years seemed to be departing from him. For years he had loved Luisa Valverde, and hoped that his love would be returned. Never until the night before had he despaired of it, for he believed that if she had ever felt any affection for her father's pupil it must have long ago died out, and that the pitiful plight in which the latter had been seen by her would give the final touch to extinguishing any lingering affection for him. But the revelations of the dwarf had revived all his past suspicions, turning them into certainties. Zorillo had told him all—how the weapons and implements had been found in the carriage, proving connivance at the escape; and still further had he confessed all

about his receiving the watches and jewelry, and the purpose for which they had been given him.

There could be no mistaking the sentiment that inspired such acts as these ; and Santander's jealousy was now excited to the highest pitch of spite, while his hopes had gone down to the profoundest depths of despair.

And yet he endeavored to resuscitate a hope. Notwithstanding all that had passed, might there not be some misunderstanding? The escape of the prisoners might have been conceived, planned and executed by Ysabel Almonte, and more on account of Ruperto Rivas than his prison companion.

Santander had heard of the early attachment between this young lady and the reputed robber. He knew also that she was a girl of exceptional character—that she possessed a spirit of independence, original and daring even to recklessness. More than once he had himself had a touch of her temper, during his visits to the house of Don Ignacio, where she had been for some time staying. Was it that spirit had set the prisoners free? And was Luisa Valverde only an accomplice, not caring very much about the matter? Or, perhaps, only acting from a feeling of friendship,

humanity, or for the sake of old acquaintance? It was a straw to clutch at; and as a drowning man, Santander eagerly seized upon it. Proud of his personal appearance—and with some reason—steeped in vanity to the lips, it still partially supported him.

Soon, however, this slight fabric would sink beneath him, and his spirit would be again plunged into depths of bitter despondency, and with renewed spite would he dwell upon the programme he had now traced out.

He was going to have Don Ignacio once more stripped of his honors and estates—once more brought down to the lowest point of humiliation, and so at his (Santander's) mercy—his daughter along with him.

The conference he had that day held with the Dictator gave him hope of this; for Santa Anna, equally with himself, and for somewhat similar reasons, was maddened by the disclosures which the hunchback had made.

Amidst Santander's bitter thoughts there were the sweet reflections of revenge, as a streak of silver lining to the cloud of his black chagrin, though it was more like the fierce gleam of lightning that shoots athwart the storm-threatening sky.

With folded arms he paced the court-yard alone, not even entering into converse with the officers of his escort. Now and then a groan escaped him, as he inhaled the smoke of his cigar, while ever and anon his eyes sought the door of the chamber that contained the object of all his solicitude, now regarding it with the fierce glare of the jaguar, and now with a subdued expression, as if hope was once more rekindled in his breast.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WITHIN THE CHAMBER.

Again inside their own room, with the door close shut, the two young girls took counsel together.

They could have no misconception about the cause of their arrest and the charges that would be brought against them. Clearly it was for their act in assisting the escape of Ruperto Rivas and the Texan prisoners. Nor were they unconscious of the seriousness of the offence they had committed, and the situation into which it had led them.

Of the two, Luisa Valverde was the most alarmed. Not so much on her own account as her father's, whose position would now be compromised. She knew she had done what would cause great displeasure to the Dictator for more reasons than one, and it would be certain to fall upon her father's head as well as upon her own. Don Ignacio would again be disgraced from his high position—in all likelihood once more banished from the land.

And for herself—what would be the punishment inflicted? She could not tell—she could not even conjecture it; she could only surmise something serious—something terrible. She felt so crushed that for a time after entering her chamber she had only wept and prayed. Her cousin had done the same, though with less violent emotions, for *she* had never suffered the pains and penalties of exile. Besides, the spirit of Ysabel Almonte was one that did not easily succumb. It would have been a very great misfortune that could have brought it down to the point of actual despair.

She was the first to recuperate and commence an examination into the circumstances that surrounded them, so that they might better comprehend their situation and its dangers.

