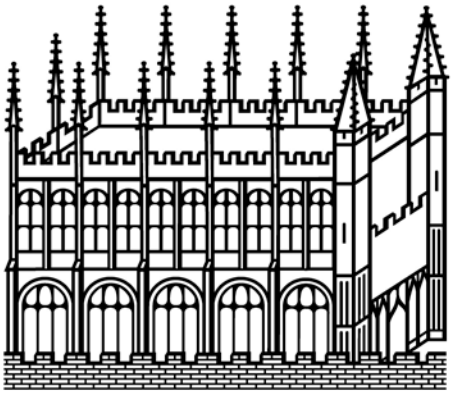

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THE WOOD-RANGERS.

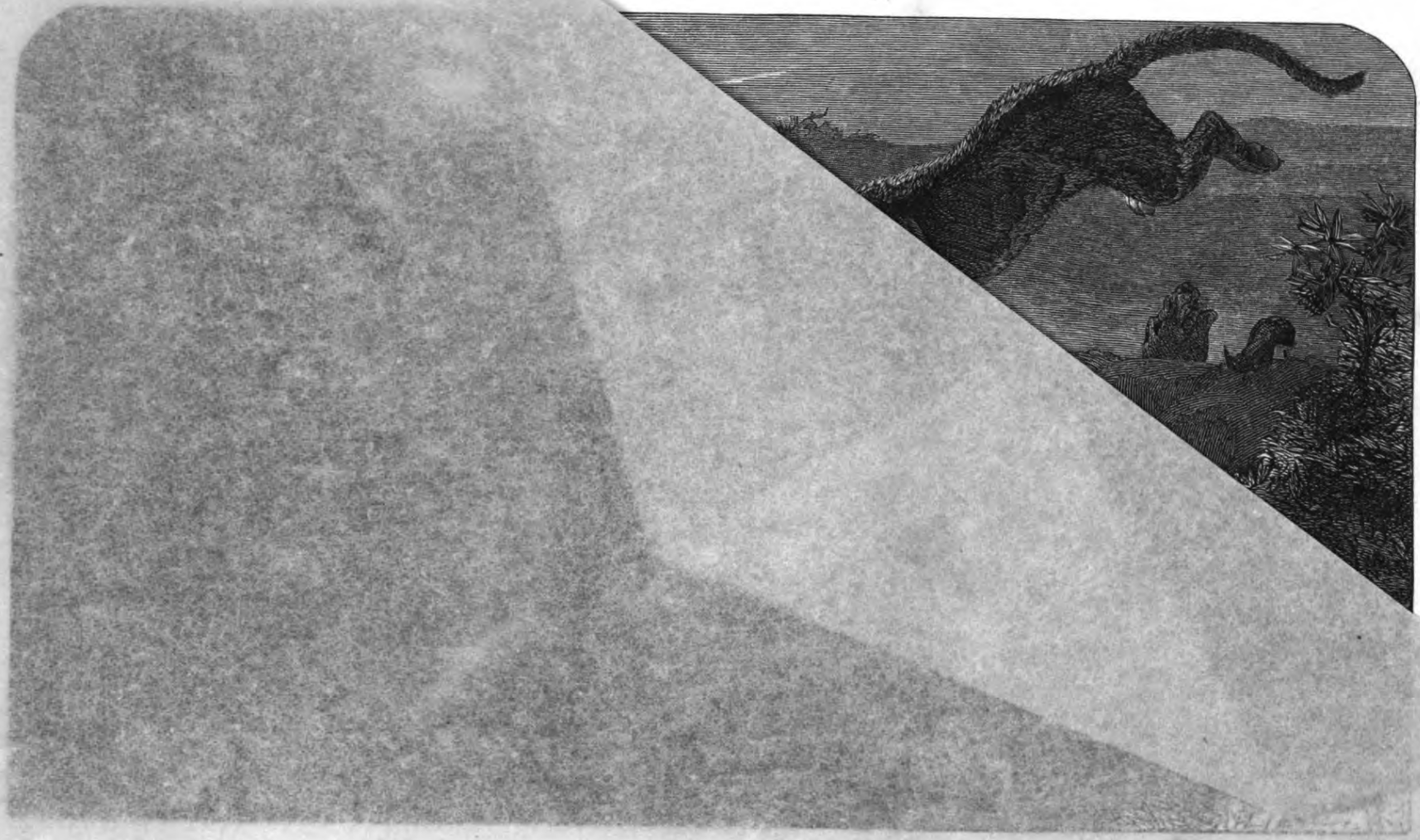
Vol. I., p. 204.

WOOD-RANGERS.

CH OF LUIS DE BELLEMARE.)

REID,

" "OÇEOLA,"



THE WOOD RANGERS.

Vol. I., p. 204.

THE WOOD-RANGERS.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF LUIS DE BELLEMARE.)

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE SCALP HUNTERS," "OÇEOLA,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE WOOD-RANGERS.

CHAPTER I.

PEPÉ, THE SLEEPER.

No landscape on the Biscayan coast presents a more imposing and picturesque aspect than the little village of Elanchovi. Lying within an amphitheatre of cliffs, whose crests rise above the roofs of the houses, the port is protected from the surge of the sea by a handsome little jetty of chiselled stone; while the single street of which the village is composed, commencing at the inner end of the mole, sweeps boldly up against the face of the preci-

pice. On both sides, the houses, disposed in a sort of *échelon*, rise, terrace-like, one above the other; so that, viewed from a distance, the street presents the appearance of a gigantic stairway.

In these, the common dwellings, there is not much variety of architecture; since the village is almost exclusively inhabited by poor fishermen. There is one building, however, that is conspicuous—so much so as to form the principal feature of the landscape. It is an old château—perhaps the only building of this character in Spain—whose slate roofs and gothic turrets and vanes, rising above the highest point of the cliffs, overlook the houses of the village.

This mansion belonged to the noble family of Mediana, and formed part of the grand estates of this ancient house. For a long period, the Counts of Mediana had not inhabited the château of Elanchovi, and it had fallen into a state of neglect and partial decay, presenting a somewhat wild and desolate as-

pect. However, at the beginning of the year 1808, during the troubles of the French invasion, the Count Don Juan, then head of the family, had chosen it as a safe residence for his young wife, Doña Luisa, whom he passionately loved.

Here Don Juan passed the first months of his married life—a marriage celebrated under circumstances of sad augury. The younger brother of Don Juan, Don Antonio de Mediana, had also fervently loved the Doña Luisa; until, finding her preference for his brother, he had given up his suit in anger, and quitted the country. He had gone, no one knew whither; and though, after a time, there came back a rumour of his death, it was neither confirmed nor contradicted.

The principal reason why the count had chosen this wild spot as a residence for his lady was this:—He held a high command in the Spanish army, and he knew that duty would soon call him into the field. The *alcalde* of Elanchovi had been an old servant

of the Mediana family, and had been raised to his present rank by their influence. Don Juan, therefore, believed he could rely upon the devotion of this functionary to the interests of his house, and that during his absence Doña Luisa would find security under the magisterial protection. Don Ramon Cohecho was the name of the chief magistrate of Elanchovi.

The count was not permitted long to enjoy the happiness of his married life. Just as he had anticipated, he soon received orders to join his regiment; and parted from the château, leaving his young wife under the special care of an old and respectable domestic—the steward, Juan de Dios Canelo. He parted from his home, never more to return to it; for in the battle of Burgos, a French bullet suddenly terminated his existence.

It was sad tidings for the Doña Luisa; and thus, to the joys of the first days of her married life, succeeded the sorrows of a premature widowhood.

It was near the close of the year 1808, when the château was the sombre witness of Doña Luisa's grief, that our story commences; and though its scene lies in another land—thousands of leagues from the Biscayan coast—its history is intimately woven with that of the château of Elanchovi.

Under ordinary circumstances, the village of Elanchovi presents a severe and dreary aspect. The silence and solitude that reign along the summit of the cliffs, contrasted with the continuous roaring of the breakers against their base, inspires the beholder with a sentiment of melancholy. Moreover, the villagers, as already said, being almost exclusively fishermen, and absent during the whole of the day, the place at first sight would appear as if uninhabited. Occasionally, when some cloud is to be observed in the sky, the wives of the fishermen may be seen at the door, in their skirts of bright colours, and their hair in long double plaits hanging below their waists. These, after remaining a while to cast anxious

glances upon the far horizon, again recross the thresholds of their cottages, leaving the street deserted as before.

At the time of which we are writing—the month of November, 1808—Elanchovi presented a still more desolate aspect than was its wont. The proximity of the French army had produced a panic among its inhabitants; and many of these poor people—forgetting in their terror that they had nothing to lose—had taken to their boats, and sought safety in places more distant from the invaders of whom they were in dread.

Isolated as this little village was on the Biscayan coasts, there was all the more reason why it should have its garrison of *coast-guards*; and such in reality it had. These, at the time, consisted of a company of soldiers—carabiniers, under the command of a captain, Don Lucas Despierto—but the condition of these warriors was not one to be envied, for the Spanish government, although nominally keeping them in its pay, had for a long time neglected to

pay them. The consequence was, that these poor fellows had absolutely nothing upon which to live. The seizure of smuggled goods —with which they might have contrived to indemnify themselves—was no longer possible. The contraband trade, under this system, was completely annihilated. The smugglers knew better than to come in contact with coast-guards whose performance of their duty was stimulated by such a keen necessity! From the captain himself, down to the lowest official, an incessant vigilance was kept up—the result of which was that the fiscal department of the Spanish government was, perhaps, never so faithfully or economically served.

There was one of these coast-guards who affected a complete scepticism in regard to smuggling—he even went so far as to deny that it had ever existed! He was distinguished among his companions by a singular habit—that of always going to sleep upon his post; and this habit, whether feigned or real, had won for him the name of *The Sleeper*. On

this account, it may be supposed that he was never placed upon guard where the post was one of importance.

José, or, as he was more familiarly styled, *Pepé,* was a young fellow of some twenty-five years—tall, thin, and muscular. His black eyes, deeply set under bushy eyebrows, had all the appearance of eyes that *could* sparkle; besides, his whole countenance possessed the configuration of one who had been born for a life of activity. On the contrary, however—whether from a malady or some other cause—the man appeared as somnolent and immobile as if both his visage and body were carved out of marble. In a word, with all the exterior marks that denote the possession of an active and ardent soul, Pepé *the Sleeper* appeared the most inactive and apathetic of men.

His chagrin was great—or appeared to be so—when, upon the evening of the day in which this narrative commences, the captain of the coast-guard sent a messenger to summon him to head-quarters.

On receiving the unexpected order, Pepé rose from his habitual attitude of recumbence, stretched himself at his leisure, yawned several times, and then obeyed the summons, saying, as he went out:—"What the devil fancy has the captain got into his head to send for *me?*"

Once, however, on the way and alone, it might have been observed that the somnolent coast-guard walked with an energetic and active step, very unlike his usual gait!

On entering the apartment where the captain awaited him, his apathetic habit returned, and, while rolling a cigarette between his fingers, he appeared to be half asleep. The captain was buried in a profound meditation, and did not at first perceive him.

"*Bueno!* my captain," said the coast-guard, respectfully saluting his superior, and calling attention to his presence. "I am here."

"Ah! good! my fine fellow," began the captain, in a winning voice. "Well, Pepé!" added he, more slowly and significantly, "the times are pretty hard with us—are they not?"

"Rather hard, captain."

"But you, *hombre!*" rejoined Don Lucas, with a laugh, "you don't appear to suffer much of the misery—you are always asleep, I understand?"

"When I sleep, captain, I am not hungry," replied the coast-guard, endeavouring to stifle a yawn; "then I dream that the government has paid me."

"Well—at all events you are not its creditor for many hours of the day, since you sleep most of them. But, my fine fellow, it is not about this I desire to talk to you. I wish to give you a proof of my confidence."

"Ah!" muttered Pepé.

"And a proof of my regard for you," continued the officer. "The government has its eye open upon all of us; your reputation for apathy begins to be talked about, and you might be discharged one of these days as a useless official. It would be a sad affair if you were to lose your place?"

"Frightful! captain," replied Pepé, with

perfect simplicity of manner; "for if I can scarce keep from dying of hunger in my place, what would be the result were I deprived of it? Frightful!"

"To prevent this misfortune, then," continued the captain, "I have resolved to furnish to those who calumniate you, a proof of the confidence which may be placed in you, by giving you the post of *Ensenada*—and this very night."

Pepé involuntarily opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

"That surprises you?" said Don Lucas.

"No," laconically replied the coast-guard.

The captain was unable to conceal from his inferior a slight confusion, and his voice trembled as he pronounced the interrogation:—

"What! It does not surprise you?"

"No," repeated Pepé, and then added in a tone of flattery, "The captain Despierto is so well known for his vigilance and energy, that he may confide the most important post to the very poorest of his sentinels. That is

why I am not astonished at the confidence he is good enough to place in me; and now I await the instructions your Honour may be pleased to give."

Don Lucas, without further parley, proceeded to instruct his sentinel in his duty for the night. The orders were somewhat diffuse —so much so that Pepé had a difficulty in comprehending them—but they were wound up by the captain saying to the coast-guard, as he dismissed him from his presence—

"And above all, my fine fellow, *don't go to sleep upon your post!*"

"I shall *try* not to do so, captain," replied Pepé, at the same time saluting his superior, and taking his leave.

"This fellow is worth his weight in gold," muttered Don Lucas, rubbing his hands together with an air of satisfaction; "he could not have suited my purpose better, if he had been expressly made for it!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SENTINEL OF LA ENSENADA.

THE little bay of Ensenada, thus confided to the vigilance of Pepé the Sleeper, was mysteriously shut in among the cliffs, as if nature had designed it expressly for smugglers—especially those Spanish *contrabandistas* who carry on the trade with a cutlass in one hand and a carbine in the other.

On account of its isolation, the post was not without danger, especially on a foggy November night, when the thick vapour suspended in the air not only rendered the sight useless, but hindered the voice that might

call for assistance from being heard to any distance.

In the soldier who arrived upon this post, advancing with head erect and light, elastic tread, no one could have recognized Pepé the Sleeper—Pepé, habitually plunged in a profound state of somnolence—Pepé, of downcast mien and slow dragging gait—and yet it was he. His eyes, habitually half shut, were now sparkling in their sockets, as if even the slightest object could not escape him even in the darkness.

After having carefully examined the ground around his post, and convinced himself that he was entirely alone, he placed his lantern in such a position that its light was thrown along the road leading to the village. Then advancing some ten or twelve paces in the direction of the water, he spread his cloak upon the ground, and lay down upon it—in such an attitude that he could command a view both of the road and the bay.

"Ah, my captain!" soliloquized the coast-

guard, as he arranged his cloak around him to the best advantage, "you are a very cunning man, but you have too much faith in people who are always asleep; and devil take me! if I don't believe that you are interested in my sleeping most soundly on this particular night. Well, *quien sabe?*—we shall see."

For about the period of half an hour Pepé remained alone—delivering himself up to his reflections, and in turns interrogating with his glance the road and the bay. At the end of that time, a footstep was heard in the loose sand; and looking along the pathway, the sentinel perceived a dark form approaching the spot. In another moment the form came under the light of the lantern, and was easily recognized as that of Don Lucas, the captain of the coast-guard.

The officer appeared to be searching for something, but presently perceiving the recumbent sentinel, he paused in his steps.

"Pepé!" cried he, in a low, mincing voice.

No reply came from Pepé.

"Pepé!" repeated the captain, in a tone a little more elevated.

Still no reply from the sentinel, who remained obstinately silent.

The captain, appearing to be satisfied, ceased calling the name, and shortly after retraced his steps towards the village. In a few seconds his form was lost in the distance.

"Good!" said Pepé, as his superior officer passed out of his sight; "just as I expected. A moment ago, I was fool enough to doubt it. Now I am sure of it. Some smuggler is going to risk it to-night. Well, I shall manage badly if I don'tcome in for a windfall—though it be at the expense of my captain."

Saying this, the sentinel, with one bound, rose erect upon his feet.

"Here I am, no more Pepé the Sleeper," continued he, stretching himself to his full height.

From this time his eyes were bent continually upon the ocean; but another half hour passed without anything strange showing

itself upon the bosom of the water—nothing to break the white line of the horizon where sea and sky appeared to be almost confounded together. Some dark clouds were floating in the heavens, now veiling and now suddenly uncovering the moon, that had just risen. The effect was fine; the horizon was one moment shining like silver, and the next dark as funeral crape; but through all these changes no object appeared upon the water to denote the presence of a human being.

For a long while the coast-guard looked so intensely through the darkness, that he began to see the sparks flying before his eyes. Fatigued with this sustained attention, he at length shut his eyes altogether, and concentrated all his powers upon the organs of hearing. Just then a sound came sweeping over the water—so slight that it scarce reached him—but the next moment the land-breeze carried it away, and it was heard no more.

Fancying it had only been an illusion, he once more opened his eyes, but in the obscu-

rity he could see nothing. Again he shut them closely, and listened as before. This time he listened with more success. A sound, regularly cadenced, was heard. It was such as would be made by a pair of oars cautiously dipped, and was accompanied by a dull knocking, as of the oars working in their thole-pins.

"At last we shall see!" muttered Pepé, with a gasp of satisfaction.

A small black point, almost imperceptible, appeared upon the horizon. Rapidly it increased in size, until it assumed the form and dimensions of a boat with rowers in it, followed by a bright strip of foam.

Pepé threw himself suddenly *á plat ventre*, in fear that he might be seen by those on the water; but from the elevated position which he occupied, he was able to keep his eye upon the boat without losing sight of it for a single instant.

Just then the noises ceased, and the oars were held out of water, motionless, like some sea-bird, with wings extended, choosing a spot

upon which to alight. In the next instant the rowing was resumed, and the boat headed directly for the shore of the bay.

"Don't be afraid," muttered the coast-guard, affecting to apostrophize the rowers. "Don't be afraid, my good fellows—come along at your pleasure!"

The rowers, in truth, did not appear to be at all apprehensive of danger; and the next moment the keel of the boat was heard grinding upon the sand of the beach.

"*Por Dios!*" muttered the sentinel, in a low voice; "not a bale of goods! Is it possible, after all, they are not smugglers?"

Three men were in the boat, who did not appear to take those precautions which smugglers would have done. They made no particular noise, but, on the other hand, they did not observe any exact silence. Moreover, their costume was not that ordinarily worn by the regular *contrabandista.*

"Who the devil can they be?" asked Pepé of himself.

The coast-guard lay concealed behind some tufts of withered grass that formed a border along the crest of the slope. Through these he could observe the movements of the three men in the boat.

At an order from the one who sat in the stern sheets, the other two leaped ashore, as if with the design of reconnoitering the ground. He who issued the order, and who appeared to be the chief of the party, remained seated in the boat.

Pepé was for a moment undecided whether he should permit the two men to pass him on the road; but the view of the boat, left in charge of a single man, soon fixed his resolution.

He kept his place, therefore, motionless as ever, scarce allowing himself to breathe, until the two men arrived below him, and only a few feet from the spot where he was lying.

Each was armed with a long Catalonian knife, and Pepé could see that the costume which both wore was that of the Spanish privateers of the time—a sort of mixture of the

uniform of the royal navy of Spain, and that of the merchant service; but he could not see their faces, hid as they were under the slouched Basque bonnet.

All at once the two men halted. A piece of rock, detached by the knees of the coast-guard, had glided down the slope and fallen near their feet.

"Did you hear anything?" hastily asked one.

"No; did you?"

"I thought I heard something falling from above there," replied the first speaker, pointing upwards to the spot where Pepé was concealed.

"Bah! it was some mouse running into its hole."

"If this slope wasn't so infernally steep, I'd climb up and see," said the first.

"I tell you we have nothing to fear," rejoined the second; "the night is as black as a pot of pitch, and besides—the *other*—hasn't he assured us that he will answer for the man on guard, *who sleeps all day long.*"

"Just for that reason, he may not sleep at

night. Remain here, I'll go round and climb up. *Carramba!* if I find this sleepy head," he added, holding out his long knife, the blade of which glittered through the darkness, "so much the worse—or, perhaps, so much the better for him—for I shall send him where he may sleep for ever."

"*Mil diablos!*" thought Pepé, "this fellow is a philosopher! By the holy virgin! I am long enough here."

And at this thought, he crept out of the folds of his cloak, like a snake out of its skin, and leaving his garment where it lay, crawled rapidly away from the spot.

Until he had got to a considerable distance, he was so cautious not to make any noise, that, to use a Spanish expression, *the very ground itself did not know he was passing over it.*

In this way he advanced, carbine in hand, until he was opposite the point where the boat rested against the beach. There he stopped to recover his breath—at the same time fixing his eye upon the individual that was alone.

The latter appeared to be buried in a sombre reverie, motionless as a statue, and wrapped in an ample cloak, which served both to conceal his person and protect him from the humidity of the atmosphere. His eyes were turned toward the sea; and for this reason he did not perceive the dark form of the carabinier approaching in the opposite direction.

The latter advanced with a stealthy tread —measuring the distance with his eye— until at length he stood within a few paces of the boat.

Just then the stranger made a movement as if to turn his face towards the shore, when Pepé, like a tiger bounding upon its prey, launched himself forward to the side of the boat.

"It is I!" he exclaimed, bringing the muzzle of his carbine on a level with the man's breast. "Don't move, or you are a dead man!"

"You, who?" asked the astonished stranger, his eyes sparkling with rage, and not even

lowering their glance before the threatening attitude of his enemy.

"Why, me! Pepé—you know well enough? Pepé the Sleeper!"

"Curses upon him, if he has betrayed me!" muttered the stranger, as if speaking to himself.

"If you are speaking of Don Lucas Despierto," interrupted the carabinier, "I can assure you he is incapable of such a thing; and if *I am here* it is because that he has been only too discreet, señor smuggler."

"Smuggler!" exclaimed the unknown, in a tone of proud disdain.

"When I say smuggler," replied Pepé, chuckling at his own perspicuity, "it is only meant as a compliment, for you haven't an ounce of merchandize in your boat, unless indeed," continued he, pointing with his foot to a rope ladder, rolled up, and lying in the bottom, "unless that may be a sample! *Santa Virgen!* a strange sample that!"

Face to face with the unknown, the coast-

guard could now examine him at his leisure.

He was a young man of about Pepé's own age, twenty-five. His complexion had the hale tint of one who followed the sea for a profession. Thick dark eyebrows were strongly delineated against a forehead bony and broad, and from a pair of large black eyes shone a sombre fire, that denoted a man of implacable passions. His arched mouth was expressive of high disdain; and the wrinkles upon his cheeks, strongly marked, notwithstanding his youth, at the slightest movement, gave to his countenance an expression of arrogance and scorn. In his eyes—in his whole bearing—you could read that ambition or vengeance was the ruling passion of his soul. His fine black curling hair alone tempered the expression of severity that distinguished his physiognomy. With regard to his costume, it was simply that of an officer of the Spanish navy.

A look that would have frightened most men, told the impatience with which he

endured the examination of the coast-guard.

"An end to this pleasantry!" he cried out, at length. "What do you want, fellow? Speak!"

"Ah! talk of our affairs," answered Pepé, "that is just what I desire. Well, in the first place, when those two fellows of yours return with my cloak and lantern—which they are cunning enough to make a seizure of—you will give them your commands to keep at a distance. In this way we can talk without being interrupted. Otherwise, with a single shot of this carabine, which will stretch you out dead, I shall also give the alarm. What say you? Nothing? Be it so. That answer will do, for want of a better. I go on. You have given to my captain forty *onzas?*" continued the carabinier, with a bold guess, making sure that he had named enough.

"Twenty," replied the stranger, without reflecting.

"I would rather it had been forty," said

Pepé. "Well, one does not pay so high for the mere pleasure of a sentimental promenade along the shore of the Ensenada. My intervention need be no obstruction to it—provided you pay for my neutrality."

"How?" asked the unknown, evidently desirous of putting an end to the scene.

"Oh, a mere bagatelle—you have given the captain forty onzas."

"Twenty, I tell you."

"I would rather it had been forty," coolly repeated the carabinier; "but say twenty, then. Now, I don't wish to be indiscreet—he is a captain, I am nothing more than a poor private. I think it reasonable, therefore, that I should have *double* what he has received."

At this extortionate demand the stranger allowed a bitter oath to escape him, but made no answer.

"I know well," continued Pepé, "that I am asking too little. If my captain has three times my pay, of course he has three times less need of money than I, and therefore I have

the right to *triple* the sum he has received; but as the times are hard, I hold to my original demand—forty onzas."

A terrible struggle betwixt pride and apprehension appeared to be going on in the bosom of the stranger. Despite the coldness of the night, the perspiration streamed over his brow and down his cheeks. Some imperious necessity it was that had led him into this place—some strange mystery there must be—since the necessity he was now under tamed down a spirit that appeared untamable. The tone of jeering intrepidity which Pepé held toward him caused him to feel the urgency of a compromise; and at length, plunging his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a purse, and presented it to the carabinier.

"Take it and go!" he cried, with impatience.

Pepé took the purse, and for a moment held it in his hand, as if he would first count its contents.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, after a pause, "I'll

risk it. I accept it for forty onzas. And now, señor stranger, I am deaf, dumb, and blind."

"I count upon it," coldly rejoined the unknown.

"By the life of my mother!" replied Pepé, "since it's not an affair of smuggling, I don't mind to lend you a hand—for as a coast-guard, you see, I could not take part in anything contraband—no, never!"

"Very well, then," rejoined the stranger, with a bitter smile, "you may set your conscience at rest on that score. Guard this boat till my return. I go to join my men. Only, whatever happens—whatever you may see—whatever you may hear—be, as you have promised, deaf, dumb, and blind."

As he uttered these words the stranger sprang out of the boat, and took the road leading to the village. A turning in the path soon hid him from the sight of the coast-guard.

Once left to himself, Pepé, under the light of the moon, counted out the glittering con-

tents of the purse which he had extorted from the stranger.

"If this jewel is not false," muttered he to himself, "then I don't care if the government never pays me. Meanwhile, I must begin to-morrow to cry like a poor devil about the back pay. That will have a good effect."

CHAPTER III.

THE ALCALDE AND HIS CLERK.

It is not known how long Pepé remained at his post to await the return of the stranger; when the cock was heard to crow, and the aurora appeared in the eastern horizon, the little bay, Ensenada, was completely deserted.

Then life began to appear in the village. The dark shadows of the fishermen were seen upon the stair-like street, descending to the mole; and the first beams of the morning lit up their departure. In a few minutes the little flotilla was out of sight; and at the doors of the cottages the women and children

only could be seen, appearing and disappearing at intervals.

Among these wretched hovels of the village, there was one dwelling of greater pretensions than the rest. It was that of the alcalde, Don Ramon Cohecho, of whom we have already spoken. It alone still kept its doors and windows closed against the morning light.

It was full day, when a young man, wearing a high-crowned beaver hat—old, greasy, and shining like leather—walked up to the door of the alcalde's mansion. The limbs of this individual were scantily covered with a pair of pantaloons, so tightly fitting as to appear like a second skin to his legs, so short as scarce to touch his ankles, and of such thin stuff as to ill protect the wearer from the sharp air of a November morning. The upper half of this individual was not visible. A little cloak, of coarse shaggy cloth, known as an *esclavina*, covered him up to the very eyes. From the manner in which he so carefully

guarded the upper part of his person with this pinched mantle, at the expense of his thighs and legs, an observer might have supposed that he was perfectly content with his pantaloons. Appearances, however, are often deceptive; for in truth, the ambition of this youth, whose unsteady glance, miserable aspect, and a certain smell of old papers about him, proclaimed him to be *un escribano* —his every-day dream was, to have a pair of pantaloons entirely different from his own—in other words, a pair with long ample legs, of good wide waist, and made out of fine broadcloth. Such a pair would render him the most satisfied man in the world.

This young man was the *right hand* of the alcalde—his name Gregorio Cagatinta.

On reaching the door, he gave a modest knock with his horn ink-bottle, which he carried hanging to his button. The door was opened by an old housekeeper.

"Ah! it is you, *Don* Gregorio?" cried the housekeeper, with that superb courtesy so

peculiar to the Spaniards, that even two shoeblacks, on meeting, lavish upon each other the epithet *Don*, as if each were a grand noble.

"Yes, it is I, Doña Nicolasa," replied Gregorio.

"*Santissima Virgen!*—since it is you, then I must be late, and my master will be waiting for his pantaloons that are not yet aired. Take a seat, Don Gregorio; he will soon be down."

The chamber into which the notary's clerk had been introduced would have been a large one, had it not been for the singular conglomeration of objects with which it was more than half filled. Nets of all sizes, masts, yards, and rudders of boats, oars, sails of every kind—both square and lateen—woollen shirts worn by sailors or fishermen, and a variety of other marine objects, were placed pell-mell in every corner of the room. Notwithstanding, there was space enough left to hold three or four chairs around a large

oaken table, upon which last stood a large cork inkstand, with several goose-quill pens; with some sheets of half dirty paper placed ostentatiously around it to awe the visitors, who might have business with the alcalde.

The presence of this odd assortment of objects, it would have been difficult for a stranger to explain—though there was no mystery about it. The fact is, that besides his official character as first magistrate, the alcalde had another *rôle* which he played, of rather an unofficial character. He was the *pawnbroker* of the place—that is, he lent out money in small sums, charging a *real* for every dollar by the week—in other words, a simple interest of twenty per cent. by the month, or two hundred and fifty per cent. per annum! His clients being all fishermen, will account for the nautical character of the "pledges" that filled the chamber of audience.

Cagatinta scarce deigned to cast a look at this miscellaneous collection of objects. Had there been a pair of pantaloons among them,

it might have been different; for, to say the truth, the probity of Don Gregorio was scarce firm enough to resist so strong a temptation as this would have been. The notary's clerk was not exactly of that stuff of which honest men are composed. Nature, even in its crimes, does not leap to grand villainies at once; it proceeds from less to greater; and Cagatinta, though still but young, was yet capable of a little bit of "cribbing."

Don Ramon was not long in coming out of his sleeping-room. In a little while he showed his jovial face at the door of the audience-chamber.

He was a person of portly and robust figure; and it was easily seen that one leg of his ample pantaloons would have been sufficient to make a pair for the thin limbs and meagre body of the escribano.

"*Por Dios!* Señor alcalde," said the clerk, after having exchanged with his superior a profusion of matutinal salutations, "what a splendid pair of pantaloons you have on!"

From the alcalde's answer, it was evident that this was not the first time that Cagatinta had made the remark.

"Ah! Gregorio, *amigo!*" replied he, in a tone of good humour, "you are growing tiresome with your repetitions. Patience, patience, señor escribano! you know that for the services you are to render me — I say nothing of those already rendered — I have promised you my liver-coloured breeches, which have been only a very little used; you have only to gain them."

"But what services are to gain them, señor alcalde?" inquired the clerk, in a despairing tone.

"Eh—Dios!—who knows what—patience, amigo! Something may turn up all at once, that will give you that advantage over me. But come! let us to business—make out the deed of appropriation of the boat of that bad pay, Vicente Perez, who, under pretence that he has six brats to feed, can't reimburse me the twenty dollars I have advanced him."

Cagatinta drew out from his little portfolio a sheet of stamped paper, and, sitting down by the table, proceeded to execute the order of the magistrate. He was interrupted by a hurried knocking at the outer door, which had been closed to prevent intrusion.

"Who dare knock in that fashion?" sharply inquired the alcalde.

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" cried a voice from without.

"*Sin pecado concebida!*" replied at the same time the two acolytes within.

And after this formula, Gregorio hastened to the door and opened it.

"What on earth can have brought you here at this hour, Don Juan de Dios Canelo?" inquired the alcalde, in a tone of surprise, as the old steward of the Countess de Mediana appeared in the doorway, his bald forehead clouded with some profound chagrin.

"Ah, señor alcalde," replied the old man, "a terrible misfortune has happened last night—a great crime has been committed—

the countess has disappeared, and the young count along with her."

"Are you sure of this?" shouted the alcalde.

"Alas—you will only have to go up into the balcony that overlooks the sea, and there you will see in what state the assassins have left the countess's chamber."

"Justice! justice! Señor alcalde! Send out your alguazils over the whole country; find the villains—hang them!"

This voice came from a woman still outside in the street. It was the *femme de chambre* of the countess, who, to show a devotion which she very little felt, judged it *apropos* to make a great outcry as she precipitated herself into the chamber of audience.

"Ta-ta-ta, woman! how you go on!" interrupted the alcalde. "Do you think I have a crowd of alguazils? You know very well that in this virtuous village there are only two; and as these would starve if they

didn't follow some trade besides their official one, they are both gone fishing hours ago."

"Ah, me!" cried the *femme de chambre*, with a hypocritical whine, "my poor mistress! —who then is to help her?"

"Patience, woman, patience!" said the alcalde. "Don't fear but that justice will be done."

The chamber-maid did not appear to draw much hope from the assurance, but only redoubled her cries, her excited behaviour strongly contrasting with the quiet manner in which the faithful old steward exhibited the sincerity of his grief.

Meanwhile a crowd of women, old men, and children had gathered around the alcalde's door, and by little and little, were invading the sanctuary of the audience-chamber itself.

Don Ramon advanced towards Cagatinta, who was rubbing his hands under his *esclavina* charmed at the idea of the quantity of stamped paper he would now have an opportunity to blacken.

"Now, friend Gregorio," said the alcalde, in a low voice, "the time has come, when, if you are sharp, you may gain the liver-coloured breeches."

He said no more; but it was evident that the escribano understood him, at least to a certain extent. The latter turned pale with joy, and kept his eye fixed upon every movement of his patron, determined to seize the first opportunity that presented itself of winning the breeches.

The alcalde reseated himself in his great leathern chair; and commanding silence with a wave of his hand, addressed his auditory in a long and pompous speech, with that profuse grandiloquence of which the Spanish language is so capable.

The substance of his speech was as follows:—

"My children! We have just heard from this respectable individual, Don Juan de Dios Canelo, that a great crime has last night been committed; the full knowledge of this villainy

cannot fail to arrive at the ears of justice, from which nothing can be kept hid. Not the less are we to thank Don Juan for his official communication; it only remains for him to complete the accusation by giving the names of the guilty persons."

"But, señor alcalde," interrupted the steward, "I do not know them, although, as you say, my communication may be official—I can only say, that I will do all in my power to assist in finding them."

"You understand, my children," continued the alcalde, without taking notice of what the steward had said, the worthy Canelo, by this official communication, asks for the punishment of the guilty persons. Justice will not be deaf to his appeal. I may now be permitted, however, to speak to you of my own little affairs, before abandoning myself to the great grief which the disappearance of the countess and the young count have caused me."

Here the alcalde made a sign to Cagatinta,

whose whole faculties were keenly bent to discover what service was expected from him, by which he was to gain the object of his ambition—the liver-coloured breeches.

The alcalde continued:—

"You all know, my children, of my attachment to the family of Mediana. You can judge, then, of the grief which this news has given me—news the more incomprehensible, since one knows neither by whom, nor for what reason, such a crime should be committed. Alas, my children! I lose a powerful protector in the Countess de Mediana; and in me the heart of the old and faithful servant is pierced with anguish, while as a man of business I am equally a sufferer. Yes, my children! In the deceitful security which I felt no later than yesterday, I was up at the château, and had an important interview with the countess in regard to my rents."

"To ask time for their payment," Cagatinta would have added, for the clerk was perfectly acquainted with the alcalde's affairs. But Don

Ramon did not allow him an opportunity of committing this enormous indiscretion, which would for ever have deprived him of the promised breeches.

"Patience, worthy Cagatinta!" he exclaimed hastily, so as to prevent the other from speaking, "constrain this thirst for justice that consumes you!—Yes, my children!" he continued, turning to his auditory, "in consequence of this feeling of security, which I have now cause to regret, I placed in the hands of the unfortunate countess"—here the voice of Don Ramon quivered—"a sum equivalent to ten years of my rents *in advance*."

At this unexpected declaration, Cagatinta bounded from his chair as if stung by a wasp; and the blood ran cold in his veins, when he perceived the grand blunder he had been so near committing.

"You will understand, then, my children, the terrible situation in which this disappearance of the countess has placed me, when I tell you that *I took no receipt from the lady*,

but this very morning was to have gone up for it."

This revelation produced a profound sensation among the auditory; and though, perhaps, not one of them really believed the story, no one dared to give utterance to his incredulity.

"Fortunately," continued the alcalde, "the word of persons worthy of credit may yet repair this mistake I have committed—fortunately there were witnesses of the payment."

Here Cagatinta—who, like water that had been a long time dammed up and had now found vent—stretched out both his arms, and in a loud voice cried out:—

"I can swear to it!"

"He can swear to it," said the alcalde.

"He can swear to it," mechanically repeated one or two of the bystanders.

"Yes, my friends!" solemnly added Cagatinta. I swear to it now, and should have mentioned the matter sooner, but I was prevented by a little uncertainty. I had an idea

that it was *fifteen* years of rent, instead of *ten*, that I saw the alcalde hand over to the unfortunate Doña Luisa."

"No, my worthy friend," interrupted the alcalde, in a tone of moderation likely to produce an effect upon his auditory, "it was only ten years of rent, which your valuable testimony will hinder me from losing."

"Yes, señor alcalde," replied the wily scribe, determined at all hazard to deserve the liver-coloured breeches, "I know it was ten years in advance, but there was also the two years of back rent which you paid—two years of arrears and ten in advance—twelve years in all. *Por Dios!* a large sum it would have been to have lost!"

"And with this reflection Cagatinta sat down again, fancying, no doubt, that he had fairly won the breeches.

We shall not detail what further passed during this scene in the alcalde's chamber of audience—where justice was practised as in the times of Gil Blas—long before and long

after Gil Blas—for it is not very different in a Spanish law court at the hour in which we are writing.

Enough to say that, the scene concluded, most of the *dramatis personæ*, with the alcalde at their head, proceeded to the château, to inspect the chamber, and if possible find out some clue to the mysterious disappearance of the countess.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FORSAKEN CHAMBER.

On arriving at the château, the alcalde ordered the door of the countess's chamber to be burst in—for it was still bolted inside. On entering the apartment, a picture of confusion was presented. Drawers empty, others drawn out, but only half sacked of their contents.

All this did not indicate precisely that there had been any violence. A voluntary but hurried departure on the part of the countess might have left just such traces as were discovered. The bed was still undisturbed, as if she had not lain down upon it. This

fact appeared to indicate a foreknowledge, on the part of the lady, of what was to happen—as if she had had the intention of going off, but had made no preparation until the moment of departure. The furniture was all in its place—the window curtains, and those of the alcove, had not been disarranged, and no traces of a struggle were to be discerned within the chamber, which contained many light fragile objects of furniture that could not fail to have been destroyed by the slightest violence.

The fetid odour of an oil-lamp filled the apartment, despite the cold air that came in through the open window. It was evident, therefore, that this lamp had been left alight, and had continued to burn until the oil had become exhausted.

It could not be a robbery neither? A thousand articles of value, likely enough to have tempted the cupidity of robbers, were left behind, both on the tables and in the drawers.

The conclusion then was that neither assassination nor burglary had taken place.

Notwithstanding all these deceptive appearances, the old steward shook his head doubtfully. The signs were sufficient to baffle his reason, which was none of the strongest, but the faithful servant could not bring himself to believe that his noble mistress would take flight in a manner so extraordinary,—his good sense revolted at the thought. In his belief, some crime had been committed, but how was it to be explained—since the assassin had left no traces of his guilt? The devoted Don Juan looked with a sad eye upon that desolate chamber—upon the dresses of his beloved mistress scattered over the floor—upon the cradle of the young count, where he had so lately slept, rosy and smiling, under the vigil of his mother.

Suddenly struck with an idea, the steward advanced towards the iron balcony that fronted upon the sea—that where the window

had been found open. With inquiring eye he looked to the ground below, which was neither more nor less than the beach of the sea itself. It was at no great depth below; and he could easily have seen from the balcony any traces that might have been there. But there were none. The tide had been in and out again. No trace was left on the sand or pebbles that had the slightest signification in regard to the mysterious event. The wind sighed, the waves murmured, as always; but amid the voices of nature none raised itself to proclaim the guilty.

On the far horizon only were descried the white sails of a ship, gradually passing outwards and fading away into the azure of the sea.

While the old steward watched the disappearance of the ship with a sort of dreamy regard, he sent up a silent prayer that his mistress might still be safe. The others, with the exception of the alcalde and his

clerk, stood listening to the mournful howling of the wind against the cliffs, which seemed alternately to weep and sigh, as if lamenting the sad event that had just transpired.

As regards the alcalde and his assistant, they were under the same conviction as Don Juan—both believing that a crime had been committed—though they did not care to avow their belief, for reasons known to themselves. The absence of any striking evidence that might lead to the discovery of the delinquents, but more especially the difficulty of finding some interested individual able to pay the expenses of justice (the principal object of criminal prosecutions in Spain), damped the zeal of Don Ramon and the scribe. Both were satisfied to leave things as they stood—the one contented with having gained the recompense so much coveted—the other with the twelve years of rents which he felt sure of gaining.

"*Valga me Dios!* my children," said the alcalde, turning towards the witnesses, "I

cannot explain what fancy the countess may have had in going out by the window—for the door of the chamber, bolted inside, leaves no room to doubt that she went that way. Some woman's caprice, perhaps, which justice has no business to meddle with."

"Perhaps it was to escape from giving the alcalde his receipt," suggested one of the by-standers to another, in an under-tone of voice.

"But how, Don Juan," continued the magistrate, addressing himself to the old steward—"how did you know of the countess's disappearance, since you could not get into the room?"

"That is simple enough," replied the old man. "At the hour in which the chamber-maid is accustomed to present herself before the señora, she knocked as usual at the door. No answer was given. She knocked louder, and still received no answer. Growing anxious, she came to me to tell me. I went to the door myself, first knocked, and then called; and receiving no reply, I ran round to the

garden and got the ladder. This I placed against the balcony, and mounted up in order to see through the window. On reaching the window I found it open, and the chamber in the condition you now see it."

When the steward had finished this declaration, Cagatinta whispered some words in the ear of the alcalde; but the latter only replied by a shake of the shoulders, and an expression of disdainful incredulity.

"Who knows?" answered the scribe, in reply to this dumb show.

"It might be," muttered Don Ramon, "we shall see presently."

"I persist, gentlemen," continued the alcalde, "in my belief that the countess has gone out by the window; and however singular it may appear, I believe the lady is free to her fancy to go out as she pleases—even though it be by a window."

Cagatinta, and some others, complimented with a laugh this little bit of magisterial facetiousness.

"But, señor alcalde," spoke out Don Juan, disgusted with this ill-timed pleasantry, "a proof that there has been a forced entry into the chamber is this broken glass of the window, of which you see some pieces still lying on the balcony."

"This old fool," muttered the alcalde to himself, "is not going to let me have any breakfast. By this time everything will be cold, and Nicolasa —— What do these bits of glass prove?" he continued, raising his voice; "don't you think that the breeze, which was blowing roughly last night, might have caused this? The window was hanging open, and the wind clashing it violently against the frame, would readily cause the breaking of a pane?"

"But why is it," answered Don Juan, "that the broken pane is precisely the one adjacent to the fastening? It must have been knocked out to get the window open."

"*Corramba!* Señor Don Juan de Dios!" cried the alcalde, in a peevish tone—at the

same time biting his gold-headed cane, the emblem of his office—"is it you or I who have here the right to ask questions? *Carrai!* it appears to me that you make me cut a strange figure!"

Here Cagatinta interposed with a modest air:—

"I shall answer our friend Canelo, if you permit me. If the window was opened with the design he has stated, it must of course have been done from the outside. The pieces of glass then would have fallen *into* the chamber; but such is not the case—there they lie on the balcony! It has been the wind, therefore, as his honour the alcalde has reasonably stated, that has done this business. Unless, indeed," added he with a feigned smile, "some trunk carried incautiously past the window might have struck one of the squares. This may have been—since it appears the countess intends a prolonged absence, judging from the effects taken with her, as testified by the empty drawers."

The old steward lowered his head at this proof, which seemed completely to falsify his assertion. He did not hear the last observation of Cagatinta, who was cogitating whether he ought not to exact from the alcalde something more than the liver-coloured breeches, as a recompense of this new service he had done him.

While the faithful Don Juan was busy with painful reflections that threw their shadows upon his bald forehead, the alcalde approached and addressed him in a voice so low as not to be heard by the others:—

"I have been a little sharp with you, Don Juan—I have not sufficiently taken into account the grief which you, as a loyal servant, must feel under such an unexpected stroke. But tell me—independent of the chagrin which this affair has caused you, are you not also affected by some fears about your own future? You are old—weak in consequence—and without resources?"

"It is just because I am old, and know

that I have not long to live, that I am so little affected. My grief, however," added he, with an air of pride, "is pure and free from all selfishness. The generosity of Count de Mediana has left me enough to pass the remainder of my days in tranquillity. But I should pass them all the more happily if I could only see avenged the lady of my old master."

"I approve of your sentiments, Señor Don Juan; you are doubly estimable on account of your sorrow, and as to your savings—— Notary! Señor Cagatinta!" cried the alcalde, suddenly raising his voice so as to be heard by all present. "Make out a *proces verbal* —that the Señor Don Juan Dios Canelo, here present, will become prosecutor in this case. It cannot be doubted that a crime has been committed; and it is a duty we owe to ourselves, as well as to this respectable man, to seek out and punish the authors of it."

"But, señor alcalde!" interposed the steward, perfectly stupefied with this unex-

pected declaration, "I did not say—I have no intention of becoming *prosecutor*."

"Take care, old man!" cried Don Ramon, in a solemn tone; "if you deny what you have already confided to me, grievous charges may be brought against you, As friend Cagatinta has just this minute observed to me, the ladder by which you scaled the balcony might prove sinister designs. But I know you are incapable of such. Rest contented, then, at being the accuser in place of the accused. Come, gentlemen, our duty calls us outside. Perhaps underneath the balcony we may find some traces of this most mysterious matter."

So saying, the alcalde left the chamber, followed by the crowd.

Poor Don Juan found himself thus unexpectedly between two horns of a dilemma, the result in either case being the same—that is, the spoliation of the little *pecadillo* he had put away against old age. He shook his head, and, with a sublime resignation, accepted

the voice of iniquity for that of God—consoling himself with the reflection that this last sacrifice might be of some service to the family whose bread he had so long eaten.

No trace was found under the balcony. As already stated, the waves must have obliterated any footmarks or other vestiges that might have been left.

It was believed for awhile that an important capture had been made, in the person of a man found lying in a crevice among the rocks. This proved to be Pepé the Sleeper. Suddenly aroused, the coast-guard was asked if he had seen or heard anything? "No," was the reply, "nothing." But Pepé remembered his full pockets; and fearing that the alcalde might take a fancy to search him, saw that some *ruse* was necessary to put an end to the scene. This he succeeded in doing by begging the alcalde for a *real* to buy bread with!

What was to be done with this droll fellow? The alcalde felt no inclination to question him

further, but left him to go to sleep again, and sleep as long as he pleased.

Any further investigation appeared to Don Ramon to be useless—at least until some order might be received from higher quarters—besides, it would be necessary to graduate the expenses of justice to the means of the prosecutor; and with this reflection the alcalde went home to his breakfast.

In the evening of this eventful day for the village of Elanchovi—when the twilight had fallen upon the water—two persons might have been seen wandering along the beach, but evidently desirous of shunning one another. Both appeared in grief, though their sorrows sprang from a very different cause.

One was the poor old steward, who, while heaving a sigh at the thought that his worldly store was about to be absorbed in the inexorable gulf of justice, at the same time searched for some trace of his lost mistress, praying for her and her child, and calling upon God to take them under his protection.

The other pensive wanderer was Cagatinta, of whom the alcalde had again taken the advantage. Profiting by the confidence of the scribe, Don Ramon had induced the latter to commit his oath to stamped paper; and then, instead of the liver-coloured breeches, had offered him an old hat in remuneration. This Cagatinta had indignantly refused.

He was now lamenting his vanished dreams of ambition, his silly confidence, and the immorality of false oaths—*not paid for*. Nevertheless, he was meditating whether it would not be more prudent to accept the old hat in lieu of the liver-coloured breeches, alas! so well earned.

CHAPTER V.

PEPÉ'S REVANCHE.

WHEN Pepé the Sleeper had made himself master of the secret of Captain Despierto—which he had found of such profitable service—he was not aware that the captain had held back another. Nevertheless, the coast-guard felt some kind of remorse of conscience—though he had as yet no idea of the terrible consequences that had resulted. His remorse was simply that he had betrayed his post of sentinel; and he determined that he would make up for it by a more zealous performance of duty whenever an opportunity should offer. To bring about this contingency, he went on

the very next night, and requested to be once more placed on the post of Ensenada.

His wish was gratified; and while Don Lucas believed him asleep, as usual, Pepé kept wide awake, as on the preceding night.

We shall leave him at his post, while we recount what was taking place off the coast not far from Ensenada.

The night was as foggy as that which preceded it, when, about the hour of ten o'clock, a coaster was observed gliding in towards the cliffs, and entering among a labyrinth of rocks that lay near the mouth of the bay.

This vessel appeared well guided and well sailed. The shape of her hull, her rigging, her sails, denoted her to be a ship of war, or at least a privateer.

The boldness with which she manœuvred, in the middle of the darkness, told that her pilot must be some one well acquainted with this dangerous coast; and also that her commander had an understanding with some people on the shore.

The sea dashed with fury against both sides of the rocky strait, through which the coaster was making her way, but still she glided safely on. This strait once cleared, a large bay opened before her, in which the sea was more calm, and rippled gently up against a beach of sand and pebble.

The coaster at length succeeded in gaining this bay ; and then, by a manœuvre directed by the officer of the watch, she hove to with a celerity that denoted a numerous crew.

Two boats were let down upon the water, and, being instantly filled with men, were rowed off in the direction of the upper end of the bay, where some houses, which could be distinguished by their whiteness, stood scattered along the beach.

To end the mystery, let us say that the little coaster was a French vessel—half privateer, half smuggler—and had entered the bay with a double design—the disposing of merchandize and the procuring of provisions, of which the crew began to stand in need.

Further, we shall add, that the pilot was a skilful fisherman of Elanchovi, furnished by Don Lucas Despierto, captain of the coast-guard!

The officer of the watch silently walked the deck—now listening to the waves surging against the sides of the little vessel—now stooping a moment over the light of the binnacle—anon watching the sails that flapped loosely upon the yards, now turned contrary to the direction of the wind.

An hour had been passed in this manner, when a brisk fusillade was heard from several points on the shore. Other reports of musketry appeared to respond; and shortly after the two boats came hastening back to the coaster.

It was Pepé who had caused all this; Pepé, who, to the great chagrin of his captain, had given warning to the coast-guards. He had been too late, notwithstanding his zeal, for the boats came back laden with sheep and other provisions of every sort.

The last of the men who climbed over the gangway, just as the boats were being hoisted up, was a sailor of gigantic height, of colossal proportions, and Herculean vigour. He was a Canadian by birth. He carried in his arms a young child that was cold and motionless, as if dead. A slight trembling in its limbs, however, proclaimed that there was still life in it.

"What the deuce have you got there, Bois Rose?" demanded the officer of the watch.

"With your leave, lieutenant, it's a young child that I found in a boat adrift, half dead with hunger and cold. A woman, quite dead, and bathed in her own blood, still held it in her arms. I had all the trouble in the world to get the boat away from the place where I found it, for those dogs of Spaniards espied it, and took it for one of ours. There was a terrible devil of a coast-guard kept firing at me with as much obstinacy as awkwardness. I should have silenced him with a single shot, had I not been hindered in looking after this

poor little creature. But if ever I return—ah!"

"And what do you intend to do with the child?"

"Take care of it, lieutenant, until peace be proclaimed; then return here, and find out whom it belongs to."

Unfortunately, the only knowledge he was able to obtain about the infant was its name, Fabian, and that the woman who had been assassinated was its mother. * * *

Two years passed, during which the French privateer did not return to the coast of Spain. The tenderness of the sailor towards the child he had picked up—which was no other than the young Count Fabian de Mediana—did not cease for an instant, but seemed rather to increase with time. It was a singular and touching spectacle to witness the care, almost motherly, which this rude nurse lavished upon the child, and the constant *ruses* to which he had recourse to procure a supplement to his rations for its nourishment. The sailor had

to fight for his own living; but he often indulged in dreams that some day a rich prize would be captured, his share of which would enable him to take better care of his adopted son. Unfortunately, he did not take into his calculations the perilous hazards of the life he was leading.

One morning the privateer was compelled to run from an English brig of war, of nearly twice her force; and, although a swift sailer, the French vessel soon found that she could not escape from her pursuer. She disdained to refuse the combat, and the two vessels commenced cannonading each other.

For several hours a sanguinary conflict was kept up, when the Canadian sailor, dashed with blood, and blackened with powder, ran towards the child, and lifting it in his arms, carried it to the gangway. There, in the midst of the tumult, with blood running over the decks, amidst the confusion of cries, and the crash of falling masts, he wished to engrave on the child's memory the circumstances

of a separation, of which he had a strong presentiment. In this moment, which should leave even upon the memory of an infant a souvenir that would never be effaced, he called out to the child, while shielding it with his huge body :—

"Kneel, my son!"

The child knelt, trembling with affright.

"You see what is going on?"

"I am afraid," murmured Fabian; "the blood—the noise—" and saying this, he hid himself in the arms of his protector.

"It is well," replied the Canadian, in a solemn tone. "Never forget, then, that in this moment a sailor, a man who loved you as his own life, said to you—*kneel and pray for your mother*—"

He was not permitted to finish the speech. At that moment a bullet struck him, and his blood spouting over the child, caused it to utter a lamentable cry. The Canadian had just strength left to press the boy to his breast, and to add some words, but in so low a tone

that Fabian could only comprehend a single phrase. It was the continuation of what he had been saying—"*Your mother—whom I found—dead beside you—*"

With this speech ended the consciousness of the sailor. He was not dead, however; his wound did not prove fatal.

When he came to his senses again, he found himself in the fetid hold of a ship. A terrible thirst devoured him. He called out in a feeble voice, but no one answered him. He perceived that he was a prisoner, and he wept for the loss of his liberty, but still more for that of the adopted son that Providence had given him.

What became of Fabian?—That the history of the "Wood-Rangers" will tell us; but before passing from the prologue of our drama —before crossing from Europe to America— a few events connected with the tragedy of Elanchovi remain to be told.

It was several days after the disappearance of the countess before anything was known

of her fate. Then some fishermen found the abandoned boat driven up among the rocks, and still containing the body of the unfortunate lady. This was some light thrown upon the horrid mystery; but the cause of the assassination long remained unknown, and the author of it long unpunished.

The old steward tied black crape upon the vanes of the château, and erected a wooden cross on the spot where the body of his beloved mistress had been found; but, as everything in this human world soon wears out, the sea-breeze had not browned the black crape, nor the waves turned green the wood of the cross, before the tragic event ceased to cause the slightest emotion in the village—ay, even ceased to be talked of.

CHAPTER VI.

SONORA.

SONORA, naturally one of the richest provinces of Mexico, is also one of the least known. Vast tracts in this state have never been explored, and others have been seen only by the passing traveller. Nevertheless, nature has been especially bountiful to this remote territory. In some parts of it the soil, scarce scratched by the plough, will yield two crops in the year; while in other places gold is scattered over the surface, or mixed with the sands, in such quantity as to rival the *placers* of California.

It is true that these advantages are, to

some extent, neutralized by certain inconveniences. Vast deserts extend between the tracts of fertile soil, which render travelling from one to the other both difficult and dangerous; and, in many parts of the province, the savage aborigines of the country are still masters of the ground. This is especially the case in those districts where the gold is found in placers.

These placers are not to be approached by white men, unless when in strong force. The Indians repel all such advances with warlike fury. Not that they care to protect the gold —of whose value they have been hitherto ignorant—but simply from their hereditary hatred of the white race. Nevertheless, attempts are frequently made to reach the desired gold-fields—some that result in complete failure, and some that are more or less successful.

The natural riches of Sonora have given rise to very considerable fortunes, and not a few very large ones, of which the origin was

the finding a "nugget" of virgin gold; while others again had for their basis the cultivation of the rich crops which the fertile soil of Sonora can produce.

There is a class of persons in Sonora, who follow no other business than searching for gold placers or silver mines, and whose only knowledge consists of a little practical acquaintance with metallurgy. These men are called *gambusinos*. From time to time they make long excursions into the uninhabited portions of the state, where, under great privations, and exposed to a thousand dangers, they hastily and very superficially work some vein of silver, or wash the auriferous sands of some desert-stream, until, tracked and pursued by the Indians, they are compelled to return to their villages. Here they find an audience delighted to listen to their adventures, and to believe the exaggerated accounts which they are certain to give of marvellous treasures lying upon the surface of the ground, but not to be approached on

account of some great danger, Indian or otherwise, by which they are guarded.

These *gambusinos* are to mining industry what the backwoodsmen are to agriculture and commerce. They are its pioneers. Avarice — stimulated by their wonderful stories, and often, too, by the sight of real treasure brought in from the desert—for the expeditions of the gambusinos do not always prove failures—avarice, thus tempted, is ready to listen to the voice of some adventurous leader, who preaches a crusade of conquest and exploration. In Sonora, as elsewhere, there is always an abundance of idle men to form the material of an expedition —the sons of ruined families—men who dislike hard work, or indeed any work—and others who have somehow got outside the pale of justice. These join the leader, and an expedition is organized.

In general, however, enterprises of this kind are too lightly entered upon, as well as too loosely conducted; and the usual conse-

quence is, that before accomplishing its object, the band falls to pieces; many become victims to hunger, thirst, or Indian hostility; and of those who went forth, only a few individuals return to tell the tale of suffering and disaster.

