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Savage
1850



His Cuban Sweetheart

A Novel

BY

COL. RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF

("MY OFFICIAL WIFE," Etc.)

AND

MRS. ARCHIBALD CLAVERING GUNTER

NEW YORK

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HIS CUBAN SWEETHEART.

BOOK I.

THE BUCCANEER'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

AT EDGECLIFF ON THE HUDSON.

"Young man! Do you know where you are going?" demanded James Nixon, M.D., severely,—as he nailed his friend, Frank Lorimer, in front of the Hoffman House, on a pleasant August evening of the peaceful year of ninety—.

"Not quite so hard, Buster," remarked the victim singled out of the uptending drift of America's one promenade. "Let up and I'll answer. I suppose I must call you 'Doctor Jim' now!"

Still in the grasp of his classmate, whose "stroke" was not yet forgotten in the rapid eclipse of 'varsity heroes, Lorimer shook his tawny locks and laughed, as his captor gravely said: "There is but one human being now ornamenting this mundane sphere of football who is privileged to call me 'Doctor Jim,' and she is the very nicest girl in New York—bar none! But I will answer for you, as you stand recusant. You are going back to the Club to dine with me." Lorimer nodded.

"First there is a little ceremony!" remarked the returned traveler. So side by side they stood in a few moments, dividing their attention between the

deft manipulations of the "gentleman" who practiced at the bar—of the Hoffman—and those active o'ergrown frolic nymphs of Bougereau twitching around very roughly that patient satyr who is only one Adam among far too many Eves, and so pitifully outclassed.

"Your patients!" gayly cried Lorimer, as he struck the attitude of the Governor of North Carolina.

"Your clients!" merrily rejoined Doctor Jim—in the pose of the chief executive of South Carolina—of that ilk!

"*De mortuis nil nisi*," sadly remarked the son of Galen, as he gazed into the wreck of a Manhattan.

"*Les absens out toujours tort*," quietly replied Frank Lorimer. "But neither tort nor trespass—nay, nor breach of promise—even the festive divorce—naught cometh my way. If I ever figure conspicuously in legal circles, I fear I will have to furnish forth the wedding breakfast—with funeral baked meats of my own cooking."

"In other words," rejoined Doctor Jim, "we may admit that we have toiled all night, and taken nothing. Is this a fair return to Alma Mater for all her years of fostering care?"

Lorimer laughed heartily as they selected a couple of Brevas. "We might have done worse by old Yale," he gravely argued. "In the first place we have both just taken something. I have taken a trip around the world for these two weary years, to restore my nerves, broken down by much 'midnight oil!' And you? What have you taken? 'How stands the record of the dying year?' as the Devil somewhat pointedly queried of that very remarkable person, the Black Crook."

Doctor Jim Nixon, with an air of professional dignity, admitted taking a long furlough. A year of European gadding and a twelve months' cruise in the West Indies with his esteemed uncle, Surgeon Bradford, U. S. Navy, had filled up his time bill.

"And what may your harvest have been, my man of bones?" continued Lorimer, as they strolled over Madison Square to a quiet corner in the University Club.

"I have learned how to roll cigarettes a l'Espagnol, also the soft dialect of Don Quixote de la Mancha, and the art of devouring alligator pears, conch soup and many weird Castilian dishes suitable in tone to the climate of your probable final domicile. But I can conscientiously swear that I am guiltless of human blood! No lost soul comes wailing to my door! I've learned a bit of the world, though. But—the law? Your chaste mistress?"

"I have been a law unto myself!" lightly answered Lorimer, "and I have expounded the law, 'Thou shalt not steal,' to the many cosmopolitan sharks nibbling at my juicy youthful greenness. I have also satisfied that vague yearning to go aimlessly abroad—which proves we are still a parvenu nation. I have been indifferent in England, mildly agnostic in France, flatly defiant in Germany, and passive among the maddening Italian crowd. Perhaps I have at least learned the value of directness, for I came directly home like a good boy—from Liverpool—no stops on the way. I have seen about the whole thing and I have not 'practiced to deceive,' if I have not exactly knocked Webster, Choate, Kent and Story from their coigns of vantage."

As the two friends faced each other at table, they were a striking contrast. Frank Lorimer's twenty-four years showed the splendid development of a tawny-haired athlete. Blue-eyed, with a frank laughing face, his restrained garb of civilization covered the browned arms and sun-scorched back of a giant midship oar.