“It is clear they must have discovered all about it,” she said, after a time spent in reflecting. “I suppose they must have found the tools we put into the carriage. José would not betray us.”

“Oh, never, Señorita. It was not José. I’m sure he would not do it.”

This speech came from Pepita, who had been per-

mitted to accompany them to their chamber for the purpose of attending upon them.

“No ; I do not suspect him, Pepita. I know your José is incapable of such treachery.”

“He is, Señorita—he is. He would lay down his life for the Doña Luisa or her father. I think I know how they have learnt everything.”

“How, Pepita ?”

“Through that ugly imp who was chained along with them. You know José heard him tell Don Carlos where they had gone to in the mountains, and it's likely he has told him, too, about how they managed to get away. The villain dwarf must have seen the hammer and chisel, and couldn't help knowing that they had been put into the carriage. Besides, didn't you give him up your things ? That would tell him all. He's now here along with the soldiers. I saw him before Don Carlos came inside. Yes, Señoritas, that's the thing that has done it.”

“'Tis true,” said Ysabel. “And that repulsive little wretch will be the witness they will have against us. Ugh ! isn't it awful to think of it !”

Luisa also shuddered as she thought of it. What-

ever was to be the accusation against them, they could not escape from the proofs of it. The testimony would be conclusive.

It did not occur to Luisa to think of an attempt at escaping in any other way, though it did to her more daring cousin. Ysabel glanced at the window, then rose from her seat, walked toward it, and looked outside.

“He has placed sentries all around the house. I can see them,” she said. “What a careful strategist he must be thus to suspect us poor things of making an attempt to get away from him and his soldiers! Aye, and I would do it, Luisita, if I saw the chance; run right into the fields, and take to the mountains. Oh! if I only knew how to get a message to Ruperto. *Santissima!* I never thought of that.”

“But could you think of it now!” asked Luisa, in surprise.

“I could, can, and do. Reflect, Luisa, on what our situation really is. We are prisoners, and may expect some humiliating punishment—social disgrace for certain. That cannot be worse by anything we may now do. If I could reach Ruperto in the mountains, I

would go willingly. Wouldn't you? Remember, Don Florencio is along with him."

Luisa made no reply, but it was evident the words had weight with her.

"If Ruperto only knew how we are situated! I'm sure his band numbers as many men as there are here—at all events, they'd be more than a match for these laced leperos. If we only had a bird that could fly and tell Ruperto!"

Excited by the thought the fiery creature strode backward and forward across the room like a beautiful tigress chafing in her cage. All at once she stopped before her cousin, as if a thought had occurred to her.

"Why shouldn't we send José? He knows where they are. He might still be in time."

"But how are we to send him?" asked Luisa, suddenly inclining to the suggestion. "He wouldn't be allowed to come in here. How can we communicate with him?"

"Surely they will not hinder Pepita from going out. She could tell him what we want. José is intelligent, and would know what to do. Luisita, let us try. I'd rather live in a cave in the mountains, starve

in it, than be a prisoner in the palace of Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, at the mercy of that tyrant and his tool, as we both shall be."

There was a double meaning in these words which Luisa Valverde could well understand. She remembered something that made their comprehension easy to her; and she shuddered at the recollection.

"I, too," she assented, while the tone in which she spoke told how her thoughts coincided with those of her cousin.

"Then let us do it. At all events let us try."

There was no opposition on the part of Luisa. On the contrary, she entered into Ysabel's scheme with an energy equal to that of its projector.

A few hurried instructions were whispered to Pepita, and she was dispatched to communicate them to José.

The girl was permitted to pass out without any obstruction, though she was questioned as to her errand. She was going to the *cocuiá* to fetch some refreshments. The young ladies stood in need of something to eat before starting on their compulsory journey.

The excuse was natural enough. It would have

been very ungallant to refuse such a request, above all on the part of a man who had talked so much about the disagreeableness of the duty he was called upon to perform.