This example will, for a while, damp the ardour for such pursuits. But the disaster is soon forgotten; fresh stories of the gambusinos produce new dreams of wealth, and another band of adventurers is easily collected.

At the time of which I am writing—that is, in 1830—just twenty-two years after the tragedy of Elanchovi, one of these expeditions was being organized at Arispe—then the capital of the state of Sonora. The man who was to be the leader of the expedition was not a native of Mexico, but a stranger. He was a Spaniard, who had arrived in Sonora but two months before, and who was known by the name, Don Estevan de Arechiza.

No one in Arispe remembered ever to have seen him, and yet he appeared to have been in the country before this time. His knowledge of its topography, as well as its affairs and political personages, was so positive and complete, as to make it evident that Sonora was no stranger to him; and the plan of his expedition appeared to have been conceived and arranged beforehand—even previous to his arrival from Europe.

Beyond doubt, Don Estevan was master of considerable resources. He had his train of paid followers, kept open house, made large bets at the *monte* table, lent money to friends, without appearing to care whether it should ever be returned, and played "grand seigneur" to perfection. No one knew from what source he drew the means to carry on such a "war."

Now and then he was known to absent himself from Arispe—for a week or ten days at a time. He was absent on some journey; but no one could tell to what part of the country these journeys were made—for his well-trained

servants never said a word about the movements of their master.

Whoever he might be, his courteous manner, *á la Española*, his generosity, and his fine free table, soon gave him a powerful influence in the social world of Arispe; and by this influence he was now organizing an expedition, to penetrate to a part of the country, which it was supposed no white man had ever yet visited.

As Don Estevan almost always lost at play, and as he also neglected to reclaim the sums of money which he so liberally lent to his acquaintances, it began to be conjectured that he possessed, not far from Arispe, some rich placer of gold from which he drew his resources. The periodical journeys which he made gave colour to this conjecture.

It was also suspected that he knew of some placer, still more rich, in the country into which he was about to lead his expedition. What truth there was in the suspicion we shall presently see.

It will easily be understood that, with such a reputation, Don Estevan would have very little difficulty in collecting his band of adventurers. Indeed, it was said that already more than fifty determined men, from all parts of Sonora, had assembled at the *Presidio of Tubac* on the Indian frontier—the place appointed for the rendezvous of the expedition. It was further affirmed that in a few days Don Estevan himself would leave Arispe to place himself at their head.

This rumour, hitherto only conjecture, proved to be correct; for, at one of the dinners given by the hospitable Spaniard, he announced to his guests that in three days he intended to start for Tubac.

During the progress of this same dinner, a messenger was introduced into the dining-room, who handed to Don Estevan a letter, an answer to which he awaited.

The Spaniard, begging of his guests to excuse him for a moment, broke the seal and read the letter.

As there was a certain mystery about the habits of their convivial host, the guests were silent for awhile—all watching his movements and the play of his features; but the impassible countenance of Don Estevan did not betray a single emotion that was passing in his mind, even to the most acute observer around the table. In truth, he was a man who well knew how to dissemble his thoughts, and perhaps on that very occasion, more than any other, he required all his self-command.

"It is well," he said, calmly addressing himself to the messenger. "Take my answer to him who sent you, that I will be punctual to the rendezvous in three days from the present."

With this answer the messenger took his departure. Don Estevan, turning to his guests, again apologized for his impoliteness; and the dinner, for an instant suspended, once more progressed with renewed activity.

Nevertheless, the Spaniard appeared more thoughtful than before; and his guests did not

doubt but that he had received some news of more than ordinary interest.

We shall leave them to their conjectures, and precede Don Estevan to the mysterious rendezvous which had been given him, and the scene of which was to be a small village lying upon the route to the Presidio of Tubac.

The whole country between Arispe and the Presidio in question may be said to be almost uninhabited. Along the route only mean hovels are encountered, with here and there a *hacienda* of greater pretensions. These houses are rarely solitary, but collected in groups at long distances apart. Usually a day's journey lies between them, and, consequently, they are the stopping places for travellers who may be on their way towards the frontier. But the travellers are few, and the inhabitants of these miserable hovels pass the greater part of their lives in the midst of a profound solitude. A little patch of Indian corn which they cultivate—a few head of cattle, which, fed upon the perfumed pastures of the plains, produce

beef of an exquisite flavour—a sky always clear—and, above all, a wonderful sobriety of living—enable these dwellers of the desert steppes of Sonora to live, if not in a state of luxury, at least free from all fear of want. What desires need trouble a man who sees a blue sky always over his head, and who finds in the smoke of a cigarette of his own making a resource against all the cravings of hunger?

At one part of the year, however, these villages of hovels are uninhabited—altogether abandoned by their occupants. This is the *dry season*, during the greater portion of which the cisterns that supply the villages with water become dried up. The cisterns are fed by the rains of heaven, and no other water than this can be found throughout most tracts of the country. When these give out, the settlements have to be abandoned, and remain until the return of the periodical rains.

In a morning of the year 1830, at the distance of about three days' journey from Arispe,

a man was seated, or rather half reclining, upon his *serapé* in front of a rude hovel. A few other huts, of a similar character, were near, scattered here and there over the ground. It was evident, from the profound silence that reigned among these dwellings, and the absence of human forms, or implements of household use, that the *rancheria* was abandoned by its half nomad population. Such in reality was the fact, for it was now the very height of the dry season. Two or three roads branched out from this miserable group of huts, leading off into a thick forest which surrounded it on all sides. They were rather paths than roads, for the tracks which they followed were scarce cleared of the timber that once grew upon them. At the point of junction of these roads, the individual alluded to had placed himself; and his attitude of perfect ease told that he was under no apprehension from the profound and awe-inspiring loneliness of the place. The croak of the ravens, flitting from tree to tree, hoarsely uttered in their flight, the cry

of the *chaculucas*, as they welcomed the rising sun, were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the scene.

Presently the white fog of the night began to rise upward and disappear under the strength of the sunbeams. Only a few flakes of it still hung over the tops of the mezquite and iron-wood trees that grew thickly around the huts.

Near where the man lay, there might be seen the remains of a large fire. It had been kindled no doubt to protect him from the chill dews of the night; and it now served him to prepare his breakfast. Some small cakes of wheaten meal, with a few pieces of *tasajo*, were already placed upon the red embers of the fire; but notwithstanding that these would make but a meagre repast, the man appeared eagerly to await the enjoyment of it.

Near at hand, with a frugality equal to that of his master, a horse was browsing upon the tufts of dry yellow grass that grew thinly over the ground. This horse, with a saddle and bridle lying near, proved the solitary indivi-

dual to be a traveller. Contrary to the usual custom of the country, the horse had no *lazo*, or fastening of any kind, upon him; but was free to wander where he pleased.

The costume of the traveller consisted of a sort of jacket or vest of brick-coloured leather, without buttons or any opening in front, but drawn over the head after the manner of a shirt. Wide pantaloons of the same material, open from the knee downwards, and fastened at the waist by a scarf of red China crape. Under the pantaloons, and covering the calf of the leg nearly up to the knee, could be seen the *botas* of strong stamped leather; in one of which was stuck a long knife with a horn hilt —thus ready to the hand whether the owner was seated, standing, or on horseback. A large felt hat, banded with a *toquilla* of Venetian pearls, completed a costume sufficiently picturesque, the vivid colours of which were in harmony with that of a *serapé* on which the traveller was reclining. This costume denoted one of those men accustomed to gallop among

the thorny jungles that cover the desert steppes of North Mexico; and who in their expeditions, whether against Indian enemies, or for whatever purpose, sleep with indifference under the shadow of a tree, or the open heaven itself—in the forest, or upon the naked plain.

There was in the features of this traveller a singular mixture of brutal ferocity and careless good humour. A crooked nose, with thick bushy eyebrows, and black eyes that sparkled from time to time with a malicious fire, gave to his countenance a sinister aspect, and belied the expression of his mouth and lips, that presented rather a pleasant and smiling contour. But the man's features, when viewed as a whole, could not fail to inspire a certain feeling of repulsiveness mingled with fear. A short carbine that lay by his side, together with the long knife, whose haft protruded above the top of his boots, did not in any way tame down the ferocious aspect of his face. On the contrary, they proclaimed him one whom it would not be desirable to have for a companion in the desert.

Despite the *nonchalance* of his attitude, it was evident that he awaited some one; but as everything in these countries is on a large scale, so also is the virtue of patience. This outlaw—for everything about him signified that he was one of some sort—this outlaw, we say, having made three days' journey before arriving upon the ground where he now was, thought nothing of a few hours, less or more, spent in expectation. In the desert, he who has travelled a hundred leagues will consider it a mere bagatelle to wait for a hundred hours: unlike to him who keeps an appointment in the midst of a great city, where a delay of a quarter of an hour will be endured with feverish impatience.

So it was with our solitary traveller; and when the hoof-strokes of a horse were heard at some distance off in the forest, he did nothing more than make a slight change in the attitude in which he had been reclining; while his steed, also hearing the same sounds, tossed up his head and neighed joyously.

The hoof-strokes each moment were heard more distinctly; and it was evident that a horseman was galloping rapidly in the direction of the huts. After a little the strokes became more gentle, and the gallop appeared to be changed to a walk. The rider was approaching with caution.

A few seconds intervened, and then, upon one of the roads—that leading to Arispe—the horseman was perceived coming on at a slow and cautious pace.

On perceiving the traveller, still half reclining upon his serapé, the horseman drew his rein still tighter and halted, and the two men remained for some seconds regarding each other with a fixed and interrogative glance.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO HONEST GENTLEMEN.

THE new comer was a tall man, with dark complexion and thick black beard, costumed very similarly to the other—in vest and pantaloons of brick-red leather, felt sombrero, sash, and boots. He was mounted upon a strong active horse.

It may appear strange that, during the period of mutual examination, each of these two men made a very similar reflection about the other; but it was scarcely strange either, considering that both presented an equally suspicious aspect.

"*Carramba!*" muttered the horseman as

he eyed the man on the serapé, "if I wasn't sure that he is the gentleman I have been sent to meet, I should believe that I had chanced upon a very unlucky acquaintance."

At the same instant he upon the ground said to himself—

"Por Dios! if that infernal Seven of Spades had left any dollars in my purse, I should have considered them in danger of being taken out of it just now."

Despite the nature of his reflection, the horseman did not hesitate any longer, but, spurring his horse forward to the edge of the fire, lifted his hat courteously from his head, and saluted him on the ground, at the same time saying interrogatively :—

"No doubt it is the Señor Don Pedro Cuchillo I have the honour to address?"

The same, cavallero!" replied the other rising to his feet, and returning the salute with no less politeness than it had been given.

"Cavallero, I have been sent forward to meet you, and announce to you the approach

of the Señor Arechiza, who at this time cannot be many leagues distant. My name is Manuel Baraja, your very humble servant."

"Your honour will dismount?"

The horseman did not wait for the invitation to be repeated, but at once flung himself from the saddle. After unbuckling his enormous spurs, he speedily unsaddled his horse, fastened a long lazo round his neck, and then giving him a smart cut with the short whip which he carried, despatched the animal without further ceremony to share the meagre provender of his companion.

At this moment, the tasajo, beginning to sputter over the coals, gave out an odour that resembled the smell of a dying lamp. Notwithstanding this, Baraja cast towards it a look of longing.

"It appears to me, Señor Cuchillo," said he, "that you are well provided here. Carramba!—*tortillas*, of wheaten meal!—tasajo!—it's a repast for a prince!

"Oh, yes," replied Cuchillo, with a certain

air of foppishness, "I treat myself well. It makes me happy to know that the dish is to your liking; I beg to assure you it is quite at your service."

"You are very good, and I accept your offer without ceremony. The morning air has sharpened my appetite."

And saying this, Baraja proceeded to the mastication of the tasajo and tortillas. After being thus engaged for some time, he once more addressed himself to his host.

"Dare I tell you, Señor Cuchillo, the favourable impression I had of you at first sight?"

"Oh! you shock my modesty, señor. I would rather state the good opinion your first appearance gave me of *you!*"

The two new friends here exchanged a salute, full of affability, and then continued to eat, Baraja harpooning upon the point of his long knife another piece of meat out of the ashes.

"If it please you, Señor Baraja," said

Cuchillo, "we may talk over our business while we are eating. You will find me a host *sans ceremonie.*"

"Just what pleases me."

"Don Estevan, then, has received the message which I sent him?"

"He has; but what that message was is only known to you and him."

"No doubt of that," muttered Cuchillo to himself.

"The Señor Arechiza," continued the *envoy*, "started for Tubac shortly after receiving your letter. It was my duty to accompany him, but he ordered me to proceed in advance of him with these commands: 'In the little village of Huerfano you will find a man, by name Cuchillo; you shall say to him that the proposal he makes to me deserves serious attention; and that since the place he has designated as a rendezvous is on the way to Tubac, I will see him on my journey.' This instruction was given by Don Estevan an hour or so before his departure, but although

I have ridden a little faster to execute his orders, he cannot be far behind me."

"Good! Señor Baraja, good!" exclaimed Cuchillo, evidently pleased with the communication just made; "and if the business which I have with Don Estevan be satisfactorily concluded—which I am in hopes it will be—you are likely to have me for a comrade in this distant expedition. "But," continued he, suddenly changing the subject, "you will, no doubt, be astonished that I have given Don Estevan a rendezvous in such a singular place as this?"

"No," coolly replied Baraja, "you may have reasons for being partial to solitude. Who does not love it at times?"

A most gracious smile, playing upon the countenance of Cuchillo, denoted that his new acquaintance had correctly divined the truth.

"Precisely," he replied; "the ill-behaviour of a friend towards me, and the malevolent hostility of the alcalde of Arispe, have caused

me to seek this tranquil retreat. That is just why I have established my head-quarters in an abandoned village, where there is not a soul to keep company with."

"Señor Don Pedro," replied Baraja, "I have already formed too good an opinion of you not to believe that the fault is entirely upon the side of the alcalde, and especially on the part of your friend."

"I thank you, Señor Baraja, for your good opinion," returned Cuchillo, at the same time taking from the cinders a piece of the meat, half burnt, half raw, and munching it down with the most perfect indifference, "I thank you sincerely, and when I tell you the circumstances you may judge for yourself."

"I shall be glad to hear them," said the other, easing himself down into a horizontal position; "after a good repast, there is nothing I so much enjoy as a good story."

After saying this, and lighting his cigarette, Baraja turned upon the broad of his back, and with his eyes fixed upon the

blue sky, appeared to enjoy a perfect beatitude.

"The story is neither long nor interesting," responded Cuchillo; "what happened to me might happen to all the world. I was engaged with this friend in a quiet game of cards, when he pretended that I had *tricked* him. The affair came to words—"

Here the narrator paused for an instant, to take a drink from his leathern bottle, and then continued—

"My friend had the indelicacy to permit himself to drop down dead in my presence."

"What! at your words?"

"No, with the stab of a knife which I gave him," coolly replied the outlaw.

"Ah! no doubt your friend was in the wrong, and you received great provocation?"

"The alcalde did not think so. He pestered me in the most absurd manner. I could have forgiven the bitterness of his persecution of me, had it not been that I was myself bitterly roused at the ill-behaviour of my

friend, whom up to that time I had highly esteemed."

"Ah! one has always to suffer from one's friends," rejoined Baraja, sending up a puff of smoke from his corn-husk cigarette.

"Well—one thing," said Cuchillo, "the result of it all is that I have made a vow never to play another card; for the cards, as you see, were the original cause of this ugly affair."

"A good resolution," said Baraja, "and just such as I have come to, myself. I have promised never to touch another card; they have cost me a fortune—in fact, altogether ruined me."

"Ruined you?—you have been rich, then?"

"Alas! I had a splendid estate—a *hacienda de ganados* (cattle farm) with a numerous flock upon it. I had a lawyer for my *intendant*, who took care of the estate while I spent my time in town. But when I came to settle accounts with this fellow, I found I had let

them run too long. I discovered that half my estate belonged to him!"

"What did you do then?"

"The only thing I could do," answered Baraja, with the air of a cavalier, "was to stake my remaining half against his on a game, and let the winner take the whole."

"Did he accept this proposal?"

"After a fashion."

"What fashion?"

"Why, you see I am too timid when I play in presence of company, and certain to lose. I prefer, therefore, to play in the open air, and in some quiet corner of the woods. There I feel more at my ease; and if I should lose —considering that it was my whole fortune that was at stake—I should not expose my chagrin to the whole world. These were the considerations that prompted me to propose the conditions of our playing alone."

"And did the lawyer agree to your conditions?"

"Not a bit of it."

"What a droll fellow he must have been!"

"He would only play in the presence of witnesses."

"And you were forced to his terms?"

"To my great regret I was."

"And of course you lost—being so nervous in presence of company?"

"I lost the second half of my fortune as I had done my first. The only thing I kept back was the horse you see, and even him my ex-intendant insisted upon having as part of the bet. To-day I have no other hope than to make my fortune in this Tubac expedition, and if I should do so, I may get back and settle accounts with the knave. After that game, however, I swore I should never play another card; and, carramba! I have kept my oath."

"How long since this happened?"

"Five days."

"The devil!—You deserve credit for keeping your word."

"The two adventurers, after having ex-

changed these confidences, began to talk over their hopes founded on the approaching expedition—of the marvellous sights that they would be likely to see—but more especially of the dangers that might have to be encountered.

"Bah!" said Baraja, speaking of these; "better to die than live wearing a coat out at elbows."

Cuchillo was of the same opinion.

Meanwhile the sun was growing hotter and hotter. A burning wind began to blow through the trees, and the horses of the two travellers, suffering from thirst, uttered their plaintive neighings. The men themselves sought out the thickest shade to protect them from the fervid rays of the sun, and for awhile both observed a complete silence.

Baraja was the first to resume the conversation.

"You may laugh at me, Señor Cuchillo," said he, fanning himself with his felt hat; "but, to say the truth, the time appears very long to me when I am not playing.

"The same with myself," hastily responded Cuchillo.

"What do you say to our staking, on word of honour, a little of that gold we are going to find?"

"Just what I was thinking myself, but I daren't propose it to you—I'm quite agreeable."

Without further parley, each of the two thrust a hand into his pocket, and drew forth a pack of cards—with which, notwithstanding the oath they had taken, both were provided.

The play was about to commence, when the sound of a bell, and the clattering of hoofs at a distance, announced the approach, most probably, of the important personage whom Cuchillo awaited.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SENATOR TRAGADUROS.

THE two players suspended operations, and turned their faces in the direction whence came the sounds.

At some distance along the road, a cloud of dust suddenly rising, indicated the approach of a troop of horses.

They were without riders. One only was mounted; and that was ridden by the driver of the troop. In short, it was a *remuda*—such as rich travellers in the north of Mexico usually take along with them for a remount. These horses, on account of the half-wild life they lead upon the vast plains where they

are pastured, after a gallop of twenty leagues without carrying a rider, are almost as fresh as if just taken out of the stable. On long routes, each is saddled and mounted at regular intervals; and in this way a journey is performed almost as rapidly as by a mail express, with relays already established.

According to usual custom, a *bell-mare* preceded this drove, which appeared to consist of about thirty horses. It was this bell that had first attracted the attention of the players.

When within a hundred yards or so of the huts, the driver of the remuda galloped to the front, and catching the bell-mare, brought her to a stop. The other horses halted on the instant.

Shortly after, five cavaliers appeared through the dust, riding in the direction of the huts. Two were in advance of the other three, who, following at a little distance, were acting as attendants or servants.

The most distinguished looking of the two

who rode in advance, was a man of somewhat over medium height. He appeared to have passed the age of forty. A greyish-coloured sombrero, with broad brim, screened his face from the fervent sun-beams. He was habited in a pelisse, or dolman, of dark blue, richly laced with gold, and almost concealed under a large white kerchief, embroidered with sky-blue silk, and known in Mexico as *pano de sol.* Under the fiery atmosphere, the white colour of this species of scarf, like the *burnous* of the Arabs, serves to moderate the rays of the sun, and for this purpose was it worn by the cavalier in question. Upon his feet were boots of yellow Cordovan leather, and over these large spurs, the straps of which were stitched with gold and silver wire. These spurs, with their huge five-pointed rowels, and little bells, gave out a silvery clinking that kept time to the march of the horse—sounds most agreeable to the ear of the Mexican *cavallero.*

A *mango*, richly slashed with gold lace,

hung over the pommel of the saddle, in front of the horseman, half covering with its folds a pair of white pantaloons, garnished throughout their whole length with buttons of filigree gold. In fine, the saddle, embroidered like the straps of the spurs, completed a costume that, in the eyes of a European, would recall the souvenirs of the middle ages. For all that, the horseman in question did not require a rich dress to give him an air of distinction. There was that in his bearing and physiognomy that denoted a man accustomed to command, and perfectly *au fait* to the world.

His companion, much younger, was dressed with far more pretension; but his insignificant figure, although not wanting in a certain degree of elegance, was far from having the aristocratic appearance of him with the embroidered kerchief.

The three servants that followed—with faces blackened by dust and sun, and half savage figures—carried long lances, adorned

with scarlet pennons, and *lazos* hung coiled from the pommels of their saddles. These strange attendants gave to the group that singular appearance peculiar to a cavalcade of Mexican travellers. Several mules, pack laden, and carrying enormous valises, followed in the rear. These valises contained provisions and the *menage* necessary for a halt.

On seeing Cuchillo and Baraja, the foremost of the two cavaliers halted, and the troop followed his example.

"'Tis the Señor Don Estevan," said Baraja, in a subdued voice. "This is the man, Señor," he continued, presenting Cuchillo to the cavalier with the *pano de sol.*

Don Estevan—for it was he—fixed upon Cuchillo a piercing glance, that appeared to penetrate to the bottom of his soul; at the same time the look denoted a slight expression of surprise.

"I have the honour to kiss the hands of

your excellency," said Cuchillo. "As you see, it is I who—"

But in spite of his habitual assurance, the outlaw paused, trembling as vague souvenirs began to shape themselves in his memory; for these two men had met before, though not for a very long time.

"Eh! if I don't deceive myself," interrupted the Spaniard, in an ironical tone, "the Señor Cuchillo and I are old acquaintances—though formerly I knew him by a different name?"

"So too your excellency, who was then called—"

Arechiza frowned till the hairs of his black moustache seemed to stand on end. The outlaw did not finish his speech. He saw that it was not the time to tell what he knew; but this species of complicity appeared to restore him to his wonted assurance.

Cuchillo was, in truth, one of those gentlemen who have the ill luck to give to

whatever name they bear a prompt celebrity; and for this reason he had changed his more than once.

"Señor Senator," said Arechiza, turning towards his *compagnon de voyage*, "this place does not appear very suitable for our noon siesta?"

"The Señor Tragaduros y Despilfarro will find the shade of one of these cottages more agreeable," interposed Cuchillo, who knew the senator of Arispe. He knew, moreover, that the latter had attached himself to the fortunes of Don Estevan, in default of better cause; and in hopes of repairing his own fortune, long since dissipated.

Despite the low state of his finances, however, the senator had not the less a real influence in the congress of Sonora; and it was this influence which Don Estevan intended using to his own advantage. Hence the companionship that now existed between them.

"I agree with all my heart to your proposal," answered Tragaduros, "the more so that

we have now been nearly five hours in the saddle."

Two of the servants, dismounting, took their masters' horses by the bridle, while the other two looked after the *cargas* of the mules. The camp-beds were taken from the pack-saddles, and carried into two of the houses that appeared the most spacious and proper.

We shall leave the senator reclining upon his mattress, to enjoy that profound slumber which is the portion of just men and travellers, while we accompany Don Estevan into the hut which he had chosen for himself, and which stood at some distance from that occupied by the legislator.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMPACT.

AFTER having followed Don Estevan, at the invitation of the latter, inside the hovel, Cuchillo closed behind him the wattle of bamboos that served as a door. He did this with great care —as if he feared that the least noise should be heard without—and then he stood waiting for the Spaniard to initiate the conversation.

The latter had seated himself on the side of his camp-bedstead, and Cuchillo also sat down, using for his seat the skull of a bullock,—which chanced to be in the house. It is the ordinary stool of this part of the country,

where the luxury of chairs is still unknown—at least in the houses of the poor.

"I suppose," said Arechiza, breaking silence, "that you have a thousand reasons why I should know you by no other than your present name. I, with motives very different from yours, no doubt, desire to be here nothing more than *Don Estevan Arechiza.* Now! Señor Cuchillo," continued the speaker with a certain affectation of mockery, "let us have this grand secret that is to make your fortune and mine!"

"A word first, Señor Don Estevan de Arechiza," replied Cuchillo, in the same tone; "one word, and then you shall have it."

"I listen to you; but observe, sir, say nothing of the past—no more perfidy. We are here in a country where there are *trees*, and you know how I punish traitors."

At this allusion to some past event—no doubt some mysterious souvenir—the face of the outlaw became livid.

"Yes," replied he, "I remember that it is

not your fault that I was not hung to a tree. It may be more prudent not to recall old wrongs —especially as you are no longer in a conquered country, but in one of forests—forests both sombre and dumb."

There was in this response of the outlaw such an evident air of menace, that, joined with his character and sinister antecedents, it required a firm heart, on the part of Don Estevan, not to regret having recalled the souvenir. With a cold smile he replied:—

"Ha! another time I shall entrust the execution of a traitor to the hands of no human being—I shall perform that office myself," continued he, fixing upon Cuchillo a glance which caused the latter to lower his head. "As to your threats, reserve them for people of your own kind; and never forget that between my breast and your dagger there is an insurmountable barrier."

"Who knows?" muttered Cuchillo, dissembling the anger which was devouring him. Then, in a different tone, he continued:—"But

I am no traitor, Señor Don Esteven; and the proposal I am now about to make to you is frank and loyal."

"We shall see then."

"Know, then, Señor Arechiza, that for several years past I have followed the profession of a *Gambusino*, and have rambled over most of this country in the exercise of my calling. I have seen a deposit of gold such as mortal eye perhaps never looked upon!"

"You have seen it, and not possessed yourself of it?"

"Do not mock me, Don Estevan; I am in earnest. I have seen a placer so rich, that the man who gets it might for a whole year play the game of hell, with luck all the while against him, and not be impoverished! So rich as to satisfy the most insatiable avarice; so rich, in fact, as to buy a kingdom!"

At these words, which responded to some hopes and desires already conceived, Don Estevan could not hinder himself from the manifestation of a certain emotion.

"So rich," continued the outlaw, in an exalted tone, "that I would not hesitate for one instant to give my soul to the devil in exchange for it."

"The devil is not such a fool as to value so highly a soul which he knows he will get gratis. But how did *you* discover this placer?"

"Thus, señor. There was a gambusino, called Marcos Arellanos, who was celebrated throughout the whole province. It was he who discovered this *bonanza*, in company with another of the same calling as himself; but just as they were about to gather some of the gold, they were attacked by the Apache Indians. The associate of Marcos Arellanos was killed, and he himself had to run a thousand risks before he succeeded in making his escape.

"It was after he came home again, that, by chance, I met him at Tubac. There he proposed to me to join him, and go back to the placer. I accepted his offer, and we started.

We arrived safely at the Golden Valley, for by that name he called the place. Powers of heaven!" exclaimed Cuchillo, "it only needed to see those blocks of gold shining in the sun, to bring before one's eyes a thousand dazzling visions!

"Alas! we were only permitted to feast our eyes. The savages were upon us. We were compelled to fly in our turn, and I alone escaped. Poor Marcos! he fell under the horrible war clubs; and I—I have sorely grieved for him! Now, señor, this is the secret of the Golden Valley which I desire to sell to you."

"To sell to me!—and who is to answer for your fidelity?"

"My own interest. I sell you the secret, but I do not intend to alienate my rights to the placer. I have vainly endeavoured to get up an expedition such as yours, for without a strong force it would be of no use going there. It would be certain death to a party of only two or three. With your band, how-

ever, it will be easy, and success would be certain. I only ask the tenth part of all the gold that may be gathered, which I would deserve as guide of the expedition; and going as guide, I will be, at the same time, a hostage for my good faith."

"Is this what I am to understand—you estimate the price of your secret and services a tenth part of the whole?"

"That, and two hundred dollars paid down, to enable me to equip myself for the expedition."

"You are more reasonable than I expected, Cuchillo. Very well, then let it be so; the two hundred dollars you shall have, and I promise you the tenth part."

"Agreed."

"Agreed; and you have my word upon it. Now, answer me some questions which I wish to put. Is this Golden Valley in that part of the country where I intended to have taken my expedition?"

"It is beyond the Presidio of Tubac; and,

since your men are to meet there, you will not need to make any change in the dispositions you have already taken."

"Good. And you have seen this Golden Valley, you say, with your own eyes?"

"I have seen it, without the power of touching it.—I have seen it, grinding my teeth as I looked upon it, like the damned in hell who get a glimpse of Paradise."

As Cuchillo spoke, his countenance betrayed beyond doubt the anguish he felt at his cupidity having been balked.

Arechiza knew too well how to read the human physiognomy, to doubt the truth of Cuchillo's report. Two hundred dollars were to him a mere bagatelle; and taking an ebony case from his bed, small but heavy, he drew from it a rouleau of gold pieces, and handed them to the gambusino, who immediately put them into his pocket.

There was a little more in the rouleau than had been bargained for. The Spaniard took no notice of this, but forming a cross with his

thumb and the index finger of his right hand, *à la mode Espagnole*, he held it before Cuchillo, directing him to make oath upon it.

"I swear by the cross," said the latter, "to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. At the end of ten days' journey beyond Tubac, going in a north-western direction, we shall arrive at the foot of a range of mountains. They are easy to recognize—for a thick vapour hangs over them both night and day. A little river traverses this range of hills. It is necessary to ascend it to a point where another stream runs into it. There, in the angle where the two meet, is a steep hill, the summit of which is crowned by the tomb of an Indian chief. I was not near enough to distinguish the strange ornaments that surround this tomb; but at the foot of the hill there is a small lake by the side of a narrow valley, in which the water from rain torrents has thrown to the surface immense treasures of gold. This is the Golden Valley."

"The way will be easily found?" inquired Don Estevan.

"But difficult to travel," replied Cuchillo. "The arid deserts will be no obstacle compared with the danger from the hostility of Indians. This tomb of one of their most celebrated chiefs they hold in superstitious veneration. It is the constant object of their pilgrimages, and it was during one of these visits that we were surprised, Arellanos and myself."

"And this Arellanos—do you think he has not revealed this secret to any one besides yourself?"

"You must know," replied Cuchillo, "that it is a custom of the gambusinos, before starting upon any expedition, to swear before the Holy Evangelists not to reveal the *bonanzas* they may find without the consent of their associates. This oath Arellanos took, and his death of course prevented him from betraying it."

"You have said that after his return from his first expedition, you met him at Tubac.

Was there no woman whom he may perchance have had in his confidence?"

"His wife only—he may have told it to her. But yesterday a vaquero gave me the news that she has lately died. For all that, she may have revealed the secret to her son."

"Arellanos had a son then?"

"An adopted son—a young man whose father or mother no one knows anything about."

Don Estevan could not repress an involuntary movement.

"This young fellow is, no doubt, the son of some poor devil of this province?" said the Spaniard, in a careless way.

"No," replied Cuchillo, "he was born in Europe, and very likely in Spain."

Arechiza appeared to fall into a reverie, his head bending towards his breast. Some souvenirs were disturbing his spirit.

"This much at least is known," continued Cuchillo. "The commander of an English brig-of-war brought him to Guaymas. He

stated that the child, who spoke both French and Spanish, had been captured in an affair between the brig and a French privateer. A sailor, who was either killed in the fight or taken prisoner, was beyond doubt his father. The captain of the English brig, not knowing what to do with him, gave him to Arellanos—who chanced to be in Guaymas at the time—and Arellanos brought him up, and has made a man of him—my faith! that he has. Young as the fellow is, there is not such a *rastreador* or horse-tamer in the province."

The Spaniard, while apparently not listening to Cuchillo, did not lose a word of what he was saying; but whether he had heard enough, or that the subject was a painful one, he suddenly interrupted the gambusino:—

"And don't you think, if this wonderful tracker and horse-breaker has been told the secret of his adopted father, he may be a dangerous rival to us?"

Cuchillo drew himself up proudly, and replied:—

"I know a man who will yield in nothing—neither at following a trail, nor taming a wild horse—to Tiburcio Arellanos; and yet this secret has been almost worthless in his keeping, since he has sold it for the tenth part of its value!"

This last argument of Cuchillo's was sufficiently strong to convince Don Estevan that the Golden Valley was so guarded by these fierce Indians that nothing but a strong party could reach it—in short, that he himself was the only man who could set this force afoot. For awhile he remained in his silent reverie. The revelations of Cuchillo in regard to the adopted son of Marcos Arellanos had opened his mind to a new set of ideas, which absorbed all others. For certain motives, which we cannot here explain, he was seeking to divine whether this Tiburcio Arellanos was not the young Fabian de Mediana!

Cuchillo on his part was reflecting on certain antecedents relative to the gambusino Arellanos and his adopted son; but for powerful reasons

he did not mention his reflections to Don Estevan. There are reasons, however, why the reader should now be informed of their nature.

The outlaw, as we have said, frequently changed his name. It was by one of these *aliases*, used up so quickly, that he had been passing, when at the Presidio Tubac he made the acquaintance of the unfortunate Arellanos. When the latter was about starting on his second and fatal journey—before parting with his wife and the young man whom he loved as well as if he had been his own son—he confided to his wife the object of his new expedition; and also the full particulars of the route he intended to take. Cuchillo was nevertheless ignorant of this revelation. But the knowledge which the outlaw carefully concealed was that he himself, after having reached the Golden Valley, guided by Arellanos, murdered his companion, in hope of having all the treasure to himself. It was true enough that the Indians appeared afterwards, and it was with difficulty that the assassin could save his own

scalp. We shall now leave him to tell his own story as to how he made the acquaintance of young Arellanos, and it will be seen that this story is a mere deception practised upon Don Estevan.

"Nevertheless," resumed Cuchillo, in breaking the silence, "I was determined to free my mind from all doubt upon the subject. On my return to Arispe, I repaired to the dwelling of the widow of Arellanos, to inform her of the death of poor Marcos. But with the exception of the great grief which the news caused her, I observed nothing particular —nothing that could give me the least suspicion that I am not the sole possessor of the secret of the Golden Valley."

"One easily believes what he wishes to believe," remarked Arechiza.

"Hear me, Señor Don Estevan! There are two things on which I pride myself. One is, that I have a conscience easily alarmed; the other, that I am gifted with a perspicuity not easily deluded."

The Spaniard made no further objections. He was satisfied, not with the outlaw's conscience, but his perspicuity.

With regard to Tiburcio Arellanos, we need hardly state what the reader has no doubt already divined—that this young man was in reality no other than Fabian, the last descendant of the Counts of Mediana. Cuchillo has already related how the English brig brought him to Guaymas. Left without a guide to enable him to discover his family—disinherited of his rich patrimonial estates—an orphan knowing nothing of his parents—here he was in a strange land, the possessor of nothing more than a horse and a hut of bamboos.

CHAPTER X.

THE AFTERNOON RIDE.

WHEN Cuchillo, after the interview just described, came forth from the hovel, the sun was no longer in the vertex of the heavens, but had commenced his downward course to the western horizon. The earth, burnt up and dry as tinder, gave forth a thin vapoury mist, that here and there hung over the surface in condensed masses, giving that appearance known as the *mirage*. Limpid lakes presented themselves to the eye, where not a drop of water was known to exist—as if nature, to preserve a perfect harmony, offered these to the imagination in compensation for

the absence of the precious fluid itself. Far off in the forest, could be heard at intervals the crackling of branches under the burning rays of the sun—just as if the woods were on fire. But the trees were beginning to open their leaves to the southern breeze that freshened as the hours passed on, and they appeared impatiently to await the twilight, when the night-dews would once more freshen their foliage.

Cuchillo gave a whistle, at which well-known signal his horse came galloping up to him. The poor beast appeared to suffer terribly from thirst. His master, moved with pity, poured into a bowl a few drops of water from his skin bottle; and although it was scarce enough to moisten the animal's lips, it seemed to bring back the vigour of his spirit.

Cuchillo, having saddled and bridled his horse, and buckled on a pair of huge spurs, called one of the attendants of Don Estevan. To this man he gave orders to have the pack mules harnessed, as well as to collect the

remuda to be sent on in advance—in order that the sleeping quarters for the night should be ready upon their arrival. The place where the travellers were to rest that night—as Cuchillo informed the domestic—was to be at the cistern known as La Poza.

"But La Poza is not on the route to Tubac!" objected the servant; "it lies out of the way, and on the road leading to the Hacienda del Venado."

"*You* have nothing to do with the route," peremptorily answered Cuchillo; "your master intends spending some days at the Hacienda del Venado. Therefore do as I have ordered you."

The Hacienda del Venado was the most important estate between Arispe and the Indian frontier, and its proprietor had the reputation of being the most hospitable man in the whole province. It was, therefore, without repugnance that the attendants of Don Estevan heard this news from Cuchillo—since, although their route of march would be extended in

making the detour by the Hacienda del Venado, they knew they would enjoy several days of pleasant repose at this hospitable mansion.

The man to whom Cuchillo had given his orders immediately saddled his horse, and set off to collect the remuda. He soon discovered the horses browsing in the woods near at hand, and collected, as usual, around the bell-mare.

As he approached, the troop bounded off in affright—just as wild horses would have done; but the active horseman was too quick for them, for already the running noose of his lazo was around the neck of one of them. The horse perceiving that he was caught, and knowing well the lazo—whose power he had often felt—yielded without resistance, and permitted himself to be led quietly away. The *capitana* (bell-mare) knew the signal, and followed the horse of the servant, with all the others trooping at her heels.

Two of the freshest of the drove were left behind, for Don Estevan and the Senator.

These would be enough to serve them as far as La Poza—the place of their intended night halt—which was only a few hours distant. The other horses, guided by the bell-mare, were taken on in advance, and the drove soon disappeared behind the cloud of dust thrown up by their hoofs.

Shortly after, the Senator made his appearance at the door of the hut where he had taken his siesta—a necessity almost imperious in these hot climates. At the same time, Don Estevan presented himself in the open air. The atmosphere, though a little fresher than when they had gone inside, was still sufficiently stifling to be disagreeable.

"Carramba!" cried the Senator, after inhaling a few mouthfuls of it, "it is fire, not air, one has to breathe here. If these hovels were not a complete nest of snakes and scorpions, I should prefer staying in them until night, rather than launch myself into this dreadful furnace.

After this doleful speech the Senator climbed

reluctantly into his saddle, and he and Don Estevan took the route, riding side by side, as in the morning. Behind, at a few paces distance, followed Cuchillo and Baraja, and after these the little *recua* of mules with the other domestics.

For the first hour of their march the shade of the trees rendered the heat supportable, but soon the forest ended, and the road debouched upon open plains that appeared interminable.

It is hardly possible to conceive a more dreary prospect than that presented by those arid plains of Northern Mexico—naked, white, and almost destitute of vegetation. Here and there, at long distances on the route, may be seen a tall pole, which denotes the presence of some artificial well—a cistern—but as you draw near, the leathern buckets by which the water is to be raised, show by their stiff and contracted outlines that for a long time they have held no water, and that the well is dried up—a sad fortune for the traveller whose evil

star has guided him into these deserts during the dry season, especially if, at the end of his day's journey, he reckons on a supply from these treacherous depositaries. If his canteen is not well filled, or if he is by any chance detained upon his route, his story is likely to be that of hundreds who have perished of thirst upon these plains, between a heaven and an earth that are equally unpitying.

"Is it true, then, Don Estevan," inquired the Senator, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, "that you have been through this country before?"

"Certainly," replied Don Estevan; "and it is just because I have been here before that I am here now. But what brought me here formerly, and why I now return, is a secret I shall tell you presently. Let me say that it is a secret sufficient to turn a man's brain, provided he is not one with a bold, firm heart. Are you that man, Señor Senator?" added the Spaniard, fixing his eyes upon his companion with a calm regard.

The Senator made no reply, further than by giving a slight shiver that was perceptible through his frame, and which denoted that he felt some apprehension as to the rôle he might be called upon to play.

The Spaniard did not fail to observe his uneasiness, as he resumed:—

"Meanwhile, señor; let me ask you, are you decided to follow my advice, and restore your fortunes by some rich matrimonial alliance which I shall arrange for you?"

"Without doubt I am," replied the Senator, "though I can't see what interest that can be to you, Señor Don Estevan."

"That is my affair and my secret. I am not one of those who sell the skin of the bear before the animal is caught. It is enough for you to know, Don Vicente Tragaduros y Despilfarro, that I have a hundred thousand dollars at your disposal the moment you say the word—it only remains for you to hear my conditions, and subscribe to them."

"I don't say No," replied the Senator, "but

I candidly avow that for the life of me I cannot think of anyone possessing such an inheritance as you mention—not one in the whole province."

"Do you know the daughter of the rich landowner, Augusta Peña—at whose hacienda, please God, we shall sleep to-morrow night?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the Senator, "the proprietor of the Hacienda del Venado? I have heard of her—*her* dowry should be a million, if report speaks true; but what folly it would be for me to pretend—"

"Bah!" interrupted the Spaniard. "It is a fortress that, well besieged, may capitulate like any other."

"It is said that the daughter of Peña is pretty."

"Beautiful."

"You know her then?" said the Senator, regarding his companion with an astonished look. "Perhaps," he added, "it is to the Hacienda of Venado that you make those periodical

and mysterious journeys so much talked about at Arispe?"

"Precisely so."

"Ah! I understand you," said the Senator, turning a sly look upon his companion; "it was the beautiful eyes of the daughter that attracted you, the—?"

"You are mistaken. It was the father, who was simply the banker from whom, from time to time, I drew the funds necessary for my expenses at Arispe."

"Is that also the object of our present journey?"

"Partly," replied the Spaniard, "but not altogether—there is another object, which I will communicate to you hereafter."

"Well, señor," answered the Senator, "you are a mystery to me from head to foot; but I abandon myself blindly to your guidance."

"You do well," said Don Estevan, "and in all likelihood your sun, for awhile eclipsed, will shine out again with more than its former splendour."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNFORTUNATE TRAVELLER.

It was now near sunset; the travellers were still about two leagues from La Poza, and the desert plains were nearly passed. Some *mezquite* trees appeared in front, thinly covering the calcareous soil, but the twilight sun began to render less visible the objects here and there scattered over the plain.

All at once the horse of Don Estevan came to a stand, and showed signs of affright. The steed of the Senator acted in a similar fashion,

though neither of the two horseman could perceive the cause of this strange behaviour.

"It is the body of some dead mule?" suggested the Mexican.

Don Estevan spurred his horse forward, despite the repugnance of the animal to advance; and a few paces further on, behind a clump of wild aloe plants, he perceived the body of a horse stretched out upon the sand. Such a sight in these dry plains is by no means uncommon; and the travellers would not have given a moment's thought to it, but for the fact that the horse in question appeared to be saddled and bridled. This circumstance indicated some extraordinary occurrence.

Cuchillo had meanwhile ridden forward to the spot.

"Ah!" said he, after glancing a moment at the dead horse, "the poor devil who has ridden him has met with a double accident; he has not only lost his horse, but also his water-bottle. See!"

The guide pointed to an object lying upon

the ground by the shoulder of the fallen horse, and still attached by a strap to the saddle. It was a leathern water-bottle, apparently broken and empty. In fact, its position proved that the horse, enfeebled by the heat and thirst, had fallen suddenly to the earth, and the bottle, hardened by the sun, and coming in contact with the animal's shoulder, had got crushed either by the fall, or in the struggle that succeeded it. A large fracture was visible in the side of the vessel, through which the water had escaped to the very last drop.

"We are likely enough by and by to stumble upon his owner," suggested Cuchillo, while he examined the trappings of the dead horse, to see if there might be anything worth picking up. "*Por Dios!*" he continued, "this reminds me that I have the very devil's thirst myself," and as he said this, he raised his own bottle to his head, and swallowed some gulps from it.

The tracks of a man upon a sandy surface indicated that the traveller had continued his

route on foot; but the footmarks showed also that he must have tottered rather than walked. They were unequally distant from each other, and wanted that distinctness of shape that would have been exhibited by the footsteps of a man standing properly on his legs.

These points did not escape the keen eyes of Cuchillo, who was one of those individuals who could read such dumb signs with an unfailing certainty.

"Beyond a doubt," said he, taking another gulp from his bottle, "the traveller cannot be far off."

His conjecture proved correct. A few moments after, the body of a man was seen by the side of the path, lying upon the ground, and perfectly motionless. As if this individual had intended that his countenance should be hidden from the eyes of any one passing, a broad palm-leaf hat covered the whole of his face.

The costume of this traveller in distress betrayed a certain degree of poverty. Besides

the hat already mentioned, which appeared old and battered, a rusty-coloured Indian shirt, somewhat torn, and a pair of pantaloons of nankeen, with common filigree buttons, appeared to be his only garments. At least, they were all that could be noticed in the obscure twilight.

"Benito," said Don Estevan, calling to one of his servants, "knock off with the butt of your lance the hat that covers this man's face —perhaps he is only asleep."

Benito obeyed the order, and tossed aside the hat without dismounting; but the man stretched on the ground did not appear to know what had been done—at least he made not the slightest movement.

When the hat was removed, however, the darkness, which had suddenly increased, rendered it impossible to distinguish his features.

"Although it is not exactly your speciality, Señor Cuchillo," said Don Estevan, addressing himself to the outlaw, "if you will do an act

of humanity, in trying to save the life of this poor devil, you shall have a half ounce of gold if you succeed."

"Caspita! Señor Don Estevan," cried Cuchillo, "you surely mistake my character. I am the most humane of mortals—that is," continued he in an under tone, "when it is my interest to be so. You may ride forward then; and it will not be my fault if I don't bring this poor fellow safe to our halting place at La Poza."

In saying these words Cuchillo dismounted, and laying his hands upon the neck of his horse, cried out—

"Now good Tordillo, don't budge an inch from this spot till I call for you."

The animal, pawing the sand, and champing his bit, appeared to comprehend the words of his master, and remained in the place where he had been left.

"Shall we leave one of the servants to assist you?" inquired the Senator, as they were riding off.

"No, thank you, Señor Don Vicente," responded Cuchillo, fearing that if any one was left he might expect some share in the promised *demi-onza;* "it will not be necessary."

And the cavalcade, riding off, left the outlaw alone with the recumbent body.

CHAPTER XII.

TIBURCIO ARELLANOS.

CUCHILLO, approaching the body, bent down to examine the features, and see if there were any signs of life. At the first glance of that face the outlaw trembled.

"Tiburcio Arellanos, as I live!" he involuntarily muttered.

It was, in truth, the adopted son of his victim whom he saw before him.

"Yes—there is no mistake—it is he! *Santa Virgen!* if not dead, he's not far off it," continued he, observing the mortal paleness of the young man's countenance.

A hellish thought at this moment arose in

the mind of the outlaw. Perhaps the only man in all the world who shared with him that secret, which he himself had purchased by the crime of murder, was there before him—completely in his power. It only needed to finish him, if not already dead, and to report that he could not be saved. He was in the middle of the desert, under the shadow of night, where no eye could see, and no hand could hinder; why then should he not make his secret secure against every contingency of the future?

All the ferocious instincts of the villain were reawakened; mechanically, he drew the long knife from his boot, and held its point over the heart of the unconscious Tiburcio.

At that moment, a slight quivering of the limbs told that the latter still lived. The outlaw raised his arm, but still hesitated to strike the blow.

"It was just thus," reflected he, "that I stabbed the man he called his father—just in the same way, as he slept beside me, in full

confidence of security. I see him now, contesting with me for the life of this young fellow more than half gone. I feel at this moment the weight of his body upon my shoulders, just as I felt it when I carried him down to the river."

And the murderer, at these thoughts, in the middle of the darkness and solitude, cast around him a look that betrayed the terror with which the souvenir still inspired him.

That terror saved the life of Tiburcio; for the knife was thrust back into its singular scabbard, and the villain, seating himself beside the recumbent form, thrust his hand under the vest of the young man, and held it over his heart to try whether it was still beating.

In this attitude he remained for a short while—until satisfied that Tiburcio was yet alive. Then a bright thought seemed to startle him; for a voice had spoken to him from within, stronger than the voice of conscience. It was that of personal interest.

Cuchillo knew the rare qualities of Tiburcio—his talents as a *rastreador*, or tracker—his daring prowess in Indian warfare; and after some consideration, he resolved to enrol him in the expedition of Don Estevan, to which he would no doubt prove of great value.

"That will be the best plan," said the outlaw, speaking in soliloquy. "What would his life be worth to me now?—Nothing. And if I wish to have it hereafter—why, then there will be no lack of opportunities. He cannot be otherwise than grateful for what I am going to do for him. But let me see how matters stand—of course it is thirst that is killing him—how lucky I have kept a little water in my canteen!"

He now opened the mouth of the dying man, and holding the neck of the leathern bottle to his lips, poured some drops down his throat. The water produced an almost instantaneous re-animation, and the young man opened his eyes, but soon closed them again.

"That shows he is coming round," muttered Cuchillo.

Twice or thrice he repeated the operation, each time doubling the dose of water. Finally, at the end of half an hour or so, Tiburcio was sufficiently recovered to be able to raise himself up, and to answer the questions put to him by the man who was, in reality, the preserver of his life.

Tiburcio Arellanos was still but a young man; but the sort of life he had led—solitary, and dependent on his own resources—had given to his judgment a precocious maturity. He therefore observed a degree of prudence in recounting to Cuchillo the death of his adopted mother, to which subject the outlaw had guided the conversation.

"During the twenty-four hours that I passed by the death-bed of my mother," said Tiburcio, "I quite forgot to attend to my horse; and after all was over I closed the door of the cottage, where I never wished to return, and I set out upon this journey.

The poor animal, so long neglected, became feeble on the second day, and fell dead under me; and, to my misfortune, my water-bottle was broken in the fall, and the water spilled upon the sand. I remained on the spot till thirst brought on fever, and then I strayed away; and after wandering about, I know not how long, I fell, as my horse had done, expecting never more to rise."

"I comprehend all that," responded Cuchillo. "Well! it is astonishing how people will regret the death of parents who do not leave them the slightest inheritance!"

Tiburcio could have told him that, on her death-bed, his adopted mother had left him a royal as well as a terrible legacy—the secret of the Golden Valley, and the vengeance of the murder of Marcos Arellanos. Both had been confided to him—the golden secret upon the especial condition that Tiburcio would, if necessary, spend the whole of his life in searching for the assassin.

Tiburcio appeared to take no notice of

Cuchillo's last reflection, and perhaps his discretion proved the saving of his life; for had the outlaw been made sure that he was in possession of the secret of the Golden Valley, it is not likely he would have made any further efforts to save him, but the reverse.

"And is it a fact," continued Cuchillo, interrogatively, "that with the exception of a hut which you have abandoned, a horse which has dropped dead between your legs, and the garments you carry on your back, Arellanos and his widow have left you nothing?"

"Nothing but the memory of their goodness to me, and a reverence for their name."

"Poor Arellanos! I was very sorry for him," said Cuchillo, whose hypocrisy had here committed him to an unguarded act of imprudence.

"You know him then?" hastily inquired Tiburcio, with some show of surprise. "He never spoke to me of you!"

Cuchillo saw that he had made a mistake, and hastened to reply.

"No, I didn't know him personally. I have only heard him much spoken of as a most worthy man, and a famous gambusino. That is why I was sorry on hearing of his death. Was it not I who first apprised his widow of the unfortunate occurrence, having myself heard of it by chance?"

Notwithstanding the natural tone in which Cuchillo delivered this speech, he was one of those persons of such a sinister countenance that Tiburcio could not help a certain feeling of suspicion while regarding it. But by little and little the feeling gave way, and the young man's thoughts taking another turn, he remained for some moments buried in a silent reverie. It was merely the result of his feebleness, though Cuchillo, ever ready to suspect evil, interpreted his silence as arising from a different cause.

Just then the horse of Cuchillo began to show evident signs of terror, and the instant after, with his hair standing on end, he came galloping up to his master as if to seek pro-

tection. It was the hour when the desert appears in all its nocturnal majesty. The howling of the jackals could be heard in the distance; but all at once, a voice rising far above all the rest appeared to give them a signal to be silent. It was the voice of the American lion.

"Do you hear it?" inquired Cuchillo of his companion.

A howl equally loud, but of a different tone, was heard on the opposite side. "It is the puma and jaguar about to battle for the body of your horse, friend Tiburcio; and whichever one is conquered may take a fancy to revenge himself on us. Suppose you mount behind me, and let us be off?"

Tiburcio followed the advice; and notwithstanding the double load, the horse of Cuchillo galloped off like an arrow, impelled to such swift course by the growling of the fierce animals, that for a long time could be heard, as if they were following in the rear.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STUMBLING HORSE.

FAR along the route these sounds accompanied the two riders—that is, the wailing of the jackals, mingled with the more fearful utterance of the great feline denizens of the desert. All at once, however, these noises became stilled, as a sound of a far different nature indicated the presence of some human being interfering in this scene of the desert. It was the crack of a gun, but with that quick, sharp report that distinguishes the detonation of the rifle.

"A shot!" exclaimed Tiburcio. "But who can be amusing himself by hunting at this

time of night, and in the middle of such a desert?"

"Very likely one of those American trappers we see now and them at Arispe, where they come to sell their beaver skins. These fellows think as little of a puma or a jaguar as they do of a jackal."

No other noise was afterwards heard to break the imposing silence of the night. The stars were shining brightly in the blue heaven, and the breeze, that had now become much cooler, scarce made the slightest rustling as it passed through the branches of the iron-wood trees.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Tiburcio, after an interval of silence.

"To La Poza, where I have some companions who are to pass the night there. To-morrow, if you like, on to the hacienda of Venado."

"To the hacienda of Venado!—that is just where I was going."

Had it been daylight, Cuchillo might have

seen a blush suddenly redden the cheeks of the young man as he pronounced these words; for it was an affair of the heart that, in spite of all the efforts he had made to resist it, was attracting him to the hacienda de Venado. The object of his interest was no other than the danghter of the *haciendado* himself—the young heiress already spoken of.

"For what purpose were you going there?" inquired Cuchillo, in a careless tone.

This simple question was nevertheless difficult to be answered. His companion was not the man to whom the young gambusino could give his confidence. He hesitated before making reply.

"I am without resources," said he at length, "and I go to ask Don Augustin Peña if he will accept me in the capacity of one of his *vaqueros*."

"'Tis a poor business you wish to undertake, *amigo*. To expose your life for ever for such paltry pay as you will get—to keep watch at night and run about all the day; exposed to

the burning heat of the sun, and by night to the cold—for this is the lot of a vaquero."

"What can I do?" replied Tiburcio. "Besides, it is just the sort of life I have been accustomed to. Have I not always been exposed to privations and the solitude of the desert plains? These torn *calzoneras* and this well-worn jacket are all that are left me—since I have now no longer my poor horse. Better turn vaquero than be a beggar!"

"He knows nothing of the secret then," reflected Cuchillo, "since he is meditating an employment of this nature." Then raising his voice:—"You are in truth, then, a complete orphan, amigo; and have no one to mourn for you if you were to die—except myself? Have you by chance heard anything of this grand expedition that is being organized at Tubac?"

"No."

"Become one of it then. To an expedition of this kind a resolute young fellow like you would be a valuable acquisition; and upon

your part, an expert gambusino, such as I fancy you must be—from the school in which you have been taught—might make his fortune at a single stroke."

If he parry this thrust, muttered the outlaw to himself, it will be proof positive that he knows nothing about it.

Cuchillo was thus pursuing his investigation with a twofold object, sounding Tiburcio about the secret, while at the same time trying to attach him to the expedition by the hope of gain. But cunning as was the outlaw, he had to do with one that was no simpleton. Tiburcio prudently remained silent.

"Although, between ourselves," continued Cuchillo, "I can tell you that I have never been beyond Tubac, yet I am to be one of the guides of this expedition. Now what say you?"

"I have my reasons," replied Tiburcio, "not to engage in it without reflection. I therefore demand of you twenty-four hours to think it over, and then you shall have my answer."

The expedition, of which this was the first

news Tiburcio had heard, might, in fact, ruin or favour his own projects—hence the uncertainty he felt, which he contrived so cleverly to conceal by his discreet reserve.

"Very well," rejoined Cuchillo, "the thing will keep that long."

And with this the conversation was discontinued.

Cuchillo, joyed at being disembarrassed of his apprehension about the secret, began carelessly whistling while he spurred forward his horse. The greatest harmony continued between these two men, who, though they knew it not, had each a motive of the deadliest hatred one against the other. Suddenly, as they were thus riding along, the horse that carried them stumbled upon the left foreleg, and almost came to the ground. On the instant Tiburcio leaped down, and with eyes flashing fire, cried out in a threatening tone to his astonished companion:—

"You say you have never been beyond Tubac —where did you get this horse, Cuchillo?"

"What business of yours is it where I got him?" answered the outlaw, surprised by a question to which his conscience gave an alarming significance; "and what has my horse to do with the interrogatory you have so discourteously put to me?"

"By the soul of Arellanos! I will know; or, if not—"

Cuchillo gave the spur to his horse, causing him to bound to one side—while at the same time he attempted to unbuckle the straps that fastened his carbine to the saddle; but Tiburcio sprang after him, seized his hand, and held it while he repeated the question:—

"How long have you owned this horse?"

"There, now! what curiosity!" answered Cuchillo, with a forced smile; "still, since you are so eager to know—it is—it is about six weeks since I became his master; you may have seen me with him, perhaps?"

In truth, it was the first time Tiburcio had seen Cuchillo with this horse—that, notwithstanding his bad habit of stumbling, was

otherwise an excellent animal, and was only used by his master on grand occasions. For this very reason Tiburcio had not seen him before.

The ready lie of the outlaw dissipated, no doubt, certain suspicions that had arisen in the mind of the young man, for the latter let go the horseman's wrist, which up to this time he had held in his firm grasp.