"Doctor Jim" in supple dark elegance of contour, disguised the spring-steel vitality of his perfect proportions. Clear, steady, dark-brown eyes, a firmly cleft chin, with mobile, sensitive lips, and a flush of restrained Celtic passion, he might have been taken easily for the pick of either of the three branches of the gifted Gauls.

The chance reunion of two leading members of the "Skull and Bones" set their hearts throbbing once more with the memories of their days of wine and wassail. Before the chums had reached the Omega of the menu, they had discussed many half forgotten college comrades, and genial old-time roving enemies.

"See here, Buster!" remarked Frank Lorimer

with a sudden soberness, "as we are both doing nothing—suppose we join forces and do it together! Now, old man, you have long owed me a visit. I have a telegram from the Mater to report forthwith at Edgecliff. I have not seen my home for these two long years. Come and be one of us in the slumbrous old Fishkill valley! You can run down to York whenever you want a day! There are trout—they actually are takeable! And—woodcock—a more or less evanescent tradition! At any rate, we will get as near them as we do to most of the things we covet in life. We will have a distant glimpse at least! You know my mother always fancied you. And—Ethel is at home now. She has been successfully ground out of Matthew Vassar's training mill for '*la jeune personne bien élevée!*' I hope she will not look down on me! For the New Woman cometh on apace in her might."

"She was a nice little girl," remarked Doctor Jim, with a four years' past memory of a delightfully overgrown young thing with a mutine child face. It was in that strange uncertain age when frocks are unadjustable and nothing fits, when Nixon had led the shy child over the campus of Yale. His personal reminiscences were only a clouded vision of "legs and arms for two."

"By Jove, Doctor Jim! It's a case of 'child no more!' Her last photograph shows me a slip of the budding 'new womanhood' of America. I may have to ask for an introduction myself. Now you have not one plausible excuse to offer. Let us strike our tents to-morrow! 'Come to the bower I have shaded for you!'" gayly suggested Frank. "Foi de Rohan, there are no mosquitoes at Edgecliff!"

"I would like to come," replied Nixon. "I might run up and stay from a Friday night to Monday morning, for I blush to admit that I am really one of the three months' extra physicians of the Board of Health, and my tour of duty runs on to October 1st. I am also making a special study of nervous diseases with Jacoby! That seems to be my branch of *the craft!*" musingly added the Doctor.

Frank Lorimer started at the last remark. "Nixon, you must surely come up to Fishkill with me. Throw overboard your Board patients for a few days, or get a leave. I have really a very interesting case for you. Something in your own special line. I had forgotten all about the dear old Mater's letter, for she did charge me with a request to look up some reliable nerve specialist."

"I hope there is nothing wrong in your own family, Frank!" earnestly rejoined Doctor Jim, with an air of startled interest. In truth James Nixon, M. D., had been secretly speculating upon the possible development of the Miss Legs and Arms, of these four years of rosebud formation, into a shining wonder, wearing a real train.

"No! Our own people are all well, thank God!" heartily said Frank. "But I really have a double claim on you now. For many years the dear mother's widowed seclusion at Edgecliff has been lightened by the courtly friendship of an old Cuban Don, who has a modest villa near by. In my recent boyish days I always considered General José Romero quite good fun. I really don't know why they call him 'General,'" added the young man, "save that he is darkly supposed to have been chased out of Cuba by some revolutionary pampas—and I suppose it is always the swell thing for a Cuban to be a General. I only recognize now the perfection of his manners. The bonhomme of a Henri Quatre—the gentle gravity of a Don Quixote. He has been growing feeble. There's something a little out of gear in his upper story, and as you speak Spanish, I will nail you as the coming 'specialist.' So get another sawbones to take your gentle clientele for a week, and you can bag the Don, the trout and the woodcock at one fell swoop."

"Has he any-family?" rejoined Nixon, with an air of awakening interest.

"A very spirited lad of twenty, his only son, Felipe, and a Cuban boy, a sort of ward, the relative of some influential priest down at Matanzas. Both these youngsters are being educated at Poughkeepsie. That is, they are mixing up all American petty vices with the

"Bless you! Felipe Romero is so gracefully mentally lazy that he could not tell an emerald from a marsh-mallow!"