Pepita passed on without further interrogation.

With a keen anxiety the young ladies awaited her return.

She came back at length bearing a tray, upon which were arranged various viands intended for their refectation.

They commenced eating, as they did so addressing side speeches to their waitress.

“Have you seen José?” was the whispered question.

“Yes.”

“And given him our message?”

“No—it was too late.”

The countenance of both fell on receiving this answer.

“Too late? For what reason?” asked Pepita’s mistress.

“The reasons are written. If the Doña Luisita will unfold her napkin, she will find something inside it.”

With a glance to the window, and another towards the keyhole of the door, to see that no eye was peeping through it, the Doña Luisita did as her maid had whisperingly suggested.

Out of the unfolded napkin fell a piece of folded paper, which itself being unfolded was seen to contain a writing that ran as follows :

“If the Señoritas Luisa Valverde and Ysabel Almonte sleep this night in a prison, then the Señores Don Florencio Kearney and Ruperto Rivas will also pass the night in a prison, or sleep upon the bed of death, with many brave comrades beside them. Fear not, noble ladies; though we need not speak thus to those who have shown such a generous courage. We owe you for our lives, and this night we shall repay the debt by either giving them up or you your liberty. Take no step of yourselves. Leave all to us, to our comrades, and to God.”

“It is in the handwriting of my Ruperto !”

“And the spirit of my Florencio !”

“O, Luisa, they will rescue us !”

“If the Virgin wills it, Ysa. Let us pray to her to help them !”

The two beautiful creatures knelt down together in front of a picture of the Virgin, and hand in hand—their other hands placed upon their throbbing bosoms—offered up a united prayer in words almost the same.

The Indian maiden, standing behind and waiting to give the responsive Amen, completed this charming tableau of adoration.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RESCUE.

The golden god of day, for centuries and to this hour worshiped by the descendants of Moctezuma, was just bidding his daily adieu to the land long ago wrested from their fathers—the beautiful valley of Mexico. His last rays had forsaken the domes and turrets of what was once the ancient city of Tenochtitlan, and only lingered in roseate tint upon the snowy cone of Popocatepec. Already the deep mountain ravines were in darkness, and the twilight, descending like a purple vail over the village of San Augustin de las Cuevas, invested also the country house of Don Ignacio Valverde with the same subdued light.

There was a stillness in the air that seemed to extend over all the broad valley, broken only by the distant lowing of kine, the hinneying of mules joyful at being relieved from their loads, or up in the air the whirtling of many wings as the wild fowl of lake

Xochemilco disported themselves in their evening flight.

In front of the residence above mentioned there was a tableau in the act of being formed that ill conformed with the peaceful character of the scene ; for it was a tableau in which soldiers were the principal figures. The escort of cavalry that had for some time held the place was getting ready to march.

They had not yet mounted. Their horses, saddled and bridled, were standing upon the road in front, each trooper by the head of his own.

The great gate forming the main entrance to the house stood open, showing upon the flagged courtyard inside a carriage with the horses attached, and the coachman seated upon his box. Near it stood a group of officers, one of them conspicuous by his splendid uniform, as also from being the superior in command. Their horses were held outside ; and they seemed to wait for some one who was to take a seat in the carriage.

Their patience was not to be long tried. A young girl-domestic, issuing from a side-door, came tripping across the pavement, and drawing the carriage-door, held it open in her hand. She was followed by two

ladies in sombre travelling-dress, both closely veiled, so as to hinder any observation of their faces.

The officer in the showy uniform, and who was Colonel Carlos Santander, stepped forward, and with a bow, offered to hand them into the carriage.

There was a slight courtesy in return, with just enough hauteur to show that his gallantry was declined, when at that moment an incident occurred that changed the thoughts as well as the attitudes of every one about the place, both inside and without. It was the bell of San Augustin church, that, pealing clear upon the still evening, announced the *Angelus*.

No Mexican, good or bad, dares to disregard that summons, and even the cutthroat uncovers to it. This did the group of officers by the carriage, and the driver on the box; while the female servant who held open the door, and the veiled ladies about to step inside, made severally the sign of the cross. The troopers outside upon the road, dropped upon their knees, each by his own stirrup, as if the act was part of their manual for mounting. A few seconds passed, in which might have been heard the mutterings of "Ave-Maria" and "Pater-noster," and then everything was free to proceed as

before. But scarce any change had taken place in the tableau, beyond that of the ladies having stepped inside the carriage, and the door being shut upon them, when a second interruption occurred, altogether different in character from the first. The first was the "angel"—the second had the semblance of the "devil."

A creature scarce human in shape, long-armed like an ape, and apparently using its arms as much as its limbs for the purpose of progression, came scrambling through the open entrance, in breathless haste making way into the court-yard.

All present recognized the hunchback, Zorillo; for all of them, in one place or other, had seen this monstrous shape before. He had no word for any one there except Santander, and to him his speech was addressed.

"Don Carlos, you are betrayed! And there's the man who betrayed you—up there upon the carriage." A slight scream was heard inside it. "I suspected, and followed him up the glen. He went to give them warning."

"Give who warning?"

"Ruperto Rivas and his band."

“Drag the scoundrel down! Out with him to the back yard, and send a bullet through his body!”

“You have no time to waste upon him!” screamed the dwarf. “They are coming! They are close at hand! They are here! *Aye dios!*”

His last words were not heard. The exclamation became blended with a volley of shots that at that instant rang along the walls of the hacienda, and came reverberating into the court-yard.

The two lieutenants rushed together towards the gate, but before they could reach their horses outside they saw the escort of dragoons that awaited them—such as had not already fallen under the fire of the attacking party—spring to their saddles in double-quick time, and in treble-quick gallop off towards San Augustin.

It was but the instinct of a last resort to retreat back into the court-yard and attempt to close the gate. But the huge door was too heavy to yield soon enough to their strength, and before its massive folds could be brought together they were seized and burst apart by the powerful arms of a man who seemed a giant, and who sprang into the court-yard, shouting out in a strange tongue:

“Surrender to Cris Rock and Texas !”

Behind him was a sea of scowling faces—in their midst distinguishable those of Rivas and Kearney.

The officers of Santander’s escort seeing that resistance would only end in their being chopped into pieces, at once turned the hilts of their swords towards their assailants, eager to have them accepted.

Santander stood irresolute and hesitating. It would be a terrible humiliation right under the eyes of her who sat in the carriage. But there seemed no alternative between it and instant death. And while he stood thus vacillating, even this chance came near escaping him, for Cris Rock, having his eyes upon him, and becoming excited, with the remembrance of all that had passed—his intended treachery in the rendezvous at New Orleans, his poltroonery in the duel at Portchartrain, his causing them to be sent into the sewers—for he now knew it was Santander who had so degraded them—all these thoughts crowding at once into the Texan’s soul, made him no longer master of himself ; and with the bound of a panther he sprang forward, long-bladed knife in hand, to cut to pieces the scoundrel he detested.

But for the young Irishman Santander would at

that moment have ceased to exist, though Kearney himself did not intend he should live much longer. It was but the instinct of a gentleman, who could not see even a coward cut down without the chance of defending himself.

As the Texan flung himself forward upon his almost unresisting antagonist, Kearney caught him by the arm and with a strength equalling his own swung him to one side.

“Hold, Rock!” he cried, “and don’t make a butcher of yourself. This is an old quarrel of mine—not yours; and I intend to settle it in my own way.”

Rock, sullenly clamoring, stood for the moment aside. He still respected his captain too much to disobey him, even in his hours of anger.