"Pardon me," said he, "for this rudeness; but allow me to ask you another question?"

"Ask it!" said Cuchillo, "since we are friends; in fact, among friends, one question less or more can make no difference."

"Who sold you this horse six weeks ago?"

"Por Dios, his owner, of course—a stranger, whom I did not know, but who had just arrived from a long journey."

Cuchillo repeated these words in a slow and drawling manner, as if to gain time for some hidden purpose.

"A stranger?" repeated Tiburcio; "pardon me—one more question?"

"Has the horse been stolen from *you?*" asked the outlaw in an ironical tone.

"No—but let us think no more of my folly—pardon me, señor!"

"I pardon you," answered Cuchillo, in a tone of magnanimity, "the more so," added he mentally, "that you will not go much farther, you son of a hound!"

Tiburcio, unsuspecting, was no longer on his guard, and the outlaw, profiting by the darkness, had already detached his carbine from the saddle. In another moment, beyond doubt, he would have carried into execution his demoniac purpose, had it not been for the appearance of a horseman who was coming at full gallop along the road. Besides the horse which he rode, the horseman led behind him another, saddled and bridled. He was evidently a messenger from Don Estevan.

"Ah! Is it you, Señor Cuchillo?" he cried out, as he rode up.

"The devil!" grumbled the outlaw, at

this ill-timed interruption. "Ah! is it you, Señor Benito?" he inquired, suddenly changing his tone.

"Yes. Well, have you saved the man? Don Estevan has sent me back to you with a gourd of fresh water, and a horse to bring him on."

"He is there," replied Cuchillo, pointing to Tiburcio, who stood at a little distance; "thanks to me he is sound and safe—until I have a chance of being once more alone with him," he muttered, in a tone not intended to be heard.

"Well, gentlemen," remarked the servant, "we had better go on—the camping place is not far from here—we can soon reach it."

Tiburcio leaped into the empty saddle, and the three galloped silently towards the place where the travellers had halted—the servant thinking only of reaching it as soon as possible and going to rest—Cuchillo mentally cursing the interruption that had forced him to adjourn his project of vengeance—and

Tiburcio vainly endeavouring to drive out of his mind the suspicion which this curious incident had aroused.

In this occupation the three rode on for about a quarter of an hour, until the gleam of fires a-head discovered the halting-place of the travellers at La Poza. Soon afterwards their camp itself was reached.

CHAPTER XIV.

LA POZA.

THE place known by the name "La Poza" was the only one, within a circle of many leagues, where at this time of the year water could be found. There was here a natural cistern or well—partly nourished by a spring, and partly by rain from the skies. It was hollowed at the bottom of a little crater-shaped valley, only a few paces in circumference, the sloping sides of which served to conduct to the well the rain-water that fell around.

The ridges enclosing the little valley were crowned with trees of thick frondage, which,

nourished by the evaporation of the water, appeared green and vigorous, and protected the cistern from the burning rays of the sun. The green grass that grew around, the cool shadow of the trees, and the freshness of the air rendered the well of La Poza, in the middle of the desert, a delicious little oäsis. Besides serving as an excellent resting-place for travellers, it was a favourite resort of hunters, who used it as a stalking-ground for animals—elks and deer—as well as jaguars and other fierce beasts that in great numbers came to the well to drink.

At a short distance from the cistern of La Poza commenced a tract of thick forest, through which ran the path leading to the Hacienda del Venado. Nearer to the edge of the little valley, upon the side of this path, the travellers had kindled an enormous fire, partly to defend themselves from the cold night air, and partly to frighten off any jaguars or pumas that might be in the neighbourhood of the water.

Not far from this fire the servants had

placed the camp-beds of the Senator and Don Estevan; and while a large saddle of mutton was being roasted for supper, a skin bottle of wine was cooling in the fresh water with which the trough had been filled.

After a painful day's march, it was an attractive spectacle which this scene presented to the eyes of the travellers.

"*Mira!* your halting-place, Tiburcio," said Cuchillo, as they rode into the camp, and speaking in a tone of pretended friendliness, in order to conceal the real rancour which he felt. "Dismount here, while I go and report your arrival to our chief. It is Don Estevan de Arechiza himself under whose orders we are enrolled; so, too, may you be, if you desire it; and between ourselves, amigo, it is the best thing you can do."

Cuchillo, fearing that his victim might escape him, now wished more than ever that he should join the expedition. He pointed out Don Estevan and the Senator seated on their camp-beds, and visible in the light of

the great fire, while Tiburcio was not yet seen by them. Cuchillo himself advanced towards Don Estevan.

"I am desirous, Señor Don Estevan," said he, addressing himself to the Spaniard, "to say two words to your honour, with the permission of his excellency the Senator.

Don Estevan rose from his seat, and made a sign to Cuchillo to accompany him into one of the dark alleys of the forest, the same by which the path entered that led to the hacienda.

"You will hardly guess, Señor Don Estevan, who is the man your generosity has saved—for I have brought him with me safe and sound, as you see?"

Without making answer, Don Estevan took from his purse the piece of gold he had promised, and handed it to Cuchillo.

"It is the young Tiburcio Arellanos to whom you have given life," continued the outlaw. "As for me, I only followed the dictates of my heart; but it may be that we have both done a very foolish action."

"Why that?" asked the Spaniard. "This young man will be easily watched so long as he is near us; and I presume he is decided to be one of our expedition?"

"He has asked twenty-four hours to reflect upon it."

"Do you think he knows anything of—"

"I have my fears," replied Cuchillo, in a melancholy tone, little regarding the lie he was telling, the purpose of which was to render the Spaniard suspicious of the man he had himself vowed to kill. "In any case," continued he, with a significant smile, "we have saved his life, and that will serve as tit for tat.

"What do you mean to say?"

"Only that my conscience assures me it will be perfectly tranquil if—if—Carramba!" added he, brusquely—"if I should send this young fellow to be broiled with his mother in the other world."

"God forbid that!" exclaimed the Spaniard, in a lively tone. "What need? Admit that

he knows all—I shall be in command of a hundred men, and he altogether alone. What harm can the fellow do us? I have no uneasiness about him. I am satisfied, and so must you be."

"Oh! I am satisfied if you are," growled Cuchillo, like a dog whom his master had hindered from biting some one—"quite satisfied," he continued, "but perhaps hereafter—"

"I shall see this young man," said the Spaniard, interrupting him, and advancing in the direction where Tiburcio stood, while Cuchillo followed, talking to himself:

"What the devil possessed him to ask how long I had owned my horse? Let me see! The animal stumbled, I remember, and it was just then he dismounted and threatened me. I can't understand it; but I suspect what I do not understand."

When Arechiza and Cuchillo reached the camp, an excitement was observed among the horses that gathered around the *capitana*, at a short distance from the fire, which, to all ap-

pearance in a state of extreme terror, were uttering a wild and continuous neighing. Some danger yet afar, but which the animals' instincts enabled them to perceive, was the cause of this sudden *stampedo*.

"It is some jaguar they have scented," suggested one of the domestics.

"Bah!" replied another, "the jaguars attack only young foals—they wouldn't dare to assault a strong, vigorous horse."

"Do you think so?" demanded the first speaker. "Ask Benito here, who himself lost a valuable animal taken by the jaguars."

Benito, hearing this reference to himself, advanced towards the two speakers.

"One day," he began, "or rather one night just like this, I chanced to be at a distance from the Hacienda del Venado, where I was a vaquero at the time. I was in search of a strayed horse, and not finding him, had made up my mind to pass the night at the spring of Ojo de Agua. I tied my horse at a good distance off—where there was better

grass—and I was sleeping, as a man sleeps after riding twenty leagues, when I was suddenly awakened by all the howlings and growlings of the devils. The moon shone so clear you might have fancied it daylight. All at once my horse came galloping toward me with the lazo hanging round his neck, which he had broken at the risk of hanging himself.

" 'Here, then,' said I, 'I shall now have two horses to go in search of instead of one.'

" I had scarce made this reflection, when I observed, under the light of the moon, a superb jaguar bounding after my horse. He scarce appeared to touch the ground, and each leap carried him forward twenty feet or more.

" I saw that my poor steed was lost. I listened with anxiety, but for awhile heard nothing. At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, a terrible roar —"

The speaker paused, and stood trembling.

" *Virgen Santa!*" cried he, " that's it!"

as the fearful cry of a jaguar at that moment echoed through the camp, succeeded by a deathlike stillness, as if both men and animals had been alike terrified into silence.

CHAPTER XV.

NOCTURNAL VISITORS.

THE sudden shock occasioned by the perception of a peril so proximate and imminent paralyzed every tongue. Even the ex-herdsman himself was silent, and appeared to reflect what had best be done to avoid the danger.

At this instant, the voice of Don Estevan broke the temporary silence that reigned within the camp.

"Get your weapons ready!" shouted he.

"It is useless, master," rejoined the old vaquero, whose experience among jaguars gave a certain authority to his words; "the best thing to be done is to keep the fire a-blaze."

And saying this, he flung an armful of fagots upon it, which, being dry as tinder, at once caught flame—so as to illumine a large circle around the camp.

"If they are not choking with thirst," said Benito, "these demons of darkness will not dare to come within the circle of the fire. But, indeed, they are often choking with thirst, and then —"

"Then!" interrupted one of the domestics, in a tone of anxiety.

"Then," continued the herdsman, "then they don't regard either light or fire; and if we are not determined to defend the water against their approach, we had better get out of their way altogether. These animals are always more thirsty than hungry."

"How when they have drunk?" asked Baraja, whose countenance, under the light of the fire, betrayed considerable uneasiness.

"Why, then they seek to appease their hunger.

At this moment, a second cry from the

jaguar was heard, but farther off than the first. This was some relief to the auditory of Benito, who, relying upon his theory, were satisfied that the animal was not yet at the extreme point of suffering from thirst. All of them preserved silence—the only sounds heard being the crackling of the dry sticks with which Baraja kept the fire profusely supplied.

"Gently there, Baraja, gently!" called out the vaquero. "If you consume our stock of fire-wood in that fashion, you will soon make an end of it, and por Dios! amigo, you will have to go to the woods for a fresh supply."

"There! hold your hand," continued he, after a pause, "and try to make the fagots last as long as possible, else we may get into darkness, and be at the mercy of the tiger. He is sure to come back again in an hour or two, and far thirstier than before."

If Benito had desired to frighten his companions, he could not have succeeded better.

The eyes of one and all of them were anxiously bent upon the heap of dried sticks that still remained by the fire, and which appeared scarcely sufficient to last for another hour. But there was something so earnest in the tone of the ex-herdsman, despite the jesting way in which he spoke, that told he was serious in what he had said.

Of course, Don Estevan had postponed the interview with Tiburcio; and the young man, still ignorant that it was to Don Estevan he really owed his life, did not think of approaching to offer him thanks. Moreover, he saw that the moment would be ill-timed to exchange compliments of courtesy with the chief of the expedition, and for this reason he remained standing where Cuchillo had left him.

Nevertheless, Don Estevan could not hinder himself from casting an occasional glance in the direction where the young man stood—though, through the obscurity, he could make no exact observation of his features.

The silence continued. Don Estevan and

the Senator remained seated on their camp-beds, carbine in hand, while Benito, surrounded by the other domestics, formed a group by the side of the fire. The horses had all approached within a few feet of their masters, where they stood trembling and breathing loudly from their spread nostrils. Their behaviour indicated an instinct on their part that the danger was not yet over.

Several minutes passed, in which no human voice broke the silence. In the midst of the greatest perils, there is something consolatory in the sound of a man's voice—something which makes the danger appear less; and, as if struck by this idea, some one asked Benito to continue the narrative of his adventures.

"I have told you then," resumed the ex-herdsman, "that I saw the tiger springing after my horse, and that in the chase both disappeared from my sight. The moment after the horse came galloping back; but I knew that it was his last gallop, as soon as by the light of the moon I saw the terrible rider

that he carried. The jaguar was upon his back, flattened over his shoulders, with the neck of the poor horse fast between his jaws.

"They had not gone a dozen paces before I heard a crackling sound—as if some bone had been crushed—and on the instant I saw the horse stumble and fall. Both tiger and horse rolled over and over, in a short but terrible struggle, and then my poor steed lay motionless.

"For safety I stole away from the dangerous proximity; but returning after daylight, I found only the half-stripped skeleton of a horse that had carried me for many a long year.

"And now, amigo," continued the ex-herdsman, turning to the man who had first spoken, "do you still think that the jaguar attacks only foals?"

No one made reply, but Benito's audience turned their glances outward from the fire, fearing that in the circle around they might

see shining the eyes of one of these formidable animals.

Another interval of silence succeeded to the narrative of the vaquero. This was broken by the young man, Tiburcio, who, used to the wild life of the plains and forests, was very little frightened by the presence of the jaguars.

"If you have a horse," said he, "you need not much fear the jaguar; he is sure to take your horse first. Here we have twenty horses, and only one tiger."

"The young man reasons well," rejoined Baraja, re-assured by the observation of Tiburcio.

"Twenty horses for one tiger—yes," replied Benito; "but suppose the horses don't choose to remain here. Supposing, what is likely enough to happen, we have an *estampeda*—the horses will be off. Now the jaguar knows very well he cannot overtake a horse, unless he does so in the first bound or two. He will not follow the horses then, but will stay by

the water, and of course by us as well. Besides, the jaguars that hunt by these springs are likely enough to have tasted human flesh before now; and if so, they will not, as the young man affirms, prefer the flesh of a horse."

"Very consoling, that," interrupted Cuchillo.

Benito appeared to be a man fond of the most frightful suggestions, for, not contented with what he had already said, he continued:—

"If there be but one jaguar, then he will be satisfied with one of us; but in case he should chance to be accompanied by his female, then—"

"Then what, by all the devils?" demanded Cuchillo.

"Why then—but I don't wish to frighten you."

"May thunder strike you! Speak out," cried Baraja, suffering at the suspense.

"Why, in that case," coolly added Benito,

"the tiger would, undoubtedly, show his gallantry to his female by killing a pair of us."

"Carramba!" fervently exclaimed Baraja. "I pray the Lord that this tiger may be a bachelor," and as he said this, he flung a fresh armful of fagots on the fire.

"Gently, amigo! gently," interrupted the ex-herdsman, lifting off some of the sticks again. "We have yet at least six hours of night, and these fagots will scarce serve to keep up the light for one. Gently, I say! We have still three chances of safety: the first, that the jaguar may not be thirsty; the second, that he may content himself with one of our horses; and the third, that he may, as you have wished it, be a *bachelor* tiger."

There was no response, and another interval of silence succeeded. During this it was some consolation to the travellers to see the moon, which now, rising above the horizon, lit up the plain with her white beams, and flung her silvery effulgence over the trees. From the direction of the woods came the

mournful notes of the great horned owl, and the sound of flapping wings, caused by the vampire bat as it glided through the aisles of the forest. No other sounds appeared to indicate the presence of living thing except those made by the horses, or the travellers themselves.

"Do you think," said Tiburcio, addressing himself to Benito, "that the jaguar is likely to return again? I have known these animals howl at night around my hut, and then go off altogether."

"Yes," replied Benito, "that may be when their drinking place is left free to them. Here we have intercepted their approach to the water. Besides, here are both men and horses—both food and drink in one place; it is not likely they have gone away from a spot that promises to furnish them with both. No, I warrant you, they are still in the neighbourhood."

At this moment the cry of the jaguar was heard once more, proving the correctness of Benito's judgment.

"There!" cried he, "just as I said; the beast is nearer too—no doubt his thirst is increasing—the more so that he is hindered from approaching the spring. Ha! do you hear that?"

This exclamation was caused by another roar of the jaguar, but evidently not the one that had been already frightening the travellers—for this cry came from the opposite side of the camp."

"Ave Maria!" screamed Baraja, in anguish, "the tiger has a wife!"

"You speak true," said Benito, "there are two of them, and they must be a male and female, since two male jaguars never hunt in company."

"*Carrai!*" exclaimed Cuchillo, "may the devil take me if ever I passed a night in the company of such a man as this old herdsman. He would frighten the hair off one's head if he could."

"After all," said Baraja, "I think there can't be much danger, so long as we have got

the horses between us and these terrible brutes."

"Unhappily, this chance of safety was not to exist much longer, for just then the jaguars recommenced their growling, both of them nearer than ever. The effect upon the horses was now exhibited in a complete estampeda—for these animals, seeing they could no longer rely upon their masters for protection, preferred trusting to their heels—and one and all of them broke away in a wild gallop.

As this last chance of security was gone, the old vaquero, leaving the fire, approached the spot where Don Estevan and the Senator were seated, and thus addressed them:—

"Gentlemen," said he, "prudence requires that you will not remain so far from the rest of us. As you perceive there is danger on both sides, it will be best that we should all keep close together, and as near the fire as possible."

The affrighted look of the Senator offered a striking contrast to the countenance of Don

Estevan, which still preserved its calm rigidity.

"It is good advice this faithful servant gives us," said Tragaduros, rising to do as Benito had suggested.

"Come, Benito," said Don Estevan, "these are nothing but hunter's stories you have been telling, and you wish to frighten these novices—is it not so?"

"As I live, Señor Don Estevan, 'tis the truth!"

"There is a real danger, then?"

"Certain there is, my master!"

"Very well, in that case I shall remain where I am."

"Are you in earnest?" asked the frightened Tragaduros.

"Quite so—the duty of a leader is to protect his followers," said the Spaniard, proudly, "and that is what I mean to do. If the danger is only from the right and left—as it appears to be—I shall guard the right here. There are two bullets in my gun, and with

these and a sure eye, what care I for a jaguar? You, Señor Don Vicente, can take your stand on the left of the fire, and watch that side. If it appears prudent to you to keep near the men, do so."

This compromise appeared to the taste of Tragaduros, who had no idea of exposing the person of a man who was to be the future proprietor of a million dollars dowry. He lost no time, therefore, in crossing over to the fire, and although he made a feint to keep watch on the opposite side from that guarded by Don Estevan, he took care to remain within a few feet of the group of attendants.

These dispositions had scarce been completed, when a formidable dialogue was struck up between the two fierce beasts that were approaching on opposite sides of the camp. Now they would utter a hoarse roaring, then a series of screams and yells, succeeded by a shrill mewing that resembled the caterwauling of cats—only louder and more terrific in its effect. Though Benito and Tiburcio knew

that all these noises were caused by a single pair of tigers, the others imagined that not less than a dozen must be engaged in the frightful chorus.

The gun of the Senator shook in his hand —Baraja commended his soul to all the saints in the Spanish calendar—Cuchillo clutched his carbine, as if he would crush it between his fingers—while the chief himself coolly awaited the *dénoûment* of the drama.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TIGER HUNTERS.

By the light of the fire, Don Estevan could be seen walking in the direction whence proceeded the cries of the jaguar that was approaching on the right. He appeared calm, as if going out in search of a deer. Tiburcio, at the aspect of the Spanish chief, felt within him that exultation of spirit which danger produces in certain energetic natures; but his dagger was the only weapon he possessed.

He cast a glance at the double-barrelled gun which the Senator held in his hand, and of which the latter was likely to make a use more fatal to his companions than to the jaguar.

On his part the Senator cast an envious look upon the safe position which Tiburcio occupied—in the centre of the group formed by Benito and his companions. Tiburcio read the meaning of this look.

"Señor Senator," said he, "it is not proper that you should expose your life thus—a life valuable to the state. You have relatives—a noble family; as for me, if I should be killed, there is no one to care for me."

"The fact is," said the Senator, "if others set upon my life half the value I put upon it myself, my death would cause a great deal of unhappiness."

"Well, señor, suppose we change places? You give me your gun, and permit me to place my body before you as a rampart against the claws of the jaguars."

This proposal was made at the moment when the two cavernous voices of the ferocious beasts were heard loudly answering to one another. Under the impression produced by the terrible dialogue, Tiburcio's offer was

hastily accepted. The Senator took his place, while the young man, with sparkling eyes and firm step, advanced several paces in the direction of the forest whence came the cries of the jaguar. There he halted to receive the attack that appeared inevitable.

Don Estevan and he appeared motionless as a pair of statues. The unequal reflections of the fire gleamed upon these two men—whom chance had thus strangely united—neither of whom might yield to the other in pride or courage.

The moment was becoming critical. The two jaguars were about to find enemies worthy of them.

The fire, now burnt down, threw out only a pale light, scarce strong enough to illumine the group that stood near its edge.

At this moment an incident occurred which was likely to cause a change in the situation of affairs. In the midst of an interval of silence—in which the very stillness itself increased the apprehension of the travellers—

was heard the long, lugubrious whine of a prairie wolf. Melancholy as was this sound, it was sweet in comparison with the cries of the more formidable animals, the jaguars.

"The prairie wolf to howl so in the presence of the tiger!" muttered the ex-herdsman. "Carramba! there's something strange about that."

"But I have heard it said," rejoined Tiburcio, "that it is the habit of the prairie wolf to follow the jaguar when the latter is in search of prey."

"That is true enough," replied Benito, "but the wolf never howls so near the tiger, till after the tiger has taken his prey, and is busy devouring it. Then his howl is a humble prayer for the other to leave him something.

"This is strange," continued the vaquero, as the prairie wolf was heard to utter another long whine. "Hark! another!—yes—another prairie wolf, and on the opposite side, too!"

In fact, another plaintive whine, exactly re-

sembling the first, both in strength and cadence, was heard from a point directly opposite.

"I repeat it," said Benito, "prairie wolves would never dare to betray themselves thus. I am greatly mistaken if it be not creatures of a different species that make this howling, and who don't care a straw for the jaguars."

"What creatures?" demanded Tiburcio.

"Human creatures!" answered the ex-herdsman. "American hunters from the north."

"Trappers do you mean?"

"Precisely. There are no people in these parts likely to be so fearless of the jaguar, and I am pretty sure that what appears to be the call of the prairie wolf is nothing else than a signal uttered by a brace of trappers. They are in pursuit of the jaguars; they have separated, and by these signals they acquaint one another of their whereabouts."

Meanwhile the trappers, if such they were, appeared to advance with considerable precaution; for although the party by the fire listened attentively, not the slightest noise

could be heard—neither the cracking of a branch, nor the rustling of a leaf.

"Hilloa! you by the fire there!" all at once broke out from the midst of the darkness a loud rough voice, "we are approaching you. Don't be afraid; and don't fire your guns!"

The voice had a foreign accent, which partly confirmed the truth of the vaquero's conjecture, and the appearance of the speaker himself proved it to a certainty.

We shall not stay to describe the singular aspect of the new arrival—further than to say that he was a man of herculean stature, and accoutred in the most *bizarre* fashion. He appeared a sort of giant, armed with a rifle proportioned to his size—that is, having a barrel of thick heavy metal nearly six feet in length.

As he approached the group, his sharp eye soon took in the different individuals that composed it; and rested with a satisfied look on the form of Tiburcio.

"The devil take that fire of yours!" he said, abruptly, but in a tone of good-humour. "It has frightened away from us two of the most beautiful jaguars that ever roamed about these deserts."

"Frightened them away!' ' exclaimed Baraja. "Carramba! I hope that may be true!"

"Will you allow me to put the fire out?" inquired the new comer.

"Put out the fire—our only safeguard!" cried the astonished Senator.

"Your only safeguard!" repeated the trapper, equally astonished, as he pointed with his finger around him. "What! eight men wanting a fire for a safeguard against two poor tigers! You are surely making game of me!"

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Don Estevan, in a haughty tone.

"A hunter—as you see."

"Hunter—of what?"

"My comrade and I trap the beaver, hunt

the wolf, the tiger—or an Indian, if need be."

"Heaven has sent you then to deliver us from these fierce animals," said Cuchillo, showing himself in front.

"Not very likely," replied the trapper, whose first impression of the outlaw was evidently an unfavourable one. "Heaven, I fancy, had nothing to do with it. My comrade and I, at about two leagues from here, chanced upon a panther and two jaguars quarrelling over the body of a dead horse."

"He was mine," interrupted Tiburcio.

"Yours, young man!" continued the trapper, in a tone of rude cordiality. "Well, I am glad to see you here, for we thought that the owner of the horse might be no longer among the living. The panther we killed, but the two jaguars made off, and we tracked them hither to the spring, which your fire now hinders them from approaching. Therefore, if you wish to be rid of these beasts, the sooner you put out the fire the

better; and you will see how soon we shall disembarrass you of their presence."

"And your comrade?" asked Don Estevan, struck with the idea of making a brace of valuable recruits. "Where is he?"

"He'll be here presently; but to the work, else we must leave you to get out of your scrape as you best can."

There was a certain authority in the tone and words of the trapper—a cool assurance that produced conviction, and upon his drawing near to put out the fire, Don Estevan did not offer to hinder him, but tacitly permitted him to have his way.

In a few seconds the burnt fagots were scattered about over the grass, and the cinders quenched by a few buckets of water drawn from the trough. This done, the trapper uttered an imitation of the voice of the *coyote;* and before its echoes had died away, his companion stepped forward upon the ground.

Although the second trapper was by no

means a man of low stature, alongside his companion he appeared only a pigmy. He was not less strangely accoutred, but in the absence of the fire-light his costume was not sufficiently visible for its style to be distinguished. Of him and his dress we shall hereafter speak more particularly.

"At last your devilish fire is out," said he, as he came up; "for the want of wood, no doubt, which none of you dared to go fetch?"

"No, that is not the reason," hastily replied the first trapper; "I got leave from these gentlemen to put it out—so that we may have an opportunity to rid them of the presence of the tigers."

"Hum!" murmured the Senator; "I fear we have done wrong in letting the fire be put out. Suppose you miss them?"

"Miss them! Por Dios! how?" cried the second trapper. *Caspita!* If I had not been afraid to frighten off one of the beasts, I could have killed the other long ago. Several times I had him at the muzzle of my carbine, when

the signal of my comrade hindered me from firing. Miss them indeed!"

"Never mind!" interrupted the great trapper; "we shall end the matter, I have no doubt, by convincing this gentleman."

"You already knew, then, that we were here?" said Baraja.

"Of course. We have been two hours involuntarily playing the spy upon you. Ah! I know a part of the country where travellers that take no more precautions than you, would soon find their heads stripped of the skin. But come, Dormilon—to our work!"

"What if the jaguars come our way?" suggested the Senator, apprehensively.

"No fear of that," replied the trapper. "Their first care will be to satisfy their thirst, which your fire has hindered them from doing. You will hear them howling with joy, as soon as they perceive that the fire is gone out. It was the light shining upon the water that frightened them more than the presence of men. All they want now is to get a drink."

"But how do you intend to act?" inquired Don Estevan.

"How do we intend to act?" repeated the second trapper. "That is simple enough. We shall place ourselves in the cistern—the jaguars will come forward to its brink; and then, if we are only favoured by a blink of the moon, I'll answer for it that in the twinkling of an eye the brutes will neither feel hunger nor thirst."

"Ah, this appears very simple!" cried Cuchillo, who was in reality astonished at the simplicity of the plan.

"Simple as bidding 'good bye' to you," humorously responded one of the trappers. "Listen there!—what did I tell you?"

Two loud roars, as if from a brazen trumpet, were heard at the moment. They appeared to proceed from the same point, proving that the jaguars had joined company; and, moreover, proclaimed the joy which the fierce creatures felt at the darkness being restored. This was further evident from their repeated

sniffing of the air, like horses who afar off scent with delight the fresh emanations of the water.

At this the two trappers, leaving the party by the fire, betook themselves to the cistern. The moon, for a moment shining out, glanced upon the barrels of their long rifles; but the next moment they had disappeared behind the ridge that surrounded the spring.

No doubt it is a grand pleasure to witness the spectacle of a bull-fight, as the huge bull dashes into the ring, and, pierced by the tormenting *bandrilleros*, with crest erect, and eye flashing fire, bounds over the arena. But if the spectators were not separated from the actors by an impassable barrier, the sight would have in it less of enjoyment than of terror. The combats between men and tigers —which the Romans used to enjoy—must have been a still more exciting spectacle; but who can doubt that, if the iron railing which separated the audience from the combatants had been removed, scarce one of the former

would have remained in the circus to witness the sanguinary struggle?

Only a short space—not wider than a jaguar could have passed over in a single leap—here separated the spectators from the actors in the drama about to been acted. Supposing, then, that one of the actors should fail in performing his part, and the spectators have to take his place? Here was a situation, exceptional, and fertile in emotions, which most of the travellers felt keenly at the moment.

Meanwhile the trappers had descended into the little crater-like valley of the spring, and there placed themselves in readiness, rifle in hand, to wait the approach of their terrible adversaries. They were both upon their knees, back to back, in order that they might keep at the same time under view the whole circumference of the circle. Both had placed their knives in readiness, in case that, by any chance, they should either miss their aim, or—what would be almost as unlucky—only wound the enemy; for they well knew that a wounded

jaguar is a more dangerous adversary than one that escapes altogether from the touch of the bullet.

Fortunately the moon had again appeared; but being yet low down in the sky, her beams were not thrown into the bottom of the valley, and therefore the trappers themselves were still under the shadow. This circumstance was in their favour.

Notwithstanding the perilous position in which they had thus voluntarily placed themselves, neither made the slightest movement; and the long barrels of their rifles stood forth in front of them, as motionless as bronze cannon set in battery.

They well knew, in case either should miss with their firearms, that a hand-to-hand struggle with the ferocious tigers would be the result; a combat of knives and claws—a combat to the death. Yes; at the bottom of that little valley it would be necessary for them to conquer or die. They knew this, without exhibiting the slightest show of fear.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNEXPECTED RECOGNITIONS.

It was not long before the spectators, who awaited this terrible conflict, perceived the jaguars advancing toward the crest of the ridge. All at once, however, the two made an abrupt pause, uttering a loud roar that seemed to express disappointment. They had just scented the presence of the two men within the cistern—from which the animals were now only a few paces distant.

For a moment both male and female stood together, stretching their bodies out to their full length, and lashing their flanks with their long sinewy tails. Then, uttering another prolonged roar, they bounded simultaneously

forward, passing, in a single leap, over a space of full twenty feet. A second spring brought them upon the crest of the ridge, upon which they had scarce rested an instant, before the quick sharp crack of a rifle, followed by a yell of agony, told that one of them had fallen to the hunter's bullet.

The second jaguar appeared for the moment to have escaped, but not to have retreated. He was seen to launch himself into the bottom of the little valley; and then was heard a confusion of noises—human voices mingling with the howls of the fierce brute; and the sound of a struggle, as if jaguar and hunters were rolling over one another. A second report now struck upon the ear, followed as before by the expiring yell of the tiger, and then succeeded a profound silence, which told that the wild scene was at an end.

The great trapper was now perceived scrambling up to the ridge—towards which the whole of the travellers had advanced to meet him.

"See!" he said, addressing himself to his admiring auditory, "see what a brace of Kentucky rifles and a good knife can do in the hands of those who know how to manage them!"

The darkness, however, hindered the spectators from making out the tableau which was exhibited at the bottom of the little valley.

A few minutes afterwards the moon lighted up the scene, and then could be observed the dead bodies of the two tigers, stretched along the ground by the water's edge, while the other trapper, upon his knees, was engaged in bathing with cold water a long scar which he had received from the claws of the last killed jaguar, and which extended from behind his ear nearly down to his waist. Fortunately this ugly-looking wound was no more than skin deep, and therefore not very dangerous.

"What signify the sharpest claws compared with the scratch of a knife!" cried he, pointing to the nearest of the jaguars, whose upturned belly exhibited a huge cut of more than

a foot in length, through which the entrails of the animal protruded.

"Can any of you tell us?" continued he, without thinking further about his wound, "if there is a hacienda in the neighbourhood where one might sell these two beautiful jaguar skins, as well as the hide of a panther we've got?"

"Certainly," replied Benito, "there is the Hacienda del Venado, where we are going. There you may get not only five dollars a-piece for the skins, but also the bounty of ten dollars more."

"What say you, Canadian?" inquired the trapper of his great comrade. "Will that do?"

"Certainly," replied the Canadian, "forty-five dollars is not to be sneezed at; and when we have had a short nap, we shall make tracks for the hacienda. We shall be likely to get there before these gentlemen—whose horses have taken a fancy to have a bit of a gallop, and I guess it will be some time before they lay hands on them again."

"Don't be uneasy about us!" rejoined the ex-herdsman. "It's not the first time I've seen horses drove *stampedoed*, nor the first time I've collected them again. I've not quite forgotten my old business, and as soon as it is daylight, with the permission of the Señor Don Estevan, I shall go in search of them."

No one made any opposition to the rekindling of the fire; for the night had grown cooler, and it was not yet midnight. The domestics, no longer afraid of going out into the woods, collected fresh fagots—enough to last till morning—and the preparations for supper, which had been interrupted by the approach of the jaguars, were now continued with renewed zeal.

The blaze soon flared up, bright and joyous as ever—the boiling mutton sent forth its delicious odour, sharpening to a keen edge the appetites of the travellers as they stood around the fire.

Don Estevan and the Senator now called before them the two intrepid hunters, who

had rendered them a service that fully deserved their thanks.

"Come hither, brave hunters!" said the Senator, "you whose daring behaviour has been of such service to us. A slice of roast mutton and a cup of Catalonian wine will not be out of place, after the rude struggle you have sustained."

"Ugh!" said the eldest of the trappers, in presenting his athletic form in front of the fire, "throwing a couple of poor tigers is no great feat. If it had been an affair of a dozen Comanches, or Pawnees, that would have been different. Howsomever, a chunk of roast mutton is welcome after a fight, as well as before one, and we're ready for it with your permission. Come along, comrade! Here's some chawing for you!"

"And you, young man," continued Don Estevan, addressing himself to Tiburcio, who stood at some distance apart, "you will also partake of our hospitality?"

Tiburcio, by a sign, accepted the invita-

tion, and approached the fire. For the first time his countenance came fairly under the light; and as it did so, the eyes of the Spaniard seemed to devour him with their regard. In truth, the physiognomy of Tiburcio Arellanos was of no ordinary character, and would have merited observation from one less interested in examining it than was Don Estevan Arechiza.

An aquiline nose, black eyes, with thick dark eyebrows and long lashes, an olive complexion—that appeared almost white in contrast with the jetty blackness of his beard—but above all, the extreme contraction of a thin upper lip, indicated the countenance of a man of quick resolves and fiery passions. A shade of tranquil melancholy over these features, to some extent, tempered their half-fierce expression.

The hair was of a chestnut brown colour, and hung in luxuriant curls over a forehead large and of noble outline. Broad shoulders and well-developed limbs denoted a man

of European vigour, whose personal strength would be equal, if occasion required it, to the execution of those passionate designs nourished under the tropical skies of Spanish America.

Tiburcio Arellanos was, in truth, the type of a noble and ancient race, transplanted into a country still less than half civilized.

"The very form and bearing of Don Juan de Mediana!" muttered Don Estevan to himself; more than half convinced that the young man before his eyes was the son of him whose name he had pronounced. No one could have read his suspicions, hidden under the mask of a perfect calmness.

There was one other man in that group who was struck by the aspect of Tiburcio. This was the big trapper, who, on the first sight of the young man's face under the light of the fire, started and closed his eyes, as if lightning had flashed before them. He was about to rush forward, when a second look seemed to convince him he had made a mis-

take; and smiling at his having done so, he kept his place. His eyes then wandered around the group of faces that encircled the fire, with that scrutinizing glance that showed a capacity for reading the characters of men in their looks.

Having finished this scrutiny, he called out to his companion, who had not yet got forward:—

"Come along, partner; or people will say you are ashamed to show yourself. Prove to these gentlemen that you know how to enjoy life like other folk."

"Oh, certainly—I am coming—all right, comrade."

And the next moment the younger trapper made his appearance within the circle of light.

An odd-looking object he appeared, with his huge fur cap upon his head, drawn down in front so as to cover his eyes, and an old striped cotton handkerchief fastened over his face and throat in such a manner as to

conceal the scar made by the claws of the tiger. With the cap and 'kerchief, the greater portion of his countenance was masked, leaving visible only his mouth, with a double row of grand teeth, that promised to perform their part upon the roast mutton.

Having reached the fire, he sat down with his back to it—so that his half-masked face was still further concealed in shadow—and being supplied, as well as his comrade, with a large cut from the joint, he at once set about satisfying the appetite of hunger.

"Are there many men of your size and strength where you come from?" inquired the Senator, addressing himself to the largest of the two hunters.

"In Canada," answered the latter, "I should not be remarked among others;—ask my comrade there!"

"He speaks true," grumbled the other.

"But you are not both from the same country?" said Tragaduros.

"No—my comrade is a native of—"

"Of New York State," hastily interposed the younger of the two trappers—a reply which astonished the Canadian, but which he refrained from contradicting.

"And what is your calling?" continued the Senator, interrogatively.

"*Coureurs des bois*" (wood-rangers), answered the Canadian; "that is to say, we pass our time in ranging the woods, with no other object than to avoid being shut up in towns. Alas! it is a profession likely soon to come to an end; and when we two are gone, the race of wood-rangers will run out in America, since neither of us has any sons to carry on the business of his father."

There was a tone of melancholy in the last words of the trapper's speech that contrasted strangely with his rude manner—something that seemed to evince a certain degree of regret. Don Estevan, noticing this, now entered into the conversation.

"I fear it is a poor business you follow, my brave fellows! But if you feel inclined to

leave it off for a while, and take part in an expedition that we are about to set on foot, I can promise to fill your caps with gold dust. What say you?"

"No!" brusquely responded the younger of the trappers.

"Each to his own business," added the Canadian. "We are not gold-seekers. We love to range freely where we please, without leader, and without being controlled by any one—in a word, free as the sun or the prairie breeze."

These answers were given in a tone so firm and peremptory that the Spaniard saw it would be of no use combating a resolution which was evidently not to be shaken; and therefore he declined to make any further offers.

Supper was soon over, and each of the travellers set about making himself as comfortable as possible for the remainder of the night.

In a short time, all, with the exception of

Tiburcio, were asleep. But Tiburcio was yet a mere youth, an orphan, who had lately lost a mother for whom he had a profound affection—and above all, Tiburcio was in love—three reasons why he could not sleep. A deep sadness had possession of his spirits. He felt himself in an exceptional situation—his past was equally mysterious with his future.

"Oh my mother! my mother!" murmured he, despairingly, to himself, "why did you not tell me who I am!"

And as he said this, he appeared to listen—as if the breeze, sighing through the leaves, would give a response to his interrogation. Little thought he at the moment that one of those men lying near him, under the light of the moon, could have given the desired answer—could have told him the name which he ought to bear.

Nevertheless, on her death-bed, the widow of Marcos Arellanos had revealed to him a secret—perhaps almost as interesting as that of his birth and parentage.

The secret of the Golden Valley, which had been made known to Tiburcio, had opened his eyes to a world of pleasant dreams. A prospect which hitherto had appeared to him only as a chimerical vision was now viewed by him in the light of a reality. A gulf that before seemed impassable was now bridged over as if by the hand of some powerful fairy.

Gold can work such miracles. Had he not in prospect the possession of a rich placer? Would not that enable him to overcome all obstacles both of the past and the future? Might he not, by the puissance of gold, discover who were his real parents? And by the same means, might he not realize that sweeter dream that had now for two years held possession of his heart?

As he lay upon the ground, kept awake by these hopeful reflections, a vision was passing before his mind's eye. It was a scene in which were many figures—a gentleman of rich apparel—a young girl, his daughter—a train of servants, all affrighted and in con-

fusion. They have lost their way in the middle of the forest, and are unable to extricate themselves from the labyrinth of llianas and thickets that surround them. A guide appears in the presence of a young hunter, who engages to conduct them to the place whither they wish to go. That guide is Tiburcio himself, who in his reverie—as in the real scene that occurred just two years before—scarce observes either the gentleman in rich apparel or the attendants that surround him; but only remembers the beautiful dark eyes and raven hair of the young girl. Tiburcio reassures them of safety, guides them during a journey of two days—two days that appeared to him to pass only too rapidly.

In his waking dream one scene is forcibly recalled. He remembers a night halt in the woods. All were asleep around him—the attendants upon the grass—the rich gentleman upon his cloak—and the young girl upon the skin of a jaguar, which the guide himself had supplied. He alone remained awake. The

moon was shining upon all; and a delicious perfume, from the blossoms of the sweet sassafras trees that grew near, was wafted towards them upon the gentle breeze. The blue heaven above appeared in perfect harmony with the tranquil scene below. The guide, with admiring eyes, looked upon that lovely virgin form, and listened to the soft breathing of that innocent bosom. To him it was a moment of delicious anguish. * * * *

Then the vision changed—the young girl at length reached her home, and entered the grand dwelling of her father. There the guide remained for a whole week a welcome guest—drunk with love, yet not daring to raise his eyes to the object of his passion.

Afterwards, too, at the festivals of the neighbouring villages, a hundred times had he gazed upon her; but what of that? He was only a poor gambusino; and she the daughter of the richest proprietor in the province!

But now—with the secret of the Golden Valley—Tiburcio suddenly saw himself power-

ful and rich; hope had sprung up within his bosom; and amidst the reverie occasioned by these delightful thoughts, he at last fell asleep.

It is scarce necessary to add that the young girl who recalled these sweet souvenirs, and who was now mingling in his dreams, was the daughter of Don Augustin Peña, the proprietor of the Hacienda del Venado.

At daybreak, the sleepers were awakened by the ringing of a bell, and the clatter of hoofs. It was the *cavallada* returning to camp, under the charge of Benito, who had thus kept his promise. The travellers were soon upon their feet, but it was soon perceived that the two trappers were not amongst them. These had gone away without any one having observed their departure.

The horses being saddled and bridled, and the mules packed, the cavalcade continued its journey towards the hacienda—Don Estevan and the Senator, as before, riding in the front.

It was after sunset before the walls of the hacienda were descried in the distance, already assuming a sombre hue under the fast increasing obscurity of the twilight. But through the wide forest tract which surrounded the hacienda, a well-defined road led in the direction of the dwelling, which the travellers could follow even in the darkest night; and upon this road the cavalcade was now seen to enter.

A few minutes before they had passed into the forest from the open plain, two men were seen standing near the edge of a thicket, by which they were hidden from the view of the travellers. These men might have been easily recognized by their long rifles, as strangers to that part of the country; they were, in fact, the two trappers, the Canadian and his comrade, who had that morning so abruptly taken leave of the camp.

"You must have been deceived by some accidental resemblance," said the Canadian to his companion.

"No," replied the latter; "I am sure it is he. Twenty years have not made much change, either in his face or figure. His voice is just the same as it was when I was the coast-guard, Pepé the Sleeper. My eyes and ears are as good as they were then, and I assure you, Bois-Rose, that he's the very man."

"Strange enough," answered Bois-Rose (for the great Canadian trapper was no other than Bois-Rose himself). "After all, one is more likely to meet an enemy he is in search of than a friend. It may be the same."

As he finished this speech, the Canadian, leaning upon his long rifle, stood looking after the cavalcade, which was just disappearing into the forest-road that led to the hacienda.

After remaining a few minutes in this position, the two trappers turned back again into the forest, and soon disappeared under the shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HACIENDA DEL VENADO.

THE Hacienda del Venado—like all buildings of this kind situated upon the Indian frontier, and of course exposed to the attacks of the savages—was a species of citadel, as well as a country dwelling-house. Built with sun-dried bricks and hewn stone, crowned by a crenelled parapet, and defended by huge massive doors, it could have sustained a siege from an enemy more expert in strategy than the tribe of Apaches who were its neighbours.

At one corner stood a tower of moderate height, which crowned the chapel belonging to the hacienda, serving for the great clock as

well as for a belfry. In case the principal part of the building should be forced, this tower would answer for an asylum almost impregnable.

Finally, a strong stockade, composed of trunks of the palmetto, completely encircled the building; within which enclosure were the quarters destined for the domestics of the hacienda—as also for the herdsmen, and such ordinary guests as from time to time came to seek a passing hospitality. Outside this privileged enclosure was a group of from twenty to thirty huts, composing a species of little village. These were inhabited by the day-labourers (peons) and their families attached to the hacienda—who, in case of danger, would escape within the enclosure for safety and protection.

Such was the Hacienda del Venado. The proprietor, Don Augustin Peña, was a man of great opulence. In addition to a rich gold mine which he worked, at no great distance off, he was the owner of countless herds of

horses, mules, and cattle, that in a half-wild state roamed over the vast savannas and forests that constituted the twenty leagues of land belonging to the hacienda. Such a vast tract of territory belonging to one man is by no means a rare thing in Northern Mexico.

At this time Don Augustin was a widower, and his family consisted of only one daughter —the young girl already introduced to the reader. Considering the immense heritage that the Doña Rosario—or, as she was more gracefully called, Rosarita — was likely to bring to whoever should become her husband, it was natural that an alliance with Don Augustin should be the object of many an ambition; in fact, her beauty—without the grand fortune which, at her father's death, she was to become mistress of—would of itself have been enough to challenge a crowd of pretenders to her hand.

The Andalusian type has lost nothing in the northern provinces of Mexico. Its purity of outline is there associated with freshness of

colour, and this happy mixture of graces was exhibited in the beautiful countenance of Rosarita. We have described her with black eyes and hair of raven hue; but hers was a beauty that words can but faintly portray, and about which all description would be superfluous.

And this lovely creature bloomed in the very midst of the desert, like the flower of the cactus, which blossoms and fades under the eye of God alone.

The immense plain, in the midst of which stood the Hacienda del Venado, presented a double aspect. In front of the house only did the ground show any traces of cultivation. On that side, fields of Indian corn and vast olive plantations denoted the presence and skilful labour of man.

Behind the hacienda—at some hundred paces distance from the stockade—the clearing ended, and thence extended the virgin forest in all its sombre and primitive majesty.

The cultivated ground was intersected by a considerable stream of water. During the

dry season it ran gently and silently along, but in the season of rain it would suddenly change into an impetuous torrent that inundated the whole plain, bearing huge rocks along in its current, and every year widening its channel.

Perhaps the most powerful of Arab chiefs, the richest patriarch of ancient times, never counted such superb and numerous herds as roamed over the pasturage of the Hacienda del Venado.

About an hour before sunset—on that same day on which the travellers departed from La Poza—two men, one on horseback, the other mounted on a mule, were seen traversing the plain in the direction of the hacienda. Both horse and mule were splendid specimens of their kind — the horse with fiery eye, broad chest, and curving, swan-like neck, was scarce more to be admired than the mule, that with fine delicate limbs, rounded flanks, and shining coat, walked side by side with him.

This horseman was the master of the

hacienda, Don Augustin Peña. His costume consisted of a hat of Guayaquil grass, a shirt of the finest cambric, an embroidered vest, and silk velvet pantaloons fastened down the sides with large buttons of gold.

His companion, the rider of the mule, was the chaplain of the hacienda, a reverend Franciscan monk, in a sort of half-convent costume. This consisted of an ample blue frock, confined around the waist with a thick cord of silk, the tassels of which hung down below his knees. Beneath this appeared a pair of large riding-boots heavily spurred. Upon his head a grey beaver, somewhat jauntily set, gave to the Franciscan an appearance rather soldier-like than monastic.

The haciendado appeared to be regarding with a look of pride his rich possessions—extending beyond view on every side of him—as if he was reflecting how much this kind of wealth was superior to golden ingots shut idly in a chest; while the monk seemed to be absorbed in some profound reverie.

"By St. Julian! the patron saint of travellers," said Don Augustin, breaking silence, "you have been more than twenty-four hours absent! I was afraid, reverend father, that some jaguar had swallowed both you and your mule."

"Man proposes, and God disposes, "replied the monk. "When I took my departure from the hacienda, I did not expect to be gone more than a few hours—giving Christian burial to poor Joaquin, that had been killed by one of the bulls—but just as I had blessed the earth where they had buried him, a young man came galloping up like a thunderbolt, both himself and horse all of a sweat, to beg that I would go along with him and confess his mother, who was upon her death-bed. Only ten leagues he said it was, and I should have been glad of a pretext to get off from such a difficult turn of duty; but at the earnest entreaty of the young fellow, and knowing who he was, I could not refuse him. Who do you think he was?"

"How should I know?" replied the haciendado.

"Tiburcio, the adopted son of the famous gambusino, Marcos Arellanos."

"How! his mother dead! I am sorry. He is a brave youth, and I have not forgotten the service he once did me. But for him we should all have been dead of thirst, my daughter, my people, and myself. If he is left without resources, I hope you have said to him that he will find a welcome at the Hacienda del Venado."

"No—I have not," replied the monk.

"And why?"

"Because this young fellow is desperately in love with your daughter;—it is my duty to tell you so."

"What signifies that, so long as my daughter does not love him?" replied Don Augustin. "And if she did, where would she find a man possessing higher physical or moral qualities than this same Tiburcio? I never dreamt of having for my son-in-law any other than an in-

telligent man, brave enough to defend the frontier against these hordes of savage Indians, and just such a man is young Arellanos. But in truth I forget myself; I have this day designed for Rosarita a husband of a more exalted station."

"And it may be that you have done wrong," rejoined the monk, in a serious tone; "from what I suspect—in fact, what I may say I know—this Tiburcio might make a more valuable son-in-law than you imagine."

"It's too late then," said Don Augustin. "I have given my word, and I cannot retract it."

It is just about this matter I wish to speak to you, if you have time to hear me."

At this moment the two horsemen, having passed the stockade, had arrived at the foot of the stone stairway—which led up to the portico, and thence into the grand sala of the hacienda—and while dismounting, their dialogue was interrupted.

This *sala* was a large room, which, according to the practice in hot countries, was so arrang-

ed as to be continually kept cool by a current of air passing lengthwise through its whole extent. Fine Chinese mats covered the floor, while richly painted window blinds prevented the rays of the sun from entering the apartment. The walls, whitened with stucco, were adorned with rare illuminated paintings, set in gold frames; some leathern chairs, called *butacas*, several side-tables, upon one of which stood a silver brazero, filled with red cinders of charcoal—these, with a *fauteuil* or two, and a mahogany couch of Anglo-American manufacture, completed the furniture of the apartment.

Upon a table of polished balsam-wood stood several porous jars containing water; beside them, on a large silver waiter, were confections of several kinds; while heaped upon other dishes, also of solid silver, were fruits both of the tropic and temperate climes—oranges, granadillas, limes, and pitayas, here brought together to tempt the appetite or assuage the thirst.

The appearance of these preparations denoted that Don Augustin expected company. As

soon as they had entered within the sala, the monk, observing the well garnished tables, inquired if such was the case.

"Yes," answered the haciendado, "Don Estevan de Arechiza has sent me word that he will arrive this evening with a somewhat numerous train, and I have taken measures to entertain a guest of such importance. But you say you wish to speak to me about some business—what is it, Friar José Maria?"

The two now sat down, each choosing an easy chair, and while Don Augustin was lighting a cigar the monk commenced speaking as follows:—

"I found the old woman seated upon a bank outside the door of her hut, whither she had dragged herself to look out for my arrival. 'Bless you, good father!' said she, 'you have arrived in time to receive my last confession. But while you rest a little, I wish you to listen to what I am going to say to him whom I have always treated as my own child, and to whom I intend to leave a legacy of vengeance.'"

"What! holy father!" interrupted Don Augustin, "surely you did not permit this infraction of God's law, who says 'vengeance belongs only to Him?'"

"Why not?" replied the monk. "In these deserts, where neither laws nor tribunals exist, every man must be his own avenger."

With this strange apology for his conduct, the monk continued:—

"I sat down and listened to what she had to say to this adopted son. It was this:—'Your father was *not* killed by the Indians, as we were led to believe. It was his companion who murdered him—for the purpose of being the sole possessor of a secret which I shall presently disclose—but to you only, Marcos.'

"'God alone knows who this man was,' said Tiburcio,—'He alone knows him.'

"'He only!' cried the dying woman, with an air of disdain. 'Is this the language of a man? When the Indians come to steal his cattle from the vaquero, does he sit still and say, 'God only can prevent them? No!—

with his eye bent, and his hand ready, he follows upon their traces, till he has recovered his herds or perished in the attempt. Go you and do as the vaquero! Track out the assassin of your father. That is the last wish of her who nourished you, and has never failed in her affection.'

"'I shall obey you, my mother,' answered the young man, in a firm voice.

"'Listen, then, what I have got to say!' continued the widow. 'The murder of Arellanos is no longer a supposition, but a reality. I have it from a herdsman who came from the country beyond Tubac. Some days before, he had met two travellers. One was your father Marcos; the other was a stranger to him. The herdsman was travelling on the same route, and followed them at some distance behind. At a place where certain signs showed that the two travellers had made their bivouac, the herdsman found the traces of a terrible struggle. The grass was bent down, and saturated with blood. There were tracks of

blood leading to a precipice that hung over a stream of water; and most likely over this the victim was precipitated. This victim must have been Marcos; for the herdsman was able to follow the trail of the murderer by the tracks of his horse; and a little further on he noticed where the horse had stumbled on the left fore leg. The assassin himself must have been wounded in the struggle, for the herdsman could tell, by his tracks leading to the precipice, that he had limped on one leg.'"

Don Augustin listened with attention to this account—proving the wonderful sagacity of his countrymen, of which he had almost every day some new proof. The monk went on with his narration:—

"'Swear then, Tiburcio, to avenge your father!' continued the dying woman.—'Swear it, and I promise to make you as rich as the proudest in the land; rich enough to bend to your wishes the most powerful—even the daughter of Augustin Peña, for whom your passion has not escaped me. This day you

may aspire to her hand without being deemed foolish; for, I tell you, you are as rich as her own father. Swear, then, to pursue to the death the murderer of Arellanos?'

"'I swear it,' rejoined Tiburcio, with a solemn gesture.

"Upon this, the dying woman placed in the hands of the young man a piece of paper—upon which Arellanos, before leaving his home for the last time, had traced the route of his intended journey.

"'With the treasure which that paper will enable you to find,' continued the dying woman, 'you will have gold enough to corrupt the daughter of a viceroy, if you wish it. Meanwhile, my child, leave me for a while to confess to this holy man; a son should not always hear the confession of his mother.'"

The monk, in a few more words, related the closing scene of the widow's death, and then finished by saying:—

"Now, Don Augustin, you perceive my reason for saying that this young fellow,

whatever may be his family, is not the less likely to make a good match for the Doña Rosarita."

"I agree with you," responded the hacendado; "but, as I have said to you, my word is given to Don Estevan de Arechiza."

"What!" exclaimed the monk, "this Spaniard to be your son-in-law!"

Don Augustin smiled mysteriously, as he replied:—

"He! no, good Fray José, not he, but another. Don Estevan does not wish this alliance."

"Caspita!" exclaimed the monk. "Does he think it beneath him?"

"It may be he has the right to think so," added Don Augustin, again smiling mysteriously.

"But who is this man?" inquired the monk, with an air of surprise.

Just as Don Augustin was about to reply, a servant entered the sala.

"Señor Don Augustin," said the servant,

"there are two travellers at the gate, who beg of you to give them a night's lodging. One of them says that he is known to you."

"Bid them welcome!" replied the hacendado, "and let them enter. Whether they are known to me or not, two guests more or less will be nothing here."

A few seconds after, the two travellers had advanced to the foot of the stone stairway, where they stood, awaiting the presence of the master of the house.

One of them was a man of about thirty years of age—whose open countenance and high forehead denoted courage combined with intelligence. His figure presented an appearance of strength and vigorous activity, and he was somewhat elegantly dressed—though without any signs of foppery.

"Ah! is it you, Pedro Diaz?" cried Don Augustin, recognizing him. "Are there any Indians to be exterminated, since I find you coming into these solitudes of ours?"

Pedro Diaz was, in truth, known as the

most celebrated hater and hunter of Indians in the whole province—hence the strange salutation with which Don Augustin received him.

"Before answering you, Señor Don Augustin, permit me to introduce to you the king of gambusinos and prince of musicians, the Señor Don Diego Oroche, who scents a placer of gold as a hound would a deer, and who plays upon the mandolin, as only he can play."

The individual presented under the name of Oroche solemnly saluted the haciendado.

It must have been a long time since the prince of gambusinos had found an opportunity to exercise the subtle talent of which his companion spoke—or else the cards had been of late unlucky—for his outward man presented an appearance that was scarcely more than comfortable.

In reaching his hand to his hat, it was not necessary for him to disarrange the folds of his cloak. It only required that he should choose one of the numerous rents that appeared in this garment, to pass through it his

long-clawed fingers—whose length and thinness denoted him a player on the mandolin. In reality, he carried one of these instruments slung over his shoulders.

Don Augustin invited both Diaz and his singular companion to enter. When they were seated in the saloon, Diaz began the conversation.

"We have heard," said he, "of an expedition being got up at Arispe to proceed to Apacheria; and this gentleman and I are on our way to take part in it. Your hacienda, Señor Don Augustin, chanced to lie in our way, and we have entered to ask your permission to lodge here for the night. By daybreak we shall continue our route for Arispe."

"You will not have to go so far," replied Don Augustin, with a smile. "The expedition is already on foot, and I expect the leader of it here this very night. He will be glad of your services, I guarantee you, and it will save you several days' journey."

"A miracle in our favour!" exclaimed Diaz; "and I thank God for the lucky coincidence."

"The thirst of gold has caught you also, Pedro Diaz?" asked Don Augustin, smiling significantly.

"No, thank God!" replied Diaz, "nothing of the sort. I leave the searching for gold to experienced gambusinos, such as the Señor Oroche here. No, you know well that I have no other passion than hatred for the ferocious savages who haved one so much ill towards me and mine. It is only because I hope, through this expedition, once more to carry steel and fire into their midst, that I take any part in it."

"It is right," said the haciendado, who, like all dwellers upon the frontiers exposed to Indian excursions, nourished in his heart a hatred for the savages almost equal to that of Diaz himself. "I approve of your sentiments, Don Pedro Diaz; and if you will permit me to offer you a gage of mine, I beg you will accept from me the present of a horse I have—

one that will carry you to your satisfaction. I promise you that the Indian you pursue, while on his back, will require to go as fast as the wind itself if you do not overtake him."

"He shall be my war horse," exclaimed Diaz, his eyes sparkling with pleasure at the gift. "I shall ornament his crest with Indian scalps, in honour of him who gave him to me."

"I cannot divine what has delayed Don Estevan," said the haciendado, changing the subject of conversation. "He should have been here three hours before this—that is, if he passed the night at La Poza.

Don Augustin had scarce finished his speech when a sudden and graceful apparition glided into the saloon. It was his daughter, the beautiful Rosarita.

As if the expected cavalcade only awaited her presence, the chattering of hoofs at the same instant was heard outside; and, by the light of the torches which the domestics had carried out, Don Estevan and his suite could be seen riding up to the entrance gate of the hacienda.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROSARITA.

On the route from La Poza it had fallen to the lot of Cuchillo and Tiburcio to ride side by side, but for all this few words had passed between them. Although Cuchillo had not the slightest idea of renouncing his dire design, he continued to hide his thoughts under an air of good-humour—which, when need be, he knew how to assume. He had made several attempts to read the thoughts of the young gambusino, but the latter was on his guard, seeking in his turn to identify Cuchillo with the assassin of his father. No opportunity offered, however; and in this game of

mutual espionage, neither had the advantage. Nevertheless, an instinctive and mutual hatred became established between the two, and before the day's journey was over, each regarded the other as a mortal foe. Cuchillo was more than ever determined to execute his hellish purpose—since a crime less or more would be nothing to him—while Tiburcio, keenly remembering the oath which he had made to his adopted mother, was resolved on keeping it; and only awaited the time when he should be sure of the assassin. We need scarcely add that Tiburcio, in the accomplishment of his vow, had no thoughts of playing the assassin. No. Whenever and wherever the murderer should be found, he was to die by Tiburcio's hand; but only in fair and open fight.

But there were other painful reflections that occupied Tiburcio's mind during the journey. The nearer he approached the object of his love, the greater seemed to be the distance between them. Though a man may hope to obtain what he only wishes for in a

moderate way, yet, when anything is ardently yearned after, the obstacles appear insurmountable. Hence the secret of many a heroic resolution. When Tiburcio was reclining by the well of La Poza, his sweet dream hindered him from thinking of his obstacles; but now that the journey was nearly ended, and he drew near to the grand hacienda, his spirits fell, and a feeling of hopelessness took possession of his soul. Hence it was that he formed the resolution to put an end to the painful suspense which he had now a long time endured; and that very night, if possible, he intended to ascertain his position in the eyes of Doña Rosarita. Come what might, he resolved to ask that question, whose answer might render him at once the happiest or the most miserable of men.

When Tiburcio had first met Doña Rosarita with her father and his servants, in the depth of the forest, he knew nothing of the rank of the party thus wandering astray. Even during the two happy days in which he acted as

their guide, he was ignorant of the name of the beautiful young girl to whom his eyes and his heart rendered a continual homage. He therefore permitted himself to indulge in those pleasant dreams which have their origin in a hopeful love. It was only after he had learned the quality of his fellow travellers—that the young lady was the daughter of the opulent proprietor, Don Augustin Peña—it was only on ascertaining this, that Tiburcio perceived the folly of his aspirations, and the distance that lay between him and the object of his love. If then the secret so unexpectedly revealed to him had given him a desire for the possession of riches, it was not for the sake of being rich. No; a nobler object inspired him—one more in keeping with his poetic character. He desired riches only that with them he might bridge over the chasm that separated him from Rosarita.

Unhappily he could not hide from himself, the too evident fact that he was not the sole possessor of the secret.

All at once it occurred to him that the ex-

pedition to which he found himself thus accidentally attached could have no other object than this very placer of the Golden Valley. Most likely the very man who shared the secret with him—the murderer of Marcos Arellanos—was among the men enrolled under the orders of the chief Don Estevan. The ambiguous questioning of Cuchillo, his comprehension of events, the stumbling of his horse, with other slighter indications, appeared to throw some light upon the obscurity of Tiburcio's conjectures, but not enough. How was he (Tiburcio) to arrive at a complete understanding?

A still more painful uncertainty pressed upon his spirit, as they approached the dwelling of Don Augustin. What reception would he meet with from Doña Rosarita?—he, a poor gambusino—without resources, without family—poorly dressed even—a mere follower, confounded with the common mob of adventurers who composed the expedition? Sad presentiments were passing in his mind as the caval-

cade, of which he formed so humble an appendage, arrived at the palisade enclosure of the hacienda.

The gates were soon open to receive them, and the moment after Don Augustin himself welcomed the travellers at the front entrance of the mansion. With that ease and elegance almost peculiar to Spanish manners, he received Don Estevan and the Senator, while the cordiality with which he welcomed Tiburcio appeared to the young man a happy omen.

The travellers all dismounted. Cuchillo remained outside—partly out of respect to his chief, and partly to look after his horse. As to Tiburcio, he had not the same motives for acting thus, and therefore entered along with Don Estevan and Tragaduros, his face pale and his heart beating audibly.

The room into which they had been shown was the grand sala already described, in which certain preparations had been made for a magnificent banquet. But Tiburcio saw nothing of all this. His eyes beheld only one

object, for there stood a beautiful girl, whose lips rendered paler the carnation red of the grenadillas, and the hue of whose cheeks eclipsed the rosy tint of the *sandias*, scattered profusely over the tables. It was Rosarita herself. A silken scarf covered her head, permitting the thick plaits of her dark hair to shine through its translucent texture, and just encircling the outline of her oval face. This scarf, hanging down below the waist, but half-concealed her white rounded arms, and only partially hindered the view of a figure of the most elegantly voluptuous tournure. Around her waist another scarf of bright scarlet formed a sort of cincture or belt, leaving its long fringed ends to hang over the skirt of her silken robe, and blending its colours with those of the light veil that fell down from her shoulders. It was a costume that seemed well suited to her striking beauty, and the effect of the *coup d'œil* upon the heart of poor Tiburcio was at once pleasant and embarrassing.

Notwithstanding the gracious smile with

which she acknowledged his presence, there was a certain hauteur about the proffered welcome, as if it was a mere expression of gratitude for the service he had formerly rendered.

Tiburcio observed this with a feeling of chagrin, and sighed as he contrasted her cold formality of speech with the abandon and freedom of their former relations; but he could not help noticing a still greater contrast when he looked at his own poor garments, and compared them with the elegant costumes of his two travelling companions.

While Don Estevan was entertaining his host with some account of what had happened on their journey, the Senator appeared to have eyes only for the beautiful Rosarita; upon whom he was not slow in lavishing a string of empty compliments.

The young girl appeared to Tiburcio to receive these compliments with a smile very different from that she had accorded to himself; he also observed, with a feeling of bitterness, the superior easiness of manner in which those

whom he regarded as his rivals addressed themselves to her. With anguish he noticed the colour become vivid upon her cheeks, while the heaving of her bosom, as the scarf rose and fell in irregular vibrations, did not escape the keen glance of jealousy. In fact, the young girl appeared to feel pleasure from these gallantries, like a village belle who listens to the flatteries of some grand lord, at the same time that a voice from within whispers her that the sweet compliments she is receiving are also merited.

Don Estevan was not unobservant of this by-play that was passing around him. He easily read in the expressive looks of Tiburcio the secret of his heart, and involuntarily contrasted the manly beauty of the young man with the ordinary face and figure of the Senator. As if from this he apprehended some obstacle to his secret projects, more than once his dark eyebrows became contracted, and his eyes shone with a sombre fire.

By little and little he ceased to take part in

the conversation, and at length appeared wrapped in profound meditation. Insensibly also an air of melancholy stole over the features of Rosarita. As for Don Augustin and the Senator, they appeared at once to be on good terms with each other, and carried on the conversation without permitting it to flag for a moment.

Just then Cuchillo, accompanied by Baraja, entered to pay their respects to the master of the hacienda. Their entrance within the sala of course created some slight disarrangement in the tableaux of the *dramatis personæ* already there. This confusion gave Tiburcio an opportunity to carry out the desperate resolution he had formed, and profiting by it he advanced nearer to Rosarita.

"I will give my life," said he to her in a side whisper, "for one moment alone with you. I wish to speak of an affair of the highest importance."

The young girl regarded him for a moment with an air of astonishment, further expressed

by a disdainful movement of the lip; although, considering their former relations, and also the free familiarity of Mexican manners, she might have been expected to excuse his freedom. Tiburcio stood waiting her reply in a supplicating attitude, and as everything seemed spontaneous with her, he had not long to wait. She answered in a few words:—

"To-night, then—at ten o'clock I shall be at my window."

Scarcely had the thrilling tones of her voice ceased to vibrate on the ear of Tiburcio, when supper was announced, and the guests were shown into another room. Here a table, splendidly set out, occupied the middle of the apartment; above which hung a great chandelier, fitted with numerous waxen candles; these gave out a brilliant and cheerful light, that was reflected from hundreds of shining vessels of massive silver, of antique forms, arranged upon the table below.

The upper end of the table was occupied by the host himself and his principal guests.

His daughter sat on his left hand, while Don Estevan was placed upon the right. After them, the Senator and the chaplain, and Pedro Diaz. At the lower end were seated Tiburcio, Cuchillo, Baraja, and Oroche.

The chaplain pronounced the *benedicite.* Although it was no longer the same jumbling formula, *sans façon*, which he had used at the death-bed of the widow of Arellanos, yet the air of mock solemnity and unction with which the grace was uttered, recalled to the heart of Tiburcio that sad souvenir, which recent events had for a time caused him to forget.

Cheerfulness soon reigned around the table. The expedition was talked of, and toasts drunk to its success. Vast silver goblets, of antique shape, were used for wine glasses, and these, passing rapidly from hand to mouth, soon produced an abundance of good humour among all the guests.

"Gentlemen," said Don Augustin, when the festive scene was near its end, "before retiring, I have the honour to invite you all to

a hunt of the wild horse on my estate, which is to come off early in the morning."

Each of the guests accepted the invitation with that abandon natural to people who have made a good supper.

With regard to Tiburcio, jealousy was devouring him. He scarce ate of the rich viands placed before him. He kept his eyes constantly fixed upon Don Estevan, who, during the supper, appeared to show marked attentions to Rosarita, for every one of which Tiburcio thanked him with a look of hatred. As soon as the supper was ended, the young man silently left the room and repaired to the chamber that had been assigned to him for the night.

At an early hour, for such was the custom of the hacienda, all the guests had retired to their sleeping apartments—even the domestics were no longer to be seen in the great hall; and a profound silence reigned throughout the vast building, as if all the world had gone to rest. But all the world was not yet asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSIGNATION.

ALONE in his chamber, Tiburcio awaited impatiently the hour named by Rosarita. From his window he cast a distracted glance over the plain that stretched away from the walls of the hacienda. The moon was up in the heavens, and the road leading to Tubac appeared under her light shining like a vast ribbon extended through the middle of the forest. The forest itself appeared asleep; not even a breath stirred the leaves of the trees, and the only sounds he heard were those caused by the half wild herds that wandered through its glades. Now and then

the bellowing of a bull denoted the uneasiness of the animal, perhaps from the presence of those terrible night robbers, the puma and jaguar. There was another sound that reached the ear of Tiburcio, but this appeared to proceed from some part of the hacienda itself. It was the tinkling of a mandolin. The hour was appropriate to amorous reflections, as well as to thoughts of a graver character, and both presented themselves at that moment to the spirit of Tiburcio. Like all those whose life is passed amid the depths of the desert, there was at the bottom of his heart a certain poetic temperament, at the same time that his soul exhibited that energetic vigour required by the dangers which surround such a life of solitude. His present position then was perfectly appropriate to this double character. His love was unreciprocated; the coolness of Rosarita almost assured him of the painful fact, and some secret presentiment told him that he was encompassed by enemies.

While thus sadly reflecting on his situation, an object came under his eyes that attracted his attention. It was the gleam of a fire, which appeared to be kindled, under cover of the forest, at no great distance from the hacienda. The light was partly eclipsed by that of the moon, but still it could be traced by the greater redness of its rays, as they trembled mysteriously on the silver foliage of the trees. It denoted the halting-place of some travellers.

"So near the hacienda!" muttered Tiburcio, in entering upon a new series of reflections. "What can it mean? Why have these travellers not come here to demand hospitality? They have certainly some reason for keeping themselves at a distance. They may be unknown friends to me, for heaven often sends such to those who stand in need of them. Cuchillo, Don Estevan, and this pompous Senator, all appear to be my enemies, and all are secure under this roof; why might not these travellers, who appear to

shun it, for that very reason prove friends to me?"

The hour of rendezvous had at length arrived. Tiburcio took up his *serapé* and his knife—the last, the only weapon he had—and prepared to go out from his chamber without making any noise. A fearful conflict of emotions was passing in his bosom; for he knew that in a few minutes would be decided the question of his happiness or misery. Before leaving his chamber, he looked once more through the window in the direction of the forest fire. It was still gleaming in the same place.

While the lover, with cautious tread, and wildly beating heart, was silently traversing the long gallery, and passing round to that side upon which opened the window of Rosarita, other scenes were passing elsewhere that must now be detailed.

Since his arrival at the hacienda, Don Estevan, in presence of the other guests, had scarce found an opportunity to speak with

the haciendado on business that concerned both of them. Only for one moment had they been alone, and then the Spaniard had briefly related to Don Augustin the contract he had entered into with Cuchillo. When Don Estevan mentioned the secret of the Golden Valley, the haciendado appeared to make a slight gesture, as of disappointment, but their short dialogue ended abruptly by a promise to return to the subject at a later hour of the night.

Don Estevan had awaited until all the other guests had retired to their chambers; then, drawing the Senator into the bay of one of the large windows of the sala, he requested him to look up at the stars that were shining in all their brilliance in the blue sky above.

"See," said he, pointing to a particular constellation, "that is the *Chariot* that has risen above the eastern horizon. Do you perceive a single star farther down, which scarce shines through the vapour? That is the

emblem of *your* star, which, at present pale, to-morrow may be in the ascendant, and gleam more brightly than any of those that compose the brilliant cortége of the *Chariot.*

"What mean you, Señor Arechiza?"

"I shall tell you presently. Perhaps the hour is nearer than you think, when you may be the future master of the hacienda, by a marriage with the charming daughter of its present owner, who is to be its heiress. Come presently to my apartment. The conversation which I am about to have with Don Augustin must be decisive, and I shall let you know the result."

With these words, the Spaniard and the Senator parted — the heart of the latter beating at the same time with hope and fear.

Don Estevan now awaited the haciendado, who the moment after came up to him.

The proprietor of the Hacienda del Venado, as will already be seen, had given to the Spaniard more than an ordinary welcome. His

politeness to him, when in presence of witnesses, was even less respectful than when the two were alone. On his side, Don Estevan appeared to accept the homage of the other as if it were due to him. There was in his polite condescension towards the rich proprietor, and in the deference of the latter towards him, something resembling the relation that might be supposed to exist between a powerful sovereign and one of his noble vassals.

It was not until after reiterated requests—orders they might almost be called—that Don Augustin consented to be seated in the presence of the other; whereas the Spaniard had flung himself into a *fauteuil* on the moment of entering the chamber, and with the most perfect abandon.

The haciendado waited silently for Don Estevan to speak.

"Well, what do you think of your future son-in-law?" inquired the Spaniard. "I presume you never saw him before."

"Never," answered Don Augustin. "But if he was even less favoured by nature than he is, that would make no obstacle to our projects."

"I know him; he only needs to be known, to prove that he has in him the stuff of a gentleman, besides being a senator of the illustrious congress of Arispe." The Spaniard pronounced these words with a slight smile of contempt. "But, señor," continued he, "that is not the difficulty, the important matter is, whether *your daughter* will find him to her liking."

"My daughter will act according to my wish," said the haciendado.

"But supposing her heart is not free?"

"The heart of Rosarita is free, Señor Don Estevan; how could it be otherwise — she whose life has been spent in the midst of these deserts?"

"And what about this ragged young fellow, this Tiburcio Arellanos, whom you appear to know? He is in love with your daughter."

"I have been made aware of it this very morning."

"If it is only a few hours, then, since you have been apprised of the secret of his passion, surely that of your daughter cannot have to this time escaped you?"

"The truth is," answered Don Augustin, smiling, "that I understand better how to follow the traces of an Indian, and read in the countenance of a savage his most secret thoughts, than to look into the heart of a young girl. But I repeat it—I have reason to believe that my daughter's heart is free of any such an affection. I do not apprehend any difficulty in this regard. I dread an obstacle of a more important character—I mean an obstacle to the expedition you are about to conduct into the desert."

Here the haciendado communicated to Don Estevan the particulars which the monk had gathered at the death-bed of the widow of Arellanos, and which seemed to produce a strong impression on the Spaniard; but al-

though the conversation continued for some time longer, I shall not here detail what was said, but return to the Senator, who with anxious heart was now awaiting Don Estevan in the apartment which had been assigned to the latter.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DUKE D'ARMADA.

THE chamber set apart for the Señor Don Estevan de Arechiza was undoubtedly the best in the house, and notwithstanding the little progress that luxury has made in the state of Sonora, was furnished with considerable elegance.

In this chamber Don Estevan found the Senator pacing to and fro, with an air that bespoke him a prey to the most vivid emotions.

"Well, Señor Don Vicente," began Arechiza, who appeared to make light of the impatience of his *protégé*, "what do you think of the daughter of our host? Have I exaggerated her beauty?"

"Oh, my friend!" exclaimed the Senator, with all that vivacity of pantomimic gesture so characteristic of the South, "the reality far exceeds the imagination. She is an angel! Even in our country, famous for its beautiful women, Doña Rosarita is certainly loveliest of all."

"And the richest too," added the Spaniard with a smile.

"Who would have expected to find, in the middle of the desert, such an accomplished beauty?—such youthful freshness? Such charms were created to shine in a far higher sphere."

"At the court of a king, for instance," carelessly rejoined Arechiza.

"Oh! Señor Don Estevan!" again exclaimed the Senator, in an earnest voice, "do not keep me in suspense; the divine, the rich Doña Rosarita—is it possible I am to have her for my wife?"

"One word from me, one promise from you, and the thing is done. I have her

father's word. Within fifteen days you may be the husband of his daughter."

"Agreeable as easy."

"A little later you will be rich."

"No harm in that."

"Later still you will a be grand proprietor."

"Oh! it is magnificent. Carramba! Señor de Arechiza, it is a perfect cataract of felicities to be lavished upon my head—it is a dream! it is a dream!" shouted the Senator, as he strode to and fro across the floor.

"Lose no time then in making it a reality," replied Don Estevan.

"But is the time so pressing?" inquired the Senator, suddenly pausing in his steps.

"Why this question? Is it possible to be too quick in obtaining happiness?"

The Senator appeared thoughtful, and for a moment presented an aspect of embarrassment in strange contrast to his previous looks. He replied, after a pause—

"The fact is, Don Estevan, I am willing to marry an heiress whose wealth, as is usually

the case, would compensate for her ugliness. In this case, it is the very beauty of the lady that confuses me."

"Perhaps she does not please you?"

"On the contrary, so much happiness awes me. It appears to me, for a reason which I cannot divine, that some sad disappointment lurks under this seductive prospect."

"Ah, just as I expected," answered Don Estevan; "it is the human heart. I knew you would make some objection of this kind, but I thought you were more of a man of the world than to trouble yourself about the past, with such a splendid future before you. Ah! my poor Despilfarro," added the Spaniard, with a laugh, "I thought you were more advanced."

"But why, Don Estevan?" inquired the Senator, intending to give a proof of his high diplomatic capacity,—"Why is it, *entre nous*, that you desire to lavish this treasure of beauty —to say nothing of her grand wealth—upon another, while you yourself—"

"While I myself might marry her," interrupted the Spaniard. "Is that what you mean to say? Suppose I have no wish to get married. I had that desire long ago, like the rest of the world. My history has been like a great many others; that is, my sweetheart married another. It is true I adopted the means to re—to console myself, and quickly too," added Arechiza, with a dark scowl. "But who do you think I am, Don Vicente Tragaduros?"

"Who are you! Why, Don Estevan de Arechiza, of course!"

"That does honour to your penetration," said the Spaniard, with a disdainful smile. "Well, then, since I have already demanded the hand of Doña Rosarita for the illustrious Senator Tragaduros y Despilfarro, of course I cannot now take his place."

"But why, señor, did you not make the demand on your own account?"

"Why, because, my dear friend, were this young lady three times as beautiful, and three

times as rich as she is, she would neither be beautiful enough nor rich enough for me."

Despilfarro started with astonishment.

"Eh! and who are you then, señor, may I ask in my turn?"

"Only, as you have said, Don Estevan Arechiza," coolly replied the Spaniard.

The Senator made three or four turns across the room before he could collect his thoughts; but in obedience to the distrust that had suddenly sprung up within him, he resumed:—

"There is something in all this I cannot explain, and when I cannot explain a thing I can't understand it."

"Good logic," exclaimed Don Estevan, in a tone of raillery; "but am I really mistaken about you, my dear Senator? I did you the honour to believe you above certain prejudices and even if there was anything in the past life of the beautiful Rosarita—for instance, any prejudice to be trampled under foot—is a million of dowry, besides three millions of expectation, nothing in your eyes?"

Don Estevan put this question for the purpose of sounding the morality of the man, or rather to try the strength of a tool which he meant to make us of.

Despilfarro returned no reply.

"Now, then, I await your answer," said Don Estevan, after a pause, appearing to take pleasure in the Senator's embarrassment.

"Upon my word, Don Estevan," replied Despilfarro, "you are cruel to mystify one in this manner. I—I—Carramba! it is very embarrassing."

Don Estevan interrupted him. This hesitation on the part of Despilfarro told the Spaniard what he wished to know. An ironical smile played upon his lips, and laying aside his pleasantry, he resumed in a serious tone:—

"Listen to me, Tragaduros. It would be unworthy of a gentleman to continue longer this badinage where a lady's reputation is concerned. I can assure you, then, that the past life of Doña Rosarita is without a stain."

The Senator breathed freely.

"And now," continued Don Estevan, "it is necessary that you give me your full confidence, and I will set you an example by giving mine with a perfect frankness; the success of the noble cause I have embraced depends upon it. First, then, hear who I am—Arechiza is only a borrowed appellation. As to my real name, which you shall soon know, I made oath in my youth that no woman, however rich or beautiful, should share it with me; therefore, now that my hair is grey, do you think that I should be likely to break the oath I have so long kept? Although a wife, such as I propose for you, may ofttimes be a stepping-stone to ambition, she is oftener an obstacle."

As he said this, Don Estevan rose, and in his turn paced the floor with an agitated air. Some traces of distrust were still perceptible upon the countenence of the Senator—they were noticed by him.

"You wish for a more precise explanation?" said he; "you shall have it."

The Spaniard approached the window and closed the shutters, as if fearful that their conversation might be heard outside. He then sat down again, and requested the Senator to be seated near him.

Tragaduros watched him with a lively curiosity, at the same time lowering his eyes whenever they met the fiery glances of the Spaniard.

The latter appeared suddenly to become transformed, as if looking grander and nobler.

"Now, Señor Senator," began he, "I am going to make known to you some secrets sufficient to turn your head."

The Senator trembled.

" When the tempter carried the Son of Man to the top of a mountain, and promised him all the kingdoms of the earth if he would fall down and worship him—he scarce offered him more than I am offering to the Senator of Arispe. As the tempter, then, I lay at your feet honours, power, and riches, if you will subscribe to my conditions."

The solemnity of this exordium, and the imposing manner of Don Estevan, following so closely upon the jocular mien he had hitherto exhibited, made a painful impression upon the mind of the Senator. There was a short moment in which he regretted being so *advanced* in his opinions, and during this time the great dowry of Rosarita and her rosy lips had but slight prestige for him.

"It is now twenty years," continued the Spaniard, "since I took up my real vocation in the world. Previous to that time, I believed myself made for domestic life—and indulged in those absurd dreams of love natural to young hearts. An illusion soon destroyed! An evil hour—an accident—showed me the deception; and I found out that I was made for ambition—nothing more. I have therefore sought for glory and honour to satisfy my desires, and I have won them. I have conquered the right to stand uncovered in the presence of the King of Spain. Chevalier of the Order of St James of the Sword, I have taken part

in the royal ceremonies of the *white cloak and red sword;* and I may say that for me fame has been no idle illusion. Chevalier also of Carlos III., I have shared with the royal princes the title of the Grand Cross. I have won successively the Order of St. Ferdinand, of St. Hermengildo, and the Golden Fleece of Calatrava. These honours, although coveted by all, were for me but sterile consolations."

This enumeration, made without the slightest show of ostentation, caused the Senator to regard the speaker with an air of respectful astonishment. Don Estevan continued :—

"Wealth followed close upon these honours. Rich *appanages*, added to the fortune I derived from my ancestors, soon left far behind me the time when, as a simple cadet of my family, I was worth nothing but my sword. Now I was rich, opulent, and—will I tell you?—I was still far from being content. My efforts continued; and I was made Comte de Villamares, and afterwards Duke de Armada—"

"Oh! Señor Duke," interrupted Despilfarro, in an humble voice, "permit me—but —I—"

"I have not yet finished," calmly continued the Spaniard; "when you have heard all, you will no longer doubt my words. Notwithstanding your mistrust, señor, I am still nothing more than the secret agent of a prince, and I desire to remain in your eyes, as ever, the simple gentleman, Don Estevan de Arechiza—nothing more. It is necessary, however, that this distrust of me should not manifest itself again; for since you are presently to know the object which I am pursuing, you will be privy to my most secret thoughts."

The Senator continued to listen in the most respectful silence.

"As I have said, then, I followed ambition for twenty years for its own sake; or, to speak more truly, I passed twenty years of my life to destroy a painful souvenir, at the same time that I was pursuing the path to fame.

I fancied that in the middle of a turbulent life, this souvenir would in time be effaced from my memory. The favourite of a prince, the expectant heir to one of the first thrones in Christendom, elevated to the highest places of power—wealth prodigally lavished upon me—I hoped to be able to forget that terrible souvenir. Vain hope!" added the speaker in a solemn voice. "Alas! nothing can banish remorse. The bloody sword of St. James was no idle symbol in my hands; for remorse lends to ambition a fearful activity—like a voice continually crying, 'On!—on for ever!'"

Don Estevan paused, and for a time remained silent, during which the Senator regarded him with a timid look, at the same time admiring the imposing and solemn dignity of his countenance.

"But where to go on?" continued the speaker; "what object to follow next? Into what new course might I precipitate this torrent of ambition that was boiling within

me? At length a new incident offered itself, and gave me a fresh opportunity for action—an opportunity to strive and combat—for in my case to struggle and fight is to forget.

"In all likelihood you have scarce heard of our political troubles, Don Vicente? I am aware that all the kingdoms of Europe might be shaken to their bases, without your knowing anything of the matter, in this out of the way corner of the world. Well, then, I shall make known to you what occurred.

"It is now about two years since the King of Spain, by a total violation of the Salic law, hitherto observed by all his ancestors, violently cut off the succession to the throne in the person of his brother Don Carlos; and by this act kindled the fires of civil war throughout the kingdom. The Infanta Isabella was declared heiress to the throne, to the exclusion of her uncle, the legal heir. This prince it was of whom I spoke, and who is my august patron and protector. I did everything in my power to assuage the mortal

grief that this unexpected event naturally caused to the man whom I above all others have reason to esteem.

"Amidst the consolations which I offered him, and the plans which I proposed, one design of a gigantic nature offered itself to my imagination. True, it presented the prospect of countless dangers, and obstacles almost insurmountable; but for this very reason I adopted it.

"My dream, then, is to conquer for my master a kingdom as vast as the one of which he has been wrongfully deprived; to restore to him one of the brightest jewels of that Transatlantic crown which his ancestors once so gloriously wore. I dream of conquering a kingdom—and that kingdom once conquered, I, a simple gentleman, intend to present it to the true heir of the Spanish monarchy—Don Carlos de Bourbon!

"Now, do you believe, Señor Senator, that Don Estevan de Arechiza has the power to bestow upon others, and without regretting

it, the beauty and wealth of the daughter of a Mexican haciendado?"

The Spaniard pronounced these last words with an air of proud tranquillity, and then remained silent, awaiting their effects upon his listener.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NEW KINGDOM.

THE Mexican senator, with his contracted, or rather egotistic views, was struck dumb by the gigantic and daring design of his companion. He could only exclaim as he respectfully pressed the hand which the Spaniard held out to him:—

"Oh, Don Estevan, if you permit me still to give you this modest title, I regret my suspicions; and for the happiness which you offer me, for the grand perspective which you open before me, I promise you my life, my heart, but—"

"But!—another suspicion?" asked Don Estevan, with a smile.

"No, not a suspicion of you, but a fear of some one else. Have you noticed the young man whom chance brought into our company? I have a secret presentiment that there is something between him and Doña Rosarita. He is young, he is good-looking, and they appear to have known each other a long while."