"Well, Frank," slowly said Doctor James, "I will take a week off like Mary Ann, and accept your kind invitation!" The young medico rose as he glanced at the clock.

"I will give you a rattling good time," cried Lorimer, "and I am glad to see that Miss Inez has turned the scale like the sword of Brennus. For adding her to the trout, the Don and the woodcock, the 'big four' is irresistible. The only thing you have to do is to gain the dear old General's confidence, for he is charmingly courteous, yet solemnly distant, and you will have to dig him out of his shell like a pecan."

"I shall be very happy to thank your mother for her past kindness in college days!" said Nixon, warmly, as they parted for the night, a rendezvous for the morrow having been arranged.

Lorimer sped away across the park like a shooting star, intent upon his purpose "to hunt up some of the other fellows," and yet his mind was strangely centered upon the soft-voiced Cuban girl! He remembered laughing on a Mediterranean steamer at reading the semi-original poem signed "Oscar" in the *Fishkill Weekly Bugle* addressed to "Inez and Ethel," in which the rural songster had improved Byron by tacking a new prow on his well-known lines, with the needed alterations:

"And all that's best of dark and bright
Meets in their aspect and their eyes!"

"I wonder if she has Americanized herself into a little staying power of beauty," mused Lorimer. "She promised to be a stunner!"

Old Sol was doing his perpendicular best to drive all the long-suffering and long suffered police of New York City into the cool vaults where Gambrinus reigneth, when the two friends met next day at the Forty-second street station. There was a professionally expectant look of restful calm upon Nixon's handsome face and a certain aptitude in the decorative arts was shown in his cool grays and whites.

As for Frank Lorimer, he was both wearied, flurried and excited.

There was a crimson spot burning on his cheek as he said anxiously: "I have both a letter and a telegram from the Mater! Did you bring your 'indispensables' in the way of nerve carpentering?"

They were now bowling along out of town into the tunnel! Nixon nodded an assent.

"I am glad," remarked Lorimer in the shades of darkness. "The old Don has just had a cablegram from Havana, his Friar of orders gray is on the way here, with some important intelligence. It seems to have set the ancient hidalgo swimming for dear life in his Emerald sea—or sea of Emeralds. For the Mater wired me to take you right over there to see him. Inez is simply frightened into helplessness, and is with our people. The local medicos cannot speak the tongue of Tortillas and Tamales and he is really very shy and suspicious! But to you, coming to him from out of your own circle, he will unfold his armadillo nature and shake out his Castilian wrinkles. You ought to be able to tell pretty soon if he is only half cracked or a dead goner. Draw him out, and let him 'the round unvarnished tale deliver!' It will ease old prunciado's mind at all events!"

As they spun along by Spuyten Duyvil and the Bronx, classic Yonkers and dreamy Tarrytown, the young Doctor mused alone over the situation. "I shall endeavor to first steady the old gentleman's nerves, then to give him a good sleep, and to find out from Mrs. Lorimer and the daughter what basis of even probability there is for this emerald fad."

Lorimer listened with interest as James Nixon, M. D., gravely expounded his preliminary theories. "There is a world of difference, my dear boy, between the haunting of this solitary dreamer's brain by an ingenious theory, formed upon certain facts or possibilities, and a hallucination proceeding from mere mental vagary, a wavering mind, senility or impending paresis! A romantic-minded man linked in memory to the weird mystic stones of the buccaneer-haunted Spanish Main may indulge fairly woven dreams and theories quite untenable to us practical Yankees!"

"You are right!" brightly remarked Lorimer. "I have a firm belief that failing a windfall from undiscovered aunts or the 'heavy uncle' of the stage, any emeralds I ever get will be by purchase or theft. Now, this gay relic of the aristocracy of the Greater Antilles fancies that a large number of these lambent sea-green gems are lying around loose somewhere, waiting for him to pick them up. That in some shadowy way they belong to him as fruits of the bow and spear of some old mail-clad ancestor. The Mater, Ethel and Inez Romero can tell you something of his claims, memories or theories. I have, however, little faith in them. I have figured the general chances out on my shirt cuff and find something like a million, nine hundred and odd thousand to one against the General's success."

"Stop joking, Frank. Tell me the simple foundation of the Don's idea." Nixon tried to be severe.