“Now, Señor Santander,” said Kearney, facing square to his old antagonist, and assuming an attitude that told him what was intended, “you and I have crossed swords before, under circumstances which I presume you remember. You wore a covering then that protected you; and perhaps the habit still sticks to you, as his uncomfortable shirt did to Nessus. We shall be sure before proceeding. Señor Ruperto

Rivas, will you have the goodness to unbutton that gentleman's coat and see whether he has such a thing as a suit of chain armor beneath it?"

The captain of the Free Lances, already acquainted with the details of the New Orleans duel, stepped forward to obey, assisted by two of his followers. Santander made no resistance. He knew that by doing so his life would not be worth the tossing of a die. His coat was unbuttoned, and then his cassimere vest. Underneath these was only a shirt of finest cambric, and still closer to his skin an elastic undershirt of spun silk. The chain armor was not there. He had not been expecting an encounter that required it.

"Now, sir," said Kearney, as soon as the inspection was completed, "the last time I saw you was when I was toiling in the sewers of Mexico. You pointed me out to a young lady seated in her carriage, desiring, no doubt, to feast her eyes with a spectacle of humiliation. The same is now present, and again seated in her carriage. But it is my turn to provide the spectacle. You told her of our once crossing swords, Señor Santander, and, as I understand, you gave her a fine account of how you defeated me. As a vanquished man you cannot, therefore, refuse me

the opportunity of a *revanche*, and I demand another bout. Last time you declared for the duel *a la mort*. I now warn you, it is *to the death*. But one of us goes through that gate alive. Defend yourself !”

As Kearney finished speaking he brought his sword to guard, and was advancing upon the Creole, who stood, not as a noble stag at bay, but a hind trembling in its last retreat. He didn't even attempt to raise his blade.

At that moment a cry came from the carriage, followed by the words :

“O, Florencio, spare him ! He is not worthy of your vengeance, much less of your honorable sword. Do not risk your life—for even a coward may kill.”

“There's no risk to me,” said Kearney. “I feel it. I feel, too, that the fight with such an antagonist would be like killing him in cold blood. You may do what you like with him, Don Ruperto. He is more your prisoner than mine.”

“We Free Lances have got a way of dealing with such poltroons,” rejoined Rivas. “Villaint,” he added, turning to one of his followers, with a significant gesture, “have the goodness to remove this gentleman out of sight ?”

Villaint made a sign to several others, some of whom advancing, disarmed Santander and marched him out through the open gate.

They were gone only a few moments, when the report of a pistol or carbine plainly told how he had been disposed of.

“That’s the way you Free Lances deal wi’ sech fellows, air it?” asked Cris Rock, putting the question to one by his side. “Wal, the captin mout as well a let me done the thing when I war about it. I kud a made jest as good a job o’ it wi’ the knife.”

“Ladies!” said Ruperto Rivas, approaching the carriage and taking off his hat, “I presume you will not object to a change in your escort, and may I hope you will not be offended if I suggest a change also in your destination. After what has passed, I am of opinion that a month or two in the mountains, if not a pleasanter, may be a safer residence for you than the City of Mexico; and if you will consent for a time to share the home of a hunted patriot, we can promise you its hospitality, and I think we can also find a priest to sanction it.”

Kearney spoke to support the proposal.

The cousins exchanged glances, each reading assent

in the eye of the other. The thought of what would be their fate should they either stay there, or return to the capital, was sufficient to appall, as it was to decide them. The circumstances were strange—even extraordinary—but, after all, was it not their lovers who made this promise of protection?

Why should they refuse to accept it—especially as there was also promised a priest to give it the sanction of the church? It was not an occasion for prudery, and neither permitted it to sway them. On the contrary, both accepted the escort thus offered, and in ten minutes after the carriage containing them was whirling—with José seated on the box and his sweetheart Pepita beside him—along the road towards Xochemilco, a few miles farther on to be exchanged for the saddle, their journey to be continued along a path where wheels had never made their mark. As they passed away from the house the Texan lingered behind.

Kearney glanced back to see whether he was following. The road, to avoid a spit of rock, turned slightly to one side, bringing the rearward of the dwelling into view. There were some old olive trees standing behind it, and among their trunks he saw lying what appeared to be the dead body of a man.

It was now nearly dark, and darker under the shadow of the trees, but there was still light enough to show a gleaming of gold lace, and that sparkle of bright buttons that told the body to be dressed in the uniform of an officer. He did not need to question any one. From what he had learned while inside, and what he now saw, he knew that it was the corpse of Carlos Santander.

“Heaven forgive him, as I do,” were the words that passed from the lips of the young Irishman, as he spurred on after the carriage.

The lieutenants of Santander's escort had been permitted to remain without further molestation. The Free Lances had no antipathy against these men, who were but acting in obedience to their duty. They could depart at their pleasure.

But there was one not allowed to leave that court-yard alive. After the carriage had rolled out into the road the Texan giant stayed behind, still holding the Mexican dwarf, who shrank and shivered in his grasp. Those who stayed with him thought he intended taking him along as a prisoner. He had no such merciful intent, as his act testified.

It was a terrible act of retaliation—a crime under any circumstances. Even mad anger might not excuse, nor the bitterest provocation palliate it. But Cris Rock was a man whose rude border training had taught him to measure out justice by the simple standard of his own judgment, and by the same to administer it. He believed himself not only justifiable, but in duty bound, to cut off all cumberers of the ground, and that the death penalty was due to every one who was a foe to humanity. In this light he looked upon the deformed creature by his side—“a curse to the airth,” as he said, hissing the words through his teeth.

And apparently less from any prompting of revenge than to rid the earth of this curse, he caught the dwarf by the ankles, hoisted him into the air, swung him once or twice around his head, and then flung him down with a heavy crash upon the pavement. The wild shriek that pealed from the victim's lips was stifled as his skull came in contact with the rim of the stone basin out of which the fountain bubbled up, while his blood spouting forth became commingled with the water! It was his life blood. Ere

the giant released his ankles from that strong, vise-like grasp the dwarf had ceased to exist.

The two Mexican officers still inside the court-yard were spectators of the tragedy. Neither attempted to interfere, or made movement in any way. They stood aghast, paralyzed, horror-struck.

The Texan bent for a moment over the lifeless body, muttering, as he gave it a last glance :

“The world air well rid o’ you.”

Then, with long but measured steps, he strode out through the open gateway, leaped upon the horse with which the Free Lances had provided him, and trotted off after the cortege, already somewhat advanced along the road to Xochemilco. Both it and he had now need to make haste, for the dragoons of the escort who took flight at the first attack, had already entered San Augustin, and warned the two squadrons there quartered.

The bugles sounding the “assembly” could be heard by the Free Lances, braying in their rear, as they escorted the carriage along the Xochemilco road. But they were all well mounted, and felt no fear. And soon after the wheeled vehicle ceased to embarrass them, as its brace of fine blooded horses were

detached from it, stripped of their harness, saddled and mounted by the two fair ladies who had been hitherto its occupants. And then all—ladies and Free Lances—continued on at a brisk pace up the steep ravine road, and from that into another road, and another, away among the defiles of the mountains, where even during daylight Major Ramirez, and his cavalry would have been afraid to follow them. But as it was now night, the major, after a short, fruitless chase, halted his squadrons, and returned to his snug quarters in the town of San Augustin.

* * * * *

When the news of this strange and tragical escape reached the capital City of Mexico, its Dictator, Santa Anna, was savage almost to madness. Fresh troops were ordered out—whole regiments—with orders to capture, and if need be kill, the party of fugitives—women and men. But weeks passed and neither men nor women were captured, nor could word be obtained where they were, or whither they had gone. It was only surmised that they were hidden somewhere among the mountains—but a poor guide to the discovery of any one in Mexico—whether a fugitive from justice or a refugee escaping from oppression.

For a time the tyrant consoled himself by expending a portion of his spleen upon Don Ignacio, innocent of all that had occurred. His estates were re-confiscated, and he himself was cast into prison.

But both his property and liberty were soon after restored by a revolution that hurled Santa Anna from the dictatorial seat, and consigned him, as he had done others, to exile in a foreign land.

Along with his estates Don Ignacio did not recover his daughter. She came back to him, it is true, but in the company of one who had the right ever after to call her his own, and by the sanction of the church; for the priest promised in the epistle of Don Ruperto Rivas had been found among the mountains. He had done not only a double but triple marriage, for at the same ceremony Don Ruperto had espoused the daring Ysabel Almonte, who, after the new revolution, became mistress of the mansion of El Villor, with Don Ruperto once more its master, where Don Florencio Kearney and her fair cousin, his wife, were often afterwards their guests; while the third couple who stood up before the priest were the faithful José and the pretty Pepita.

And after the new revolution the band of Free Lances were dissolved, no longer stigmatized under the reputation of robbers, but each becoming a patriotic officer in the army of the new *regime*.

Cris Rock remained for a time in Mexico, in the company of his old filibustering captain. But the Texan giant soon found the table valley of Tenochtitlan too confined for him. He wanted once more to stretch his limbs upon a real "puraira," and to accomplish this purpose he at length returned to Texas. But he did not stay long there. The American-Mexican war soon after broke out; and along with Hays' Rangers, Cris once more set foot upon the table land of Anahuac, and again shook the hand of his old comrade of the "Mier Expedition."

And what about another member of this expedition, of whom we have not said one word—the brave Crittenden? We have been silent about his deeds because, with the exception of that relating to the duel on the Shell Road, their chronicle lies apart from the details of this story. Yet were they deeds worth chronicling in the page of romance, and still more in that of real history.

Brave Crittenden of Kentucky! Well do I remember thee as one of the prisoners of that hopeless expedition from the time that your misfortunes began at Mier and ended in your confinement in a loathsome cell in the City of Mexico. And again do I remember you well, when, an officer of Mounted Rifles, you made triumphal entry, along with the rest of us, into that same capital where you had suffered insulting treatment. And well, too, I remember how modestly and forgivingly we both used to walk together along its streets, extending kindness where you at least had the right to kill.

Happy for me, but, alas! for you, I was not with you in that other fatal expedition—the last of your life—when, ever responsive to the call of Liberty, along with the gallant Lopez, you went to give it to the patriots of Cuba.

You failed, then, and, in your failure, fell. But let your friends fear not that this, the grandest act of your life, is lost or its sacrifice forgotten. The time is fast approaching when that scene where you and your fellow-filibusters were compelled to kneel down on the flags of Havana and receive your death-shots from a

platoon of Spanish hireling soldiers, will be painted on canvas and blazoned on banners as one of the most cruel martyrdoms of history, as well as one of its proudest triumphs.

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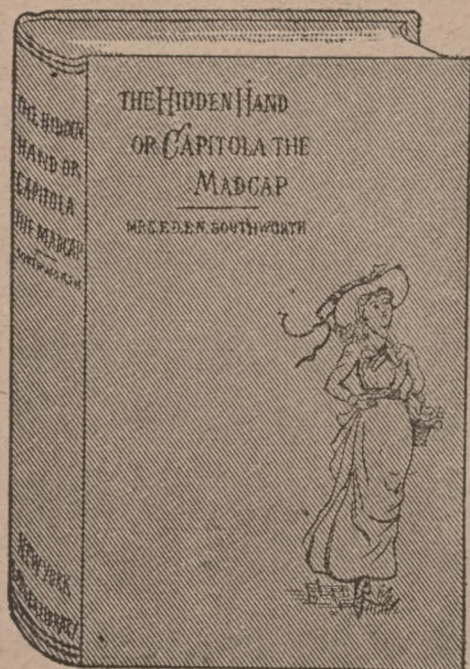
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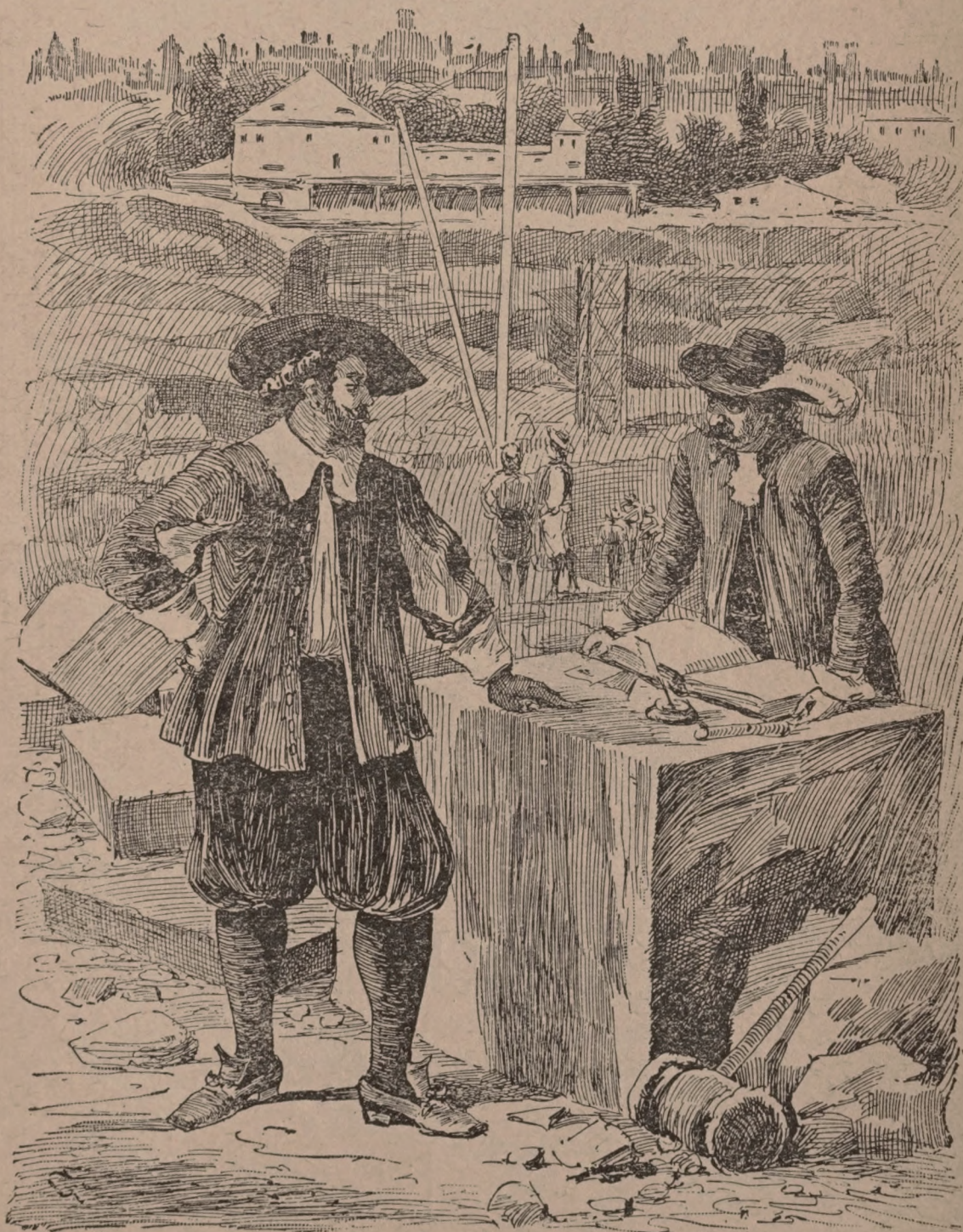
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