"What!" exclaimed Don Estevan, "jealous of this ragged rustic?"

"I avow," replied the Senator, "that I cannot help it. I noticed two or three times their eyes fixed upon each other with a strange expression."

"Make yourself easy about that. I know for certain, and from Don Augustin himself I have had my information, that the heart of his daughter is free. Besides, her vanity alone would hinder her from any fancy for this droll fellow, who appears to have all the pride of a Spanish beggar. He shall be watched; and should he have the impudence to carry his pretensions so high, it will be

an easy matter to send him about his business?"

In pronouncing the last words, the countenance of Don Estevan appeared for a moment to wear a troubled expression, and he could not hinder himself from adding:—

"I have myself remarked what you say; but let us not dwell upon chimerical fears. Listen to me, Don Vicente, while I explain more categorically the object of which I have been speaking, in order that you may understand fully why I wish to reckon upon your assistance. I have not yet told you either what resources I have, or the kingdom it is my design to conquer."

"True enough," assented Tragaduros, "you have not."

"The province then which I intend to transform into a kingdom is neither more nor less than this of Sonora."

"What! our republican state to be changed into a monarchy!" exclaimed the Senator. "Señor Don Estevan, to attempt this will be to play with your life."

"I know it."

"But what resources do you count upon?"

"Listen: Ten years ago I was in the Spanish army, and fought against the independence of your country in this very province. I then became acquainted with its resources—its incalculable richness; and when I quitted it, to go home to Europe, I had a presentiment that some day I should again return to it—as I have done. Chance at that time made me acquainted with Don Augustin, then occupied in amassing the vast wealth which to-day he so freely spends. I had the fortune to render him a service—to save his life, in fact, and prevent his house from being pillaged by the insurgents, for he did not conceal his sympathy for the Spanish cause. I afterwards kept up with him a correspondence, and learned that Sonora became every day more discontented with the federal government. I then designed my great plan, which was approved of by the prince, and at his desire I came over here. Don Augustin was among the first to whom I opened my purpose. He

was flattered by the promises I was able to make in the name of my royal master, and at once placed his fortune at my disposal.

"Notwithstanding the large pecuniary resources I have been able to dispose of, I am seeking to augment them still further, and chance has favoured me. While here, in my former campaign, I made the acquaintance of an odd character—a young fellow who in turns betrayed both royalists and republicans. My relations with him recall a somewhat droll occurrence. I found that he was guiding the regiment I commanded into an ambuscade of the insurgents, and I ordered him to be hung to the first tree we should meet with. Fortunately for him, my men translated the order in its most literal sense; and being at the time in the middle of vast savannas, entirely destitute of trees, the execution was held over, as it was an impossibility to perform it. The result was that in the middle of our marchings and countermarchings the fellow escaped; and it appears did not afterwards hold any ran-

cour towards me, since he has again offered his services to me. This fellow to-day goes by the name of Cuchillo. It was he whom I met at the village of Huerfano, where you saw us renew our acquaintance; and at that interview he made known to me the secret of an immense placer of gold, whither I intend to conduct my expedition. Besides ourselves, Cuchillo alone knows the object of this enterprise" (the Spaniard did not mention the name of Tiburcio), "which is generally supposed to be merely a new expedition—like many others that have been got up to go gold-seeking by chance.

"And now, Señor Senator," continued Don Estevan, "you need not proceed further with us. You may remain here, where you will have an easy part to play in making yourself agreeable to the fair Rosarita, while I am braving the perils of this unknown frontier. As for Cuchillo, if he attempt to play the traitor with me a second time, I shall take care to be a little more prompt in punishing him.

"The product of this expedition," pursued the Spaniard, "of which, as leader, I shall be entitled to a fifth part, will be added to the resources I have already. The men who compose it will be easily converted into devoted partisans for our design; and should it happen that the forces I expect from Europe should fail to come to hand in due time, these adventurers will serve a good purpose. But I have no fear for the want of followers. Europe is, at the present moment, overcrowded with people who want employment;—any enterprize will be welcome to them, and a leader in any part of the world needs only to speak the word for crowds to enrol themselves under his banner."

As he said this, Don Estevan paced the room, agitated by the grandeur of his thoughts. His dark eyes flashed with excitement, and his soul seemed inspired with a warlike ardour, that caused him for awhile to forget the presence of the Senator. It was only after some minutes spent in this wild

enthusiasm that he remembered an important fact—that in all projects such as he was engaged in, *intrigue* should be the precursor of open action; and as this was to be the peculiar *rôle* which the Senator was expected to play, he again turned to address himself to this individual.

"Meanwhile," said he, "your tactics will be of a more pacific character. I take charge of the open fighting—while you manage the secret diplomacy of the affair. Your fortune, restored to you by this opulent alliance, will enable you to get back the influence you have lost. You will receive, with the daughter of Don Augustin, at least 200,000 dollars of dowry. Half of this you are to employ in making partisans in the senate, and in what you are pleased to call your army. This sum you will not lose; it will be repaid to you, and with usurious interest; or, if it never should, you still make a good thing of it. The end you will keep in view is to detach the Senate of Sonora from the federal alliance.

You will find no lack of reasons for this policy. For instance, your state has now scarcely the privileges of a simple territory; your interests differ entirely from those of the central states of the republic. Every day your laws are becoming more centralized. The President, who deals with your finances, resides at the distance of seven hundred leagues from your capital—it is ridiculous! Besides, the funds of the treasury are misappropriated—the army badly paid, although you have to do your duty in raising the tax that is to pay it—a thousand grievances can be cited. Well, this will enable you to get up a *pronunciamento*, and before the news of your *grito* can reach the city of Mexico, and the executive power there can send a force against you—ay, before the government troops could get half way to Sonora, more than two-thirds of them would desert. The others would come upon the ground, only to find the insurrectionary party too strong for them, and they themselves would be certain to join us.

"Laws emanating from your own senate—of which you yourself would have the control and guidance—laws suited to the manners and usages of your state—would soon become firmly established and respected, and Sonora would then be an independent government. This would be the first step, and the most difficult. After that the rest would be easy enough; and the gold which I should furnish will bring it about. The senate and the army would call for a European prince to place himself at their head—one who speaks the same language and professes the same religion as themselves. This prince I have already provided. Now hear me, Don Vicente, as to your own share in this business. The Senator Despilfarro is already a rich man, with a lady for his wife, of whom a prince might be proud. He will be made noble—a count—a grandee of Spain. A lucrative post will attach him to the person of the new king, and nothing is to hinder him to rise to the very summit of his ambition. All this I promise

on the part of your future sovereign, *King Charles the First.*"

With these words the Spaniard finished his harangue. The Mexican Senator, fascinated by the riches and honours thus promised him, grasped the hand of the bold conspirator, at the same time crying out with enthusiasm, "*Viva! Viva Carlos el Primero!*"

"Good!" rejoined Don Estevan, with a smile. "Don Carlos can count upon one powerful partisan already in Sonora, and there will soon be many. But it is getting late, Don Vicente, and I have yet much business to do before I can sleep. You will excuse me, then, if I say good night to you."

After exchanging the usual *buenas noches*, the Senator returned to his own chamber and couch, to dream of his future riches and grandeur.

CHAPTER XXIII.

QUARRELSOME GAMESTERS.

In a remote chamber of the hacienda were lodged the four adventurers, Pedro Diaz, Oroche, Cuchillo, and Baraja. These gentlemen were not slow in becoming acquainted with one another, and this acquaintance was soon of the most familiar character. In the middle of the room in which all four were to pass the night, stood a strong oaken table, upon which, in an iron candlestick, was burning a long, thin tallow-candle, that gave forth a somewhat dim and doubtful light. By this light Cuchillo and Baraja, forgetful of all their promises and vows, were going on with the

game which had been so suddenly interrupted that morning at the village of Huerfano.

Pedro Diaz appeared to be merely an involuntary looker-on; while Oroche, seated at one corner of the table, his right leg across his left, his elbow resting on his knee—the favourite attitude of mandolin players—accompanied his own voice as he sang the *boleros* and *fandangos* then most in vogue among the inhabitants of the coast region.

Wrapped as usual in his ragged cloak, Oroche appeared to have the true inspiration of an artist, since he could thus elevate himself, upon the wings of music, above the vulgar considerations of the toilet, or the cleanliness and comfort of the person. A bottle of *mezcal*, already half-empty, stood upon the table. From this the players occasionally helped themselves, as a finale to the elegant supper they had eaten, and to which Cuchillo, Baraja, and Oroche had done ample honour. Notwithstanding the frequent bumpers which Cuchillo had quaffed, he appeared to be in the

worst of humours, and a prey to the most violent passions. His shaggy eyebrows, contracted by the play of these passions, added to the evil aspect of his physiognomy, rendering it even more sinister than common. Just then he was observed to cut the cards with particular care. He was not playing with his friend Baraja for the mere sport of the thing, far a moiety of the half-ounce he had received from Don Estevan had already gone into Baraja's pockets, and Cuchillo was in hopes that the attention which he had given to the cutting of the cards might change the luck that had hitherto been running against him. The careful cutting, however, went for nothing; and once more the sum he had staked was swept into the pocket of his adversary. All at once Cuchillo flew off into a passion, scattering his hand of cards all over the table.

"Who the devil wants your music?" cried he to Oroche in a furious tone; "and I myself —fool that I am to play in this fashion—only

credit when I win, and cash whenever I lose."

"You offend me, Señor Cuchillo," said Baraja; "my word has always passed for its value in cash."

"Especially when you don't happen to lose," sneeringly added Cuchillo.

"That is not a very delicate insinuation," said Baraja, gathering up the cards. "Fie, fie! Señor Cuchillo—to get angry about such a trifle! I myself have lost half a hacienda at play—after being robbed of the other half—and I never said a word about it."

"Didn't you, indeed?—what's that to me? I shall speak as I please, Señor Baraja—and as loudly as I please, too," added he, placing his hand upon the hilt of his knife.

"Yes," coolly answered Baraja, "I know you use words *that cause your friends to drop dead;* but these words are harmless at a distance—besides I have got a tongue as sharp as yours, Señor Cuchillo."

As Baraja said this, he drew his knife from

its sheath, in which action he was imitated by his antagonist, and both placed themselves simultaneously in an attitude for fight.

Oroche coolly took up his mandolin—which, at the interference of Cuchillo, he had laid aside—and, like a bard of ancient times, he was preparing to accompany the combat with a chaunt, when Diaz suddenly interposed between the two champions.

"For shame, gentlemen!" cried he; "what! two men made to be mutual friends, thus to cut each other's throats for a few paltry dollars!—on the eve, too, of becoming the owners of a hundred times as much! Have I not understood you to say, Señor Cuchillo, that you were to be the guide of our expedition? Your life is no more your own, then; it belongs to us all, and you have no right to risk it. And you, Señor Baraja, you have not the right to attempt the life of our guide. Come, put up your knives, and let there be no more of this matter."

This speech recalled the two combatants

to their senses. Cuchillo, remembering the grand interest he had in the success of the expedition, and perceiving that the risk of life was playing a little too high—for a combat of this sort usually ends in the death of one or the other—gave ready ear to the counsel of Diaz. Baraja, on his side, reflected that the dollars he had already pocketed might be better employed than in defraying the expenses of his own funeral; and on this reflection was equally ready to desist from his intention.

"Be it so, then!" cried Cuchillo, speaking first; "I sacrifice my feelings to the common good."

"And I," said Baraja, "I am willing to follow so noble an example. I disarm—but—I shall play no more."

The knives were again stuck into their scabbards, and the two adversaries mutually extended their hands to one another.

At this moment, Diaz, by way of preventing any allusion to the recent quarrel, suddenly turning to Cuchillo, demanded:—

"Who, Señor Cuchillo, is this young man whom I saw riding by your side as you came up to the hacienda? Notwithstanding the friendship that appeared to exist between you and him, if I mistake not, I observed you regarding one another with an occasional glance of mistrust—not to say hostility. Was it not so?"

Cuchillo recounted how they had found Tiburcio half dead upon the road, and also the other circumstances already known to the reader; but the question put by Diaz had brought the red colour into the face of the outlaw, for it recalled to him how his cunning had been outwitted by the young man, and also how he had been made to tremble a moment under Tiburcio's menace. Writhing under these remembrances, he was now determined to make his vengeance more secure, by enlisting his associates as accomplices of his design.

"It often happens," said he, in a significant tone, "that one man's interest must be sacri-

ficed to the common welfare—just as I have now done—does it not?"

"Without doubt," replied several.

"Well, then," continued Cuchillo, "when one has given himself, body and soul, to any cause, whatever it may be, it becomes his duty, as in my case, to put a full and complete constraint upon his affections, his passions, even his dearest interests, ay, even upon any scruples of conscience that might arise in an over-delicate mind."

"All the world knows that," said Baraja.

"Just so, gentlemen. Well, I feel myself in that difficulty; I have a too timid conscience, I fear, and I want your opinions to guide me."

His audience maintained an imperturbable silence.

"Suppose, then," continued the outlaw, "there was a man whom you all held in the highest esteem, but whose life compromised the success of our expedition, what should be done with him?"

"As God lives," cried Oroche, "I should be happy to find some occasion of sacrificing private interests to the common good."

"But is there such a man?" inquired Diaz; "and who may he be?"

"It's a long story," replied Cuchillo, "and its details concern only myself—but there *is* such a man."

"Carajo!" exclaimed Oroche, "that is enough; he should be *got rid of* as speedily as possible."

"Is that the advice of all of you?" asked Cuchillo.

"Of course," answered simultaneously Oroche and Baraja.

Diaz remained silent, keeping himself, as it were, out of this mysterious compromise. After a little, he rose from his seat, and under some pretext left the chamber.

"Well, then, gentlemen," said Cuchillo, addressing himself to his two more facile comrades, "you are fully of the opinion that the man should be got rid of. Let me tell

you, then, that this man is no other than Tiburcio Arellanos."

"Tiburcio!" exclaimed the two acolytes.

"Himself—and although, since he is one of my dearest friends, it goes sadly against my heart, I declare to you that his life may render abortive all the plan of our expedition."

"But," interposed Baraja, "why may he not lose it?—to-morrow, in this hunt of wild horses, there will be a thousand opportunities of his losing it."

"True enough," said Cuchillo, in a solemn voice. "It is of great importance he should not return from this hunt. Can I rely upon you, gentlemen?"

"Blindly," replied the two adventurers.

The storm was gathering over the head of poor Tiburcio; but danger threatened him from still another quarter; and long before the expected hunt that danger would be at its height.

The three adventurers continued their con-

versation, and were entering more particularly into the details of their design, when a knocking at the outer door interrupted their sinister councils.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TIBURCIO IN DANGER.

CUCHILLO opened the door, outside of which appeared one of the attendants of Don Estevan. Without entering, the man communicated his message—which was to Cuchillo himself—to the effect that Don Estevan awaited him in the garden. The outlaw, without reply, followed the servant, who conducted him to an alley between two rows of granadines, where a man wrapped in his cloak was pacing to and fro, apparently buried in deep meditation. It was Don Estevan himself.

The approach of Cuchillo interrupted his

reverie, and a change passed over his countenance. Had Cuchillo not been preoccupied with his own thoughts and purposes of vengeance, he might have observed on the features of the Spaniard an expression of disdainful raillery that evidently concerned himself.

"You have sent for me?" said he to Don Estevan.

"You cannot otherwise than approve of my discretion," began the Spaniard, without making answer. "I have allowed you time enough to sound this young fellow—you know whom I mean. Well! no doubt you have penetrated to the bottom and know all—you, whose perspicuity is only equalled by the tenderness of your conscience?"

There was an acerbity in this speech which caused the outlaw to feel ill at ease, for it reopened the wounds of his self-esteem.

"Well," continued Don Estevan, "what have you learnt?"

"Nothing," replied Cuchillo.

"Nothing!"

"No; the young man could tell me nothing, since he knew nothing himself. He has no secrets for me."

"What! does he not suspect the existence of the Golden Valley?"

"He knows no more of it than of the Garden of Eden," replied Cuchillo, with a confident swagger.

"What was bringing him to the hacienda, then?—for that is upon the route. He must have some object in coming this way."

"Oh, yes! he came to ask Don Augustin to take him into his service as a vaquero."

"It is evident," said the Spaniard, in a tone of mockery "that you have gained his full confidence, and know all about him."

"I flatter myself, my perspicuity—"

"Is only equalled by the tenderness of your conscience," interrupted Don Estevan, still keeping up his tone of raillery. "Well, but has this young man not confided to you any other secret? You have had a long ride together, and an opportunity to talk of many

things. For instance, has he said nothing to you about an affair of the heart?—has he not told you he was in love?"

"Por Dios! Who could Tiburcio be in love with in these deserts? The poor devil is likely to think more of a good horse than a pretty girl."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Spaniard, with a mocking laugh that sent a shivering through the frame of Cuchillo. "Well! well! friend Cuchillo, your youth promised better than this. If your conscience is as callous as your perspicacity is obtuse—which God forbid—it is not likely to interfere with your sleep."

"What do you mean, señor?" demanded Cuchillo, evidently confounded by the reproach.

"I fear, my friend, that in the only good action you have ever done, you have made a bad hand of it."

"Good action!" repeated Cuchillo, embarrassed to know at what epoch of his life he had done such a thing.

"Yes—in saving this young man's life."

"But it was you who did that good action; as for me, it was only a lucrative one."

"Be it so. I will lend it to you, notwithstanding the proverb which says we should only lend to the rich. But now hear what I have ascertained—I, who do not boast either of my scruples of conscience or of my perspicacity. This young man has in his pocket, at this moment, a written direction of the route to the Golden Valley; moreover, he is passionately in love with Doña Rosarita, for whom he would give all the gold in this valley, or all the gold in the world, and all the horses in Sonora, if he had them. Moreover, his object in coming to the Hacienda del Venado was to make himself its future proprietor."

"Blood and thunder!" cried Cuchillo, starting as if bitten by a snake, "that cannot be—it is not possible I could be fooled in that manner by a child!"

"That child is a giant beside you, Master Cuchillo," coldly replied Arechiza.

"It is impossible!" exclaimed the exasperated Cuchillo.

"Do you wish the proofs?—if you do, you shall have them—but I may tell you they are of a nature to make you shudder from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet."

"No matter; I should like to hear them," said Cuchillo in a suppressed voice.

"I will not speak of your conscience—mark that well, Cuchillo, for I know that it never shudders — nor yet shall I speak of your timidity, which I observed last night while you were in presence of the jaguars—"

Don Estevan paused, to let his words have their full effect. It was his design to crush by his superiority the man whose fidelity he had a thousand reasons to suspect.

"Tiburcio," continued he, "is of a race—or appears to be of a race—that unites intelligence with courage; and you are his mortal enemy. Do you begin to understand me?"

"No," said Cuchillo.

"Well, you will presently, after a few sim-

ple questions which I intend to ask you. The first is,—In your expedition with Arellanos, had you not a horse that stumbled in the left leg?"

"Eh!" ejaculated Cuchillo, turning pale.

"A second question,—Were they really Indians who murdered your companion?"

"Perhaps it was me," replied the outlaw, with a hideous smile.

"Third question,—Did you not receive, in a deadly struggle, a wound in the leg? And fourth,—Did you not carry upon your shoulders the dead body of Arellanos?"

"I did—to preserve it from being mutilated by the Indians."

"One more question,—Was it for this you flung the dead body into the neighbouring river—not quite dead, it may be?"

The beams of the moon, slanting through the leaves of the granadines, shone with a livid reflection on the face of the outlaw, who, with haggard eyes, listened, without comprehending whence they came, to the proofs of a murder

which he believed for ever buried in the desert.

Cuchillo, when imparting to Don Estevan the knowledge of his marvellous secret, had of course taken care not to give in detail the exact manner by which he had himself become master of it; he had merely stated such circumstances as were necessary to convince the Spaniard of the importance of the discovery. It would be impossible to paint the stupefied expression of his countenance as he listened to these interrogatories. The very desert itself had spoken!

"Does Tiburcio know all this?" he asked, with an ill-dissembled anxiety.

"No; but he knows that the assassin of his father had a horse like yours; that he was wounded in the leg; that he flung the dead body into the water. Of one thing only is he still ignorant—the name of the murderer. But now let me say to you, if you give me the slightest cause to suspect your fidelity, I shall deliver the secret to this young man, who will crush you like a scorpion. Good blood never

lies; so I repeat it, Cuchillo—no deception —no treason, or your life will answer for it!"

"Well, as regards Tiburcio," muttered Cuchillo to himself, "if you only keep the secret till this time to-morrow night, you may then shout it in his ears; I shall have no fear of his hearing you."

The outlaw was one of those characters who soon recover from a shock similar to that he had just received. Almost on the instant he inquired, with impudent assurance:—

"But your excellency has not proved to me that this young fellow is in love with Doña Rosarita; and until I have proof of this I shall not doubt my penetration—"

"Hush!" interrupted the Spaniard; "I fancy I hear voices."

Both remained silent. In advancing across the garden, the two men had approached nearer to the walls of the building, and on that side of it which fronted the window belonging to the chamber of Rosarita. They

were still a considerable distance from the window itself; but so tranquil was the night, that sounds could be heard a long way off. As they stood to listen, a confused murmur of voices reached their ears—as of two persons engaged in conversation—but the words could not be distinguished.

"It is the voice of Tiburcio and Rosarita," muttered the outlaw.

"Did I not tell you? You may take that, I think, as an instalment of the proof you are desirous of having."

A reflection, at this moment, came into the mind of the Spaniard, that struck upon his spirit like a thunderbolt. It was this—"If the young girl, after all, is really in love with this fellow, what a dilemma! I may have to renounce all idea of the marriage which I had designed as the corner-stone of my vast edifice!"

Don Estevan was the only one who was aware of the real name and family of Tiburcio, and of course knew that he was not unworthy of the

daughter of a Mexican haciendado. But it had never entered his mind that this young girl, who only regarded Tiburcio in the light of a poor gambusino, would think for a moment of reciprocating his passion. His ideas were suddenly altered, however, on hearing the voices of Tiburcio and Rosarita alternating with each other, with no other witness to their conversation than the stars in the sky. It was evident, therefore, that Rosarita did not regard the young rustic with an unfavouring eye. An interview, such as this, could not be otherwise than a thing premeditated and pre-arranged.

The heart of the Spaniard filled with rage at the thought. His ambition was suddenly alarmed; for this was an obstacle that had never occurred to him. His countenance exhibited a thoughtful and troubled expression. He found himself unexpectedly in the presence of one of those exigencies which render diplomacy powerless, and absolve all reasons of state. He had behind him a man

ready to destroy whatever victims he might point out; but he remembered that twenty years of expiation had failed to wash from his memory a murder of which he had been himself accused. Should he then, after having passed the middle of his career, again embitter the remainder of his days by another deed of blood? On the other hand, so near the object of his ambition, was he to permit this barrier to stand in his way?—or with a bold effort to rid himself of the obstacle?

Thus it is that the ambitious continually roll before them the rock of Sisyphus!

"Providence," said he to himself—and as he pronounced the word, a bitter smile played upon his lips — "providence offers me an opportunity to restore to this young man his name and his fortune, and the honours which he has lost. Such a good action in my ripe age would perhaps compensate for the crime of my youth. But, no—no—I spurn the occasion—it is but a slight sacrifice to the cause which I serve."

As he spoke, his face was turned towards Cuchillo, who was observing him attentively; but the shadow of the trees hindered the outlaw from noting the sombre expression of his countenance.

"The hour is come," said he, speaking to Cuchillo in a low voice, "when our doubts are to be solved. But remember! your projects of vengeance must remain subordinate to my wishes—now follow me."

Saying this, he walked silently towards the hacienda, followed by the assassin.

The storm which threatened Tiburcio promised soon to break over his head. Two dangerous enemies were approaching him; Cuchillo, with wounded self-esteem, and purposes of vengeance that caused him to grind his teeth as he thought of them; and Don Estevan, smarting at the discovery of such an obstacle to his ambition.

Tiburcio, in going forth from his chamber, and traversing the path that conducted him to the appointed rendezvous, was under the

belief he had not been observed—neither was he; but, unfortunately, chance had now betrayed him.

The night was not so dark as Don Estevan and Cuchillo would have wished; nevertheless, by crouching low, and keeping well in to the wall that enclosed the garden, they succeeded in reaching a little grove of orange and citron trees, the foliage of which was thick enough to shelter them from view. From this grove, thanks to the calmness of the night, they could catch every word that was said, for under the shadow of the trees they were able to approach very near to the speakers.

"Whatever you may hear," whispered Don Estevan in the ear of the other, "remain motionless as I do."

"I will," simply answered Cuchillo.

The two now placed themselves in an attitude to see and hear. They were separated from the speakers by a slight barrier of leaves and branches, and by a distance not greater than an active man could pass over in two

bounds. Little did the victims of their espionage suspect their proximity—little dreamed Tiburcio of the danger that was so near him.

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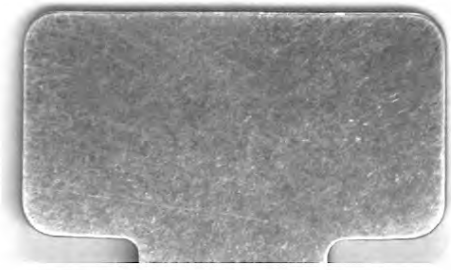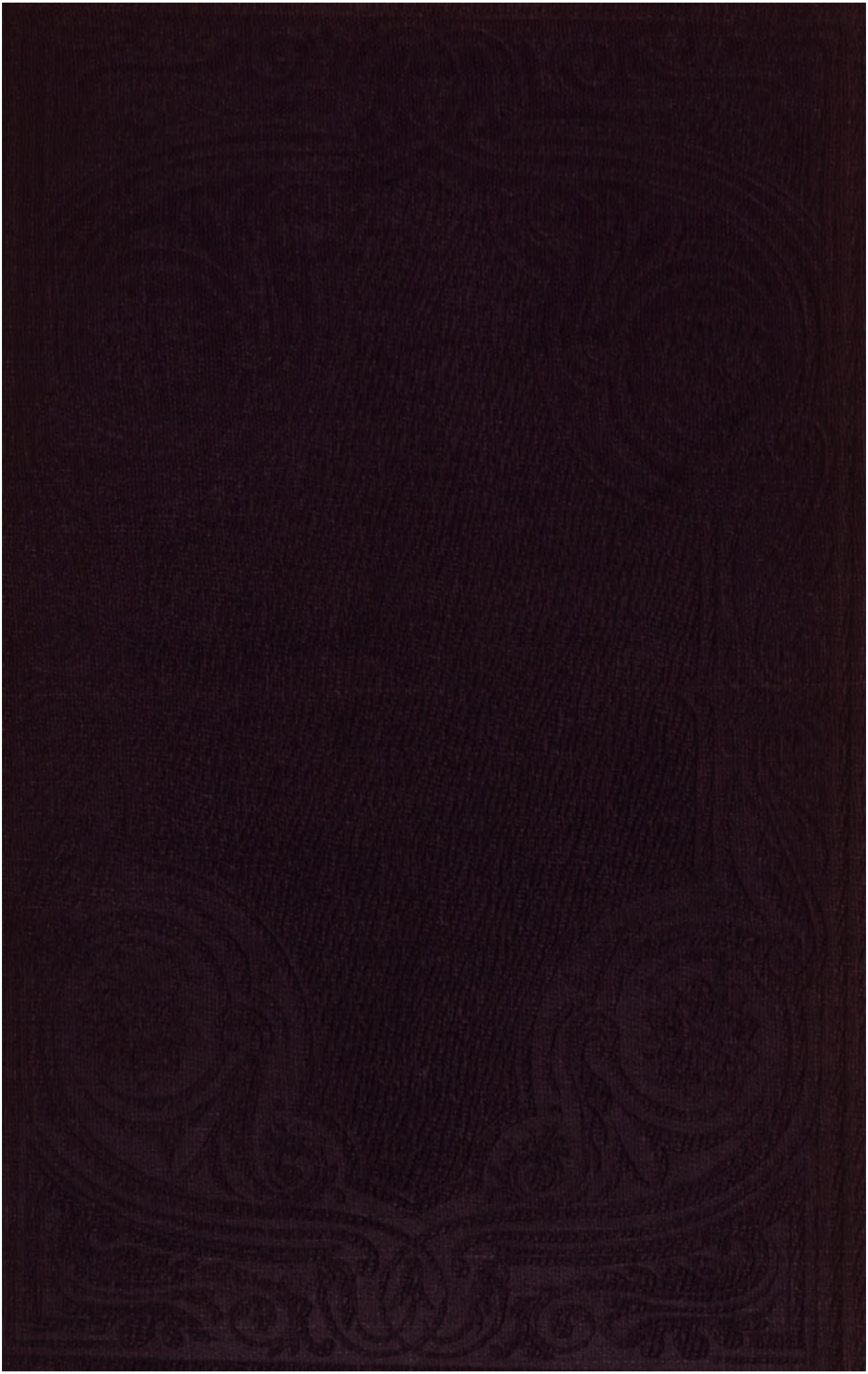
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