"He has some vague papers referring to the planting of these captured emeralds in some unknown place several hundred years ago by some ancestor who flourished with Cortez, Balboa, Pierre le Grand, Lolonois Morgan, Hawkins or Sharp. I am inclined to think that in those later unromantic days the emeralds have probably been looted by some practical man."

"Still, I must converse at length with his daughter on the subject and arm myself to meet his story intelligently," remarked the doctor, soberly.

Frank Lorimer shook his tawny locks as he laughed: "It will be a very necessary preliminary."

Whereat Nixon suddenly found a lively interest in contemplating the white-winged argosies wafting the prosaic brick of Haverstraw down to the wilds of New York City.

Lorimer's minute social studies of such eminent authorities as *Life*, *Town Topics*, *Judge*, *Vogue*, *Puck*, *et id omne genus*, busied him till the cliff villages of the great Hudson flashed by one by one—and the train swung around the stately fortress of West Point under the walls of purpled overhanging Cro' Nest.

The young doctor was lost in a day-dream. His

light-hearted friend automatically expanded his genial countenance over the humor infesting his jovial literature, while Nixon drifted into a series of rapidly dissolving glimpses of the romantic past.

"Here comes the shadow of the grim paladins of the Spanish Main stalking into our unromantic times," reflected the young physician. "The wealth of old. Where is it! True, the ocean's greedy maw has devoured spoils of argosy, galley and trirene—the wealth of Ormus and of Ind. Fire, the wanton waste of barbarian captors, the earthquake shock and all the happenings of slowly drifting centuries, have hidden the spoils of the Romans, the treasures of Greece, the riches of Egypt. Hundreds of millions in gems are probably hidden in India from the keen eyes of the rapacious official English. It may well be possible that a distinct treasure in emeralds, secreted in a place of surety, would be safely awaiting for two or three centuries the 'open sesame' of some descendant of their possessor. The General may really have found a secret of the Past hidden in the flourish and firmas of old Spanish parchments. Probably some hoard extorted from trembling natives by a haughty Castilian official, who left some description of the hidden treasure, for the old Buccaneers were wont to write their deeds in blood alone!"

Ten minutes after the day-dream passed away and Doctor James Nixon recovered his presence of mind and dropped his portmanteau, as Frank wound himself out of the clinging embrace of a gracious lady whose still blooming cheek recalled the days when men called her the "Rose of the Hudson."

Mrs. Agnes Lorimer was pleased to be kindly reminiscent of her beloved son's college chum, as he stood hat in hand. There was an amused twinkle in Frank's eyes as he led the astonished Doctor Jim up to a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" muttered Doctor Jim, "but the little girl of the college campus has bloomed into a goddess!" Then and there, before this sudden apparition in blue and gold, sapphire eyes of gleaming tender light, and a wealth of

golden hair sweeping down over her pretty, sloping shoulders, James Nixon, M.D., felt the premonitory twinges of an attack of "heart disease," the most sudden, subtle and strangely sweet of all cardiac affections.

While he murmured some singularly idiotic and irrelevant greetings to the fair young pillar of Vassar, Doctor Jim's illogical remarks "I did not expect—I had hoped, Miss Ethel—that is, I did not know—" etc., etc., were cut short by the frankly extended hand whose gentle pressure agitated his nerve centers strangely when the favored of Venus said:

"I have not forgotten all your kindness to me at New Haven."

"I must claim your professional aid at once," earnestly interjected Mrs. Lorimer, "for General Romero is in a singularly excited state. Inez is with him now. Our two local physicians cannot communicate with him technically. We will drive there. Later I shall prison you with us at Edgecliff, which you must learn to love for Frank's sake."

In a strange confusion the soul-startled Nixon mechanically echoed the fair widow's words as his eyes lingered lovingly upon the beautiful apparition whom Lorimer seemed to treat as if she were not made of fire and dew, of blossoms and the breath of the spring roses of life.

"Oh, certainly, Madame; by all means! I am sure I shall learn to love Edgecliff—for Frank's sake, as you say!" And with a gleam of professional dignity, a waft of the mantle of Jupiter, he slid down from the clouds into the calm, deep waters of professional questionings.

"I must stick to Don and the Emeralds," heroically decided Doctor Jim, mindful of his Hippocratic oath, as he was swept up the smooth roads of the pleasant Fishkill Valley into the elm-shaded driveway of a quaint old porticoed villa with a smack of revolutionary tradition.

"This is the General's home," said Mrs. