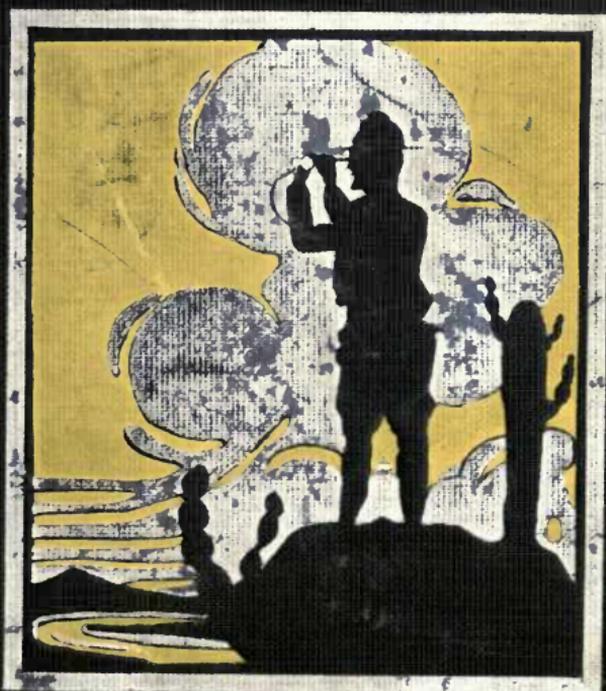


SCOUTING *with* GENERAL FUNSTON



BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON



PHILIP SMALL RUSSELL

Billy from Aunt Alice
- Halloween - 1917

100



PHILIP SMALL RUSSELL

Billy from Aunt Alice
Halloween - 1917

100

SCOUTING WITH GENERAL FUNSTON

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THE FORT IN THE FOREST
SCOUTING WITH DANIEL BOONE
SCOUTING WITH KIT CARSON



“Clearly outlined against the horizon a body of horsemen was passing in the distance. The boys stopped to look intently at the unexpected sight”

PIONEER SCOUT SERIES

—
SCOUTING WITH
GENERAL FUNSTON

BY
EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

*Author of "Scouting with Daniel Boone,"
"Scouting with Kit Carson," etc.*



Illustrated
BY J. E. ALLEN

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PREFACE

THE character of Major General Frederick Funston is one that appeals strongly to the heroic element in every American boy. The "Little Guy," as his soldiers affectionately called him, was the personification of daring. Though small of stature in the early part of his military career, when he did not weigh more than one hundred and twenty pounds, he was nevertheless a leader—and his men were willing to follow. Twenty years ago he was a "soldier of fortune" with small knowledge of military science and tactics apart from what he had picked up in rough-and-tumble fighting. Without the polish of a military education—for he had been unable to pass the West Point entrance examinations—he yet displayed marvellous ability in distributing one hundred and fifty thousand men along two thousand miles of border between the United States and Mexico. How he fed his soldiers—clothed, trained, and organized them into an army, simultaneously keeping them

PREFACE

out of trouble, is one of the marvels in American history. A military critic has said: "Funston probably never could be a Grant or a Sherman, although he will perform the most effective service as a Kearney."

When this book was being planned the author wrote to General Funston for suggestions. In reply two letters were received from Headquarters, Southern Department, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. In one the General expresses his keen interest in the purpose of the writer to prepare a story for young people with himself as the central figure. He writes: "Some of the adventures of my early life, for instance those in the arctic regions, have never been written." He then very kindly refers to certain sources of information, and expresses his regrets that he has not more time at his command in which to record his own early personal experiences and adventures. He declines to refer to his friends for detailed information, "as I cannot recall any one who would fill the bill."

Had he lived, twelve more years of military service would have remained for him, but his sudden death put an end to his romantic career. His courage, knowledge, determination, tireless industry, and self-control were qualities that alike account for his successful career, and demonstrate the price he had to pay for his success.

PREFACE

In this story I have tried to be faithful to the facts and to avoid arousing the prejudice or anger of my young readers against an unfortunate people.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

Elizabeth, New Jersey.

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SCOUTING WITH GENERAL FUNSTON

CHAPTER I

IN THE DESERT

THE sun was already sinking toward the distant horizon. Following the faint trail across the shifting desert sands, two boys were slowly proceeding on horseback. Tinted by the colours from the glow in the western sky, the sands of the desert spread out on every side as far as eye could see. Already the air, which had been hot almost beyond endurance, was taking on the chill that comes with sunset. The horizon itself seemed to have contracted; the circle, within which the lads had been moving most of the day, seemed smaller than at noon.

The bigger of the two was Jack Burns. He was a tall, powerful young fellow of eighteen. Strength was stamped upon his face and manifest in his every movement. His face and hands were bronzed from exposure to the sun. Jack and his companion had been from home only three days' but much of the time had been spent in the saddle.

A year ago the condition of Jack's health had so alarmed his parents that they decided hastily to

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send him away from Brooklyn to a locality in which the air was dry and warm.

He had gone to friends whose home was on a ranch in New Mexico, and symptoms of the dread disease which threatened him rapidly disappeared. As he himself expressed it, he was too healthy even to be tired, and it was long since he had been aware that lungs constituted any part of his anatomy. Indeed, such knowledge is seldom desirable, whether one dwells in the city or on the plains. Sometimes a busy mill with all its driving wheels and noisy hum produces a rhythm not at all unmusical, simply because all parts are working harmoniously together. If a break occurs, or an accident happens, then there is a clatter that attracts far more attention than the rhythmical hum of the turning wheels. So, too, when a person becomes aware that he is the possessor of lungs, or of a stomach, the knowledge is, as a rule, undesirable.

Beside Jack rode Steve Lait, whose every action pronounced him thoroughly at home on the plains. Not so tall as his companion, Steve's sinewy frame indicated unusual strength for one so young.

Steve's father had been a boyhood friend of Mr. Burns. When Steve was less than a year old his mother had died of that dreadful disease, tubercu-

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losis. Almost beside himself with grief and fear, Mr. Lait had taken his boy and, with such help as he was able to secure, fled from the eastern city in which he had dwelt. His object had been to protect the child from the disease which had claimed its mother. Apparently his efforts had been crowned with success, for a healthier specimen of young manhood than young Steve Lait would have been difficult to find.

It was because of the success which had attended the efforts of Mr. Lait that his friend Mr. Burns—when *his* boy also was threatened—accepted the invitation for Jack to spend as long a time as he desired on the New Mexico ranch which Mr. Lait had purchased.

Both boys were sunburnt, but at that point their resemblance ceased. Steve was dressed as the typical cowboy or ranchman. Even his pony displayed, in saddle and bridle, those silver markings—the pride of every cowboy.

For a long time both boys had been silent. The monotony of their ride and the weariness which had come upon them were the results of efforts begun three days before the time when this story opens.

A raid upon the cattle belonging to Mr. Lait had been made one night, and on the following morning hasty plans were formed for the pursuit of the

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robbers. Half a dozen men had set forth from the ranch, and, at the request of Jack, he and Steve had been permitted to follow their own devices in their efforts to overtake the thieves, whose flight naturally would be no faster than that of the cattle they had stolen.

A few minutes before the moment at which this chapter opens the boys had passed a spot around which, in a circle, lay the skeletons of many cattle. The bones had been bleached by the summer sun and picked clean by roving, hungry coyotes. The fact that the place where the skeletons lay was in the direct line of the trail they were following had somewhat disheartened both boys. Moreover, they had failed in all their efforts to discover the missing cattle.

Both now were convinced that the greasers—as Mexicans commonly are called along the border—had stampeded the herd and that, unless they had been overtaken by some of the bands from the ranch, they had doubtless succeeded in making their way far within the territory of Mexico, especially as Mr. Lait's ranch was near the border, and many of the men employed by him were plainly of Mexican origin. The discouragement of the two boys was doubly keen when they came nearer to the ranch they were seeking.

“Yes,” agreed Steve, “there probably once was

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a pool in that place we saw. I have known cattle to come a hundred miles for water."

"But how do they know there's any water there?" inquired Jack.

"It puzzles me, too," said Steve. "Probably if I were one of the herd I'd understand it just the same as they do, but I have been told of their coming that far straight across the desert, and that when they find what they are after, they sometimes drink until they die."

"That sounds well," laughed Jack.

"It sounds well because it's true," retorted Steve laughingly. "You know I never saw any one so hard to convince of the things that really occur out here in the desert as the fellow who comes from the city."

"That's all right," acknowledged Jack good-naturedly. "You may talk all you please about the country boy being green when he visits the city, but he isn't in the same class for verdancy with the city boy when he first visits the country!"

"I guess they are both green enough," replied Steve. "But it's strange about the cattle," he continued. "They'll sometimes crowd and gore and tramp on one another trying to wallow right in the mud or water. Of course a good many of them are hurt—even killed—when there's such a rush. They act as if they were mad."

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"I suppose those bones that we saw," suggested Jack as he glanced behind him, "belong to cattle that came there not long ago."

"Probably. They would have been covered by some of the sand storms if they had been there very long."

Steve was more concerned with his own thoughts than with the suggestions and questions of his friend. The horses of both boys were hot and tired. It had been a long journey across the burning sands even for the hardy little ponies. Both beasts were eager to stop, and whenever an opportunity to rest was given them, the dejected manner in which their heads hung down afforded ample evidence of their utter weariness. Nor had either of the boys much more ambition than the pony he was riding.

Although in their search they had advanced into Mexico, they had found neither man nor cattle, and at last, convinced that further efforts would be futile, they had turned and were retracing their way to the far-away ranch of Steve's father.

"I wonder," laughed John, "what my mother would say if she knew I had been on a three-days' trip into the land of the greasers."

"I imagine her thoughts would be less disquieting than they would if she thought that the greasers were hunting you!"

IN THE DESERT

“You’re right,” said Jack. “I’m not so sure that the greasers got our cattle after all. A little while ago you were talking about herds coming a hundred miles for water. Carlos was telling me that he had known them to go all day long without once stopping when they were headed for a spring. Some of them died; some were trampled to death; others got into the mud and, after they had filled up with water, were too weak to get out, so died in their tracks. My! what a forsaken country this is!” Jack glanced about him at the long vista of sand that still was plainly visible in the light of the early evening.

“I don’t know about that,” retorted Steve slowly. “I remember no other. You know my father came down here immediately after my mother died—when I was only a baby.”

“I wonder what ever made him come here. He might have gone to one of many places just as safe for everybody, and a good deal better to live in or look at.”

“I have heard my father say that he wanted, more than anything else, to get away quickly.”

“Well, he certainly succeeded,” laughed Jack. “I’ve got over feeling homesick, and yet I can tell you it would seem mighty good to me to see a city street full of people. There are streets in Brooklyn you never could forget.”

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"That may be," retorted Steve. "I shouldn't forget, because I don't care much about seeing them. Somehow they don't appeal to me. Still, I went away once."

"Where did you go?"

"To Tucson. I shall never forget it, either. There was too much noise and racket for me there and I was glad when I got back to the ranch."

"You must have felt almost smothered. How many do they call a crowd in Tucson?"

"Enough to fill up the streets," said Steve promptly. "You could hardly move there were so many people there."

"Yes, it must have been a regular jam," laughed Jack. "I confess I haven't been jostled by crowds very much since I've been down here, but I can imagine what a mob you ran into. There must have been somewhere between two and three people in it."

"You may have your 'mob' and welcome," spoke up Steve, "but just now I am a little more troubled by that noise over yonder. What do you make of it?"

Both boys halted, and peering intently toward the horizon, listened for sounds which the keener ears of Steve already had detected.

CHAPTER II

PURSUED

CLEARLY outlined against the horizon a body of horsemen was passing in the distance. The boys stopped to look intently at the unexpected sight. A low exclamation escaped the lips of Steve when the passing band was followed by others and these by still more, until for a time the line appeared to be continuous. The scores of riders had become hundreds and the number steadily was increasing. Much dust had been stirred up by the horses' hoofs, and this cloud in places hid from sight the men behind it.

Jack was the first to break the silence. He turned to his companion and said in a low voice:

"Steve, what does that mean? Who are they?—greasers?"

"Yes," replied Steve tersely.

"What are they doing here?"

"Can't you see?"

"No, I can't."

"Well, you see as much as I do," said Steve somewhat irritably; "you can draw your own con-

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clusions! *My* impression is," he added, "that the best thing for us to do is to leave this part of the country."

"Do you really think they are greasers?"

"Not the least doubt of it."

"What do you suppose they are doing here?"

"I've told you before. I should like to know, but I don't care enough about it to stay here and find out."

As Steve spoke he prepared to start his weary pony into renewed flight. He stopped, however, when Jack in a low voice inquired:

"Do you think there's any possibility that they have got our lost cattle?"

For a moment Steve did not reply. He watched the distant horsemen silently, but at last he said:

"I think it's quite probable they *had* our cattle. Whether they have any now or not is a question. The beggars will take horses or cattle whenever they have a chance, and if they haven't a chance they'll make one."

"Do you remember what Carlos said the other day?"

"No, I don't. What did he say?"

"That more cattle were stolen or driven away every year than were killed by the wolves or died from thirst."

PURSUED

“Well, Carlos ought to know. He’s been on our ranch ever since he was fifteen years old.”

“He’s a Mexican, too, isn’t he?”

“Of course he is, but he’s all right. You can trust him anywhere and he is the best natured fellow I ever saw. You know most of the greasers are hot-tempered and vindictive—a pretty strong combination when you get those two qualities working nicely. Come on now, we ought to be leaving this part of the world.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Jack thoughtfully. “It looks to me very much as if some of our friends in that line yonder had turned out of their course just to see who we are. I never thought that we would be outlined against the sky the same as they are.”

Steve did not attempt to explain or belittle the suggestion of his comrade. He observed that a division had been made in the ranks of the horsemen and that part of them plainly were headed in the direction in which he and Jack were riding.

“They are after us,” suggested Jack excitedly.

“It looks that way,” acknowledged his friend.

As he spoke the young ranchman glanced apprehensively at the ponies. Both were utterly tired, standing motionless, heads and tails hanging limp. During the past three days they had been given more than ample opportunity to become ex-

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hausted. Long rides in search of the missing cattle had been made without changing mounts, and the heat and sands of the desert, the lack of water, and the ceaseless pursuit, had combined to make them jaded.

"Come on, we can't wait!" said Steve quickly. "Those greasers are after us."

The lad spoke sharply and positively and his companion by this time was equally convinced that the detachment was approaching. It might be that they were merely curious as to who the strangers were, or—that they were bent on more serious mischief. The disorders along the border between Mexico and the United States had, of late, been steadily increasing in number and violence. In certain places it was hardly safe for Americans to venture south of their line. Gangs of bandits roamed the plains or—in larger detachments, under the command of some "general"—descended upon the helpless people of some little hamlet or village, or terrorized the workmen in a mine or a mill.

Both boys were aware of this condition when first they had seen the scores of men in the light of the setting sun. Now that certain of the number were riding swiftly toward them they were both fearful that the errand might not be entirely peaceful.

"It can't be helped," exclaimed Steve, as he

PURSUED

started his pony into a trot. "They are after us, and we must get away from them. There isn't any question."

"We've got to go, too," spoke up Jack. "Their ponies are coming like the wind."

"It's a sure enough pursuit," muttered Steve as he bent low over his saddle and urged his faithful pony to greater efforts.

On and still on sped pursuers and pursued. Monotonously the feet of the ponies struck the soft sand together. There was much motion, but—on the part of the pursued—no great progress. It was action without accomplishment though at first their speed had equalled that of the men behind them.

Neither boy was greatly alarmed at the prospect of being overtaken by the Mexicans. Although there had been many troubles, some of them exceedingly serious, neither Jack nor Steve feared anything worse than being stopped and perhaps deprived of some of his possessions. That prospect, however, did not appeal to either of them, so, in spite of the weariness of their mounts, they continued their flight.

"We'll veer a bit here, to the east," suggested Steve when ten minutes had elapsed.

Behind him in his frequent glances, he had been able to count ten in the band of their pursuers.

SCOUTING WITH GENERAL FUNSTON

It was now a real race between two parties; there was a bare possibility that the Mexicans would not be able to overtake their victims. But there was no disguising the fact that the strength of the boys' ponies was rapidly giving out. The breathing of the poor animals became laboured, and their nostrils were almost as red as burning coals. The dusk had deepened and the sun by this time had disappeared below the horizon, but objects were still distinctly discernible all about the desert.

"There are ten of them," said Jack.

"Yes. I counted them," replied Steve.

"It seems to me they're gaining upon us."

"They are. Our mounts are winded and theirs seem to be fresh."

"How much farther do we have to go before we can get help?"

"About eight miles."

"We never can make it."

"No, I don't think we can."

"What shall we do?"

"There's your answer," said Steve sharply as the animal he was riding suddenly stumbled and fell. The poor beast was unable to rise. There was a pathetic expression in the eyes of the suffering brute as it lay panting and extended upon the warm sands.

"What can we do?" inquired Jack quickly.

PURSUED

Steve made no reply. All day long the ponies and the boys had been moving in the full blaze of the sun. The heat had been intense and of itself sufficient to rob them of their strength. Now, however, conditions were still worse, and a faint sound of a shout came across the sands as the pursuing Mexicans discovered the boys' plight.

"There's nothing to be done," muttered Steve savagely, "except to get out of here."

"You go on, Steve," suggested Jack. "Take my horse. They won't be so likely to touch me, for they will understand that I don't belong here."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," retorted Steve. "But we've got to get out just the same. Your mount is fresher than mine and we'll both take hold of his tail and make him lead us away from here."

Quickly each boy grasped the horse's tail and a sharp word from Jack at once started the animal into another run. The frightened animal leaped and snorted with fear at the unexpected demand of his owner. It was a comparatively heavy load for him to drag, and yet as both boys were aware of the importance of their flight they clung tenaciously to the terrified animal and shouted at him to increase his speed.

In this manner—leaping, sliding, slipping, falling—the two boys were dragged over the plains.

SCOUTING WITH GÉNÉRAL FUNSTON

Night was almost at hand; stars were beginning to appear. They did not dare to stop lest the pony might not be able to resume his flight. Neither knew just what the peril was, but in the minds of both there was now a conviction of danger in the coming of the ten men, who were steadily gaining upon the boys, as Steve observed when occasionally he glanced behind him.

Both were aware of the raids which had been made by Mexican bandits. At one time Villa was in control; at another, Carranza. Apparently, it mattered little who was in the ascendancy, for their followers easily and lightly changed their allegiance from one to the other. The predicament of the two boys, doing their utmost to escape from a pursuing band of Mexicans, was therefore most serious.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER BAND

THE two boys had not advanced far before it became obvious that Jack's strength was nearly exhausted.

"I can't go on much farther," he managed to ejaculate between the leaps and jerks of his flight.

"Then we'll stop," said Steve promptly.

"No, keep on, We'll try it a little longer."

Exerting his strength to the utmost Jack endeavoured to keep pace with the activities of his friend. The pony—unaccustomed to this new method of transportation—had, after a few threats, abandoned his protests and was slowly and steadily forging ahead. It was, however, impossible to increase his speed beyond that at which he was now moving. In spite of the anxiety of both boys neither objected to the partial delay. They advanced a few minutes more but at last Jack gasped:

"There's no use, Steve, I simply can't keep it up. I guess my wind isn't what I thought it was."

"Never mind, Jack," replied Steve quickly. "The pony is giving out, too. We'll make him lie

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down and then we'll stretch out here on the sand and see what happens."

The dusk had given place to darkness; night had overcast all the great barren waste. There was a slight hope in the heart of Steve that if they remained motionless it might be possible to escape discovery by the prowling band. Obediently the pony had dropped at their command and both boys had stretched themselves close to him on the desert.

For a moment neither spoke while both peered intently into the darkness to ascertain, if possible, whether or not their enemies were approaching. They could not discern any horsemen near. There was a possibility that the detachment had turned back to rejoin the main force. Just why they should so soon have done so was not clear, but when they were unable to detect the proximity of their pursuers, they were both hopeful that their surmise might prove to be correct.

The very silence that rested over the desert was itself eloquent. The twinkling stars served to emphasize the boys' loneliness. Though they listened intently, not a sound could be heard save that of the laboured breathing of their exhausted pony. For half an hour or more the boys remained quietly upon the ground and then Jack suddenly raised his head and strained his ears.

ANOTHER BAND

“Sounds to me like some one coming,” he whispered. “Can you see any one, Steve?”

“Not a soul. Hold on!” Steve added hastily. Sitting erect he looked first toward the great stretches of the desert and then half angrily turned upon their pony, which at that moment had raised its head also and emitted a low whinny. This call was answered by the faint sound of another whinny in the distance.

“There’s some one coming,” exclaimed Jack excitedly. “We must get away from here.”

Steve, however, did not respond to his companion’s suggestion. He was still gazing intently in the direction from which the sound had come. A few minutes later he said, his voice expressing extreme relief:

“I can see a pony out there. There isn’t any one on its back.”

“Maybe it’s ours, though I thought he was done for when we left him back there on the sand.”

“You never can tell about these little beasts. Some of them are a good deal tougher than one would think. They will stand almost everything. A horse back east would give up half a dozen times before these broncos even think of quitting.”

“But I don’t understand,” whispered Jack. “How can a pony be wandering around the desert here in this way?”

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"Hold on," said Steve. "This one has a saddle. If there's a saddle there must have been a rider. Either some one has met with an accident or this is our old fellow coming back to join us. That's what it is, I think," he added quickly as another whinny came from the approaching animal.

It was not long afterward when he approached the place where the boys were lying. Long before Jack was able to discover anything familiar about him, Steve said positively:

"That's our old pony. He got rested, you see, and followed us across the sands."

"It's a wonder the Mexicans didn't get him. They must have been between us and the place where we left him."

"Probably they didn't think he was worth taking—if they saw him. He will be all right now, almost as good as new, and we'll get away from here."

"Don't you think we had better wait a while longer? The Mexicans are gone and the pony has come, but we're both of us tired almost to death."

"I don't mind waiting a little longer," said Steve, "but I don't want to stay a great while. When there's something wrong, as there plainly is around here, I shall feel better when we get away from the region. It doesn't pay to give up, does it?"

ANOTHER BAND

"Not much," responded Jack. "If we had quit when that pony gave out we should now be riding with the greasers."

"Maybe we should," said Steve gravely, "and then again perhaps the Mexicans would be riding and we wouldn't be anywhere."

"What do you mean?"

"Why they might have served us as they have served hundreds of others. That bandit, Villa, is one of the worst men that ever straddled a horse."

"And yet it wasn't very long ago when a good many Americans thought he was all right."

"Not 'all right,'" retorted Steve, "but not so bad as he has since shown himself to be."

"Do you really think those men on horseback belonged to Villa?"

"Not a doubt in all the world."

"What were they doing up here?"

"I don't know. That's one reason why I want to start just as soon as we can move."

"We can move now," responded Jack promptly. "I feel rested and I guess the horses are rested, too. At any rate, we'll start."

By this time two hours at least had passed since the boys had halted. Both were somewhat rested and it was plain that both horses were in better condition. The delight of both boys was great when they discovered that the approaching pony

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was indeed the one they had lost and that to all appearances he was in condition now to do his share in the flight.

“And yet he gave us a good scare,” laughed Jack as he prepared to mount.

“He did that,” acknowledged Steve. “One never can tell whether it is an Indian, a greaser, or what it is that may be coming along in the darkness. But it’s plain that there is no one following us now.”

“How do you know?”

“Because our pony wouldn’t have come through as well as he did if the greasers were still hanging around. We shan’t have to override them now and in a little while we ought to be back at the ranch.”

Silently the boys resumed their journey. There was no need now to urge their weary ponies to greater efforts. Both, of their own accord, swung into a trot, which, like the Indians of the plains, they were able to maintain almost unbroken.

It was marvellous, the number of miles the hardy little beasts could cover in a day. Their speed was not great, but their endurance exceeded that of any ponies Jack had ever seen. Occasionally halts were made for rest, and it was near sunrise when at last the boys prepared to cross the American border.

ANOTHER BAND

Now that they were so near home, again their failure to find any of the lost cattle became doubly depressing. They were hopeful that others who had gone forth in the same attempt might have met with success. Steve particularly was chagrined and recalled a similar expression he often had seen on the face of Carlos, the Mexican, who had charge of the cattle on his father's ranch.

Abruptly Steve drew the rein on his pony and in a startled voice exclaimed:

"Jack, can you make out what that is yonder?" As he spoke the young ranchman pointed far to his left.

Jack obediently followed the direction indicated and after a brief silence said:

"To me it looks like smoke."

"So it does to me," said Steve. "Strange that there should be smoke out here on the desert. What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know any more about it than you do," replied Jack. "The only thing that troubles me is that big band of greasers which passed us. You know there were reports that Villa's soldiers had crossed the American border several times. It's possible that those men we saw may have had something to do with this smoke."

"That's as true as you live?" muttered Steve in a low voice. "We've got to look into this.

SCOUTING WITH GENERAL FUNSTON

Come on; we'll move a little faster. I guess the ponies will be able to stand it now."

Together the two boys sped across the sands as rapidly as their tired mounts were able to carry them. As they advanced, both boys were convinced that their surmise was correct. It was smoke that they saw before him, and as Jack glanced at his friend and saw how pale his face was he did not require any explanation to understand the fear which was in the heart of the young ranchman.

"There come some men!" said Jack suddenly, pointing to a band of a score or more of horsemen that could be seen in the distance. Neither boy spoke for a time as they watched the approach of the swiftly moving men. The advance was long and semi-circular as if the riders were searching for something on the ground before them.

Only a few minutes had elapsed, however, before Jack said quickly, "They're not greasers, Steve. They're American soldiers. Perhaps they are looking for us."

"What would they want with us?" demanded Steve without turning away his glance from the men who now were riding rapidly toward the spot where the boys had halted.

CHAPTER IV

THE ATTACK

CONVERSATION between the boys abruptly ceased while they awaited the coming of the soldiers. Already their presence on the plain had been discovered and several men rode swiftly toward them while the main line halted.

“Who are you?” demanded the young officer in command as he drew rein. “Oh, I know you now,” he added quickly, “you belong up on the Lait ranch.”

“Just a little,” replied Steve dryly. “What’s all this trouble about?”

“Haven’t you heard?”

“No; what is it?”

Both boys now were gazing intently at the soldier, who evidently was somewhat elated over the fact that he had important news to impart.

“Why, there’s been a terrible raid on Columbus.”

“Who raided it?” demanded Steve quickly.

“Villa and his men.”

“He’s the worst rascal that ever came across

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the border!" exclaimed Jack. "How many men did he have?"

"We don't know exactly, but there must have been several hundred in the band. He moved on the town last night, and before we knew what was happening, his men were firing at the camp."

"Didn't you have any sentinels?" inquired Steve sharply.

"We did," replied the soldier, "but they were either driven in or shot before we were told what was going on."

"How many were killed?" inquired Steve.

"Of our men?"

"Yes," said Steve hastily.

"There was quite a good many, but I can't now tell you just how many."

"And the Mexicans——? What happened to them?" inquired Jack.

"Some of them were killed, too. They tried to set fire to the town and make off with their loot."

"And what were our brave boys doing all this time?" again demanded Steve sharply.

"Why, they were taken by surprise," answered the young soldier somewhat sheepishly.

"They had no business to be!" declared Steve. "It's part of your game to be ready and you know as well as anybody about the troubles along the border."

THE ATTACK

"But we didn't think that Villa or any other bandit would ever dare cross the line."

"You don't know them," said Steve. "Villa hates an American more than he does a rattler. He has said times enough for you to know that he would take any detachment of gringos he found anywhere, any time, and now he has made good his word. What are you doing now?"

"We have started to follow him."

"That's a good one," laughed Steve. "You ought to have had an aeroplane. When did this attack take place?"

"Last night. We weren't ready. Besides, we had to find out what the whole trouble was about."

"Well, did you find out?"

"We found out something," said the soldier somewhat warmly. "My own opinion is that it's simply another drive to force intervention by the United States. Let me tell you that six of the Mexicans that were shot were identified as belonging to an American's ranch in Chihuahua."

"What does that mean?" asked Jack.

"You know as well as I do. There are many who say that there are persons who are furnishing Villa with money and urging him on so that he will do something that will make the United States intervene. If that is done, these men think, their property will all be taken care of and protected."

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“It’s time to intervene,” said Jack emphatically. “We’ve stood for all sorts of things down here. Ever since I’ve come from Brooklyn it has been first one raid and then another. The greasers are nothing but thieves and robbers. The idea of trying to recognize one or the other! Neither is to be depended upon.”

Turning away, the young soldier laughed as he said:

“You may fix it up to suit yourselves. Probably there are thousands of men in the United States, hundreds of miles from the border, who think they know how to settle this Mexican problem better than the people who live here next to the greasers.”

Both boys were silent as they watched the young soldier return with his party to the main body which once more began steadily moving across the desert.

“They won’t dare to go into Mexico, will they?” inquired Jack when their journey was resumed.

“You know as much about it as *I* do. What good is the ‘line’ anyway? The *greasers* don’t pay any attention to it; why should *we*? A Mexican steals up with his rifle and shoots a steer or a man, or makes off with a horse; I don’t see that the mere fact that there’s a ‘line’ somewhere between Mexico and the United States has anything to do with it.”

THE ATTACK

“You can’t blame Mexico for all this trouble,” suggested Jack.

“No, I suppose the Kaiser or the King of England is at the bottom of it,” retorted Steve.

“That isn’t what I mean. There have always been bandits out here in this part of the world ever since it was first known. Sometimes the Indians make trouble, and sometimes a band of Mexicans, but it isn’t fair to charge up to the country what a few desperadoes or bandits do.”

“All the same, that’s where they belong,” maintained Steve sturdily, “and the time has come, now that they have made this attack on Columbus, when something—I haven’t any question—will be done.”

“That’s all right,” assented Jack. “What do you think it will be?”

“I think they’ll have to chase this Villa until they get him.”

“That will be a big job.”

“Of course it will. He’s bright and quick and utterly reckless, and besides he’s scared all the people in this part of the country so that they dare not stand out against him. When he and his men ride into a town the people know what they have to do. They give up their valuables and deem themselves fortunate if—between Villa and his rascally followers—the breath of life is left in

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their bodies! The other day they stopped a train, took off six men, stood them up against the side of a little station, and shot every one of them right within sight of all the passengers. They have stolen our horses, stampeded our cattle, robbed our men, shot our boys, until it isn't possible to stand it any longer. Do you know what I'm going to do, Jack?" added Steve as he slowly turned and looked into the face of his companion.

"No," said Jack in a low voice. "A good many times I think I know what you'll do next, but this time I confess I don't."

"I'm going to talk with my father and see whether he'll let me go with the boys."

"The soldiers?"

"Yes."

"What will you do?"

"Why, I know this country from Chihuahua clear up to Tucson. That's more than many of the boys know and I think they will be glad to have some one act as a scout."

"If they are glad to have *one* go as a scout, perhaps they'll be *more* glad to have *two*."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this: that if you go, I will go with you. You'll need somebody to look after you, and besides if there's any trouble that grows out of this affair there'll be plenty of need for men."

THE ATTACK

Conversation ceased while the boys slowly and thoughtfully rode toward Steve's home. Jack saw a huge lizard, at least ten inches in length, run across his pathway, turn and lift its head, and stare at the young horsemen. Somehow Jack had never been able to conquer his aversion to lizards and snakes. Steve, however, was in no fear either of the rattlers or the huge lizards that were so like the colour of the sands that often they escaped detection.

The boys by this time had entered the road which led past Mr. Lait's ranch. Great fields of alfalfa were on either side of them, for the ranch was thoroughly irrigated. Indeed, the line was sharply drawn between the fields which had been irrigated and the desert and the land where no water was. On one side the soil, apparently, was barren. Close beside it, however, were fertile fields, and the lawn in front of the low house of the owner was as green as the lawns of Old England. And all this had been brought to pass within a few years by the simple process of bringing water in ditches to the arid plains.

"I guess father knows what's been going on," suggested Steve, as they saw Mr. Lait riding swiftly down the road. "He's just come from Columbus, unless I'm mistaken, and he'll have something to say to us."

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The excitement of Mr. Lait was apparent as soon as the boys overtook him.

"Yes," he said in answer to their questions. "There has been a terrible time at Columbus. The greasers had some of their own men already on our side of the border right there in the town; some say right in the camp. When they opened fire the machine guns, which our boys had, wouldn't work."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Steve. "Had somebody been tampering with them?"

"The guns jammed, but I can't tell you whether the fault was due to neglect or whether some greaser had been putting in his fine work. But something will have to be done. We have stood this just as long as we can."

"That's exactly the way we feel about it," spoke up Steve. "And Jack and I have about decided that if there's to be a chase of Villa we'll both go along as scouts."

At another time the boys would have laughed heartily at the change in the expression which abruptly came over Mr. Lait's face. He had been strong for punishing the marauders and was eager for something positive to be done. When, however, his own boy suggested that he was planning to take part in the attempt to overtake and attack the bandits, the matter assumed another and vastly different light!

THE ATTACK

All three dismounted and, turning their horses into the corral, at once prepared to enter the house.

As they drew near the building, however, they discovered Carlos (to whom reference already has been made) approaching from the doorway. His head was bound with cloths and it was obvious at once that he had been through some terrible experience.

CHAPTER V

A CHASE

IN RESPONSE to the questions of the excited boys Carlos simply stated that he had been in the fight at Columbus. His manner was surly and it was clear that he did not wish to enter into details. He did, however, explain that his head had been grazed by a bullet and that he had fallen to the ground. His wound, he explained, had bled freely but it was not dangerous, and after it had been dressed by the surgeon he at once had set forth for the ranch. In spite of the foreman's unwillingness to talk, the boys insisted upon asking many questions, most of which, however, were ignored.

Carlos was a good worker and no one on the place had been able to control so completely and so easily the Mexicans that Mr. Lait had hired to look after his herds. Usually he had been willing to devote some of his spare time to the two boys. Apparently he had developed a strong liking for Jack, and had been at pains to teach him how to ride a bronco. He was a man of about

A CHASE

thirty-two years of age and occasionally referred to certain of his experiences which indicated that he had had an exciting and somewhat checkered career.

His manner at this time, however, was so rude that the boys abandoned their attempt to elicit any further information and soon afterward entered the house where Mr. Lait was waiting to receive them.

Naturally the attack on Columbus was the sole and exciting topic of conversation. Both boys were eager to join the soldiers and serve as scouts. Again and again they explained to Mr. Lait that they were familiar with the region and might be of great service to the forces that undoubtedly would be sent in pursuit of Villa and his band that had fled back across the Mexican border and probably were making for the hills beyond.

"The whole trouble is," said Mr. Lait as the boys joined him about the supper table, "our men weren't ready. They take things too easily. They did not really believe that Villa would dare to make such a raid."

"And they say that the machine guns jammed so that they weren't any use," exclaimed Steve in disgust.

"That's what I heard," said Mr. Lait. "Of course a good many of us went down soon after we heard of the attack."

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“Were you there while they were fighting?” inquired Jack quickly

“No. The Mexicans had gone before I arrived. I did see some of the men who were wounded and helped to care for two or three poor chaps myself.”

“Where does Villa get his money?” inquired Jack.

“That’s one of the mysteries,” replied Mr. Lait dryly. “It is said that some of the mining companies have bought large quantities of the bonds issued by his ‘Government.’”

“But where does he get his guns?” said Jack. Mr. Lait shrugged his shoulders as he said:

“There was a time when our Government thought perhaps he was going to get control of the whole of Mexico. We permitted ammunition and guns to be shipped to him across the border.”

“And now,” spoke up Steve sharply, “they’re being used against our own boys!”

“I’m afraid that is true and yet it is one of those things which perhaps no one was able to foresee. At all events, it doesn’t alter conditions as they are now, and if some of the ranch owners or mine owners in Mexico are really trying to make trouble so that the United States will be compelled to intervene, the whole matter becomes more difficult and no one can see the end.”

“And Mexico is worse off than it has been since Diaz resigned,” suggested Jack.

A CHASE

"Yes," acknowledged Mr. Lait, "and I fancy conditions will become worse before they are better. Meanwhile, tell me what you learned about our missing cattle."

"That's right," laughed Steve. "I haven't spoken about the cattle and yet we went out just to find them. Well," he added, "all I can say is that we didn't find them. We found plenty of bones but nothing alive except lizards, until we saw a big force of greasers headed across the desert. Some of them turned aside and chased us."

"They did?" exclaimed Mr. Lait. "You did not tell me about that."

No urging was required to induce the two boys to relate the story of their pursuit by the band of ten Mexicans. Not even Mr. Lait, however, was able to suggest any cause of the sudden abandonment of the chase. Doubtless the small detachment was fearful of being cut off from the main body and was eager to continue the withdrawal to the place that Villa had selected for his rendezvous.

Although Mr. Lait did not interpose any further objections to the service which the boys had suggested, he nevertheless urged them to wait until word came from Washington as to what were the plans of the Government.

The excitement in Columbus did not entirely

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die away. The dead soldiers were to be buried, the wounded were to be cared for, and such defenses as hastily could be found were used. It was like locking the barn after the horse had been stolen, for it was not believed by any of the people that Villa would return immediately to the place of his former attack. However, action of some kind was demanded and the means described proved a way for the excitement to spend itself.

The following night Jack was greatly excited when peering from his open window about midnight he discovered some one leading half-a-dozen horses from the paddock.

Hastily running to Steve's room he aroused his friend and in a moment both boys were standing by the window peering out upon the departing horseman. Only one man was to be seen and he was riding a horse which the others were obediently following.

"Hi, there!" shouted Steve, unable longer to restrain his excitement. "What are you doing with our horses?"

The only response that came from the rider was a sudden quickening in his pace, and in a flash the rider and horses were seen to be moving swiftly over the desert.

"Wait a minute!" shouted Steve. "You stay right here, Jack, I want to find Carlos."

A CHASE

Hastily dressing, Steve rushed from the house and ran to the stable. He summoned Carlos, whose room was directly above the harness room, but there was no response. Quickly Steve mounted the low steps that led to the upper room, but when he entered, he discovered that Carlos was gone.

"I tell you," said Jack, when his friend returned, "it was Carlos himself who took those horses. You'll never see him again and you might as well say good-bye to those horses now as any time."

"I'm not going to say good-bye," said Steve, "until I've tried to run down the man that took them."

"Then I'll go with you," said Jack. Steve hesitated a moment and then said:

"If you feel up to it I shall be glad to have you come, but don't try it unless you are sure that you're strong enough. We may have trouble before we come back."

"I'm all right and that's just the reason why I'm going," declared Jack.

While they were talking both boys walked toward the corral. Hurriedly they threw the saddles upon two of the swiftest horses on the ranch.

They were convinced that if Carlos had taken the horses he would not be able to make so swift a departure as they, for he would be unable to go at a more rapid pace than that of the slowest pony

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of all. On the other hand, it was plain that whoever had stolen the ponies had selected some of the fastest.

In a brief time, without waiting to inform Mr. Lait, both boys were riding swiftly in pursuit of the man whom they had seen departing a little while before with the half-dozen horses.

The raid upon Columbus was the only explanation for the action of Carlos, or whoever had taken the horses. Doubtless he was relying upon the excitement which had followed the engagement to draw the attention of people from other and minor events.

It was fortunate that the boys had been able to secure two of the best horses owned by Mr. Lait. Jack, who had recovered from his experiences of the preceding day, was riding beside his friend. His manner, however, betrayed the fact that, although he was a good horseman, he was not by any means the equal of his companion. Jack's sturdy frame was somewhat tense, while Steve's—apparently, at least—relaxed with every bound of his speeding horse.

It was not sufficiently light to enable either to see the face of the other, but both were aware of the excitement and of the dangers that might befall them before they could overtake the fleeing horseman. A half-hour or more elapsed before they obtained

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any trace of him. Once they had stopped to examine the ground and make certain that they were still on the right track.

As the time passed, however, and the speed of their horses was unbroken, they soon discovered far in advance of them a confused mass or body that was moving swiftly toward the horizon.

"There's our man!" said Steve confidently in a low voice.

"Where is he headed for?"

"Mexico."

"Will you chase him across the border?"

"I'll chase him to Chihuahua or Mexico City if I have to. I'm not coming back without those horses."

The conversation ceased abruptly and both boys did their utmost to increase the speed of their mounts.

Slowly and yet steadily they gained upon the object of their pursuit. Soon they were able to distinguish several horses. What had seemed to be one body was now broken up into several and the excitement under which the boys were labouring steadily increased. Madly they raced across the sands, not once turning aside their gaze from their quarry.

The intervening distance steadily became less. Convinced that they would soon overtake the

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fugitive, Steve drew rein, and, as his speed slackened, turned to his friend and said:

“Is your revolver all right?”

“Yes,” replied Jack, “but I don’t want to use it.”

“I don’t want to, either, and I shan’t unless the greaser makes me.”

Satisfied that their weapons were ready for instant use the boys again increased the speed of their horses and dashed forward toward the fleeing party which now was closely massed, still moving swiftly.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSING SCOUT

THE two boys now were drawing rapidly nearer the horses before them. Their own animals were breathing hard, but it was plain that they were overhauling the fugitives. If Carlos really was the sole man in charge of the drove then both boys were convinced there was little to be feared.

Suddenly Steve in a low voice exclaimed excitedly:

“Look yonder, toward the west! What do you see, Jack?”

“I see somebody moving,” replied Jack after a brief scrutiny in the direction indicated by his companion.

“Yes,” said Steve, “there are at least ten. I can’t make out whether they are only horses or horses and riders.”

“What do you make of it?”

“I’m not going to stay to find out,” replied Steve positively. “There’s too much risk after what happened at Columbus.”

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Jack demurred slightly at the suggestion of his friend, but the raid was still so fresh in his memory that he, too, was willing to withdraw from the region.

Their tired horses, aware now that they were headed for home, seemed to gain fresh strength. There was, however, no escaping from the fact that the band which had been discovered in the distance was made up of horsemen and that they, too, had become aware of the presence of the two boys on the desert.

“They’re after us!” called Steve in a low voice.

It was too dark to enable Jack to see the face of his friend, but his voice betrayed his excitement and instantly both boys put on speed and were dashing swiftly over the sand.

Occasionally they glanced behind them, but after the lapse of a few minutes they were convinced that the pursuit—if pursuit it had been—was abandoned. Doubtless the horsemen had been riding many miles and their tired beasts were unable to continue at the swift pace at which they had been moving.

When at last the boys once more reached the ranch they discovered that Mr. Lait already was dressed and awaiting their coming.

“What did you find?” he inquired calmly as the two boys rode into the yard.

THE MISSING SCOUT

"We found Carlos, or somebody, making off with six or seven of our horses," said Steve.

"Did you get them?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"We gained upon them, and would have overhauled them in another five minutes, if it had not been for the sudden appearance of ten men on horseback."

"Did they chase you?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get away?"

"Because we travelled faster than they did."

"That's right," spoke up Jack. "It's a good man that can overtake us when we're bent on escape."

Ignoring the interruption, Mr. Lait said:

"Was it Carlos who had our horses?"

"I think so," answered Steve. "Of course we couldn't be sure, because we didn't get close enough, but it looked like Carlos when the party left the ranch; and besides, he was not in his room when I went there for him."

"The rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Lait. "I have been suspicious of him for three or four days, and he has been with us over sixteen years, too," he added regretfully.

"That's right," said Steve. "I remember his

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running into the house one night when some of the men had been plaguing him. His hair seemed almost to stand straight up and his eyes flashed as if they were on fire. He was screaming: 'Let me have—let me have—let me have steek through.'" Steve laughed at the recollection, and imitated the antics of the excited foreman.

"What was it he wanted?" inquired Jack.

"A bayonet from one of the rifles. He was wild to get out and pay his respects to the fellows who had been tormenting him."

"Did you let him have it?"

"We did not," replied Steve demurely. "There would have been one man less in New Mexico if he had once got his hands on a knife or a rifle."

"Steve," said his father as the three walked toward the house after the horses had been cared for, "have you had any suspicions that Carlos might be spying for Villa?"

"I hadn't thought of it," said Steve, turning and facing his father. "What makes you think so?"

"Several things I have seen," replied his father. "But now regarding these horses. You think Carlos (or whoever it was) has got away with them, do you?"

"I certainly do."

"Then there'd be no use trying to do anything

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more to-night; we might as well wait until morning. Let us go indoors and turn in."

"What time is it?" inquired Jack of Steve as the two went to their room.

"It's about half-past three. We might as well go back to bed; we'll get at least two hours' sleep."

It was difficult, however, for Jack to sleep. For a long time he rolled and tossed as again he saw the vision of the fleeing horses and the wild Mexican who was leading them away.

The following morning, directly after breakfast, both boys and Mr. Lait again rode over to Columbus. The excitement of the preceding days had somewhat died away, although men were still talking about the attack which Villa wantonly had made upon the little place. There was much conversation also concerning the measures which the United States Government would take for the punishment of the bandits. The curiosity was set at rest when, shortly afterward, orders came from Washington for a party to go into Mexico in pursuit of the bandits and their leader.

It was then that the offer of the two boys' services as scouts was accepted. Apparently Mr. Lait's reluctance was gone for he interposed no objections to their departure with the first expedition. Troops were to come to Columbus; ammunition was to be shipped there; and all necessary

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arrangements were to be made for a vigorous pursuit of the rebels whose leader was to be taken—alive, if possible, but in any case to *be taken*.

The sight of the preparations was inspiring in spite of the confusion which more or less prevailed. There was unwonted life in the little hamlet and the entire scene presented a sharp contrast to that which had followed the attack made by Villa and his followers upon the quiet little community. Many Mexicans still were to be seen about the streets, but every one now was marked, for suspicions had been sharply aroused and the soldiers were in no mood to deal gently with spies or members of the bandit gang who still might be loitering there.

It was under such conditions that Steve was making his way along the rambling street on which most of Columbus was located. He was planning to go to the camp to receive his instructions. Already he had been informed that he and Jack were to ride on the flanks of the advancing army and to report instantly to General Pershing any signs of the bandits' presence that they might discover.

Abruptly Steve stopped as he saw Carlos approaching. The Mexican was mounted on a powerful little bronco and it was plain that he had seen Steve at the very moment that Steve had noticed him.

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"Where have you been, Carlos?" demanded Steve sharply.

The Mexican smiled into the face of Steve, but he did not reply.

"Where have you been?" again demanded Steve. "Where are our horses? Why did you take them away?"

"I did not take them away," replied Carlos slowly.

For a moment Steve stared blankly into the face of his father's chief ranchman, impressed by the assurance and calmness of the man.

"Where have you been, then?" demanded Steve.

"I have no been anywhere."

"But we saw you taking the horses away."

"You did not see me," answered Carlos in slow and even tones.

"Where are you going now?" demanded Steve.

"I'm going back to the ranch."

"Where?"

Disdaining to explain more, Carlos quietly departed—giving not the slightest indication of haste as he rode toward Columbus.

For a brief time Steve stared at the departing ranchman, completely mystified by the calm assurance which Carlos had displayed. As he recalled the exciting experience through which he and Jack had passed it seemed extraordinary that the

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foreman could have denied his recent activities. And there was no question in Steve's mind concerning the part Carlos had taken in the theft of the horses.

And yet, in spite of his confidence, Steve was perplexed. The presence of the ranchman in Columbus, the fact that he calmly denied all knowledge of the lost horses, the statement he had made that he was now on his way back to the ranch—all served to deepen the mystery.

The young scout would have been glad to go back to the ranch to verify—or disprove—what Carlos had said. But it was impossible for him to leave the town at this time, for at any moment he might receive his orders to depart.

It happened that when Steve arrived at the camp he found those orders awaiting him. He and Jack were to leave at once, carrying supplies sufficient for five days. Much of the time he, as a scout, would be beyond the limit of protection afforded by the little invading army. This, however, did not greatly trouble the young scout as he busied himself with preparations for a speedy departure.

It was strange, he thought, that Jack did not join him. When most of his labours were completed and still his friend was nowhere to be seen, Steve angrily began a search for him. He was irritated more than his manner betrayed. It was

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like Jack, he said to himself. Never yet had he known him to be on time. On whatever expedition they had started Jack was the one who usually delayed the departure. Frequently, also, something would be missing from his kit, and he would have to make good the deficiency at the last moment.

Steve's feeling of irritation soon gave way to anxiety when he was unable either to find the missing boy or to learn anything concerning his recent movements. No one in the camp had seen Jack within several hours, nor had he left any word as to where he might be found. The time for Steve's departure had come and it was not possible for him to delay longer. Leaving clear information as to the direction in which he intended to proceed, Steve left the camp—his feelings a mixture of anger at, and anxiety concerning Jack, and his strange failure to join him. Soon the camp was far behind him, and Steve was well on his way toward the country which he was aware was infested with friends of Villa, roving hordes of bandits whose feeling toward their American neighbours could not, by any flight of the imagination, be deemed friendly.

CHAPTER VII

A BATH—AND THE SEQUEL

STEVE found himself a member of a little band of five horsemen who had been sent far to the left of the line which the leading forces of Villa were believed to have followed. They had not been ordered to pursue the retreating bandits, but to discover, if possible, whether or not there were other roving bands among the hills.

It was not long before Steve learned that the man riding next to him was named Tom Long.

“Yes, sir,” explained Tom, “I was in the Philippines when General Funston was there. He’s a little sawed-off chap, but every one of his inches is as full of fight as a mad rattler.”

“That’s all right,” retorted the man on the other side of Steve.

This scout rejoiced in the name of Bert, and before many hours had elapsed it was very clear to Steve that his strange companion did indeed “re-joice.” Even the inexperienced boy suspected that “Bert” was not his complete—perhaps not even his correct—name. The man was a giant in

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stature, good-natured, and—for the most part—jolly; but at times there was an expression of wildness in his eyes which indicated that he was easily angered—was of a type that, once aroused, might lose control of himself. It was easy for Steve to understand why Bert “rejoiced” in a name which was unlike the one that had been given him by his parents.

“Yes, sir,” Bert said as the party continued on its way across the desert, “this is hotter than we ever had it in Minnesota.”

“Then you are from Minnesota, are you?” inquired Steve innocently.

“Did I say so?” retorted Bert, his eyes betraying the momentary anger that swept over him. Instantly, however, the feeling passed and he laughingly added: “Yes, I have been in Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Utah, Maine, and Kansas. Kansas beats the world for some things. In my judgment Kansas is stark, raving crazy.”

“Why?” laughed Steve.

“I don’t know why,” answered Bert. “All I know is that it *is*. There are two states in the Union in which I have been that seem to me to be crazy.”

“Which are they?”

“One is Kansas, as I was telling you, and the other is South Carolina. Both of them stark,

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raving crazy. Even the alligators in Kansas are redheaded."

"What?" demanded Steve.

"Yes, *sir*; it's just as I'm telling you. I was reading about it in the paper not long ago, but I have seen them myself. I have seen some mighty queer things in my travels. Up in Minnesota, where it's so cold, I caught seven fish one day and they froze before I could land them. I didn't need the fish just then, so I put them with some others that I had in a sort of cold storage. Seven months later—if you'll believe me—when it began to get a little warmer up there, those fish thawed out and swam off, every one of them."

"That's a great one!" laughed Tom.

"I was telling you I saw some queer things," continued Bert solemnly. "I was out in Salt Lake one time when they had a pest of porcupines."

"Pest of what?"

"Porcupines," asserted Bert solemnly. "They just come from everywhere, and filled everything. Horses, streets, and even churches, and a Mormon temple, too, were full of porcupines. People didn't dare sit down for a month afterward. There were porcupine quills all over chairs and benches, and the streets. There was a man that I met out there near San Diego, too, who fed his pet snails on nothing but the hearts of

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lettuce. It cost him a fortune, for lettuce was nineteen cents a head. The snails cried every time he didn't feed them right so—as the man was kind hearted—he used up his fortune just taking care of his pets.”

“Have you ever seen anything as bad as that in the Philippines or anywhere?” said Steve, turning to his other companion.

“I guess I have. Once, in the streets of Chicago, I saw a woman chased two blocks by a wolf.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Steve.

“Just what I say.”

“I don't believe Chicago has seen wolves for fifty years.”

“Yes, it has, too,” asserted Tom strongly. “I saw it myself, only this was A. Wolf. He chased a woman that had stolen some things out of his store and was trying to make off down the street with them.”

“That's a good one,” roared Bert. “If he had been like a Pennsylvanian I knew once it would have been all right.”

“What about him?” inquired Steve.

“Why, he caught a wild cat with bare hands.”

“I don't know that I ever saw a wild cat that had bare hands,” said Steve dryly.

“I didn't say the *wild cat* had bare hands, I said the man *caught it* with bare hands.”

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“Oh, I understood you to say that he caught a wild cat with bare hands.”

“That’s what I did say. What’s the matter with that? Don’t you understand the American language when she is spoke correctly?”

“Sometimes I think I do,” answered Steve demurely.

“Speaking of strange things,” broke in Tom, “did you ever see a cat that would dive for frogs?”

“I never did,” laughed Steve. “Did you?”

“Yes, sir. I used to have a pet cat that would eat nothing but frogs’ legs. After a while he got so that he could dive as straight as a ramrod and he never failed to bring up a big frog.”

“You must have lived near the water.”

“You guessed right the first time.”

“I wish we were near some water now,” said Steve as he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

The sun was beating directly upon the heated sands of the desert, though the outlines of the mountains in the distance presented an appearance of coolness that was not verified in the experience of the young scouts. For a time the little party proceeded in silence. All were keenly watching for signs of the enemy, but the monotonous stretch of the desert was unbroken. Occasional bunches of cactus were seen, and here and there were little drifts of sand which the wind had heaped together.

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The prospect was dreary, but the scout's memory of the attack upon Columbus was so fresh, and the sight of the victims still so vivid, that their thoughts were not to be diverted from the purpose of their journey.

About the middle of the afternoon Bert abruptly exclaimed in a low voice:

“There's some one coming.”

Instantly the other four also were gazing in the direction pointed out by their companion, and they saw, approaching, a single horseman. The first impulse of the party was to scan the landscape to discover whether or not the stranger was one of a party. Apparently, however, he was alone; he was riding rapidly toward them.

The speed of the scouts was not checked; soon they and the stranger met. He proved to be a young Mexican who spoke broken English. He claimed to be a soldier in Carranza's army, but of his clothing the sole article that betokened a uniform was his cap, which evidently had been cast off, as worn out, by some previous owner. In response to questions put by Tom, the young Mexican declared that his name was Philippe, that he was alone—that not one of his friends was near. Indeed, he offered to join the scouts, to assist them in their task which he at once intimated that he understood.

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No protest being made, the scouts—accompanied by the Mexican—resumed their march toward the mountains, which now seemed not far distant. The Americans were all keenly observant of their uninvited companion, but after an hour had elapsed and no signs of the presence of others were discovered they all agreed that he had joined them in the hope of obtaining food. Certainly, his possessions included nothing edible.

“We’ll soon come to the banks of the Bavispe,” said Tom. “It can’t be more than another fifteen minutes’ trot.”

“Then I propose,” said Bert quickly, “that we all of us have a swim. I’m so dusty and hot that it seems to me I could take a bath in the Missouri, and that means more than any of you can understand.”

“What’s the matter with the Missouri?” inquired Steve.

“Nothing the matter with it except that it’s the colour of bricks. The water looks almost as thick as soup. It isn’t a stream one would select for a bath after a hot ride like ours.”

“This water will be clear enough,” said Tom. “The trouble is that it will be cold. It comes right down off the mountain.”

“That’s all the better,” said Steve.

The prospect of a plunge in the cool waters was

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so enticing that unconsciously the entire party put on speed, and soon arrived at the stream they were seeking.

“Will our military friend go in the water, too?” asked Tom in a low voice of Bert.

“You may know a lot about the Philippines, but you don’t know much about this part of the world,” retorted Bert. “If there’s any one thing in the world which the Mexicans detest, it’s cold water.”

This assertion was confirmed when the young scouts dismounted and quickly undressed. Although repeatedly urged to join them their “military companion” steadily refused. His refusal, however, was speedily eclipsed by the enthusiasm with which the others sprang into the cool water.

So busily engaged were they that not one of them was aware of the activities of their Mexican companion. Stealthily he searched the clothing on the bank, removing the revolver from each belt and appropriating such other valuables as he found.

Not long after his stealthy robbery the young scouts returned to the bank and dressed. Before they mounted their horses, however, Philippe turned upon them abruptly and levelling two revolvers at them said: “You go with me or I shoot.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CUARTEL

FOR the moment the young scouts regarded the demand of the Mexican as a practical joke, but as the Mexicans are not given to practical joking, it was not long before Tom concluded that there was more in the startling demand than at first had appeared. The eyes of the young Mexican were glowing and his excitement was apparent in the tone of his voice as he repeated his exasperating command.

“*Si, mis queridos señores; you come with me or I shoot,*” he repeated.

“I think we’re in for it,” said Tom in a low voice to his companions. Then, turning to Philippe, he said:

“Where do you want us to go?”

“You come with me,” was the Mexican’s only reply.

He was holding a revolver in each hand and was at a distance sufficient to prevent a concerted rush of the Americans upon him before he could fire.

“Never mind, we’ll bide our time,” whispered

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Bert. "He's got the drop on us now and we'll have to do what he says."

"Do you want us to walk or shall we mount our horses?" demanded Tom.

"You take your horses," replied the Mexican. "You ride side by side. If any one try to get away he shall be first to be shot, and I shoot straight. See that?" he demanded abruptly.

A rabbit had appeared about a hundred feet down the bank of the stream. For a moment the little creature reared itself upon its haunches and stared at the intruders; then, dropping upon all fours, he bounded away. Philippe fired; the rabbit fell—dead. The Americans glanced apprehensively at one another at this proof of their captor's skill.

A few years before this time it was a common remark along the border that no Mexican was a good shot. Continual practice, however, by the competing bands and the revolutionary parties—that developed apparently as fast as the adherents of any one man gained an advantage—had given them much practice and it was evident that not all of their experience had been wasted.

"You shall ride five together," said Philippe. "No," he added hastily, "you shall ride two on one horse."

"But there are five of us," protested Tom.

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“Two shall ride on one horse. Two shall ride on another horse, and one shall ride on one horse. In this way we shall go to Bavispe.”

“How far is that?” inquired Steve of Tom.

“About three miles.”

“We’ll have to do what he tells us,” said Bert.

The scout spoke in a manner that indicated no uneasiness on his part, but there was an expression in his eyes that boded ill for their bold captor if Fortune should furnish Bert with a suitable opportunity for action.

The commands of the Mexican were speedily obeyed, inasmuch as he kept the five men constantly covered with the weapons. He then commanded them to precede him. The two riderless horses were left to follow as he knew that they would do.

In this manner the little procession slowly advanced. The shadows of the great mountains became longer as the sun sank lower. There was, too, a chill in the air that betokened a marked change in the temperature. All five, however, were used to these changes, and so gave slight heed to them. Occasionally one glanced behind him, but always to see their captor still doubly armed. Not only had he the two revolvers which he held in his hands but also the other three, which had been thrust into his belt. Once when—at a suggestion from Tom—his companions started their horses

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into a swifter pace, the Mexican sharply commanded them to slow down. Hardly faster than a walk the little procession advanced until—after what seemed to Steve a long journey—they came within sight of the few huts that made up the little place called Bavispe.

“Look at all the men here,” exclaimed Tom just above a whisper.

Already his companions were aware of the sight which had startled Tom. A band of a dozen or more armed men were awaiting their coming.

“They are greasers, every one,” said Bert. “This is going to be serious. We ought to have treated this young cub as he deserved when he first had the nerve to speak to us as he did.”

“There is no help for it now,” said Steve, who was watching keenly the men before him. All plainly were Mexicans and every one was armed; two or three were clad in the remnants of what once had been uniforms; several were hatless; and all presented an appearance that would have been ludicrous had not their manner been so threatening.

To attempt escape would have been worse than useless. Convinced that their capture had passed beyond its ludicrous stage, the young Americans were looking anxiously at the men before them. Soon they approached the group and there was a

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hurried conversation between their captor and the men.

It was impossible for Steve or his comrades to overhear what was said, although all five were sufficiently familiar with Spanish to be able to understand and to speak it, but obviously the five Americans were the subject of it and there was evidently a feeling of elation and excitement among the Mexicans over the capture.

“There goes somebody with the good news,” said Bert, dryly, as one of the Mexicans—leaping on the back of a pony, which he lashed furiously—bounded swiftly southward.

Before he had disappeared from sight, however, the entire force joined with the young Mexican who had captured the scouts, and, at the command of one who now became the leader, their ponies were restored to the Americans who then were commanded to precede the party, which also was now mounted.

The leader was following the direction taken by the Mexican who had just fled so swiftly from the camp.

“I don’t like this,” whispered Tom. “I’m afraid that fellow is riding for something that means no good for us.”

“What?” inquired Steve.

Tom shook his head and did not reply; if he had

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fears he wisely kept them to himself. In silence the party proceeded through the twilight.

All five now were hungry, and somewhat weary from their long ride, Not a word was said, however, concerning relief nor the destination to which they were bound.

“They are taking us to Bacarac,” suggested Bert in a low voice.

“What’s that?” inquired Tom.

“Oh, it’s a metropolis about the size of Bavispe. You’ll have to use a microscope to find out whether there are any greasers there or not.”

“Not much you won’t,” retorted Steve. “You won’t need any microscope. You’ll find plenty of them there. I have been there myself and I know what it is. I shall be much mistaken if we don’t find a good many soldiers and other people there.”

Very shortly afterward the prediction of the young scout was confirmed. On approaching the hamlet they were startled by a crowd made up of soldiers, women, and children—an excited mob—yelling, in Spanish and English: “Hang the gringos!” “Shoot the Americans!”

Steve’s face became pale as he heard the wild cries, for he was well aware of the excitable nature of the people that dwelt to the south of the American border.

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The excitement increased as the party came nearer and the cries redoubled. Some of the assembly shook their fists at the scouts while others were loud in their praises of the heroism and daring of one young Mexican soldier who, single-handed, had made prisoners of five gringos. Even the guard which had escorted the scouts to Bacarac now became as excited as the men they were approaching.

Before any one was fully aware of what was occurring the scouts were dragged from their horses and, under guard of their captors, led through the little street.

“To the Cuartel! Cuartel!” shouted the excited throng.

The mob now followed, cheering and howling at the prisoners. Soldiers and peons were moving side by side and the cry “Kill the gringos!” became louder and more persistent.

At that moment some one hurled a heavy stick. It struck Steve in his back, tearing his coat. This action, and its successful result, added to the excitement. Instantly stones and sticks were hurled from every direction.

The scouts were doing their utmost to protect their faces. Each was alike fearful that, in the midst of the excitement, rifles might be fired at them. Fortunately none were, but the excited

THE CUARTEL

mob threw more missiles at the gringos. Every one of the five had been hit half a dozen times or more, though as yet all had been able to shield their faces.

Steve now was keen on reaching the place in which they were to be confined. The first wild cry of "Cuartel" had alarmed him; the shout had aroused his fear of what might occur when once the men were within the walls of the jail. Now, however, he was eager to gain its protection. All five scouts were almost despairing of their lives.

The excitement increased as the mob drew near the cuartel; louder and louder became the cries of the infuriated peons; the showers of missiles continued to fall.

As they drew near the entrance, two men—apparently Mexican officials—suddenly appeared. The sight for a moment served to calm the excitement of the mob, but as the five scouts in surprise gazed at the officials their alarm increased. There was little—in either the appearance or the attitude of the two men—to warrant hope of escape from the blood-thirsty mob.

CHAPTER IX

EVENTS ON THE RANCH

READERS will recall Steve's anxiety concerning Jack's failure to accompany the party of scouts. While Steve sought Jack, the latter had hunted for the missing Steve. The confusion which reigned in the little hamlet had deprived many of the ability to realize their position. The activity of the soldiers, the hurried preparations for the pursuit of the bandits, the fact that many had come from ranches far and near to share the excitement—had produced a confusion that affected even the solemnly quiet Mexicans.

In the midst of his search Jack saw Carlos a little ahead of him, and called to him. To the boy's surprise Carlos for a moment seemed inclined to run from the place. However, he changed his mind and in his usual solemn manner waited for Jack to approach.

"Have you seen anything of Steve, Carlos?" demanded Jack.

"Not in an hour," replied Carlos in a low voice.

"I have been looking for him for a long time.

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Some of the scouts have gone, and I don't know whether Steve joined them or not. I can't find him anywhere."

"I think he has left Columbus."

"Yes, but in which direction? Has he gone back home—or did he start with the scouts?"

"I cannot say."

"But do you think he went back home?"

"As I told you," said Carlos, "I saw him about an hour ago. What he has done since then I do not know; how should I?" he added, shrugging his shoulders and spreading out his hands.

"The soldiers are getting ready to start," suggested Jack, "and the scouts ought to go ahead of them."

"That's so."

"But I have been waiting for Steve to tell me where to report."

"He was looking for you," said Carlos, his eyes flashing a moment as he glanced at the excited boy.

"We missed each other because of the confusion. Do you think I had better go back to the ranch?"

"I think so," said Carlos, his dark eyes again snapping as he glanced stealthily at Jack.

"That's what I'll do," said Jack, turning away and hastening to the place where he had tied his pony.

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There were evidences that the little army was almost ready for its departure. The long delay had been puzzling to the eager-hearted boy who knew little of the enormous preparation or the quantity of supplies and equipment that are indispensable before an expedition can advance with reasonable prospect of success.

At this time, however, his mind was filled with thoughts of his missing friend and he was eager to discover whether Steve had gone back again to the ranch or had already departed for the front. Despite his many inquiries he learned nothing more concerning his friend, so, almost in desperation, he mounted his pony and rode swiftly in the direction of Mr. Lait's ranch.

On the road he met more people than he had seen there in many a day. Mexicans—some sullen, some alarmed, their children gathered about them—were moving steadily toward the border. Cowboys were riding swiftly toward the scene of the recent attack, the report of which by this time had reached even the most remote ranches. Frequently Jack was hailed and questioned, but he was in such haste that he gave slight response to the inquiries. He was eager to reach the ranch, to discover whether or not his friend was there.

The heat by this time was intense. Jack realized

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that his pony was suffering from the pace at which he was moving, but the eager-hearted boy did not check his speed.

When at last he arrived at his destination he was startled by the quiet that rested over the entire scene. Not a man was visible. Even the ponies were gone from the paddock. There was a foreboding in Jack's heart as he rode swiftly up in front of the house and dismounted, throwing his reins over the pony's head as he leaped to the ground.

His fears were confirmed when he entered the house. He called loudly, but received no response. He ran to the various parts of the adobe house but the Mexican women, who had been servants in the house, were not to be found. The place was deserted.

Puzzled by his discovery, Jack ran from the house, still hoping to discover Mr. Lait somewhere about the ranch. Not finding him in the barn, and the fact that all the horses were gone, increased Jack's confusion and alarm. It might be, he thought, that Mr. Lait had remained in Columbus until Steve had departed. According to rumours, Steve had already started with others, and was heading southward in search of signs of the bandit army.

Convinced that neither Mr. Lait nor Steve was

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about the ranch, Jack decided to return to Columbus. As he mounted his waiting pony he was startled to see some one riding swiftly across the roadway and approaching the house. The thought that Steve might be returning caused Jack to remain where he was while he watched eagerly the newcomer, who turned out to be none other than Carlos. Why the ranchman had returned Jack was unable to conjecture; he must have been aware that the ranch was deserted! Why, then, was he coming back?

The question was still unanswered in Jack's mind when Carlos rode swiftly up to him, halted, and dismounted, bowing low—in mock courtesy—to the perplexed boy.

As Jack glanced at the flanks of Carlos's horse, he saw that they were dripping with blood. It was plain that the Mexican had had no mercy for the poor beast. Often of late Jack had witnessed more cruelty to animals than, in his young life, he had ever deemed possible.

"And did you find him?" inquired Carlos, again bowing low and sweeping his broad hat in front of him.

"He isn't here," replied Jack quietly.

"And is that so?" demanded Carlos, laughing. "Where, then, can he be?"

"I'm inclined to think, Carlos," said Jack, "that

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you knew all the time there wasn't any one here, and that Steve had started southward."

"If he has gone into my country," said Carlos, his eyes shining with excitement, "he will never come back. Francisco Villa will never permit the gringos to cross the border without paying the penalty with their lives."

"And what are you doing to help Villa?" demanded Jack.

"I do not see General Villa," responded Carlos, his voice as well as the expression of his face betraying the anger which the question had aroused.

"What were you doing with Mr. Lait's horses, then?"

"I have told Mr. Lait that I did not have anything to do with the loss of the ponies," solemnly answered Carlos.

"What have you come back here for now?" demanded Jack.

"I have a wish to see Mr. Lait. I am to give up my place. I no longer wish to serve a gringo."

For a moment Jack was alarmed by the expression of rage which swept over the face of the young Mexican. Apparently his feelings had overpowered him and for a moment Jack was fearful of some sudden attack by the angry man.

He was, however, in a measure prepared for any eventuality, as his life on the border during the past

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year had provided him with a knowledge of the peculiar traits of the Mexicans who had crossed the line to seek employment. The conversation ceased abruptly. Carlos turned toward the barn, apparently ignoring the presence of the boy.

The action of the ranchman reminded Jack that he, too, ought to go to the barn where there was a bridle which he was desirous of securing in addition to the one he now had.

Before he entered the low building he had thrown the reins over the head of his pony which he had left outside the barn. His search, though fruitless, was still continued, in the hope of finding the missing bridle. Much harness was still hanging on the pegs but the bridle he was unable to locate.

Suddenly he was startled by the slamming to of the door. Running to the spot, Jack discovered that the door had been fastened on the outside, and, peering through one of the low windows, he saw that Carlos was departing from the place, mounted on his own horse and leading Jack's.

For a moment the startled boy stared in amazement. Then, realizing that the treacherous ranchman had made him a prisoner and also had stolen his horse, he turned his thoughts to devising how to effect his escape from the building.

CHAPTER X

A PRISONER

JACK was aware that there was a heavy padlock on the outer side of the barn door. Investigation was not needed to assure him that the windows were all small—too small to permit him to crawl through any of them. They were simply holes in the walls. The cattle seldom had been driven within the barn; the mild weather and the fact that most of the herds were left free to roam over the desert had rendered a protecting building unnecessary.

Still—hoping against hope—Jack made the rounds of the windows; but he found it impossible to squeeze through any of them. He returned to the door and pushed against it with all his strength. He was unable to make any impression upon it and his fears were confirmed.

Jack now realized that his imprisonment was a far more serious matter than at first he had thought; he was genuinely alarmed. There would be no response to his calls for aid—if he should call—as there was no one on the place.

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What could he do? The troubled boy seated himself on a wheelbarrow and tried calmly to face the problem that confronted him. Carlos, no doubt, would not return. He (Jack) was alone on the ranch. It was impossible for him to escape through the windows—impossible to force open the door. The walls had been built of adobe and would resist any attempt to break through them. Perhaps he would be left where he was for hours—even for days!

The hours passed slowly. The sun was sinking low. He had been long enough without food or water now to feel the need of both. His alarm, too, was increasing for, with the coming darkness, new foes might have to be met. Carlos himself might return to the ranch though Jack felt sure that he would not. Even now he fancied he could see the treacherous Carlos fleeing across the border to join the roving bandits—perhaps even to enroll with the immediate followers of Villa, the king of them all.

The building itself contained only one story. In places Jack was able to touch the roof. This fact, however, served merely to strengthen his fears—to convince him that the barn was a prison-house, as secure as if it had bolts and bars on every window.

The need of food was becoming acute—his thirst

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even more so; and yet these needs were causing him less anxiety than his confinement. His one great desire was to escape.

The dreary waiting was painfully monotonous. The silence that rested over the place was most oppressive. Jack could not hope for the coming of any helper; he was nearly hopeless.

Night set in, but the darkness was not deep. Through the windows he could discern the desert that stretched away for miles, but not a sound broke in upon the stillness. There were moments when Jack felt that he must cry aloud, his tense nerves demanded relief. And yet the uselessness of crying was so apparent that he resisted the impulse and gave no voice to his feelings. His great problem was still unsolved. He was a prisoner with no prospect of being able to escape from his prison-house.

In the midst of his despondency Jack was startled by a sound which indicated that some one was unlocking the heavy door. The sound was repeated and Jack fancied also he heard the voices of men.

His first impression was that some one had come to release him, but a moment later his worst fears returned with redoubled force, as several of the reckless men entered the barn. Perhaps they had come back to bind him and carry him away with

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them, or mete out to him an even worse treatment. Eager as he was to escape, his fear prompted him to hide behind a pile of boards that were standing in one corner of the room.

Darting to the spot he succeeded in wriggling behind the boards just as the heavy door began to open.

From his hiding-place he was able to see dimly what was taking place in the front of the barn. He saw one man enter who was speedily followed by two more. The three men stopped and in low voices spoke to some one outside the building. There were then at least four in the party and Jack noted that Carlos was not among them; his peculiar voice would have revealed his presence to any one acquainted with him.

Jack, however, had recognized the voice of one of the men as that of Francesco, a young Mexican who had been a devoted follower of Carlos. Indeed, the friendship that existed between the two had been a frequent topic of conversation between Mr. Lait and Steve. Francesco had doubtless come back to the ranch to carry out the directions of the foreman, who no doubt had given details of the boy's confinement in the barn.

Jack's fears were not relieved when he saw the three men move toward the room in which the harness was kept. The conclusion was that Carlos

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had sent his faithful followers back to the ranch to steal the harness. Would they depart as soon as they had secured it? They did not *seem* to be making any search for *him*, and as far as he was able to judge, they were ignorant of his presence. Not once did they call to him nor make any search. In spite of his peril, Jack found himself wondering where Mr. Lait was and what his feeling would be when he knew of the theft of his harness. Among them were several silver-mounted bridles, of which he was exceedingly proud. Two of them had been prizes offered by the ranchmen and by them had been left in the barn with the other bridles.

The thought of Mr. Lait induced Jack to endeavour to ascertain positively whether a guard had been placed outside the building. He heard the stamping of the men's horses, but no other sound. Even the men in the barn were performing their task silently, and when they returned to the open air with their arms laden they hastily deposited their burdens and reëntered the building. It was plain that every man understood the portion of the task which had been assigned him, and that each was in haste to complete it and be gone.

Suddenly Jack decided that he would seize the opportunity to make a dash for liberty. If only he could crawl out noiselessly from behind the

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boards, he would make a dash for the outer air, and perhaps escape. He had not forgotten that one man had remained outside the barn—presumably as a guard—but in the dim light there was the bare possibility that the watcher might mistake him for one of the party.

Stealthily Jack crept from his hiding-place. Twice he stopped when he thought the boards were about to fall. At last, however, he succeeded in his attempt and, standing against the wall, paused a moment while he watched the three men—apparently still ignorant of his presence—carry out more of the heavy harness. He was satisfied that they would come back again, and, motionless, he awaited their return. Soon they ran back into the barn, and from their eagerness, Jack concluded that this was to be their last trip.

Keeping close to the wall, Jack moved stealthily around the side until he came near to the open door. Still moving slowly, he peered out and—discovering that only one man was on guard, and that the four horses were not tethered—he stepped out upon the ground. Striving to appear indifferent he glanced at the man who seemed not to be alarmed by his appearance.

The guard asked him a question. Jack replied “*Si*,” and then moved toward the horses. He selected one that was standing apart from its

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fellows and, instantly deciding upon his course of action, he walked toward it. Still unmolested, he approached the animal; then, with a sudden leap, he mounted and started swiftly toward the road.

The guard, now awakened to realities, called loudly to his comrades, instantly leaped upon the back of another horse, and started in swift pursuit of the boy.

Jack heard the sentry's calls. He urged his horse into its utmost speed. Shouts and shots soon were mingled and the excited boy was aware that Francesco and his companions were in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XI

A FRIEND IN NEED

WHEN Steve and his companions glanced anxiously—first at the two men who had so unexpectedly appeared and then at the howling mob—their fears—as readers will remember—were by no means relieved. A fresh shower of missiles from the peons and their companions struck the bodies of the young Americans who were unable to protect more of themselves than just their faces.

Fresh cries of “Kill the gringos” rose on every side, and the mob surged forward as if determined to carry out its own wild suggestion, but just then the two men who had emerged from the cuartel raised their hands and cried:

“Silencio ! Silencio !”

The excited crowd stared at the men as if waiting for an explanation. In a low voice, using conversational tones, one of the strangers began to address the mob. Steve—who (as has been said) was familiar with the Spanish language—in astonishment listened to the man as he pleaded for the

unfortunate prisoners' lives. The speaker explained—not always adhering to the truth—that the five young Americans were not a part of the band which was sent in pursuit of Villa; that, further, they were in no wise concerned with the “punitive expedition” which America had sent across the border.

Cries of derision greeted the statement, but the speaker proceeded, and, after a while, the hesitation of the mob increased. Several of the most dangerous in the assembly—those who had been calling most loudly for the death of the Americans—slipped out from the crowd and disappeared.

Still the speaker passionately urged those that remained to give heed to his words. He pleaded for the lives of the young prisoners and besought the assembly to deal justly with them, especially as they had no feeling of malice against any one at the place.

Within a half-hour the mob dispersed. At the first sign of its scattering, the companion of the speaker turned quietly to Steve and said:

“You boys will do well to go inside the cuartel.”

“Wouldn't they fire at us if we turned?” inquired Steve anxiously.

“Not *now*. They might have done so a few minutes ago. Don't act as if you were afraid; just turn as if it were the most natural thing to do.”

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Tom led the way and one by one the young scouts followed him into the low building. They assembled in the front room where from the windows they were able to see the actions of the excited people outside the building.

"That was a close call," whispered Steve when at last the excitement subsided. "I thought at one time, when they stood us up against the wall, that we never would get out of this alive."

"We aren't *out of it* alive yet," said Bert dryly. "I would rather deal with the Moros. I was with General Pershing in Central Mindanao when he was in command of the operations there. That was from October, 1902, to June, 1905."

"My! you're quite an old soldier, aren't you, Bert?" laughed Steve nervously. The lad was greatly relieved at their escape from the "greasers" and his voice still trembled in spite of his efforts to speak lightly.

"I'm not to blame for my age," retorted Bert. "I didn't have anything to say about when I should come into this world and I have mighty little to say about when I shall leave it."

"You're not in any hurry, are you?" inquired Tom dryly.

"I'm not making any special effort to leave right now," said Bert quietly. "I was just speaking of General John Joseph Pershing, that's all. I re-

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marked that I would rather go up against the Moros—though they are treacherous little brutes—than I would against a crowd of peons like the ones that shoved us against the wall here in Bacarac.”

As much to relieve the nervous strain under which he had been labouring, as for the sake of information, Steve turned quickly to Bert and said:

“How old a man is General Pershing?”

“He was born in 1860. That would make him fifty-seven, wouldn’t it?”

“That’s the way I figure it,” answered Tom. “Is he a West Point man?”

“He’s that and more, too. He graduated from the Military Academy in 1886. He studied awhile afterward at the University of Nebraska, but the army was what he wanted. He was a second lieutenant in the Sixth Cavalry and then first lieutenant in the Tenth. He was honourably discharged from the volunteers and then became a captain in the regular army.”

“When was he made a general?” inquired Steve.

“In 1906 he was made a brigadier-general and he had plenty to do, let me tell you. He was in the campaign against the Apaches back here in New Mexico and Arizona, and a little later he was up in the Dakotas fighting the Sioux Indians. He was in command of the Sioux Indian Scouts, too,

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for a time. That was in '91. Then he went to the University of Nebraska as military instructor and it was while he was there that he did some work on his own account. Then he went to West Point to be instructor in tactics and he was there when the war with Spain broke out. He served with the Tenth Cavalry, as I was telling you, in that Santiago campaign in Cuba in '98. He stayed in Cuba for a while as Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, which was a part of his work, and then he went to the Philippines. He was there over three years."

"That's where he learned the tricks I guess," said Steve.

"You mean the tricks of these greasers?" demanded Tom. "I don't believe there's anybody on earth that understands them except their mules. A Mexican yells at a mule in a way that no human being could understand but the mule seems to take it all in."

"He has to," said Steve. "I have never seen any one treat animals the way they do."

"Well, General Pershing learned some things in the campaign against the Spaniards," asserted Bert, "and when he became military attaché at Tokio, Japan, he learned a lot more. Then he went off with Kuroki and his troops in Manchuria in the Russo-Japanese war. I guess he found out a

good many things in that campaign. He served on the general staff and was on duty in the Philippines again after the close of that war. The greatest thing he ever did, though," asserted Bert, "was smashing the Moros in that battle of Bagsag. He's the best man in the United States to send after this fellow Villa, and he'll get him dead or alive."

"He may 'get' him if Villa dies," said Tom disconsolately, "but I have my doubts about getting him any other way."

"I'm afraid our little adventure has affected your spirits," remarked Bert quietly.

"It has," acknowledged Tom. "I don't feel nearly as well as I did this morning, for I am of the opinion that we aren't through with these blood-thirsty peons yet. Listen to that, will you!" he added as a cry from outside the building broke in upon their conversation.

The five Americans listened to the startling sound, every scout fearful of a renewed attack by the excited mob.

Fears of an immediate attack, however, proved groundless. They were left to themselves, a condition which would not have been difficult to endure if food and water had been provided for them. As it was, however, it had been long since they had tasted food and all five were suffering keenly from thirst.

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It was dark when there came a rap on the door. "Who's there?" demanded Steve quickly as he approached the door.

"It's your friend who saved you this afternoon."

"Shall I open?" whispered Steve as he turned to his companions.

"Yes, open," directed Tom quickly. "We'll all stand ready to shove the door back if more than one tries to get in. It may be this fellow has something of importance to say. One thing is sure, and that is we can't stay *here* very much longer."

Thus bidden, Steve opened the door a few inches and was relieved to find that there was only one man standing before him.

The visitor speedily was admitted and as soon as he entered the room the door was closed again and securely barred. In the dim light the young scouts were able to see that he was a Mexican, even if his speech had not already betrayed him.

"Why do you come down here into my country?" he demanded as he turned upon the occupants of the room.

"It isn't because we *want* to come," answered Tom. "You'll remember that rascal Villa crossed the border and made a treacherous attack on Columbus. We haven't forgotten, either, that he killed eight of the troopers of the 13th United States Cavalry and nine others besides."

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“But that is no excuse,” protested their visitor, “for your country to send General Pershing and Colonel Dodd with more than six thousand men into Mexico. They have come from Columbus and from Hachita.”

The speaker was not aware of the fact at the time but only a few days were to elapse before three columns were to be in Mexico and it was not long afterward when it was said that there were twelve thousand American soldiers beyond the Mexican border. At that moment, however, the five scouts were much more deeply interested in their own welfare than in the outcome of the invasion.

Turning to their visitor Steve said:

“What has become of our horses?”

“There are horses outside.”

“Ours?”

“Yes, yours.”

“And are we free to leave now?”

“Where you go?” demanded the visitor keenly.

“We’re going away from here,” spoke up Bert, “and we’re going to leave at a two-forty clip.”

“Where you go?” repeated the Mexican.

“I can’t tell you just *where* we’re going,” said Bert, “but we’re going to *get* there just as soon as our horses can take us.”

“You go after Villa?”

“I cannot tell you anything about it. What we

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want just now is to get out of Bacarac. We'll raise such a dust that you won't be able to see us."

"You go back to Columbus?"

"Where are our horses?" broke in Steve. "Take us to them and we won't trouble you any more."

Hungry, tired, and thirsty the scouts for a moment forgot their physical discomforts in the hope of escaping from the little hamlet. Their visitor, although he was not fully satisfied with their answers, did not delay longer, and safely led the way outside the cuartel.

CHAPTER XII

A DECISION

THE released prisoners advanced until all five stood beneath the open sky. All were alike fearful of treachery of some kind and carefully scanned the near-by region for possible enemies. When convinced that their foes were not in the immediate vicinity they approached their horses, which were hobbled near by as the Mexican had told them.

A low whinny of pleasure came from the patient animals at the approach of their riders. The poor beasts were in no better condition than were the scouts. Their heads were hanging low and it was plain that they were suffering from thirst and hunger as well as from weariness.

The stars were shining with unusual brightness. On every side stretched the desert, while to the east the outlines of the mountains could be dimly seen. The silence that rested over everything was oppressive. Steve's heart was heavy, for he still believed that enemies were near and that an attempt to flee would result in their being overtaken by the bandits.

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“Where shall we go?” whispered Tom as he threw his arm over the neck of his horse before mounting.

“Anywhere,” said Steve promptly. “Any direction that will take us away from this horrible spot.”

“My advice,” said Bert, “is to go back over our trail. The greasers won’t suspect us of doing that and if they are hiding anywhere among the hills they will be on the lookout for us farther down.”

“That’s good sense,” said Tom eagerly. “I agree to that. Let’s start at once.”

In a moment the five scouts were mounted and heading northward. Whether or not it was the thought of moving toward home that influenced the tired beasts, fresh strength and courage seemed to have returned to them, and—at a swifter pace than any of their riders believed them capable of—they left Bacarac behind. Soon the low houses were out of sight, and the little band, moving closely together, continued on its way northward.

Frequently a halt was called and a careful investigation made to discover whether pursuers were on their trail. After the third halt, however, when approaching the little hamlet which was to be their first stopping place, they felt convinced that no one was following them. What they

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might find at Bavispe, toward which they now were headed, no one could foretell.

The party now was drawing near the little stream on the bank of which the Mexican had taken advantage of their defenceless condition and had stolen all their weapons. The sight of the water brought renewed courage to man and beast alike. Every one quickened his pace till all gained the bank of the stream.

"Careful," said Bert, "don't let those horses drink too much!"

"To say nothing of ourselves," retorted Tom. "I don't know whether the water is safe or not, but it comes from the hills and has been filtered through the sands and I'm going to chance it."

Cautiously the band drank of the cool water, but although their thirst was relieved, it was not entirely quenched when they drew back their reluctant horses and debated their next move.

"I think we'd better rest a bit and let John Cleary go ahead to find out the lay of the land," said Bert.

His companion of that name at once signified his willingness, and after his departure the remaining four seated themselves upon the sand to await his return. Although the spirits of all were somewhat low they had been revived by the water they had drunk and Bert most of all was doing his

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best to rise above the fears and anxieties besetting him.

“Never mind,” he said to his companions, “this is one of the things that have to be met. If there wasn’t any hard work to be done there wouldn’t be any need of an army, or scouts either for that matter. I was thinking of Mrs. Britton.”

“Who’s she?” demanded Tom.

“Why, she’s a woman from down East somewhere. She had a boy who was a lieutenant in the army and she came on to the post to visit him. The lad was so tickled to have his mother with him that he got up a theatre party in her honour. Some of the officers and their wives were in the boxes and the lieutenant and his mother had one box all to themselves. It was in the second tier, and you know that the bottom of one box is the top of the one beneath; and they are all of them mighty low.

“Well, the young lieutenant hadn’t been there very long when, glancing over the audience, he saw that a good many women were holding their handkerchiefs to their mouths and that some of the men were shaking as they tried to stifle their laughter. The poor chap didn’t know what the trouble was, though he saw that they were all looking at his box.

“Just then he noticed that his mother who was holding a fan in her right hand—(of course she had

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gloves on)—was resting her left arm on the rail of the box, her left hand resting, *so she thought*, on the lower rail. But the truth is, it was resting on the bald pate of an old man who sat in the box directly below. The old gentleman had grasped the situation, but he didn't know just what to do. He tried to be patient because he wanted to be the gentleman, I guess.

“Suddenly the audience turned again to the play and began to applaud when one of the actors was a little less bad than usual. The lieutenant's mother joined in the applause. She took her hand and patted the poor old gentleman's bald pate!—she thought she was patting a part of the rail. That was too much for the poor old chap. Suddenly he jumped up, his face as red as a beet, and made for the door.”

“Didn't the officer's mother ever find out?” laughed Steve.

“I don't know. I never heard *that* part of the story.”

“I'm not surprised a bit,” said Tom. “I have seen men with just that kind of top knots. You couldn't tell whether they were made of ivory or bone.”

“That's right,” admitted Bert. “Makes me think of something that happened a spell ago. There was a column of our troops all tired out on

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the march. They were climbing down a rocky ledge looking for a place to camp. Finally they found a little pool of water that was just what they wanted. The commanding officer placed his sentry at the pool the first thing. It wasn't very long before more of our boys came tumbling down the ledge and one of the lieutenants got ready for a plunge in that pool. The sight of it had been more than he could stand. Just as he got ready to jump in, he heard some one call out from the other side:

"Halt!"

"What are your orders?" demanded the lieutenant.

"Sir," said the sentry, "my orders are to prevent bathing in that pool."

"What is that for?"

"Because the water has been reserved for the coffee for supper."

"Well, why didn't you tell me that before?" snapped the lieutenant. "Here I am all stripped and you didn't say a word until I got ready to jump into the water."

"Sir," said the sentry soberly, "I have no orders to prevent stripping."

"That doesn't affect us," laughed Steve. "We've had our bath."

"And lost our revolvers," broke in Tom.

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It was not long before the scouts sighted their comrade returning from Bavispe.

"What luck?" demanded Bert as the scout drew nearer.

"I didn't find any one there except a few old women and children."

"I guess it's safe then for us to go on," said Steve.

As his conclusion met with approval the five scouts at once set forth for the little hamlet. Cleary's report proved to be correct. Few people, in the early hours of the morning, were moving about the little hamlet. Among them, however, was a Mexican who, after inquiring the purpose of their coming, said:

"We have heard that Villa is dead."

"Is that so?" demanded Bert in surprise.

"I don't know whether it's so or not, but we have heard it. It is said he was shot in the leg and that his wound was not dressed, so he died."

"I don't believe it," said Steve turning to Tom.

"You never can tell," replied that worthy. "I remember reading that they had a great time in the Senate of the United States last February when the President reported that seventy-six Americans had been killed in Mexico since 1913 and that thirty-six more had been slain by the greasers on American soil. If they can do that to our boys I don't see why Villa mightn't get his, too."

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Turning again to the Mexican, Bert asked:

“Where is General Pershing?”

“He has gone far south.”

“How far?”

“Three hundred and seventy-five miles.”

“How do you know he has gone that far?”

“I have heard from a friend who sent me a message.”

“Why should he send you one?”

“Because he is my friend,” snapped the Mexican.

“The only thing for us to do,” suggested Tom as he turned once more to his companions, “now that we’ve been driven out of our course, is to go south. We can follow the trail and can hear from the supply wagons what has happened ahead of them. Besides, there are the aeroplanes and they may be able to report what has been done.”

“And that’s just what we were to do, anyway,” suggested Steve. “We are scouts that have to be told instead of scouts that do the telling, I’m afraid.”

“It won’t be so long,” said Tom. “The thing now for us to do is to find something to eat and then make for the south as fast as we can go.”

CHAPTER XIII

PUZZLING SUPPLIES

WHEN Jack began his swift flight from the barn of Mr. Lait he was unaware even of the direction in which he was going. His chief desire was to avoid recapture. Knowing that he was being pursued by the men who had stolen the harness, he frequently glanced behind him to discover whether the Mexicans were gaining upon him. The light being dim he could not see clearly, but after a few minutes he was convinced that his pursuers were not riding so fast as he. He did not relax his efforts, however; the wild flight continued. The horse upon which he was mounted was a hardy little beast and responded nobly to every appeal of its rider.

Without a halt Jack continued his flight until he believed that at least an hour had elapsed since his escape from the barn. Still ignorant as to direction, he nevertheless fancied that he was approaching the border.

Again the excited boy looked behind him. For a moment his fears returned; he thought he heard

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the sound of voices. A moment later those fears were dispelled; and yet he was unable to believe that the pursuit had been abandoned completely.

Suddenly he saw, not far to his right, a low sand hill. He recognized the spot, and recalled that on the farther side was a depression in which it would be possible for him to hide himself, and—perhaps also his horse. The place would provide a refuge for a brief time only, for when daylight appeared, his pursuers would discover the change in his direction by following the prints of his horse's hoofs.

Jack found the refuge he was seeking and, though his anxiety still was keen, the rest was most welcome. His horse also plainly showed his relief from the swift pace at which he had been moving across the desert. In a few minutes the tired beast dropped upon the sands, but John, through fear of being traced, was wide awake and watchful. Twice he thought he heard sounds of men approaching. He was unarmed—and this increased his fear; the boy's vigil was unbroken.

At the first sign of approaching dawn he led forth his horse and resumed his journey.

He had not gone far when he discerned a body of men in the distance before him. Abruptly stopping, he searchingly scanned the vista, and tried to make out who the strangers were. There were at least forty men in the assembly; the horses and

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mules had been tied near by, and the men apparently were busily doing something, the nature of which he was unable to discover.

At first Jack was tempted to turn sharply about and flee from the region, but, on second thoughts, he decided that his peril would be greater if he fled than if he joined the company. So he pushed forward, and soon arrived at the little encampment.

His approach had been noticed but seemed to arouse no excitement. To Jack's intense surprise, Mr. Lait was in the assembly. What his friend's father was doing in such a place and at such a time he was unable to conjecture. The sight, however, was a great relief to Jack, who hastily rode to where Mr. Lait was standing. As Jack leaped from his horse, Mr. Lait advanced and in a low voice inquired:

"What are you doing here, Jack?"

"I don't know," replied Jack.

"How did you find us?"

"I didn't find you. I have just come from your ranch."

"Is everything all right there?"

"No, sir. Half a dozen Mexicans came there last night, and stole every saddle and piece of harness you had in the barn."

"Was Carlos with them?" inquired Mr. Lait.

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"No, of course he was not," he added quickly, "for he has been here all night."

"Who are these men?" demanded Jack as he glanced at the gathering.

He saw that most of them were Mexicans, and that their surly manner indicated their displeasure at his arrival. Whether or not it was Mr. Lait's presence that restrained them, John could not determine, but whatever hostility they may have felt toward the young scout was not expressed by word or act.

"These men," explained Mr. Lait, "are taking supplies across the border."

Again Jack glanced about him and saw boxes and bags which indicated that food was being taken in quantities.

"What are the supplies for?" he inquired.

"What are supplies usually for?" asked Mr. Lait with a smile.

"Are they taking these things to Villa?"

"That I do not know," answered Mr. Lait in a low voice. "I confess I am afraid they are."

"How do you happen to be here?"

"I haven't time to explain *now*, Jack. 'Happen' is just the word, though, for it is only by chance that I ran across this crowd."

"Do you think it is safe for you to be here?"

"Why not? There isn't any law now against

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taking supplies into Mexico and it may be that I shall be wiser when I get home than I was when I came here. Who took the saddles and harness?"

"Francesco was the leader. He is here now, I see."

"Yes, he came in the night. He had four or five greasers with him but I did not think they had stripped my barns to get supplies and I shall tell Carlos they must be sent back."

"Is Carlos here?"

"Yes, I told you he has been here all night."

"Have you any idea where the men are going?"

"No more than I told you. I have my suspicions, but I do not know."

Throughout the interview John was aware of the glances of anger that both Carlos and Francesco were bestowing upon him. Neither of them approached the place where he and Mr. Lait were standing, but their silent manner and glances of hatred were too plain to be misunderstood.

At last, however, Francesco walked up to them and said in a surly tone to Mr. Lait:

"This boy stole our horse."

"What?" demanded Jack.

"He stole our horse," repeated Francesco; "now we shall take it back."

"But how shall I go on?" protested Jack.

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Francesco shrugged his shoulders; he made no reply.

“I did take one of your horses,” protested Jack, “but I did not *steal* it. I will pay you for it. I had to have a horse last night to help me away from the barn. There was a crowd of men in there stealing everything they could lay their hands on.”

It was light now, and the flash that appeared in Francesco's eyes was unmistakable. Jack was thankful that Mr. Lait was present. His influence throughout the region was considerable and as many Mexicans had received favours at his hands, Jack was confident that that fact—coupled with the respect which had grown up through many years for Mr. Lait—would protect them both.

“What did you steal the saddles for?” demanded Jack, turning again to Francesco.

“I did not steal saddles,” retorted the Mexican angrily.

“Let's look around and see whether we can find any of them,” suggested Mr. Lait.

Together he and Jack went to the spot where the supplies had been stacked. Boxes and bags, as has been said, were heaped together promiscuously; saddles and various parts of harness also were there, but a careful search failed to reveal any of Mr. Lait's belongings. The saddles had been

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either mutilated and the various parts of the harness separated, or they had been sent in another direction. At all events, nothing belonging to the ranchman was found.

“What am I to do, Mr. Lait?” inquired Jack when the search was ended. “Shall I go to Columbus or start directly to the south?”

“Go back to Columbus by all means,” said Mr. Lait quickly. “You are in no condition to go across the border alone, for no one knows what dangers you might have to meet. Columbus is only a few miles away and there you will find friends with whom you can start. Before you go, however, you must have something to eat.”

“Where shall I get it?” inquired Jack with a smile as he glanced at his surroundings.

[The appearance of the men was not prepossessing. Many of them had been exceedingly frugal in the use of water—externally at least—and soap practically was unknown in their midst.]

“We can get some beans,” suggested Mr. Lait, referring to the national food of the Mexicans along the border.

Jack made a wry face, but he was too tired and hungry to protest. Shortly afterward he and Mr. Lait were served with a dish which, if not tempting, at least was satisfying.

Nothing more had been said about the horse

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which Jack had taken. He was perplexed as to how he could make his way to Columbus.

The matter, however, was soon arranged by Mr. Lait, who secured a horse each for himself and Jack. Promptly after breakfast they mounted and started for Columbus.

CHAPTER XIV

DESERTED

JACK was so wearied by his experiences of the night that conversation was almost impossible. Steadily the hardy little horses continued on their way and shortly before mid-day Jack and Mr. Lait arrived at their destination.

By this time Jack was so exhausted that he begged permission to rest. As soon as he entered the little building he found a quiet spot where stood a pile of blankets. Throwing himself on these, he fell asleep. It was evening when he awoke and again sought Mr. Lait. The latter, however, had been compelled to leave as he had received word of further danger threatening his ranch.

Jack now was left alone and the responsibility of deciding what his future movements were to be rested heavily upon him. He made his way at once to the quarters of Captain Olmsted, from whom he had received his first instructions after he and Steve had been accepted as scouts.

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"Where have you been?" inquired the captain sharply, as Jack entered his presence.

"I have had my troubles and plenty of them," replied Jack. "I went out to Mr. Lait's ranch last night, but the greasers were there and I had all I could do to get away."

"What were they doing?"

"Stealing saddles and harness."

"Did they get away with them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you stop them?"

"Because I was alone, and the greaser who was at the head of the band—for there were five of them—was a fellow I did not want to have more to do with than I *had* to."

"Who was he?"

"Francesco."

"How did you get away?"

"I slipped out of the barn while they were picking out the harness and saddles. I took one of the horses and left in a hurry."

"Didn't they follow you?"

"Yes, sir, some of them did; but either I had the best horse, or they had too heavy loads, for they didn't overtake me. Finally I came to a spot on the border back here, where I found Mr. Lait. Did you know that the greasers are carrying supplies across the line?"

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“Do I know it?” repeated Captain Olmsted sharply. “Indeed I *do* know it—and to my sorrow. Such a thing ought not for a moment to be allowed. Tell me what you saw.”

Thus bidden, Jack briefly described what he had seen and then related his experiences while he and Mr. Lait were making their way to the little village. “And now,” added Jack ruefully, “my friend Steve Lait has gone and so have the others. Excepting a few beans, I haven’t had anything to eat for twenty-four hours. I was so tired when I got here that I just threw myself down on a pile of blankets and slept five hours. If I can get a meal, I’ll be ready to start.”

“Do you know where your friend is now?”

“No, sir.”

“The last we heard, he was at Bacarac. He, too, has had troubles, according to the report, for the greasers stole the horses, stood the men up against the wall of the old jail, and threatened to shoot every one.”

“They didn’t *do* it, did they?” demanded Jack hastily.

“Not quite. A friend of theirs got them out of their trouble and they started back on their trail. When they had come as far as the Bavispe River, one of the party was detached to reconnoitre as far as Bavispe. On rejoining the party and re-

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porting, all proceeded to Bavispe where they gleaned information that decided them to turn southward again."

"And you don't know where they are now?"

"Somewhere below Bacarac; probably they are dodging in and out among the hills looking for news of the enemy." The captain smiled dryly and shook his head as he added: "I have told you almost all that I know. The only addition is that Philippe is going to start in an hour and that if you want to join your friends your best plan will be to go with him."

"I don't know him," suggested Jack quickly.

"That's not necessary," replied the captain; "he's known here at the post and I think you will not have any trouble. He knows the way and is a courageous little rascal, though his manners are not of the best. Wait here," added the captain, "and I will call him."

Hastily rising, the captain departed and in a few minutes returned with Philippe.

Jack looked keenly at the man who was to be his travelling companion. Philippe was a small, swarthy Mexican, heavier than most of his countrymen, and plainly possessed of unusual strength. The expression of his face was surly and his entire manner betokened lack of enthusiasm in the expedition on which he was being sent.

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“Philippe,” said the captain, “you are going to start south again to-night.”

“Yes,” answered the Mexican in a low voice, glancing suspiciously at Jack as he spoke.

“You are going alone, are you not?”

“Yes,” muttered Philippe.

“I want this young man to go with you.”

“And why?” demanded the Mexican quickly, as he again looked sharply at the young scout.

“Because he wants to overtake that party of scouts to which he belongs.”

“Is Bert in the party?” demanded Philippe, his eyes gleaming as he spoke.

“Yes, I believe he is one of the band,” admitted Captain Olmsted, not noticing the momentary glance of anger in the Mexican’s eyes.

“How soon do you start?”

“Right away, quick.”

“We’ll have to find a horse for Jack, then. Are you ready to go?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Jack. “That is, if you really think it is the best thing for me to do.”

“Of course it is,” replied the captain heartily. “You remain here while I go out to arrange for your horse.”

“Can I get something to eat?” inquired Jack quickly.

“I had forgotten all about that,” laughed the

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captain. "You stay here and I will have something sent in to you."

Left to themselves Jack turned again to his diminutive companion. He noticed now how heavy-chested Philippe was, and how muscular his hands were. For some reason, which he was unable to explain even to himself, Jack was suspicious of his prospective fellow traveller. He resolved, however, not to show his distrust, but decided that he would maintain a keen watch upon the actions of the Mexican.

Soon food was sent into the tent and as Philippe still remained with him Jack said cordially:

"Won't you share my meal?"

"Yes," said Philippe gruffly.

No second bidding was required and the young Mexican, waiving preliminaries, at once appropriated a part of the food and devoured it after the manner of a hungry dog.

For a moment Jack was so startled by the manifest hunger of Philippe that he almost forgot his own. Reminded, however, that if he himself was to have anything to eat he must act quickly, he joined in the repast and, in a very brief time, all the food had disappeared.

It was then that Captain Olmsted returned to the tent and said:

"I have a horse for you, Jack. I have arranged

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for you to take provisions that will last you two days. Beyond that you will have to forage for yourself. I am afraid the outlook is not very promising and you will not live very high, even if you overtake the troops. I think, however, that, before that time, you will be either with your friends or will overhaul some of the troop trains that are following in the rear of General Pershing's army."

Jack understood that the interview had come to an end. At once he departed from the tent accompanied by Philippe, at whose suggestion they both went directly to the place where horses were awaiting them; mounted those hardy steeds, and at once set forth on what they believed would be a long ride into Mexico. †

There were only snatches of conversation between Jack and his companion when they had left Columbus far behind them. The Mexican declared that he was thoroughly familiar with the entire region and had changed the direction in which they were moving to the southeast.

Although Jack was not at all convinced that they were moving in the proper direction he made no protest, but silently continued by the side of his companion. The ponies apparently were tireless and continued on their unbroken way until long after midnight. It was then that Philippe said:

"We come to Bavispe." As he spoke he pointed

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to a few low, adobe houses, visible in the distance. There was a feeling of relief in Jack's heart, for he was persuaded that, thus far, the Mexican had dealt fairly with him.

When they entered the little hamlet, they learned, in response to their hasty queries, that the American scouts had departed from the place, turning again toward the south. It was impossible for Jack to ascertain how many hours had elapsed since his friends had gone. He was so tired from his long and monotonous ride, however, that he eagerly hailed the brief rest that was to be given, and—in response to a suggestion of Philippe—entered a small house, threw himself upon the earthen floor, and promptly was soundly sleeping.

When Jack awoke the sunlight was streaming into the little building and in some confusion he hastily arose. When he emerged from the house, however, he could not find Philippe. A woman—apparently so old that her faculties were nearly gone—at first could not or would not give him any clear replies to his questions. At last, however, he was able to make out from her mumbled words that Philippe was gone and that he had taken both horses with him.

CHAPTER XV

FROM THE SKY

THE suggestion of breakfast—made by Tom (as recorded at the close of Chapter XII)—increased the appetites of the little party which already were keen. There was, however, a necessity of saving the little store which they possessed, and, at Bert's suggestion, he began a search for food in the little hamlet.

Leaving his companions he at once started toward a little adobe house not far away, and shortly returned with an earthen bowl partly filled with beans. The dish, however, did not prove tempting, and there were many exclamations of disgust when Bert placed it before his friends.

“The national dish of Mexico is at any time bad enough,” laughed Tom, “but *this* is about the worst I ever saw.”

“It will help us keep our own stuff a little longer,” retorted Bert, “and that is worth a good deal in times like these. What we went through with that howling mob has made me think of a good many things. I don't see how we ever kept our supplies anyway.”

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"I don't know whether I would rather try to keep the supplies or starve, if I had to depend on such stuff as this," remarkable Steve disgustedly.

In spite of their feelings, however, the scouts managed to dispose of a quantity of the beans which, not very good even in their best days, now were "dead of old age," as Tom expressed it.

"Hold on," Tom said. "Bert has been telling you all about General Pershing, but he hasn't told you about the biggest man in the army."

"Huh!" sniffed Bert. "He means General Frederick Funston."

"You guessed right the first time," retorted Tom; "the Little Guy."

"The who?" broke in Steve with a laugh.

"The 'Little Guy.' 'Most everybody calls General Funston the 'Little Guy.' You see he's only five foot two. The other fellows call him *Chiquito Diablo*."

"The 'little devil,'" laughed Steve.

"That's it exactly and that's pretty nearly what he is. You see we hadn't more than put the Spaniards out of the Philippines before the natives decided that they would put out the Americans, too, so raiding and guerilla fighting broke out and Aguinaldo was the head of it all. But he wasn't able to do much against the 'Little Guy.'"

"Tell me how he captured Aguinaldo."

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“Why, he first caught a messenger from Aguinaldo’s headquarters—he was carrying messages to the different chiefs. As soon as General Funston found out what was on foot he equipped some of the native troops so that they could pass themselves off as rebel reinforcements. He sent several Americans with them who were to pretend to be prisoners. The expedition started on a gunboat and landed near Baler. The country there is a difficult one, but the men marched steadily on for six days. Then they sent word to Aguinaldo that they wanted food. The rebel chief fell into the trap and after a stiff fight he was made a prisoner along with the rest of his party. I have heard General Funston tell about it, though it was rather hard to get him to talk much. It seems that Aguinaldo had his guard of about fifty armed and uniformed men drawn up to receive the ‘reinforcements.’ As soon as they were fired upon, however, the guards broke and ran, though a few of them tried to return the fire as they retreated. Aguinaldo and his officers had been waiting in his quarters. Two of his chiefs, Villa and Alhambra, were wounded. Villa surrendered, but the little imp jumped out of the house into the river, and we never saw him again. Some of the other officers also escaped and swam across the river. Aguinaldo, however, was held, and when the

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Americans came up, as they did very soon, they took him. It was a pretty bold trick, but the President didn't forget the 'Little Guy.' He made him a brigadier-general, April 1, 1901, when he was only thirty-six years old."

"Who was thirty-six, the President or Funston?" laughed Steve.

"It wasn't the President," said Tom dryly. "But I don't think the work he did in the Philippines was any greater than what he did in San Francisco at the time of the earthquake. He knew he didn't have any orders to do what he was doing when he marched his troops into San Francisco to help the police and fire departments, but he said that the laws and orders were not framed for dealing with conditions that came from earthquakes and big fires. It was not much different there from what he was doing in the Philippines. You see he was still the 'Little Guy' that crossed the Rio Grande when he had only a few men behind him and nothing to save him except a long rope. With his rope he worked the rafts which he had made for ferries that carried General MacArthur's brigade across the stream and then they drove the natives into the mountains. That was one of the things that helped to make him a brigadier-general."

"Yes," broke in Bert. "The little man is all

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right and he was before he got into the war with the Filipinos. He was down in Cuba in 1896. He had a commission from General Gomez and it wasn't long before he got busy. He was riding at the head of his men and led the charge at Guymauro which made the Spaniards there surrender. At Bayamo he joined the cavalry for a while just because there was more work for cavalry than for artillery. He was shot three times, but it wasn't long before he was back in the fight again. At Las Tunas he had charge of the Cuban dynamite mines, and he was wounded there, too. In the fight his horse was shot and fell on him, hurting him badly. Lame as he was and all broken up, he hobbled straight to headquarters just as soon as he heard that fifty prisoners there who had fought on the Spanish side were to be executed. He fought like a little tiger for their lives, but no attention was paid him. The little man was fearfully angry at the barbarity of the Cubans. He declared then and there that he would never strike another blow for them and threw up his commission, although he had fought in twenty-two battles. He started for the coast with a letter from General Garcia ordering transportation to this country for him. He fell in with some Spaniards and as he didn't think it wise to be found with papers which had been signed by Garcia, the 'Little Guy' ate the letter. He was

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already in trouble from his wounds and had malaria besides, and that letter which he swallowed gave him indigestion. When he landed in New York he was sent to a hospital, where he remained for three weeks, and when he came out he weighed just ninety pounds.

“When the Spanish War broke out he enlisted again and General Miles offered him a position on his staff, but the Governor of Kansas offered him a commission in the Twentieth Infantry of that state and he took it. He was very much disappointed that his regiment wasn't sent to Cuba, but he got his chance when it was ordered to the Philippines. I tell you he is a great leader.

“In the spring of 1901 he had a part of his force on one side of the muddy Marillao River and on the other side was a force of Filipinos. The natives had a good position and they were galling our troops with their fire. All at once Colonel Funston, as he was then, called twenty men, told them to follow him, and holding his revolver up he swam across the river. The men put their rifles on logs and followed the daring leader, pushing the logs before them on their way. Just as soon as they landed, although there were only twenty-one of them all told, they started for the Filipinos and captured eighty of them. He got a medal for that.”

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“That’s all mighty interesting,” said Steve. “Where did he come from, anyway?”

“He was born in Ohio, but when he was two years old he decided to go with the rest of his family to Kansas. When he was older he studied in the Kansas State University, and after he left college he was a reporter for a while in Kansas City. Then he was a botanist for the United States’ Death Valley Expedition, and a little later was put in command of the expedition to explore Alaska and make a report on its flowers, etc. He was camping on the Klondike in the winter of 1914 and floated all the way down the Yukon in a canoe.”

“In the winter?” inquired Steve dryly.

“Well, the ice had gone out when he went down in his canoe,” retorted Tom. “It didn’t make any difference whether it was in Alaska or down at Vera Cruz he was the same little fighter, every inch a soldier. When our troops were in Vera Cruz one of the Mexican generals sent in a very polite message that he was not able to restrain his own troops any longer and that they were about to advance and drive the Americans into the sea. ‘If *you* can’t hold your troops back, *I can*,’ was the only answer Funston sent back, and they didn’t have any attack. [The President had ordered him not to fight if he could avoid it.] The

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outposts were fired upon, one soldier was killed, others were kidnapped by the Mexicans, camps were raided, and everything they could think of was done to try to provoke Funston to fight. Whatever he may have thought about it he held down the situation and didn't forget his orders, and President Wilson made him a brigadier-general."

"Having partaken of this hearty repast," laughed Tom, rising as he spoke, "the next thing for us to do is to do the next thing."

"And that is to start?" said Steve.

"You guessed it right the first time."

"The first thing for us to do," said Bert after a brief silence during which he had thoughtfully scanned the entire horizon, "is to keep on to the south. Then if we don't find anything we can cut across the country and join the cavalry scouts who can use us as errand boys. That's the best——"

"Look at that! Look at that!" exclaimed Steve, excitedly breaking in upon his companion. As he spoke the boy pointed to a huge object that was approaching from the hills. Plainly it was an aeroplane, but its behaviour indicated that something was wrong on board the great machine. For a moment the scouts stood and stared at the huge bird, which, with one broken or mangled wing, was

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moving with difficulty and in no certain direction.

“Whose is it? What is it?” demanded Tom in a low voice.

“Can’t you see?” retorted Bert. “It’s an aeroplane. It probably came out from Columbus and has met with an accident of some kind up here among the hills.”

“It’s going to land,” said Steve in a low, tense voice. “It’s going to land right here where we are, too.”

The young scout had spoken more truly than he knew. The aeroplane, abruptly changing its course, with a slow and not ungraceful sweep came close to the ground not more than one hundred yards away. A brief moment of uncertainty followed and then the huge machine struck the ground and became motionless.

Instantly the scouts all ran to the place where the landing had been made. None of them had any conception whether or not the aviator was any one they knew. All were alike fearful that he had suffered when his machine had struck the ground, but to their surprise they saw a young man—who from his garb belonged to the United States Army—advance from the aeroplane and stare in surprise at them.

“Where am I?” he demanded

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“To the best of our knowledge, you are in North America about seventy-five miles south of the United States border.”

“Yes, yes, I know all that,” said the aviator sharply. “What is the nearest town?”

“You aren’t very far from Bacarac. This village here is Bavispe,” said Steve.

“Can I get any one there to fix my machine?” inquired the aviator.

The scouts glanced at one another and then Tom laughingly said:

“I guess you don’t know much about the country you are flying over.”

“Take hold then,” said the aviator sharply, “and give me a lift.”

“What’s the trouble with your flying machine?” inquired Bert.

“That’s what I want to find out,” declared the aviator. “Now give me a lift and help me set her up squarely so that I can find out if anything serious has happened. She hasn’t been working well for a week. I didn’t want to start out with her in the first place, but they told me at Columbus that I must—so here I am. I’m not at Columbus, I’m not with General Pershing, and I’m not even with the army. I’m just over here among the hills, and just what I was afraid of has happened.”

“What’s that?” inquired Steve.

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“Why, some accident or other.”

Throughout the conversation the young aviator had been busily inspecting his machine. Now he abruptly ceased talking and centred his observations upon one place.

“Ah, ha! there it is,” he exclaimed in a tone of relief. “I’ve found the trouble. It’s in the steering gear,” he explained.

“But one of your wings is lower than the other,” suggested Steve.

“That may be, but I can fix that in short order. It’s the steering apparatus that I was afraid of. Take hold and give me a lift.”

It was clear that the young aviator thoroughly understood his task. Giving directions first to one and then to another, he continued at his work, and when ten minutes had elapsed he said delightedly:

“There, I think she’ll go all right now. But I can’t keep on. I must go back to Columbus.”

“Why?” inquired Steve.

“For some things I have got to have,” replied the aviator. “I’ll save time by going back. You say it isn’t more than seventy or seventy-five miles away?”

“Probably not,” said Steve.

“I wish one of you would go back with me to Columbus,” said the young aviator. “You won’t

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lose any time," he added hastily, "for I shall not stay very long. Just as soon as I am fixed up again I shall start out and I will catch up with you before you have gone many miles from this place."

"But we're out on a scouting expedition," protested Steve.

"That wouldn't make any difference. I'm on the same job myself, but I can't keep on, and the army needs all the help it can get. I didn't know a little while ago," the young fellow added laughingly, "whether I was going to be a part of the aviation corps or an aviator corpse. Just now I think I belong to neither, but I must go back to Columbus and I wish one of you would go with me."

Steve, who was eager to accept the invitation, turned to his companions and said:

"It seems to me somebody ought to go with him. We haven't many aeroplanes, at least there aren't many at Columbus, and I know General Pershing wants to use a dozen or more. If nobody else wants to go, why I'll return with him. You can keep my horse with you and if you go on to the south for a day or so it won't be very long before we shall overtake you."

"That's right," said the aviator. "We ought to be back here either late this afternoon or early to-morrow morning. I think there isn't more

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than two hours' work on the machine. Come, I'm ready to start," said the aviator. "You must make up your minds which one is going."

"He is going," answered Tom, pointing as he spoke to Steve.

"All right, then, get aboard."

In a moment Steve had consigned his horse to the care of his companions and obediently had taken his place on board the weird structure.

CHAPTER XVI

THE AEROPLANE

AS THE bird-like structure rose from the ground Steve glanced below him at his friends who, with the earth, appeared to be rapidly descending. Indeed, he was not conscious that the aeroplane was moving at all. To him it seemed to be stationary while the earth and all things on it were dropping rapidly away from him.

The young scout was so deeply interested in the sight that for a time he was scarcely aware of the activity of his companion, when a sharp call for help reminded Steve that he was more than a passenger.

“Take hold here and give me a lift,” shouted the aviator.

Steve cautiously moved from his seat and by his aid the adjustment speedily was made.

“My name is Grayson,” fairly yelled the aviator, for the noise of the propeller made the simplest conversation almost impossible. “I forgot to tell you that before we started.”

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“And mine is Steve Lait.”

“I started out from Columbus with a helper. When we got about fifty miles below here he was taken sick and I had to leave him with a party of our men. I thought I might be able to work my way back alone, but I found out pretty soon that I was mistaken.”

“And that’s the reason why you wanted me to come?”

“Exactly. I’m not going very high,” explained Grayson. “There isn’t anything to be afraid of around here, except this old machine.”

“Are you afraid of that?” asked Steve.

“Yes, I am,” replied Grayson soberly.

For a moment Steve watched his companion in silence. He was now for the first time fearful that some serious mishap might overtake them. Up to this moment his departure in the aeroplane had seemed to him more or less a joke. The words of his companion, however, now convinced him that there might be serious danger ahead before they arrived at their destination.

Meanwhile the machine was sweeping swiftly northward. Steve had no means of knowing how swiftly they were moving, but the coolness of the air and the force with which the wind struck his face convinced him that they were rapidly leaving his former companions behind them.

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“How long before we’ll be in Columbus?” Steve shouted in the ears of his companion.

“If we don’t have any mishap,” answered Grayson, “it ought not to take more than three hours at the outside.”

Again Steve became silent and watched the earth beneath him. He was able to discern defiles among the hills and many of the “pockets” to which reference had been made as possible hiding-places for the bandits, but as yet he had not been able to detect any living creature. The sands of the desert stretched far away to the westward and the hills reminded him of a relief map which he had studied in school. Conversation had ceased save for a word now and then.

A half-hour elapsed and the monotony of the sound of the engine was unbroken. Steve had suffered from the heat in his journey across the desert, but he now found that he was cold and poorly prepared to bear it. He noticed that Grayson was clad in heavier clothing, and he now understood fully the reason for his wearing the heavy garb.

His meditations were interrupted by a low exclamation from the aviator.

“What is it?” inquired Steve anxiously. “Is there anything wrong?”

“Hear that?” replied Grayson brusquely.

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As Steve listened he was aware of a grinding sound that seemed to come from the engine.

“What is it?” he repeated.

“The only thing we can do is to land and find out what it is,” said Grayson.

Steve was more anxious than he was willing to confess even to himself, as slowly the huge bird descended.

As yet apparently nothing seriously threatened them. Even the sound of the grinding had almost ceased. The aeroplane responded to the control of Grayson and at last caused Steve to say:

“Why don’t we keep on? Everything seems all right now.”

The aviator did not even respond to the suggestion and Steve was convinced that he was seriously perplexed or troubled. The young scout did not speak again until, after a gradual approach to the ground, Grayson made a successful landing.

Filled with admiration as Steve was for the skill of his companion it was nevertheless with a feeling of relief that he stepped out upon the solid earth. Quickly turning to Grayson he said:

“I am here to help in every way I can. I don’t know what to do and I’m not sure I know how to do it, but if you’ll tell me I will do my best.”

The aviator did not reply as he at once busied himself with the machinery of his aeroplane. For

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several minutes the silence of the great plain was unbroken except by the sounds of the activities of the young aviator.

“I have found out what our trouble is,” he said at last as he turned to face Steve once more.

“What is it? Is it much?” inquired Steve anxiously.

“About as bad as it can be.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean just what I say. Our gas is gone and I don’t know of any way of getting any more.”

For a moment Steve was silent, his trouble showing itself plainly in the changed expression of his face.

“What do you suggest?” he at last inquired slowly.

“I think you’ll have to go to Columbus while I wait here. You can get two or three burros, if necessary, to bring out some cans and you’ll have to be quick about it, too.”

“But how shall I be able to find my way back here?”

“If you are fit to be used as a scout you certainly ought to be able to find your way to this spot,” replied Grayson sharply. “You’ll have to do it and that’s all there is to it. It’s a matter of life or death—not only for me but you, too. All the food I have left is four sandwiches and four

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oranges. I'll divide evenly with you and you'll understand from that just how much I am afraid."

"How did your gas happen to give out?"

"I don't know, that wasn't part of my job. I suppose it's like a good many other things back at Columbus. From all I can hear there wasn't anything ready, from the machine gun up to the hospital corps. What our troops were doing down here on the border without being in any way prepared to face the Mexicans is what I cannot understand."

"Nor I," said Steve bitterly. "Perhaps those wise men back in Washington who know everything might explain."

"That won't do you any good now," said Grayson sharply. "You have got to find your way to Columbus or it means death for you and death for me."

"Why don't you come with me?" suggested Steve. "We can both come back then to this place. There won't be anything that will harm the aeroplane and two of us will be safer than one."

"That's not a bad suggestion," said Grayson. "I believe I'll do it," he added quickly a moment later. "You turn to and help me put everything in shape and then I'll start with you. Have you any idea how many miles we shall have to go?"

"Do you know how many miles we have come since we left the other men?"

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"Twenty-five or thirty miles."

"Then we've got to go at least forty miles, probably more."

"It will take us two days, won't it?" suggested Grayson.

"I'm afraid it will. We must cover all we possibly can right now while we're fresh and strong. We haven't many supplies and if they give out we'll have to depend upon somebody coming from the Post."

"And there aren't many likely to come in this direction, are there?" inquired Grayson, looking keenly at Steve as he spoke.

"I'm afraid not many. The general belief is that Villa divided his band into several parts and that they went in different directions. That was the reason why we came over here. We didn't know but some of them had started for these hills."

"Did you see any signs of any?"

"Did we!" exclaimed Steve. "We found all we wanted. They made prisoners of us and set us up against the side of the Cuartel and were just about to shoot us when a man came along who got us out of our scrape. If it hadn't been for him we would have been shot, every one of us."

"It's more serious than I thought," said Grayson soberly, "and that's all the more reason why,

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if we're going to start, we should start right away."

Acting upon the suggestion, Grayson's plans for protecting the aeroplane were speedily completed and at once he and Steve started on their long and desolate journey across the sands of the desert.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN OF THE MEXICAN

STARTLED by the statement of the old woman, Jack tried to secure from her further information concerning the reasons for Philippe's departure. He failed, however. Either she did not understand his questions or intentionally withheld the facts. Jack was unable even to learn the direction in which Philippe had gone. That the Mexican *had* departed was beyond question.

Brave as the young scout was, his fears quickly grew. He was without a horse; he was alone in the little hamlet, and many miles stretched between him and his nearest friends. Perhaps the boy's feeling of desolation would have been even more intense if he had known that his companions had recently halted in the same little place and had departed but a few hours before.

In the midst of his alarm Jack became conscious that he was hungry. Some food was still left from the provisions he had brought with him, but in view of the more serious conditions that he now

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was confronting, he decided to save that for the future. Again he reëntered the hut in which the old woman dwelt and, in exchange for a dime, obtained a few of the beans, which formed the great national dish of the Mexican people.

His scanty meal finished, the problem which confronted him returned with redoubled force. As he looked toward the silent hills in the distance the monotonous stretch of the desert sand was all that met his vision. For a brief moment Jack was so utterly miserable that it was all he could do to hold back his tears. He had been taught, however, that giving up was no part of his outfit. If there was no hard work to be done and no difficult problems to be solved then no scouts would be needed. It was just because there were so many perplexing questions that these scouting parties had been sent to assist in gaining information.

His courage somewhat revived by his determination not to give up, the troubled boy at once began a search for a horse. If only he could find even a burro he was satisfied that he would be able to make his way back to his friends, but the most careful search throughout the few adobe houses and outbuildings ended in failure.

It was now shortly after the noon hour. It was plain that help of any kind was not to be found in the little settlement. Why, then, did he wait?

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There had been in his mind the hope that Philippe might return, but that hope had died and Jack by this time felt convinced that his recent companion would not be seen again.

The beans which he had secured provided no real satisfaction for the hungry boy. Sparingly he ate a little of the food he had brought with him. Occasionally he saw the old woman appear in the doorway of the little adobe house and stare at him with curious eyes. Perhaps she was suspicious of his presence and was eager for him to be gone.

Jack had decided that he would remain until the air was cooler and then make an attempt to leave. The actions of the strange Mexican woman had made him suspicious. He was positive that she was not ignorant of the plans of Philippe and that if she were willing to speak she could easily explain why he had gone and in what direction.

The sun was steadily sinking lower in the western sky. The heat of midday, which had been intense, had departed though the air was still warm. Jack concluded that the time for his departure had arrived.

Once more he examined the pistol in his belt which he had brought with him. Satisfied that it was in satisfactory condition he was about to start on his lonely journey—to retrace the way as best

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he might, over which he and Philippe had come from the little American settlement.

Jack's thoughts were interrupted by a shrill call from the old Mexican woman. An unexpected change had come over her manner and he was aware also that she was able to speak to him in his own language.

"You go there," she piped shrilly, pointing, as she spoke, to a small adobe hut that apparently was unoccupied.

Jack laughed good-naturedly as he said: "Why?"

"You go there!" she repeated more excitedly than before.

"Why?" again demanded the young scout.

Instead of replying to his question the woman quickly approached him and grasped his arm. Hobbling along, she insisted upon his following, as she made for the little hut to which she had first pointed.

A strange whim seized upon Jack; he decided to humour the old woman in her desires. It was obvious that she was keenly excited, but her manner did not betray any hostility. Why she was so insistent upon his following her, he could not even surmise. He was well armed and felt no fear of attack.

Good-naturedly he entered the hut and even made no protest when the old crone shut the door

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and left him within. The place had one low window, and to this Jack quickly advanced. The vision through the open space was the same as that on which he had been gazing all day. He inspected the hut, but was unable to discover for what purposes it was used. Part of the roof was gone; the walls crumbling in places, indicated that the little structure had been erected many years before.

Again he returned to the window, and this time he was spellbound at the sight which greeted his eyes. In the distance he saw a band of horsemen riding toward the little hamlet. From their line of direction Jack was convinced that they had come from the mountains.

Jack now recalled the excitement of the old woman who had insisted upon his seeking refuge in the tumble-down structure. Did she know of the band's approach? Had she placed him there for his own safety or to prevent his escape?

The questions were somewhat disturbing, but Jack was so fascinated by the sight before him that—in a measure at least—he ignored them. Indeed, as he watched the movements of the horsemen, for a moment he indulged the hope that friends were coming to his assistance.

As the band drew nearer, however, Jack speedily was convinced that his first surmise had been

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incorrect. Glancing more closely at the approaching men he noted that the rider on the extreme right was none other than Philippe. All were mounted, and there were seven in the band.

Jack's alarm now increased. With Philippe in the party he had good reason to be anxious. He resisted his first impulse to flee, knowing that his flight speedily would be discovered. If the approaching men were enemies they would show no mercy; if they were friends, escape was unnecessary.

For these reasons Jack remained in the hut, still standing by the window, gazing at the men who now were within fifty yards of the little hamlet. He heard their voices; yes, Philippe was in their midst.

Presently the little Mexican dismounted and ran to the small house in which the old woman dwelt, demanding of her where the young gringo had gone. Jack listened intently for her reply, but was unable to hear what she said. Apparently Philippe was satisfied with the information she gave him. At all events, the young scout saw the Mexican turn to his companions and summon a hasty council. The result of this action was that six of the company speedily mounted their horses and at once rode swiftly from the place. They were headed westward as Jack was able to see.

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Why had they gone? He peered in all directions, anxious to discover the cause of their hasty departure, but could think of no explanation. He remained in his hiding-place until he was convinced that all the men except Philippe had departed.

Then it was that Jack decided to leave the hut. Approaching the place where Philippe was standing he demanded of him the reasons why he had left him alone in the wretched little hamlet.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE START FOR CARRIZAL

IN REPLY to Jack's question, Philippe glanced angrily at the boy and then relapsed into his accustomed sullen demeanour.

"Who were those men?" demanded Jack.

"They were friends."

"Where have you been?"

"We go to some place."

"But why?"

"It is not for any gringo to know why," said Philippe.

"What are you going to do now?" inquired Jack slowly, looking sternly at the Mexican as he spoke.

"I shall do nothing. My horse it needs a rest."

There was still an expression of anger in the face of the little Mexican that caused Jack to draw from his belt his large revolver, and—subconsciously—glance carefully at it.

When he looked up he saw that Philippe also had drawn his revolver, and that his eyes were glistening as he watched every movement of the young scout.

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Jack laughed lightly as he thrust his weapon back into his belt; possession of it added materially to his courage. Physically he had slight fear of his wiry little antagonist, but he was suspicious of a certain stealthiness on the part of Philippe.

Doing his utmost to conceal whatever alarm he had, Jack turned again to the Mexican and asked: "Who were the men with you?"

"They were friends, as I told you."

"But why didn't you go away with them?"

"Because I stay here."

"Why do you stay here?"

"Because I wish. It is not for every gringo to ask Philippe Villegas why he stay or what he do."

"Are you going to stay here?" inquired Jack.

"A little while."

"Where are you going then?"

"I shall go to the west. We shall ride toward Carrizal."

"Why do you go there?"

"Because I wish to go."

Jack was silent as he watched the little Mexican who now was seated upon the ground before him. Philippe's back was against the wall of the hut as, with an air of complete indifference, he lighted a cigarette.

Slowly withdrawing from the place Jack walked toward the building in which he thought the horses

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had been placed. As soon as he entered he discovered the beast which had carried him from Columbus. The poor animal, however, was almost exhausted—obviously suffering from the effect of the hard journey it had made.

The treatment of animals by Mexicans was too well known by Jack for him to harbour any doubt concerning what had befallen his faithful animal. Moved by compassion he approached the horse, which was apparently on the verge of falling. In spite of its weakness the poor animal laid back its ears and flinched as Jack drew near.

“The brutes!” muttered the angry young scout. “They don’t know how to treat horses, to say nothing of one another.”

At that moment Jack turned—to behold Philippe standing in the doorway! There was a sneer upon his face as he watched the proceedings; his utter contempt of Jack’s sympathy with an *animal*, was as plain as a pikestaff.

Ignoring the presence and the feelings of Philippe Jack at once busied himself in caring for his horse. He rubbed it down thoroughly and then, from his scanty store of provender, gave it food. Again he rubbed the aching muscles of the poor beast, and then gave it water to drink.

Philippe still had remained standing in the doorway. That the man had not sought food or water

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since his return, and apparently was not wearied by his hard journey, testified to his strength and endurance.

"I hear Villa dead," said Philippe sharply, after a long silence.

"You heard *what*?" demanded Jack, turning abruptly upon the Mexican.

"I hear Villa dead. He was shot by the gringos."

"How did you hear?"

"My friends tell me."

"Where was he shot?"

"In the knee."

"I don't mean in his body," said Jack quickly. "Whereabouts was he in the country when they killed him?"

"They did not kill him."

"But you say he is dead."

"He is dead," repeated Philippe dryly.

"Did they shoot him?"

"So I hear," answered Philippe, a fierce scowl appearing for a moment on his face.

"I don't understand you."

"I hear they shoot him in the knee. I hear they chased him into the mountains. I hear Villa's knee go bad. I hear it has been cut off, but still Villa do not die. At last they cut off more, and Villa is all gone."

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“What do you mean?” asked Jack. “Did he get blood poisoning?”

“That is what I hear. There is no one to care for his bad knee.”

“And you think Villa’s dead?” demanded Jack, glancing into the eyes of his companion.

“I am telling you just the same what is told me,” replied Philippe evasively.

“And your friends say he is dead?”

“My friends say he is dead.”

“Then why are you going to Carrizal?”

“Because my friends go to Carrizal.”

“When are you going to start?”

“Very soon.”

“Are there any Americans there?”

“That is what I hear—many Americans there.”

“Soldiers?”

“*Si muchos soldados por allá.*”

“Have you sent word to any one about the report you heard that Villa is dead?”

“Why send report?” retorted Philippe, his dark eyes again flashing as he spoke.

“If there’s any truth in it,” said Jack, “they ought to know it at Columbus. Has word been sent General Pershing or General Funston?”

“I do not know whether the gringo general has heard or not.”

“And you are going to Carrizal?”

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“I shall go soon.”

“Then I shall go with you.”

Jack's declaration produced no noticeable effect upon Philippe; he betrayed neither pleasure nor annoyance. His ineffable disgust though, as Jack once more devoted himself to the care of his horse, was manifest in his expression.

Jack was far from satisfied that Philippe's affirmations and explanations were correct, but if there was any truth in his report concerning Villa, it was essential that the commander should learn of it speedily.

When General Pershing started southward he was told to “get Villa—dead or alive.” The steadily increasing number of troops which had been sent across the border, and the militia of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona already were on their way. Carranza had presented a note to the United States reviewing the relations between the two countries and protesting very strongly against what he termed the violation of Mexican territory.

This declaration of the Mexican president had caused the American Executive to call still more military units to the Federal service for duty on the frontier and in the mobilization camps. This act of the President was speedily followed by a statement declining to withdraw the American soldiers from Mexican territory. At the same time Secre-

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tary Lansing had sent identical notes informing the Governments of South and Central America of the plans of the United States concerning Mexico. It was explained in these notes that there was no desire on the part of the American people to seize any territory from their neighbouring republic. They were determined, however, to stop the attacks along the border that were being made by bandits and outlaws.

This action apparently did not soothe the feelings of the Mexican president. He demanded that American troops go neither west, east, nor south in Mexico.

Of course, Jack was unaware of the correspondence, as he was also of the events in Washington or in the country farther south. He had been startled by the announcement of Philippe that the leader of the bandits was dead. As has been said, he was skeptical, but there was so much importance in the report—if true—that he felt in duty bound to do his utmost to carry the information to the American leaders. Those who were with the troops were mostly far to the west of the little hamlet in which Jack had been waiting.

It was with a heavy heart that Jack—two hours later—mounted his horse and, in the company of Philippe, departed from Bavispe. He had provisions sufficient for one day—if he used extreme

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care; his water-bottle was filled. But there was nothing for his horse.

These matters, however, troubled him less than did the attitude of his companion. Would Philippe lead him to his recent companions? Were they awaiting his coming? If so, what would be the outcome?

The questions were perplexing—the answers to them disquieting to Jack's troubled heart. However, having once started on the long journey across the desert it was impossible to turn back, so he sturdily preceded his diminutive companion, who asserted that they were on their way to Carizal.

CHAPTER XIX

PARTED

IT WAS slow and difficult work for Steve and his aviator companion when they began their march over the sands of the desert. The two sandwiches and two oranges which each carried formed but a scanty supply of food for the wearisome journey. Besides, they were fearful of losing their way inasmuch as there was no visible sign of a trail in any direction.

Before departing from the place where they had left the aeroplane, they had taken from the radiator all the water that remained. There was not more than a quart of it, and both knew that only by the utmost care could they arrive at the desired destination. Never before had the desert sands impressed Steve as being such a monotonous and complete waste as now. Not a vestige of life was to be seen; not even a buzzard was circling in the sky, nor the cry of a coyote to be heard in the land. The dreary outlook depressed both travellers; conversation flagged as they plodded on their way.

When two hours had elapsed, they halted, at the

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suggestion of Grayson, for a rest. Night would soon be at hand; already the rays of the setting sun had tinged with red the western sky.

As Steve glanced at his companion he was aware that Grayson was much weaker than he. Already he was beginning to feel and to show the strain of the journey. His features were drawn—his breathing laboured. They seated themselves on the sand—which now was warmer than the air about them—and before long Grayson noticeably benefited from the brief rest.

“I’m not in very good shape,” he explained, “because I had four days’ tramping around Sonora. We didn’t have any food or water and I came very close to winding up my affairs in this world.”

“In Sonora?” demanded Steve in surprise.

“Yes. We started from the aviation base on North Island at San Diego. I didn’t anticipate any trouble, but I was mistaken—that’s all. We left San Diego about half-past eight in the morning and planned to go east and cross the mountains to Calexico. Our maps weren’t right, however——”

“I’d like to know one thing that *is* right,” broke in Steve angrily. “The machine gun jammed at Columbus; our boys didn’t have supplies; and they have had to wait a long time before they could start after Villa!”

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“We had a compass, though, and I tried to steer our course by it. I held my course to twenty-five degrees north of east. I thought that would put us into the Imperial Valley probably, well north of the border, and then all that we’d have to do would be to sail south about fifty miles. In order to go over the high mountains though, it was necessary for me to average more than seven thousand feet. We were so high that I didn’t expect the very strong north wind, which met me, head on, when I came over the mountains; it was so strong that I then turned to the southeast.

“I had gone about thirty minutes after I changed the direction when I saw through the haze a large body of water. We decided that it must be the Salton Sea. The only map I had showed the Salton Sea a good deal farther south than I thought we then were. By this time our gas was almost gone, so the only thing for us to do was to keep on going in the direction in which we were headed, if we were to strike Calexico. We both of us thought we were headed in the right direction. We made our mistake in not figuring as we ought on the drift of our machine. It was too hazy for us to see any of the land very clearly, and the wind had been so strong that we must have gone much faster than we imagined.

“We thought if the water we saw really *was* the

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Salton Sea that there must be a station on the Southern Pacific not far away. We made up our mind that we would stop and investigate. When we tried to land we had the job almost finished when we struck some soft ground and the plane tipped up. We didn't take much time in finding out that we weren't anywhere near the Salton Sea and then we decided that the only thing that we could do was to walk back to the Imperial Valley."

"How long ago was that?" inquired Steve.

"About four days ago. We travelled night and day and on that trip I was the one that stood it all right. The man who was with me soon tired out and we didn't make much headway. We kept on going, however, and after a while some parties rescued us. I made a mistake though in thinking that I was strong enough to keep on here. I tried another machine, as you know, but it doesn't seem to be in very much better condition than the first one."

"I'm afraid they aren't any of them in good condition," growled Steve. "Now when you're rested we had better start on again."

Grayson offered no protest and although the night was upon them they resumed their toilsome journey. Steadily they moved across the desert; to walk rapidly was impossible—the sand was heavy and every step required a special effort.

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Within an hour, aware that this time his companion was suffering keenly, Steve suggested another halt, and Grayson gladly accepted the suggestion. When they had seated themselves Steve said:

“I think we had better have our dinner. We can eat a sandwich and an orange.”

“But that wouldn’t leave us much,” protested Grayson.

“True,” acknowledged Steve, “but we’re getting nearer the border all the time and when we once cross it we’ll probably find somebody who will help us out.”

Grayson did not require much urging. He offered no further protest and almost ravenously devoured his little sandwich, and then the orange.

“We’ll save our other oranges a little longer,” suggested Steve. “Perhaps they’ll take the place of a drink and we haven’t water enough to carry us very far.”

The stop was only the second of many which occurred during the long hours of the night. Each halt was longer than the preceding one and the weakness of Grayson steadily became more apparent. Indeed, there were moments when Steve was fearful that his companion would give out altogether and be unable to continue on his way.

“Are you perfectly sure of the direction?” inquired Grayson feebly.

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"I'm pretty sure," answered Steve hesitatingly.

The truth of the matter was that they had neglected to bring their compass from the aeroplane and as a consequence Steve was compelled to shape their course by the stars.

"If you don't know the way," said Grayson wearily, "then I think we had better stop and die here. It's just as easy here as anywhere, and I don't know but we're just as likely to find some one to help us."

"Can't you go on?" inquired Steve quickly.

"I could go a *little* farther, but what's the use?"

"How will it do," inquired Steve, "for you to stay here and for me to go on alone? I think I can stand it, and if I get help we'll return straight here for you."

"I don't care what you do," answered Grayson in a low voice. The young aviator was so weak that he was sobbing as he spoke and Steve's heart was moved with a deep sympathy at the wretched plight of his comrade.

"I think that's what I'll do," he said, striving to speak hopefully. "You may have to be here twenty-four hours, and then again it may be that I'll rejoin you before that time."

Grayson agreed, and Steve at once departed. He now had his remaining sandwich, an orange, and

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a small can of water. He was far from sure that his journey would be successfully accomplished; indeed the young scout had lost his way. The peril of his position, however, and the necessity of securing help for Grayson were strong incentives to fresh determination, so he increased the speed at which he was walking. After the first mile or so, Steve, in desperation, began to run, but he had not run far when he found that his strength was unequal to such a strain. He stumbled and fell; his fears and dismay redoubled. Before resuming his weary march he devoured his sandwich and his orange and drank half the water he was carrying. Then, after a brief rest, he felt somewhat refreshed, and again set out across the sands.

He had not gone far before once more his strength failed him. Dark despair settled upon him. For a moment he was tempted to follow Grayson's example and abandon his attempt to find help, but again he felt that the very necessity of the case required a corresponding determination on his part.

His tongue was parched, his mouth dry, and his feet were sore when the morning light appeared. As he looked about him he knew he had lost his bearings. His fear that he had taken a wrong direction was now acute. The courageous boy, however, still plunged doggedly forward, as his feet

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sank in the treacherous sands. It was a time of black despair.

His thoughts at that moment were abruptly diverted from his own peril. Looking behind him he saw a sight which immediately caused him to stop and throw himself prostrate on the desert.



“It was a time of black despair”

CHAPTER XX

A SUSPICIOUS CRIME

STEVE—at the moment described at the close of the preceding chapter—was unaware how much time had elapsed since he had begun his journey. His suffering had been so acute and he was so nearly exhausted that he had lost count of the passing hours.

The sight that had startled him was the approaching, from the direction in which he had left his companion, of several men on horseback. The exhausted boy, as soon as he had seen the horsemen, acted upon the first impulse that came to him, and threw himself at full length upon the desert.

For a time Steve was not convinced that he really *had* seen any men approaching. There were moments when it seemed to him that he had been dreaming—that the figures were not those of living bodies. This belief was strengthened when, twice, he partly raised his head and gazed behind him. At his third glance, however, he saw the men. His fear now was real.

In suspense he remained motionless. As the

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moments passed slowly, he more than once felt that he must rise and flee. But recollections of the experiences through which he and his friends had passed at Bavispe were still fresh in his mind. Indeed there still was a lump on the top of his head which had been caused by a missile thrown by one of the angry mob.

There were moments, too, when Steve experienced a strange indifference to the current events—felt almost unaware of his predicament. His thoughts wandered; twice he called loudly to his father for help, temporarily believing himself to be once more at home on the ranch.

At last the horsemen drew near the spot where Steve was lying; the young scout was aware of their approach. The outlines of their forms loomed large before him—like great shadows moving across the desert. On nearing the boy, the band halted, and together the seven men—for the little company was composed of that number—dismounted and surrounded the prostrate young scout.

Again Steve's mind began to wander. It seemed to him that he recognized the voice of Carlos, his father's foreman, and that the Mexican tenderly lifted him in his arms. He had a dim sensation as of some support placed beneath his head, and that a few drops of water were poured into his throat. He fancied that his legs and arms were

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being rubbed by the men—that he overheard snatches of conversation. The horses were standing near by and from one of them a blanket was taken upon which Steve was tenderly lifted. In a few minutes more water was given him and already the exhausted boy was beginning to recover.

Consciousness regained, Steve looked steadily at Carlos—Carlos in the flesh, not a creature of dreamland.

Suddenly it flashed upon Steve's mind that, far behind him, he had left a companion in a far worse plight than he.

"Is that you, Carlos?" he whispered faintly.

"*Si.* It's Carlos. What can I do?"

"I left a man on the desert." Steve was doing his best to make himself heard, and that he had succeeded was at once apparent from the actions of the men surrounding him.

"Where? Where did you leave him?" inquired Carlos excitedly.

"Back on the desert."

"How far?"

"I do not know."

"In which direction?"

"I cannot say. I think I must have been travelling around in a circle."

"Where did you start from?"

"Bavispe. I started with a man in an aeroplane."

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“Where is the aeroplane?” The dark eyes of Carlos were glowing and acted upon the boy almost like an electric shock. The ranchman in a low voice gave directions to his friends with the result that a little food was given the helpless young scout.

Quickly refreshed and strengthened, Steve resumed his story.

“There were five of us scouts, but a man in an aeroplane landed where we were and he wanted one of us to accompany him, and I was selected. We ran out of gasolene and had to land. All we had to eat was two sandwiches and two oranges each. After landing we started on foot in the direction in which we thought Columbus was, but the other man gave out and I kept on alone. How far am I from Columbus?”

“About twenty miles,” answered Carlos.

“Then I must have lost my way. Will you look for Grayson? That’s the name of the man I left back on the desert.”

“We’ll look for him,” answered Carlos quickly.

Turning to his companions the ranchman gave a few sharp directions that two parties, of two horsemen each, speedily and separately depart in search of the stranded aviator. Steve watched them silently until they faded from sight in the distance.

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Food again was now given the suffering boy whose strength was returning.

Carlos, with two of his companions, remained with Steve and was apparently doing his utmost to relieve the wants of the young scout. Steve looked wonderingly at the Mexican, undecided whether or not he had misjudged the man—whether he *had* stolen certain valuable saddles at the ranch; whether he *was* working in sympathy with the leader of the Mexican bandits.

However, Steve was still too fatigued to devote much time to these thoughts and it was not long before he was sleeping soundly.

How long he had been asleep he did not know when at last his eyes opened and he found himself staring into the full blaze of the sun. Carlos and the two men were near by. From their actions Steve thought they were somewhat restive. All three were peering intently across the desert in the direction in which the two searching parties had gone.

Steve partly arose as soon as he was awake.

“How you feel now?” inquired the Mexican.

“Better—a good deal better,” answered Steve.

“I think I can go on now.”

“You want to go before we find your friend?”

“I don't *want* to,” answered Steve, “but I was thinking that if we went back to Columbus to

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report, more parties would be sent to locate Grayson."

"That may be so," acknowledged Carlos slowly, as he again scanned the horizon. "We'll wait two hours," he said at last. "If by then they do not return, we will go back."

At frequent intervals food was given Steve; where it had been stored the puzzled boy was unable to conjecture. He asked no questions, however; his strength was returning, and, with it, came renewed hope and determination.

When the two hours fixed by Carlos had elapsed, he came to Steve and said:

"We'll leave these two men here to wait for the man from the flying-machine. You and I will go back to Columbus."

For a moment Steve did not reply. He looked keenly into Carlos's face, but was unable to obtain any enlightenment from his expression. Was the man in the employ of Villa? Had he been false to his employer? Steve thought over the years since he had known him, and, somehow, his faith overcame his fear. He said:

"I am ready to go. You'll have to ride slowly for I cannot walk fast."

"You shall not walk at all," said Carlos. "We will take one of these men's horses."

"How will *he* get away?"

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“There will be no trouble,” answered Carlos positively. “You and I will start now and it will not be long before you will be back in your father’s house.”

“But I don’t like to leave Grayson back there.”

“He shall be brought, too. Just as soon as found, he shall be brought to Columbus. I will bring word to you.”

“But I can’t stay there very long,” again protested Steve. “I must leave with the next body of scouts.”

For a moment a flash of anger appeared in Carlos’s eyes, but the expression quickly passed, and without any further conversation the Mexican quickly saddled two of the horses for their departure.

The poor beasts were gaunt and their flanks betrayed their lack of food and water. Neither animal was fit for a journey of twenty miles across the hot sands. However, there was no other way of escape. Carlos assisted Steve to mount one of the horses, and, himself mounting the other, both started northward.

CHAPTER XXI

UNDERGROUND

STEVE soon discovered that, despite the slow pace at which he and Carlos were moving, it needed all his strength to enable him to stay in the saddle. Between his suspicions of his companion—which at times mounted to positive alarm—and his realization of the weakness under which he was labouring, young Stephen Lait's plight was not a happy one.

Occasionally he glanced behind him, half fearful that Carlos's men would not remain where they had been bidden.

Carlos seldom spoke, but his manner indicated supreme confidence in his ability to conduct them both to the Post at Columbus, and this was comforting to the young scout.

Although moving slowly, Steve soon could no longer see his recent companions. He, too, lapsed into silence. The steady pace at last began to tell and, as Steve glanced at the sun, he knew that they must have advanced several miles from the point of their recent departure.

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“We shall stop to rest soon,” said Carlos encouragingly.

“Where?” inquired Steve.

“There’s the place; it is not more than one mile. You can see the chimney now.”

As he spoke, Carlos pointed to an object in the distance, which Steve had confused with some of the high cactus stalks that in this part of the desert were quite common.

“It is a place,” said Carlos, “where there was once a monastery and a church. The buildings have been burned—all but a part of the walls and the high chimney of the house in which the monks used to live.”

“Who destroyed the buildings?” inquired Steve, looking keenly in the direction of the chimney.

“It is not known. The place was not all burned, but the sun and the rain they—what you call it?—crumbled away what is left of the walls. It was a Mission.”

“I never heard of it,” said Steve. Carlos shrugged his shoulders, as he said quietly: “It has been gone many years. I know the place and it is a good place for us to stop for our rest.” Steve, not unmindful of his own needs, suggested lightly:

“It will be fine, Carlos, if somebody is there with something for us to eat.”

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"There will be somebody there," answered Carlos quickly.

"Who?"

"*I shall*; and I shall have something for you to eat." As he spoke, Carlos placed his hand upon one of the bags which had been strapped upon the back of the pony he was riding.

The prospect of rest and food acted as a stimulus to the weary young scout. Even the horses seemed to respond; the pace of both animals increased. The ruined chimney and the remains of the old walls now became more distinct as the two drew nearer. Steve was able to trace the outline of the ruins of the old building which doubtless had disappeared many years before. Whether or not it was an old Mission, as Carlos had explained, Steve had his doubts, but the fact that a resting place was at hand was most welcome. Conversation ceased till they arrived and dismounted.

Here a small quantity of food was produced by Carlos and also—from some source unknown to Steve—a little forage for their weary horses. Both men devoured the scant provision which had been made for their wants, Carlos remarking:

"We shall rest after we have had our dinner."

Steve smiled; he was familiar with the Mexican midday siesta. Even in the busy season on his father's ranch the Mexicans insisted upon an

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interval of rest in the middle of the day, and Steve himself, though eager to be back at Columbus, raised no objection to the suggested siesta. Indeed, it was not long before he was asleep, lying upon the sand with his head pillowed upon his arms.

He was awakened by the soft touch of Carlos, who lightly drew his fingers across the face of the sleeping boy.

"It is time to wake up," whispered Carlos.

"Where am I?" demanded Steve, as he sat quickly erect and in confusion glanced about him.

"You are at the Mission," explained Carlos, "but we must go below."

"Go *where*?" demanded Steve, now thoroughly awake.

"You shall look close to the ground and you shall tell what you see."

Startled by the imperative manner of the Mexican, Steve hastily followed his direction and bending low looked across the desert. Even he was startled by the sight he beheld—the outlines of a band consisting of at least ten or twelve men who were coming directly toward the ruins of the old building.

"They shall not find us here," said Carlos.

"Then we must start."

"No, they shall catch us if we start."

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“What, then, shall we do?”

“You shall come with me.”

“Where?”

Carlos did not reply in words, but, seizing the young scout by his arm, he hastily drew him toward a corner of the low wall. There, to the great surprise of Steve, what appeared to be a broken door was opened, and before him he saw stone steps leading into a vault below the ruins.

“What is it?” he demanded in a low voice.

“Where does it go?”

“It does not go,” said Carlos sharply. “It is *you* that shall go.”

“Are you coming?”

“*Si. ¡ Presto !* Be quick!” As he spoke Carlos, and Steve, too, again looked through the ruined wall. The band was now much nearer, and the young scout was able to count its number—thirteen!

“That’s an unlucky number,” he said to himself as he turned again to Carlos.

“You shall come. You shall be quick,” muttered the Mexican, pulling Steve with him as he spoke.

“But what is to become of our horses?” protested Steve.

“They shall be left.”

“But the bandits will take them.”

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“*Si*, yes; they shall take them.”

“Then we shan’t have any horses.”

“They shall much better take horses than take our lives. You shall come; you shall come.”

Startled by the genuine anxiety of his companion, Steve yielded, and in a moment both were behind the door which Carlos now closed and barred. Steve had noticed a heavy wooden bar which plainly did not belong to the years that were gone.

As soon as the bar had been dropped into its place Carlos led the way through an underground passage toward a column of light which appeared at the farther end. There was no dampness in the passageway, but it seemed certain that sunlight seldom had penetrated it since the ancient building had fallen in ruins.

When they reached the place where the light penetrated, Carlos showed his young friend how they were able to look out upon the desert in almost every direction. The sight of the approaching band fascinated Steve. When at last the horsemen came near the ruins, he found that they were all strangers to him; he could not recognize one of them.

Following the example of Carlos, he looked carefully to his weapons; somehow he scented danger. The sight of the abandoned horses (although Carlos

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had removed saddles and bridles and all their belongings before he had turned them loose) would—to say the least—arouse the curiosity of the men outside, even if they had not already discovered the whereabouts of himself and Carlos.

“It’s a band from Francisco Villa. He has sent his soldiers here,” whispered Carlos excitedly.

Steve—who, as we know, had been suspicious of Carlos—looked hastily at his companion. The expression upon the Mexican’s face, so far from indicating pleasure at the arrival of the men whom he declared to belong to Villa’s bandit horde, betrayed real fear.

Neither spoke while they watched the men outside. The discovery of the two horses plainly puzzled them. There was a hasty and excited discussion while the horses were carefully examined in order if possible to throw light on their mysterious presence in the desert so far from any ranch.

The excitement of the watchers, however, was greatly increased when they saw the leader of the men evidently approaching the spot where the secret door had been found by Carlos. He must have known of the door, and apparently was surprised to find that it resisted his efforts to open it.

Steve’s alarm became still greater when he heard the leader of the bandits, in a fit of rage, order his companions to take some of the big loose stones

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that once had formed the foundation of the building and hurl them at the door.

This order was obeyed with alacrity and zest but, for a time, in vain.

The attempts had to be repeated several times before the massive door gave way. Then, with loud shouts, the leader and several of his companions dashed into the underground refuge.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE RUINS

THE suspicion which Steve had entertained (that Carlos might be in league with the attacking party) now was dispelled. The fear of the Mexican was unfeigned—was as great as that of his young companion.

Without a word Carlos instantly seized Steve by his right arm and pulled him forward through the passage, and then, to Steve's amazement, stopped before another closed door. This second door was speedily opened by Carlos, who, as soon as they had passed into the space beyond, closed and barred it.

There was light just sufficient to enable Steve to look about him at the interior of the place in which he now found himself. He and Carlos were in a circular excavation which at first he believed to be an abandoned well. A dim light came in through the top of the excavation which Steve was persuaded had been covered with thin boards or glass, sprinkled with sand.

The second refuge was then abandoned while a

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third was found connected by a passageway of only a few yards beyond the one which they had just left. There were no doors or bars in this place and Steve noticed that they were higher than they had been before. When Carlos drew back a slide an inch and admitted more light Steve saw that there was also another panel on the opposite side. The slide which Carlos had opened was sufficiently large to enable one to thrust out his head so that he could see in all directions. For the first time Steve suspected that the underground passageways had led directly beneath the ruined chimney and that the place in which they now were standing was a part of that structure.

Whether his surmise was correct or not, both fugitives halted and the excitement of each was plain as they listened intently for the sounds in the passageway through which they had fled.

In low whispers Carlos said that he did not believe their pursuers were aware of the second exit.

“What would happen if they should find it?” whispered Steve.

Carlos shook his head and for a moment was silent.

“They shall not hear. We shall be safe. We shall——”

The Mexican stopped abruptly and grasped his companion so roughly by his left arm that the

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imprint of his fingers must have been left upon his flesh.

"I hear somebody," he whispered a moment later.

"Yes, it is so," replied the Mexican. "It is Luis."

Steve was unaware who Luis was. The fact that Carlos spoke of him as he did for a moment revived his suspicions. Was it possible that his father's foreman after all was in league with the bandit gang?

There was no way by which the pursuers could at present be seen. The door was closed and heavily barred. The sole hope of the fugitives was that it would withstand any assault that might be made upon it.

Silence rested over all. No footstep or voice on the opposite side of the door was audible. In the dim light the stones in the wall appeared to be the hiding-places of uncanny creatures that even then might be crawling upon them. The nervous fear that before had swept over Steve now returned with redoubled force. He felt as if he were being smothered. He wanted to cry aloud for help. He reached forth and touched the shoulder of Carlos to convince himself that the whole affair was real—not part of a nightmare.

At that moment Carlos, by climbing the stones, mounted to a place where he could withdraw the

IN THE RUINS

slide and peer out upon the ground. Almost fascinated, Steve watched him anxiously. It seemed to him that the Mexican had become a part of his noiseless surroundings. Motionless as the stones upon which he was standing, Carlos remained looking out upon the desert.

At last, unable longer to bear the strain, Steve advanced and plucked at the feet of his companion. Somehow the load seemed to be lifted from his heart when, in response, Carlos slowly turned his head and looked down upon the frightened boy. Still the Mexican did not speak. After one more long look through the partly opened slide Carlos pushed the board back into its place, then stepped down, and rejoined his companion.

"What did you see?" whispered Steve eagerly.

"I saw three men with the horses."

"Do you know who they are?"

"I do not, though I think one is the brother of Luis."

"Who is this Luis?"

"He's one of the Villistas."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

Carlos did not reply, for at that very moment startling sounds came from the opposite side of the door. Voices plainly were heard. Some one was giving directions to others.

An attempt was made by the party to force the

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door, but because of its heavy bar, the effort was a failure. The voices now grew louder. The leader was incensed at finding his way barred.

A second attempt to open the door was equally fruitless. Both Carlos and Steve were holding their pistols ready as they leaned forward listening to the sounds that greeted their ears.

A silence, tense and prolonged, followed the second effort to break open the door.

"They have given it up," suggested Steve in a whisper.

Carlos shook his head, but did not otherwise reply.

The Mexican's opinion presently was confirmed when, without warning, a heavy stone was thrown against the door. The suddenness of the attack almost caused Steve to call aloud in his fear, but the presence of Carlos restrained him.

Tremblingly they both awaited a further onslaught; nor did they wait long. Again and again the heavy stone was thrown against the door until it seemed as if the boards must be shattered. Still the thick planks resisted; still no apparent progress had been made by the besiegers.

"Can we get out of here?" whispered Steve in a pause between the assaults.

"I do not think there is room when I pull back the slide," whispered Carlos in reply. "Do not

IN THE RUINS

talk," he added. "Do not even ask any question. I shall wait."

The waiting was prolonged. Repeated attempts to smash the heavy doorway all failed. After the seventh attack silence again reigned. For a brief space Steve was hopeful that the assault had been abandoned. He glanced frequently at the slide which Carlos recently had opened. The young scout was fearful that Luis also might be aware of the chamber in the old chimney—that he might try to enter the passageway from that spot.

Suddenly an eighth and a furious struggle was made to batter in the protecting door. What plainly was a heavy timber of some kind had been secured by the attacking party and was being used as a battering ram. Held firmly in the hands of several men it was driven with terrific force against the door. And the door itself now threatened to give way before the onslaught.

"Can't we get out of here?" whispered Steve again to Carlos.

"I shall see," answered the Mexican.

Hastily turning again to the slide he examined it with renewed care—likewise the one on the opposite side. In a moment he rejoined Steve and whispered:

"It may be that we can crawl through, but you are not strong."

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"I'm strong enough to get out," answered Steve. Evidently fear—and the desire to escape—had done much to stimulate his activity.

"We might fight our way, I reckon," said Steve. "Do you think," he added, "I can crawl through the opening?"

"I shall go first and I shall help you when you come. But" (in a whisper still more tragic) "if the door shall not break we shall stay here some more."

Agreeing with the wisdom of his companion's suggestion, Steve, nevertheless, moved nearer the place through which they were to attempt escape if the door failed to protect them.

At that moment Steve's fear returned in full force when, from the passageway, there came the sound of loud shouts and calls. In the midst of the confusion the battering ram again was called into use, and a renewed onslaught was made upon the door.

Carlos hastily ran to the slide, but after he had drawn it a few inches and peered out he quickly turned and said:

"There are three men standing close to the chimney. We shall not get past them. Every one has a rifle in his hands. We shall not get away."

"But we *must*!" protested Steve.

Carlos shook his head disconsolately whereupon

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Steve's suspicion again revived. Was his companion in league with the man he had called Luis? Just then a renewed assault upon the door was made—and this time the panels were shattered and the door itself was broken.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FLIGHT OF CAPTORS

THE resounding crash that accompanied the smashing of the door echoed and reëchoed through the long passageway. The young scout feared the worst. Behind him were enemies; in front of him was the exit which Carlos had explained was too small. A second crash in the door behind them caused both fugitives to dart forward. Soon they were both standing in the circular room where the sliding panels had been found. Without a word Carlos drew back one of the slides and did his utmost to crawl through.

In ordinary circumstances, Steve would have laughed at the exhibition the Mexican presented. Not only was he unable to squeeze through, but also he was unable to return; he was held fast as in a trap.

At that moment shouts were heard in the passageway and these now were answered by shouts that came from without the building. The plight of Steve and his companion was desperate. In every direction were enemies.

The report of a rifle sounded outside the building.

A FLIGHT OF CAPTORS

A low cry escaped the lips of Carlos which caused the young scout once more to attempt to release him. Carlos had been shot. All of Steve's efforts to assist him were unavailing. From the failure of Carlos to respond to his questions, Steve was convinced that the man was dead. His body blocking the opening, killed Steve's chance of escape by that exit. Behind him were men who now were almost upon him.

It is true that Steve still held his revolver and that his rifle was slung over his shoulder, but the boy was in a tight corner.

His first impulse was to back against the wall and shoot at the first man to approach.

Fortunately—as the event proved—Steve decided not to attack. Even as this decision was made, the leader of the band, a dark-faced man who was perspiring freely, rushed upon him. Steve concluded that this must be Luis, the man of whom Carlos had spoken.

Just as the leader was about to lay hands upon Steve, he caught sight of the body stuck fast in the open slide.

Instantly turning upon Carlos, Luis spoke to him (in Spanish). Receiving no reply, he went closer. He then saw that the man was dead.

“What is this?” he demanded, turning fiercely upon Steve. “Who did this?”

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"Somebody outside," answered Steve.

"When was it?"

"Just a minute ago. Just before you came in here. I tried to pull him out, but I couldn't do it. He is fast in there and I think he is dead."

"He *is* dead," acknowledged Luis, again examining the body. "You take hold with me and we'll pull him through."

Together they were able to withdraw the corpse. One glance was sufficient to convince both that life was extinct. Shocked as Steve was by the sudden death of his recent companion he nevertheless was impressed by the matter-of-fact way in which Luis accepted the situation. The latter, turning toward Steve, said:

"Why were you with him?"

"He helped me," said Steve. "I was on the desert, stranded and almost gone. He used to work for my father."

"Where?" demanded Luis sharply.

"On a ranch not far from Columbus."

"Why you in here?"

"Because Carlos saw you coming and he did not know who you were."

"Carlos he know me," said Luis sharply. "He no run away from me. Why you come down here?"

"I told you," answered Steve.

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“You come with me,” ordered Luis.

Abruptly turning about, he advanced through the passageway. When they came to the exit he ordered Steve to remain in hiding while he went forth to discover what were the conditions outside, as well as to consult with his followers who now had withdrawn from the underground way. Shortly he returned and said sharply:

“You come with me.”

Steve, in obedience to the demand of his captor—for as such he regarded Luis—had given up his revolver and rifle. Consequently he was unarmed and quite at the mercy of the Mexican. Luis’s low brow and small piercing eyes were not indicative of mercy—should mercy be asked. Steve silently eyed his captor and, as a result, his worst fears were confirmed. There was little (that was not evil) for him to expect from the man into whose hands Fate had cast him.

Obediently he followed Luis as the latter led the way out of the underground passage. As soon as they stood once more in the outer air Steve saw that three men, evidently companions of the bandit, were standing near, each holding a horse by its bridle. In addition were the two horses that Steve and Carlos had ridden, and another one—evidently Luis’s. When Steve glanced out over the desert he saw the forms of nine horsemen speeding

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rapidly southward. He conjectured that they were members of the band. One of them had caused the death of Carlos.

The young scout's attention, however, was quickly drawn to the problem which immediately confronted him. A consultation—plainly showing a decided difference of opinion—followed, but as the men spoke in Spanish and their voices were very low, Steve was unable to hear what was said.

In the midst of the discussion one of the Mexicans abruptly turned and stared at something he had discerned on the desert far to the north. Steve also looked, and his excitement instantly was as great as that of the Mexicans, all four of whom now were talking eagerly and gesticulating wildly as they pointed toward the startling sight they had seen. Indeed, one of the men grasped Luis by his shoulders and, peering intently into his face, began to talk still more vigorously.

Throughout this interview the prisoner was ignored; the greater interest which had been aroused apparently had caused him to be neglected. He, however, was aware that if he should attempt flight, he would immediately be shot.

In spite of his excitement he was watching the Mexicans, but he was not prepared for the sudden action which followed. Without a word to him all four hastily mounted their horses and, leading the

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two that Steve and Carlos had ridden, they galloped from the place.

What was the meaning of the sudden flight? From watching the departing band Steve turned to observe again the sight that had alarmed them. No horse had been left; consequently he was unable—except on foot—to leave the place. He watched the approach of the body which had been discovered miles away, and soon discerned that it was composed of several mounted men.

While he was watching them he discovered, far behind them, *another* moving body. Like some huge snake it seemed to be crawling over the sands of the desert.

For a moment hope returned to him and he was almost persuaded to advance to meet them. There was no question now that the men in front formed the advance guard of the larger body behind them. Occasionally the men halted and waited, apparently for the train behind to overtake them. Steve was convinced now that he understood what the sight implied. A train of motor trucks, doubtless laden with supplies for the troops that had gone far to the south, was now slowly following. The train was escorted by some of the United States troops who formed an advance and rear guard for the supplies.

The boy could not tell whether the approaching

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train would come near the place where he was waiting. If they passed he would be left alone without food or water and without any means of escaping from the region. The fear was so strong upon him that he started to run toward the men, who now could be distinctly seen in the distance.

Speedily he realized that he could not reach the column in time, and, stopping once more to watch the men, he decided to return to the place where he had been waiting and make his presence known by signalling. Climbing the chimney he shouted in his loudest tones as he waved his hat in his endeavours to attract the attention of the soldiers. It was not long before success crowned his efforts, for he saw the men turn slightly in their course and ride swiftly toward the ruins of the old Mission building.

So great was Steve's elation that he hastily retired from his elevated position and resumed his place on the ground. He was able to discern the faces and the uniforms of the approaching soldiers. Steve was almost persuaded that he recognized some of the men.

When the horsemen rode swiftly up to the place and dismounted, his surprise knew no bounds as among them he recognized Jack and Tom and Bert.

It would be difficult to state positively whose sur-

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prise was greatest for Jack now realized that Steve was the lone man whose signal had been seen by the advance guard of the motor trucks.

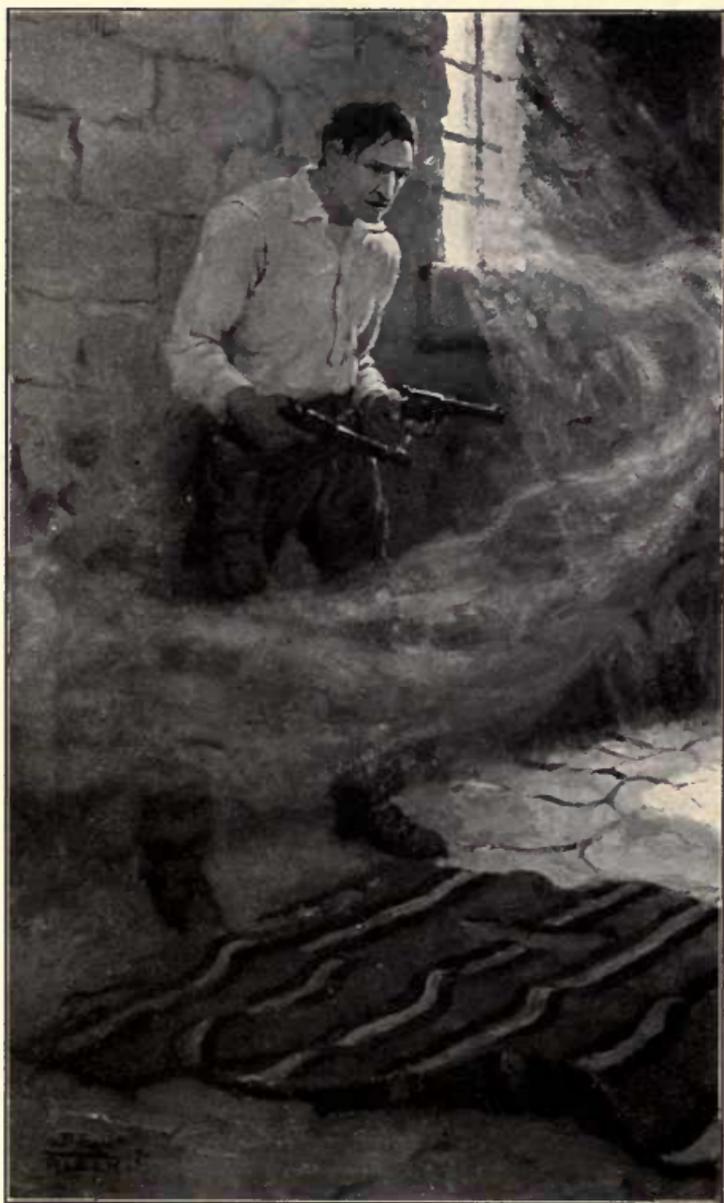
As he approached Steve, Jack was horrified to see him fall to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIV

TO CARRIZAL

JACK—the thread of whose fortunes we now take up from the close of Chapter XVIII—was unaware, when he began his long journey with Philippe to Carrizal, of the steps which had been taken by the Government at Washington to assist the expedition of General Pershing. Calls from the President for various military units for federal service on the frontier had been made and mobilization camp duty was being performed in many places. Troops from various states were pouring into Mexico and as rapidly as possible the military authorities were organizing and carrying out their plans. General Pershing, however, was meeting with obstacles that for a time seemed to block his way.

The Mexican Government had refused to allow him to use the railroads to transport his troops and also had refused to permit him to equip and ration his soldiers on the Mexican side of the border. In order to meet this condition a motor-service was organized. The war department was obliged to



“His first impulse was to back against the wall and shoot at the first man to approach”

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purchase trucks in different parts of the country and send them to the border. Much time was required for these and many other details.

As we now know, the army, at the time of the attack by Villa, was short of equipment; the deficiencies had to be made up. The little force, too, was operating in a country where supplies could not be bought. Almost every pound of rations required by the troops had to be carried into Mexico, for nearly two hundred miles, by motors. Neither going nor coming back was the army able to avail itself of the railroads.

Not from these causes only was the difficulty confronting the American general perplexing; the expense of the expedition increased by leaps and bounds. It was estimated at Washington that to maintain General Pershing's expeditionary force of 12,000 men in Mexico, \$14,000,000 a month was required. Plainly it was costing much and in many ways to "get Villa."

That Jack, when he set forth on his journey, was unaware of these details, was fortunate. Much of his attention was required for a careful watch upon his companion; he could not rely upon Philippe. There were even occasions when it seemed to him that the young Mexican was about to fire at him. Whether or not Jack's impression was correct, on each occasion he hastily drew his own revolver—

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and Philippe pretended to be busy with other matters.

On the second day the two riders fell in with many Mexican soldiers. All seemed to be moving in one direction and although Philippe said that they were Carranzists Jack had his doubts on the point. A few of the soldiers wore complete uniforms; some wore parts of uniforms; but many more were without anything to indicate, so far as their garb was concerned, that they were engaged in a military expedition.

It was a motley assembly that Jack and Philippe joined. Some of the men were old and feeble, others so young that they looked not more than twelve or fourteen years old. All of them had rifles, however, and Philippe explained with a sardonic grin that the weapons had all been made in the United States and brought across the border.

In response to the many inquiries Jack made as to why there were so many of Carranza's troops in this locality, Philippe declared that Carranza had an army of a million men. When Jack laughed at the wild statement, Philippe's cheeks flushed with anger and Jack abruptly decided that for the present at least he would not dispute his companion's words, however exaggerated they might be.

Food and water were supplied by the Mexican soldiers and Jack's fears for his immediate wants

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subsided. He had no desire, however, to continue with the odd party, but he was unable—or deemed it unwise—to attempt to desert it.

For several days the body moved slowly across the desert, no semblance of military order being maintained. The officers were almost as brutal toward their men as in the treatment of their horses.

With the passing hours Jack's desire to withdraw became stronger, but he was aware that not only Philippe but others were watchful of his every movement. The young gringo was not merely an object of suspicion, but also, apparently, of hatred among the troops. Under such circumstances he was aware that his sole hope of safety depended upon his affecting seemingly pleasant relations with his companions. Besides, the young scout was not without hope that he might obtain information which would be of value to the commander of the American expedition.

At last the party arrived at its destination. Carrizal was familiar to Jack as the name of a place of which he had frequently heard; never before had he been within its limits.

Before he had been long in the town, he was amazed to meet Tom and Bert there. Their experiences had been not unlike his own, inasmuch as they, too, had been found by some motley soldiers of Carranza with whom they had journeyed across

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the desert. They had arrived at Carrizal the preceding day and explained that in the town were already gathered a goodly number of American soldiers and scouting parties. There were, however, within the limits of the place more Mexican soldiers than Americans.

"I'm telling you," said Tom earnestly in a low voice, "that these greasers mean trouble for us."

"But Philippe says they are all Carranza's men," replied Jack.

"I don't know whose men they are, but they're all alike. You skin a Mexican and you find a greaser."

"I don't believe that," said Jack. "I've known a good many of them that were good straight men."

"I've known a good many of them," broke in Bert, "and never saw a good straight man in the whole body."

Jack did not dispute his companion's statement, for at that moment Philippe drew near and said that Jack and his companions were to go with him to quarters which had been assigned them.

Both Tom and Bert at first were inclined to demur. As soon, however, as it was explained that for the sake of safety as well as for convenience the Americans were to have quarters apart from the others, they readily assented and followed Philippe.

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When they arrived, Jack was astonished at the number of Americans there. They were still greatly outnumbered by the Mexicans, who were all armed with rifles, but—inasmuch as Philippe emphatically repeated his first declaration, that all the soldiers belonged to Carranza's forces and would help the gringoes "get Villa"—the boy's fears were allayed.

In spite of his weariness Jack was fully awake to the importance of the conversation that took place between him and his two companions when they had arrived at their quarters.

"I'm telling you," said Tom positively, "that this is no place for us."

"Why don't we leave, then?" demanded Bert.

"You know as well as I," growled Tom. "The greasers have us surrounded and the minute we try to get loose they'll get after us."

"They will if we don't go after them," assented Bert. "The thing for us to do is to get in first, the way the Japs did with the Russians. Don't give the other fellow a chance to hit back but get in your own fine work before he knows what you're up to."

"We can't do that now," said Tom. "They've got us here in a pen and if the Carranza troops are really on Villa's side we've got our work cut out for us."

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“But Carranza and Villa hate each other and their men aren’t wasting any affection on the other fellows,” suggested John.

“That may all be true,” acknowledged Bert, “when you have a greaser fighting a greaser, but when a white man comes down here you’ll find that there isn’t any such thing as Carranza’s and Villa’s men. They’re all greasers, united to drive out the gringo.”

Jack was deeply impressed by the seriousness of his two friends. With them he was convinced that it was well nigh impossible now to depart from Carrizal without the consent of the leaders. And such consent would not be given; of that he was positive.

After a scanty supper had been served, Jack, who was thoroughly tired by the labours and anxieties of the preceding days, tried to obtain a little sleep. In spite of his weariness, however, sleep did not come. He was anxious concerning Steve as well as himself. The confidence of his companions had departed. They, too, were almost as fearful as he. And it was not long before he was aware that they also were awake.

The long hours dragged slowly on, but still sleep did not come to the young scout. At the slightest sound he instantly aroused himself—and smiled grimly when on such occasions he discovered

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that both Tom and Bert also were listening intently. The night was almost as light as day. Bands of soldiers were frequently seen as they moved about the town. Some of them were noisy, too, and their shouts threatening.

Dawn at last succeeded night, but Jack's fears were not dispelled by the coming of day. The greasers greeted them with increasingly threatening glances; the people of Carrizal were openly becoming more and more hostile in their attitude.

Matters were in this state when the worst fears of Jack and his companions were fulfilled.

Suddenly—without premonition, and evidently at some prearranged signal—with many shouts and jeers, the soldiers within and without the town launched an attack upon the American troops.

Before Jack and his companions recovered from their surprise sufficiently to realize what had happened, a battle was in full swing.

CHAPTER XXV

BAPTISM OF FIRE

TO JACK the encounter was a novel experience. Shots seemed to be coming from every quarter of the town. Masses of men were hiding behind the low houses; others were firing from within taller buildings. Yells, shouts, and shots issued from every side.

At the beginning of the outbreak Jack's two companions instantly had seized their rifles and rushed out of the little building—an example speedily followed by Jack himself. As he passed through the doorway a low cry escaped his lips for he saw Bert suddenly reel, stagger, and then fall.

Instantly Jack rushed to his friend's aid; Bert was not seriously wounded.

"I'm all right," whispered the fallen man. "Leave me and I'll crawl back into the house."

Jack, ignoring the appeal, quickly helped Bert to his feet, and back into the building. Examination of Bert's wound convinced Jack that his friend was in no serious trouble.

BAPTISM OF FIRE

Hastily seizing his rifle again, he darted out of the building—this time to see Tom seized by half a dozen Mexicans who disarmed him and compelled him to accompany them to a low adobe house.

Meanwhile the battle was raging fiercely. Jack was doing his utmost to join the ranks of his countrymen, among whom a measure of disorder still prevailed because of the surprise attack.

Jack saw several fall to the ground, but he was powerless now to render any assistance. He saw others besides Tom seized by the Mexican soldiers and compelled to withdraw from the struggle.

Just how long the fight lasted Jack afterward was unable to say. Throughout it all he was in a maze. He found himself firing his rifle while he was alone and even after he had rejoined his comrades he was still so excited that the words of the officers were only partly heard.

At last the battle ended. Jack did not know at the time that a score of his fellow soldiers were dead and that twenty-two had been made prisoners.

At last the Americans succeeded in withdrawing many of their men from Carrizal and for several days they remained outside the town waiting reinforcements or instructions from headquarters.

Less than a week elapsed after the fight in Carrizal before Secretary of State Lansing—having

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received unsatisfactory replies to his demand for the surrender of the men taken at Carrizal—ordered still more troops to join the federal service on the border. At that time Carranza—aware of the serious nature of the offense and having received the demand which the American Secretary had made upon him—ordered the release of the Carrizal prisoners.

Then it was that Jack once more found himself with his former friends, Tom and Bert, the latter apparently not having been seriously wounded.

They were now ordered to ride swiftly northward to join a body of scouts detailed to protect a supply train which was making its way southward.

It was at this time also that orders were issued that the American forces should gradually make their way northward. Various plans of settling the dispute with Mexico had been suggested, but the only one that seemed feasible [it later proved fruitless] was what was designated as the A. B. C. Conference—the initials standing for the countries represented, namely Argentina, Brazil, and Chili. The delegates met with commissioners from the United States in an effort to settle the steadily perplexing problem of the Mexican border.

[Although not a part of this present story, it is of interest to know that the War Department added 25,000 men on August 1st to the 98,000 that already

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were on the border. Not long afterward militia that had been sent into Mexico or to the border was gradually withdrawn.]

All these things did not affect the fortunes of Jack and his friends, however. Horses were provided for them as well as for several of their comrades and together the little band hastened northward to join the party escorting the baggage train already alluded to.

In due course the train was met. The safety—the very lives—of the Americans farther south depended upon their receipt of these supplies. As we know, water and food locally were wanting; the difficulty of obtaining either was insuperable. The success of the expedition was unattainable without regular supplies.

How the escort saw Steve's signals and went to him has been described in Chapter XXIII. He soon recovered consciousness, and little time was required to explain to him the condition of affairs. He was so overjoyed at the meeting that other things in a measure were ignored or forgotten.

The long train of trucks meanwhile had been moving steadily forward. It was plainly seen in the distance, and when the word was spoken for the party to rejoin the convoy Jack insisted that Steve should share his horse and ride behind him.

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“It will carry two a little way,” he explained, “and when we catch up with the column, we can fit you out with one of our reserve horses.”

The double load necessitated reduced speed so they did not reach the convoy until long after Bert and Tom, the former suffering only slightly from his wound.

Meanwhile each boy had explained to the other the exciting experiences through which he recently had passed. The death of Carlos, although a shock to Jack, was nevertheless a source of relief. In his heart the young scout had been afraid of the treacherous man who never forgave an injury—real or imaginary—and who had ever been quick to believe that he was unjustly suspected. That Carlos no longer was to be feared was a source of relief to both.

The thoughts of the boys, however, were more immediately concerned with the problem confronting them. Jack had been one of the advance guard of the motor train. There was slight question in the mind of either that Steve, too, would soon be given a horse and a similar duty assigned him. Their hope was fully realized when the boys overtook Tom and Bert and found themselves among the guard.

The guard was not supposed to move far in advance of the trucks; their duty was to spy out

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the land and to report immediately the discovery of any lurking bandits or traces of them.

Tom and Bert now found themselves riding beside Jack and Steve, and Bert's spirits seemed to have been entirely revived. The rest of the guard were deeply interested in the boys' stories which they matched with incidents from their own experiences.

It was after Steve had told of the plight of the aviator that Bert said:

"I once knew a man named Grayson who was a chaplain in our post in the Philippines. He used to give the boys lessons so that they could pass examinations for promotion. One day he had a lesson in grammar and he had been talking to us for a while explaining what the parts of speech are and then he said (for he was giving us a little quiz on his talk): 'What is an adverb?' There was a silence you could feel. No one seemed to know just what to say. At least somebody in the back of the room called out: 'I know, Chaplain. An adverb is a word that ends in *ly*. I learned that back in Missouri.' 'That's good as far as it goes,' said the chaplain, 'but I wish you would give me the definition.' 'Can't do it, sir,' said the soldier. 'Can you give me an example?' 'Yes, sir,' came the response; 'Kelly.' We called that fellow Kelly all through that campaign in the Philippines.

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Sometimes we spoke of him as 'Kelly, the Adverb.' He never seemed to get over it."

"What about Grayson?" said Steve. "I'm worried about him."

"I have been thinking about him," said Tom, who had been silent for a time. "Somebody ought to look him up in a hurry."

"That's right," said Steve. "I wish somebody would. What do you think can be done?"

"Perhaps the captain might detail four of us to take supplies and go out there and search for him. How far do you think it is?"

"I can't tell you," said Steve. "I haven't any idea. If I should judge by my feelings I should think it was a thousand miles. It probably isn't more than twenty or twenty-five miles from here to the place where we stopped."

"Then I'm going to suggest to Captain O'Brien that he detail us four to go out there and look for him."

Acting at once upon his own suggestion Tom departed from his companions (for no fixed order was being maintained at the time) and sought out the captain. It was not long before he returned and in response to the eager queries of his friends said:

"It's all right, boys. The captain is going to detail four men to replace us in the advance guard

BAPTISM OF FIRE

and he told me to take supplies for two days and some gasolene and search for your friend."

"That's fine," said Steve enthusiastically. "I don't know why we didn't do it before. It just seemed to me that there was nothing to be done."

"Well, there is," said Bert, "and we're going to do it. It won't be long, and we'll find the chap and we'll come back here in his machine and fly a few times over the army before they know what is what."

"What I'm afraid of," suggested Steve thoughtfully, "is that those men Carlos sent back to look for him may have found him and——"

"And what?" demanded Jack quickly.

"Oh, I don't know what," said Steve wearily. "I'm afraid something has happened to him."

"We'll find out very soon," said Tom confidently. "Now we'll get the supplies and start in any direction you say."

CHAPTER XXVI

TOO LATE

THE small relief party, which—with a supply of food, water, and gasolene, set out to search for the stranded aviator—consisted of Steve and Jack and six men.

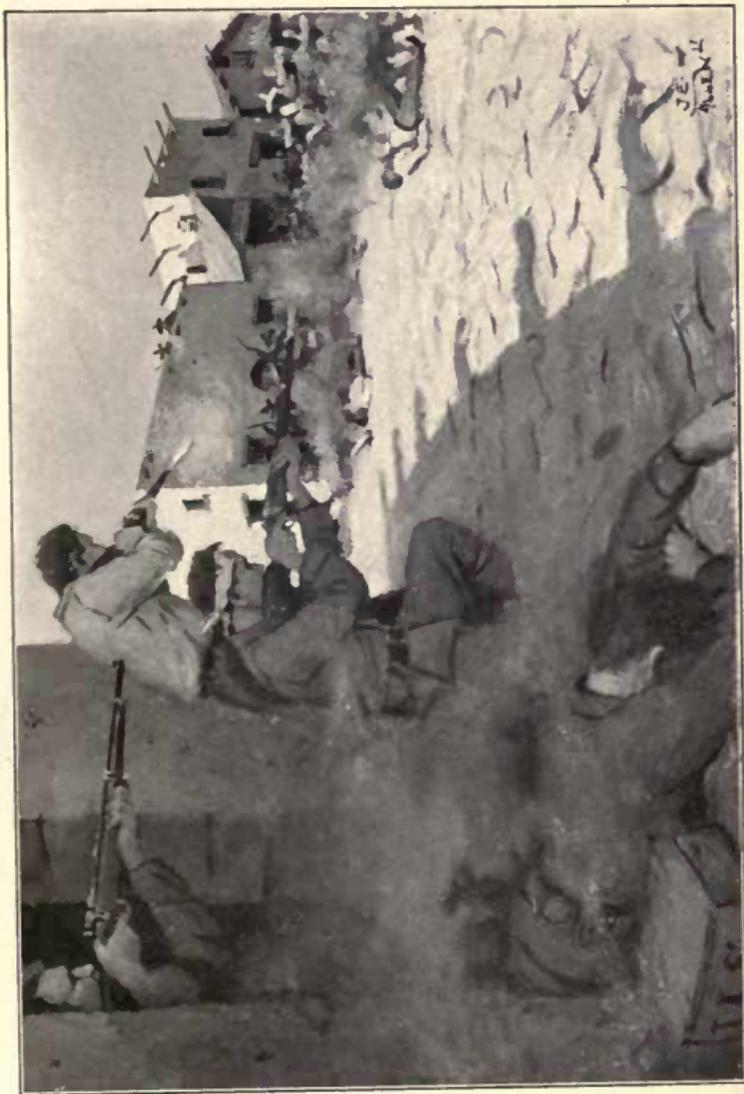
Steve was by no means confident that he would be able to guide the party to the place where his aërial companion had fallen. He himself was weary and far from strong. Recollections of his privations and the death of Carlos were engraved in his memory; now he understood what Grayson's sufferings must have been.

His hope of pointing out the proper direction became less and less as the men rode on.

"Never mind, Steve," said Tom consolingly. "We all understand. You weren't studying landmarks when you were struggling over the desert."

"The thing for us to do," suggested Bert, "is to spread out."

"That's my view, too," assented Tom. "We'll begin right now and spread out like a fan. No one



“Masses of men were hiding behind the low houses; others were firing from within taller buildings. Yells, shouts, and shots issued from every side”

TOO LATE

must go so far from the others that we can't hear his rifle if he fires for help."

From Steve's description of the terrain, the party decided to make for the little hamlet of Bavispe. A careful outlook was maintained throughout their march, but by sunset no sign had been found of the aviator. When darkness fell the men consulted as to whether or not they should continue their expedition into the night.

"It's this way," maintained Tom. "We shan't lose our way, and that fellow is suffering. Every minute now may count."

"You're right," acknowledged Bert; "but you forget that if we go on in the dark the chances are that we shall not find him. He won't be on the lookout for us, and he won't be making any calls for help."

"I'm afraid he won't," acknowledged Steve.

Finally it was decided the wiser course would be to remain where they were until dawn. Steve was so nearly exhausted that as soon as he had eaten his supper he wrapped himself in a blanket and immediately fell asleep. Tom and Bert arranged to look after his wants. His courage and determination had appealed to them, and the fact that he had not complained over the misfortunes which had overtaken him had added much to their regard for him.

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Jack's interest in Steve's welfare, naturally, was even keener than any one's; the fact that Steve now was in trouble aroused sympathy in his friend.

When the first faint streaks of the dawn appeared, the hasty breakfast was eaten, the horses were fed and watered, and the journey was resumed.

The little band, in extended order, had not advanced far when Jack suddenly discharged his rifle. His comrades rode swiftly to the spot where he had halted and, as they drew near, the cause of his signal was seen—an aeroplane, lying on the sand, which already had partly covered the framework. A close inspection convinced him that it was the one in which he and Grayson had departed from Bavispe.

“Well, lad,” said Tom, approaching Steve. “Do you think you can tell us in which direction you started from *here*—when you and your friend left the machine?”

“I think so,” replied Steve hastily. “I wasn't in very good form but as nearly as I can fix it we moved in that direction” (pointing northwest).

“Bert,” said Tom, turning to his fellow-soldier. “We had better leave two here to guard the machine while the rest of us renew the search for that man.”

The suggestion was speedily adopted.

TOO LATE

The horsemen had not ridden far before their attention was attracted to something on the sand in the distance. Not a word was spoken as the men rode swiftly toward it.

Before them lay the skeleton of what once had been a man. The bones were dry and bleached as if they had been exposed to the sun and wind for years, but the fact that they had not been covered by sand convinced every member of the little party that the skeleton had not been there long.

There was nothing by which to prove the identity of the victim. Not a garment, not even a piece of clothing was found. The scattered bones alone were eloquent of what had occurred.

“Poor Grayson,” said Steve, “and I left him alone to die.”

“Don’t blame yourself, boy,” said Bert kindly, “you did your best—a very good best. We’ll bury what’s left of him and go on.”

“Some of the buzzards have been here before us,” muttered Tom. “Poor chap!”

“But I’m not sure that this is where Grayson fell,” said Steve. “If it was Grayson what became of his clothes?” demanded Tom.

“I don’t know,” replied Steve.

“He must have died from exhaustion, hunger, and thirst.” said the soldier. “Some Mexican must have found him and stripped him.”

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It was only a brief task to bury the remains in the sand. This done, the men rode back to the fallen aeroplane.

They told their sad tale to the guards and all agreed that everything possible had been done.

One of the men said eagerly, "I'm perfectly sure if we had gas that you could get out of here in this machine. I served as a méchanic for an aviator for a time."

"We've brought some," said Tom triumphantly.

"Did you?" inquired the soldier excitedly. "I didn't know there was any."

"Well, there is," said Tom, and he at once displayed the cans that had been brought. "I don't know whether there's enough of it," he explained.

"It's enough as long as it lasts," answered the soldier who was already busily engaged in replenishing the supply. "Whether it takes us all the way or not it will take us out of this spot and that's worth something."

"I guess it will take us," spoke up Jack.

"Who are 'us?'" demanded Bert.

"Why, Steve and Tom and I. Steve hasn't had all he wants of an aeroplane and somebody will have to look after the horses, so we'll let you and the others take the horses, and we'll take the machine."

After a brief discussion it was agreed that Steve

TOO LATE

and Jack should go with Tom in the aeroplane while Bert should assume command of the small party left to look after the horses.

For a time all were engaged in inspecting and repairing the flying machine. Tom at last pronounced it fit for use and ready to start.

Several attempts were made to start the engine before the propeller began to whirr and at last the great bird slowly arose. A shout of approval came from the watching party, but it was lost upon the excited aviators.

Soon the aeroplane gathered increased headway—was flying high above the desert. Steve and Jack nervously watched Tom, who apparently had full confidence in his ability to manage the craft; but the aërial trio had not advanced far before their excitement gave place suddenly to alarm.

CHAPTER XXVII

A PERILOUS FLIGHT

THE aeroplane passed over the spot where the bones of the unfortunate Grayson had been discovered. The sight was not inspiring to the boys, but their danger was so imminent that even the misfortune that had befallen the former manager of the machine was perforce forgotten. Indeed, both Jack and Steve were now giving their entire attention to the task confronting them.

Tom had insisted upon steering and his claim had not been disputed. They had not flown far, however, before it was evident there was something wrong. The machine acted queerly, and the blanched faces of the boys bore witness to the fear which swept over their hearts.

“What’s wrong?” shouted Steve.

“I can’t tell,” replied Tom. “We’re going so fast that I can’t stop it.”

“Can’t you stop the aeroplane?” called Steve.

“No, I can’t,” said Tom. “It seems to be going all right, but I can’t guide it and I can’t stop it.”

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It was evident Tom's stock of knowledge about aeroplanes was running low.

No word was spoken for several minutes; then the fears of the boys returned with increased power when it became manifest that the aeroplane had struck a swift current of air that was forcing it in a direction opposite to that in which they had started.

Cautiously Steve crawled to the side of Tom and tried to help. His efforts, however, were vain and it was evident that the great bird must be driven by the wind until its power was exhausted. What would occur then, not one of them dared to think.

In the midst of their alarm the aeroplane suddenly began to rise. The noise of the rushing wind made conversation impossible. The machine seemed to gather power as it sped forward. Fortunately the wind, although it was strong, was steady. The machine was being carried eastward. Below them the desert seemed to be racing toward the mountains, the outlines of which could be dimly seen.

It was impossible for them to determine their course. They were driven forward swiftly on the wings of the wind. There were moments when apparently the speed slackened, but again rapid flight was resumed and the great bird once more was

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rushing forward. Faint clouds were seen occasionally below them while the sun was shining brightly above. The alarming sound from the machine had not been repeated. Whatever had failed apparently had not affected any other parts.

On and still on flew the aeroplane. The noise of its machinery became monotonous. It had been long since either of the boys had spoken. Each was staring straight before him, scarcely aware of the white faces of the others on board. Although Tom still was trying to steer he was unable to control their course. It seemed to the boys that hours must have elapsed since they had first started on their perilous flight. The machine seemed ever to increase the swiftness with which it was moving. On and still on the giant bird rushed.

The sun sank below the crest of the mountains; this aroused a new fear in the hearts of the unwilling aviators. When darkness should spread over the land how could they effect a safe landing? Day was declining; the colouring of the desert was changing. No longer were there great stretches of glaring sand beneath them, it was possible now to see at times that the land was not entirely barren. Indeed they obtained glimpses of houses, or what looked like houses, far below them.

“We’re dropping!” shouted Steve to Jack.

“What did you say?” shouted Jack in reply as

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he gripped more tightly the rod to which he was clinging.

"We're dropping," repeated Steve in his loudest tones.

For a moment Jack did not reply as he excitedly watched the course of the aeroplane. It certainly was dipping slightly. Was the gasoline exhausted? He was aware that the supply they had received was not sufficient to take them on a long flight. If the power gradually was lost there was still a possibility that they might make a landing which would not wreck the machine or prevent the boys from escaping. The outlook was one of grave uncertainty; the speed at which they were moving apparently did not decrease.

There was soon no question that they were gradually reaching a lower level. Although it was impossible to alter the course, Tom still was able to keep the aeroplane steady.

At last the sun disappeared and darkness began to creep over the land. Where were they? How far had they come? What was the hour?

Meanwhile the aeroplane steadily continued to fall. It was moving obliquely, and if this course could be maintained there was a possibility that it might at last strike ground in such a way that the safety of the party might not be endangered.

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The time for action came more swiftly than the boys expected. It was plain that the gas was almost exhausted and, as the wind was dropping, only a few minutes would elapse before they would land. It was a time of supreme anxiety. Every one was standing and eagerly peering down at the earth.

At last they were only fifty feet above the sand. Still the aeroplane moved forward though it was dropping steadily. Nearer and nearer came the boys to the sand below them. Once Jack in his excitement acted as if he was about to jump from the aeroplane, but Steve, noting the action, quickly seized him and drew him back.

Forty feet; thirty, twenty; and then only ten intervened between the boys and the ground. The flying machine was moving more slowly now and every one on board was alert and ready to leap if a collision threatened. Still more slowly the aeroplane moved forward and downward, till at last it touched the ground, and then, after sliding forward a few yards, abruptly stopped.

A great sigh of relief escaped the boys as they found themselves once more on solid earth.

"That was the greatest experience I ever had in my life," said Jack soberly.

"Same here," responded Steve; "but one I wouldn't care to have again."

A PERILOUS FLIGHT

“Nor would I,” said Jack; “but now that I have lived through it I’m glad I had it.”

Tom had taken no part in the conversation; he was still busy trying to discover the source of the difficulty with the machine. Abruptly pausing in his labours he turned to his young companions and said:

“I thought I saw a railroad off to the left about a mile. If you boys want to help, you might find out whether I was mistaken or not. Don’t go far away; and come back in a few minutes anyway.”

Pointing out the direction in which he thought he had seen the railroad Tom resumed his task and the boys at once followed his suggestion.

They had not gone very far before Jack stopped short, and said:

“Listen, Steve! What is that?” A moment later Steve said excitedly:

“It’s a train. There *is* a railroad there; Tom was right. We’ll go straight back and tell him about it.”

Excitedly the boys ran back to the place where they had left their comrade. As soon as they had made their report, Tom said:

“The only thing for us to do is to leave this aeroplane here and make straight for the railroad. A train will stop for us if we signal the driver; that’s the rule in the desert.”

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Together the three advanced in the direction from which the sound had been heard. It was not long before they saw far away the light of the locomotive. The sound of the moving train came distinctly over the silent desert. It was impossible for the boys now to arrive in time to halt the train, but the fact that they had discovered the railroad was, in itself, reassuring.

About twenty minutes later the three travellers arrived at the tracks and by common consent at once began to walk eastward. For an hour they continued their journey and then greatly to their delight they saw in advance of them another twinkling light. A moment later they discerned yet other lights, and they knew that they were approaching a little hamlet or station. Quickening their paces they moved forward with renewed hope and not long afterward arrived at a forlorn little hamlet which apparently had already gone to sleep.

Fortunately they discovered the station-master at the little station and in reply to their questions he told them that the train for San Antonio was due within a few minutes.

"You don't mean to say we're in Texas?" exclaimed Jack in amazement.

"Of course you're in Texas. Where'd you think you were?" demanded the agent.

"We must have cut across the country then,"

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said Steve thoughtfully. "We're a long way from where we started. We never could have made it if it hadn't been for that gale. It just swept us along there for hours."

"That's all right," acknowledged Jack, "but the main thing is that we're here, and that we didn't get smashed with the machine. Now we'll get this train and go to San Antonio and when we're there we'll find out what things to do."

"I know one thing we'll do," said Steve positively.

"What's that?" inquired Jack.

"We'll go up to see Tom's friend, General Funston, and get him to help us out. Do you think he'll do it, Tom?" he added as he turned to the soldier.

"Help you? Of course he'll help you. That's what the 'Little Guy' has always *been doing*—helping everybody but himself."

CHAPTER XXVIII

FUNSTON'S SCOUTS

NOT long after the arrival of the little party at San Antonio, the sun appeared in the eastern sky.

Tired, thirsty, and hungry the scouts fortunately found a little money in their possession and soon after they had registered at a hotel they made themselves presentable again. A hearty breakfast served to restore their spirits, and soon after they started for Camp Sam Houston in the hope that they might be able there to report to the commander of the men on the border.

The boys did not have long to wait after their arrival at the post for within a half-hour Tom, who had left them, returned and explained that he had seen Major-General Funston who wished the scouts to make their report directly to him.

On their way to his quarters a correspondent of an English paper joined them and entered into conversation.

“Quite a remarkable man, this General Funston, they say,” he suggested. “I have heard some men

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say that he is quite like Napoleon. He is small and has much of the vigour and boldness of the *Petit Caporal*."

"Napoleon?" shouted Tom angrily. "France never had no general like the 'Little Guy.' He isn't like nobody and there isn't nobody like him. You give 'Chiquito Diablo' fifty rangers and send him after Villa and he'll get him if the rascal stops anywhere this side of South America. But when they send him after Villa they'd better send along a chaplain and an undertaker. They'll both be needed."

"Do you indeed expect to see him?" inquired the Englishman.

"Indeed I do expect to see him," said Tom sharply. "He's the commanding general of the department, and he has to manage an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men, and every day he has to rearrange his lines and dispose his troops differently; but he never is so busy that he hasn't time to see an old friend, or to help out any one who is in trouble. There are a good many times when he's up all night long and then he works all the next day just the same. It's some job to see that his men are clothed and fed and trained, and then there's a lot of them that have to be petted like a sick girl."

"But he is a very small man," suggested the Englishman.

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“Well, you don’t think he’s a big man when you first look at him. He’s only five feet two, but since I have been down here I have heard how he found a newspaper correspondent who was below the regulation army size. They told me that the ‘Little Guy’ stood up straight, looked at the correspondent, and said: ‘Well, well, you’re the first man I’ve seen down here who is smaller than I, and I’ll bet ten dollars I can lick you.’ The newspaper man asked the general if he had the ten dollars in his pocket; the ‘Little Guy’ laughed and said: ‘Yes, yes, of course, but let’s sit down and talk it over first. That’s sometimes the first thing to do when you get a man who can understand you. Try to talk him out of it, or tire him out by talking to him and then lick him, but when you get a man who won’t understand then punch him on the nose fast and hard.’”

“Ah, yes,” said the Englishman. “Most extraordinary. Very extraordinary, indeed.”

By this time the little party had arrived at the quarters of General Funston. There was only a brief delay before Tom and the two young scouts were admitted. Both boys were strongly impressed by the intense vigour of the little commander. His flesh seemed to be “hard as nails” as Tom expressed it, and the glance of his eye was keen and straight.

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He greeted the boys cordially and then bade them tell their story.

Steve became the spokesman and related the experiences which had befallen the scouts at Carizal and other places.

A rapid fire of questions followed until General Funston at last said abruptly:

“What did you hear of Villa?”

“All I have heard,” replied Steve, “is what Philippe said.”

“Who is Philippe?” demanded the general.

“A little Mexican that took me with him across the desert.”

“What did he say?”

“He said Villa was dead. He said he had been shot in the knee and that the wound wasn't properly cared for. He said the bandit insisted upon riding horseback and leading his men when he ought to have stayed in bed after he was wounded.”

“I have heard that story,” said the general sharply. “And now tell me about the conditions at Columbus and what you found in the desert.”

By the aid of numerous questions the general succeeded in obtaining all the information the boys possessed concerning conditions on the border.

“You don't seem to have carried a great deal of information to General Pershing,” he said at last laughingly, “but I think you have done well

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as scouts. I am inclined to think the best plan will be for me to take you over and keep you here until this brush with the Mexicans is ended. I will call you 'Funston's Scouts' and you must be ready for a call at any time. I have had trouble in finding enough men—the Texas guard being used in other ways—who are accustomed to the desert and able to stand the strain of two or three days in succession."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LITTLE GUY

ELATED the boys certainly were by the manner in which General Funston received them as well as by the invitation to join his scouts. Conversation continued until it became evident that the commander had given the party more time than he had planned—that others were pressing for admission into his quarters. However, after Steve had explained the small part they had taken in the punitive expedition led by General Pershing, it was finally agreed that he should telegraph to his father and that, if permission should be obtained, he and Jack would remain at San Antonio until General Funston himself should decide to go on a tour of inspection, to investigate conditions in the army that was chasing Villa.

The duties that rested upon "Funston's Scouts"—as the boys found themselves commonly called about the post—were not heavy. It was not often that they were permitted to see the little leader nor were they sent on many expeditions, for they

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were not familiar with the adjacent country. The life, however, was novel and there were so many interesting experiences for them both that time did not drag.

Most of all Steve and Jack were interested in the stories that were current of Major-General Frederick Funston. Tom explained that the "Little Guy" had become more of a roly-poly than he had been in his early life, but that his alert mind was nevertheless as quick as ever—that the fire and energy that drove him on were still his foremost qualities. His hair had become gray, but Tom declared that the little nest of wrinkles around the twinkling eyes of the leader still showed that he was the "Firebrand"—another name by which General Funston was known.

The fact that such a little man was in command of the entire force seemed to the boys increasingly strange, although neither of them, when in the presence of the commander, gave his stature a thought. And the leader himself joked about his diminutive person and accepted it as a part of his lot in life.

Indeed, he himself told them that one time in the Philippines when he was acting as a witness at a court martial, the judge behind the table was not able to see as much of the witness as he wished. "Colonel Funston," said the regular army officer,

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who perhaps did not waste affection upon the volunteer, "I wish to remind you that it is customary for officers testifying in military courts to stand up." "Sir," replied Colonel Funston, "I *am* standing up."

Apparently the story was one which the general frequently told, and greatly enjoyed; and often, in telling it, he remarked that he was "just about as tall, standing, as a 'regular man' was, sitting down."

But when the "Little Guy" became excited or angry and stood up behind his high-piled desk, he seemed large enough to command the armies of the world. [To his credit, be it said it was not often that the fighter lost his temper.]

While the boys were at Fort Sam Houston, delegations from various towns frequently came and besought the commander for a detachment of soldiers to be sent for the protection of their homes. Sometimes this protection was necessary, but more often it was sought merely because the people were frightened. In no way did General Funston display his tact more clearly than in his dealings with these people.

One particular delegation from a little hamlet forty miles inland—which by no stretch of the imagination could be considered in danger—became so persistent that finally General Funston

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consented to send a detachment. He selected a force from a Negro regiment and dispatched it to the little town whose inhabitants were all Southern people. It was not long, however, before the delegation returned and explained to General Funston that it had been decided that no protection was necessary. The joke was greatly enjoyed at the post, and doubtless did much to relieve the commander from similar applications from other towns which were safe from attack.

General Funston at the outbreak of the trouble after the attack on Columbus had earnestly requested that the civil authorities leave the punishment of raiders to him. He very frankly expressed his opinion that much of the trouble had been caused by arrogant treatment of the Mexicans by the men along the border. He explained that the Mexicans were just as resentful over the killing of Mexicans on one side of the Rio Grande as the Americans were at the killing of Americans on the other side. It is quite remarkable that in the midst of all these difficulties and the general's frank statement of his conviction, none of the Texas people displayed any ill will. Indeed, none of them had any.

"It wouldn't be so hard," said Tom one day, "to command a *trained* army of this size. But the 'Little Guy' has to command troops that come

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from more than forty states and to lick them into a fighting force. He has to train men who have never had any training: equip them; piece the different units into regiments, brigades, divisions—and do it all right within sight of the border. It is a tremendous job, let me tell you, and a good deal bigger because it has to be done in such a hurry; at least one hundred thousand of the troops never before had a day's military experience."

One time when he was asked what he thought of the failure of Congress to provide proper equipment for his men the leader simply said:

"My business is to fight and not to talk. The officials and the politicians do the talking and when they get through with that and give us orders to fight, we'll fight. It wouldn't take long to arrange at least a skirmish if we once get orders to fight, and it wouldn't take long for us to get soldiers down where something would happen to them, or, with good luck, to the other side."

He complained bitterly because much of his work was forced upon him by politicians who were seeking special favours. They wanted the return of certain regiments or they wished for furloughs or discharges from the service for their friends, and continually they were sending telegrams that ought to have gone through regular military channels.

On rare occasions the "Little Guy" flared up. It

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was not the strain of his heavy task that was the cause, for in that he kept his poise perfectly, but there were times when his fighting spirit was thoroughly aroused.

When he went with General Scott to the border to confer with General Obregon, who was the Minister of War for the Provisional Government of Mexico, there was a story current that persons who were outside the room in which the conference was held heard General Funston talking loudly and saw him shaking his fist under the nose of the war minister. Afterward, when General Funston was asked concerning the incident, he said that he had been "telling Señor Obregon funny stories that required some pantomime." Finally it is said he admitted to his intimate friends that perhaps he had been a "little angry" with the Mexican minister.

His friends solemnly said to him:

"You ought not to take advantage of your size in trying to intimidate Señor Obregon. And besides, he has lost one arm in battle."

"I wasn't shaking my fist at *him*," retorted General Funston sharply. "I was shaking it at all Mexico. And besides," he added with a chuckle, "I didn't take advantage of Señor Obregon. I shook only one fist."

The "Little Guy" was exceedingly sensitive

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about having his plans changed or his original orders modified. He had slight sympathy with policy or politicians as applied to the army. It is said that when the punitive expedition was sent into Mexico he asked to command it, but being a good soldier, when his request was refused he uttered no complaint. There were many who said that if Funston had been ordered to "go get Villa"—as he had formerly been told to "go get Aguinaldo"—and had not been hampered by politicians and politics, he would have succeeded.

When the War Department declared that the time for the withdrawal of the expedition into Mexico could be fixed by him, General Funston at a public dinner at Corpus Christi, Texas, flared up and said: "They can't 'pass the buck' to me that way. If the Pershing expedition is to be withdrawn, the orders will come from Washington—not from me."

Perhaps the story which most interested Jack was the one which General Funston told that, when he made his great trip in the Arctic regions—traveling more than 3,500 miles alone in that vast wilderness of ice and snow, and then going more than 2,000 miles down the Yukon in a canoe—he had carried constantly with him "Barrack Room Ballads" and "Soldiers Three."

"I believe," exclaimed Jack, in relating the

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incident to Steve, "that General Funston not only *reads* romance, but that he *lives* it as well. He might almost walk right out of the story: 'The Reporter Who Made Himself King.' That's just his type."

The enthusiasm of Funston's young scouts over the forcefulness and magnetism of the little leader increased with every passing day. In this they shared the feelings of most of the men in the post. Some of the soldiers chafed because they were held back, so eager were they to enter the country whose bandits had created so much trouble.

It was at this time that Tom joined his friends one day and said:

"I have just heard another one about the 'Little Guy.' It seems that when he was promoted for his capture of Aguinaldo he wasn't much older than most army officers when they are lieutenants. Of course some of the officers didn't like the idea of a volunteer being pushed ahead, and Major-General Corbin was the strongest of all in his objection. He said that Funston was no better than a second lieutenant of regulars. Brigadier-General Otis, however, backed up the 'Little Guy' in great shape. Some one asked the general if Funston was a fighter.

"'Is he a fighter?' exclaimed General Otis. 'He's the greatest dare-devil fighter in the army,

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and he would rather fight than eat. I never saw a man who enjoyed fighting so much. He watches every chance in a scrap and he never loses an opportunity. Why one time Funston's regiment was exposed to a cross-fire at Malalos and I asked the colonel of the Fighting Twentieth (that was his regiment, you know) "how long can you hold your position?" "Until my regiment is mustered out," the Little Guy answered. When the people of Kansas gave General Funston a sword, those words—"Until my regiment is mustered out"—were engraved on it."

Careful in many ways as General Funston was, he apparently did not care much for dress in the field. When Governor Leedy of Kansas sent for him to give him his commission as colonel of the Twentieth Kansas, Funston went into the executive chamber wearing muddy boots and a raincoat that was a good deal the worse for wear.

When he was trying to get out of Cuba, he rushed into the office of General Fitzhugh Lee in Havana after he had run the lines and eaten his passport so that the Spaniards could not identify him. The consul-general seized his revolver and ordered the "Little Guy" to throw up his hands.

"He was such a disreputable looking character, that I thought he was an assassin," said General Lee afterward describing the incident.

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To make matters appear even worse General Funston always carried a .45-calibre pistol that extended from his waist to his knee. Of course, that wasn't a remarkable long way, but that very fact made it more conspicuous.

When he went to Vera Cruz to take command of the city, both Admiral Fletcher and Admiral Badger with their staffs were drawn up in line to receive him. They were all dressed in white, their swords were bright and shining, and all their accoutrements were in perfect order. General Funston, however, was in his olive-drab uniform with no blouse, and had his great pistol strapped to his waist. The British minister was there, too, with his staff, and when he didn't see any one approaching all dressed up in gold and lace, he asked: "Where is the general? Is he the little Chinaman at the head of the column, or is that just an American artillery regiment?"

General Funston frequently told this story and laughed heartily over it.

Indeed, the only thing to distinguish him from any other officer on the border was his badge of rank—two stars. He wore plain khaki that had been sent to the laundry a good many times—so many, in fact, that much of its original colour was gone.

One day when he was a young soldier in San

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Francisco, in camp with the Twentieth Kansas, he saw a handsome girl cross the parade ground. He immediately declared that she appealed very strongly to him and that he was going to marry her. Three weeks later the girl was Mrs. Frederick Funston and was on her way with him to the Philippine Islands.

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CONSENT was obtained for the boys to remain and do their part under General Funston at San Antonio, but the need of such help soon promised to cease. Not many days elapsed before word was received that many of the troops were to be withdrawn from the border. Meanwhile rumours as to Villa's death and Villa's activities were frequent and conflicting, but no reliable news was received—nothing definite was known, at least by the troops.

Steadily the boys from one state and then those from another were ordered to return home. San Antonio and Brownsville both began to take on a different appearance. A frequent question among the men was:

“Why are we being withdrawn?—the real object for which we were sent here has not been accomplished!”

To all such questions there were various replies. Some were based upon the reported feeling in the South American Republics, most of which naturally

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shared with Mexico the fear that the object of the great Republic to the north was to seize territory. Many of them also doubtless sincerely believed that the proposed punishment of Villa had been merely a pretext for sending a great army into the country. Others were positive that conditions within Mexico provided the basis for the withdrawal. But the explanation which perhaps did more than any other to satisfy the men was: "They know more about this in Washington than we do."

At all events, troops steadily moved northward leaving a decreasing number on the border to protect the interests of the people who dwelt there and the aims of the United States. Not many had any desire to annex territory that belonged to a sister Republic, although former dealings with Mexico had not left an impression that was altogether a source of pride. Mexico—a great table-land traversed by high mountains, composed of twenty-seven states, two territories, and a federal district; with stock raising and agriculture successfully carried on in the north; and having great mines marvellously rich in silver, gold, copper, and lead, and oil wells of almost untold value—was indeed a land toward which the eyes of many countries longingly turned. But the United States coveted neither the silver nor the gold, the cattle nor the herds, the mountains nor the plains. All that she

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desired was that peace should return and prosperity be found within her borders.

Such a condition was exceedingly difficult to create.

The early inhabitants of Mexico were the Aztecs—a race of Indians of higher intelligence perhaps than any others that were found on the American continent. Cortez invaded the country in 1519, and in 1521 made a conquest of the capital. Spain then declared that the land was her colony and gave it the name of New Spain.

In 1810, under Hidalgo, began a revolution which lasted five years. But the last Spanish viceroy was not deposed until 1821.

Texas seceded from Mexico in 1836 and frequent changes in government followed. The language generally spoken is Spanish, although in many places there is a mixture of Indian and Spanish.

Troubles continued until 1861 when there was intervention by foreign countries. Maximilian, upheld by French troops, was made Emperor; but when the Civil War in America was ended and the United States was free to devote herself to the perplexing problem of her neighbour, the French troops were withdrawn, and in the same year Maximilian was shot and Mexico again became a Republic.

Most of the time since then there have been

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plots and counterplots, and although Diaz for many years contrived to hold the country in a semblance of order, in recent years there has been revolution after revolution. These facts were often told the troops that had come from a distance to the border, and in part helped toward an understanding of the perplexing problem.

When the young scouts departed from San Antonio for Columbus they travelled by train. To Steve especially the ride was one of intense interest although to Jack the monotony of the country was tiresome. Stretches of what appeared to be waste land; occasional hamlets; mountains in the distance; bridges across great chasms—these were among the sights to be seen from the car windows. Jack, however, had travelled more extensively than his friend and for that reason perhaps found less to interest him in the vista. At all events, they arrived safely at Columbus and at once made their way to Mr. Lait's ranch. There they found Steve's father who, after a warm greeting, explained that there had been no disturbance since the troops had moved southward.

"Let me change that a bit," he added. "That Philippe Villegas that went with you I think has been caught and thrown into jail. I was always suspicious of the little rascal for I have known him for years. He used to come here to see Carlos."

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“What was the trouble?” inquired Steve, interested at once.

“Why, he was caught trying to run off some of the horses, so it was decided, in the interests of the community, to place him where he would be out of temptation.”

“Is Villa really dead?” inquired Jack. Mr. Lait smiled and shook his head as he replied:

“That’s something I think no man north of the border knows positively.”

“But what do you think?” persisted Jack.

“My own personal impression is that he is very much alive. I think it is quite likely he was shot and perhaps severely wounded. I feel sure he is still active. His methods are unmistakable.”

“But they didn’t ‘get’ him,” said Steve bitterly.

“No, they didn’t ‘get’ him,” admitted Mr. Lait, “but they have scattered the bandits; I do not think we shall have much trouble with them for a time. You see in a time of trouble like this, these lawless men have a chance to do a lot of damage. We must not forget the difference between Mexico and the bandits.”

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Bert, who with his companions had returned to the post and had just heard of the arrival of the scouts.

“Yes,” he said in reply to the eager questions

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of the boys, "we came through all right. We didn't find any trace of your friend and I'm afraid those bones we found were his. What did you think of the Little Guy?"

"I think General Funston is one of the greatest men I ever saw," spoke up Jack eagerly. "He has more enthusiasm packed in his little body than I ever saw in any other one man. He called us 'Funston's Scouts' and I don't care what title I get later, I never shall be as proud of any as I am of that."

Inasmuch as General Pershing's troops were returning, Bert and Tom were not sent to join them. It was decided that they should remain in Columbus until the punitive expedition had recrossed the border.

Before the coming of General Pershing, however, a rumour passed along the border and speedily was confirmed as a fact: General Funston was dead. Suddenly, while he was playing with some little children in a hotel at San Antonio, death had overtaken him. For a time, even after the report was confirmed, the boys could not believe it; but at last they were convinced that it was but too true. Major-General Frederick Funston was dead.

Again and again the boys talked over their interviews with the Little Guy and tried to recall all that he had said to them. Even after life on the ranch had resumed for them its normal course

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their conversation every night turned to the little fighting leader, his daring in Alaska, his courage in his long voyage down the Yukon, his bravery in the Philippines and Cuba, and his strong qualities even in the quiet campaign on the border, which had made him a hero in their eyes as well as a marked figure in the history of their country. Indeed as the days passed there was no title more pleasing to the boys than the one which the commander at San Antonio bestowed upon them.

THE END

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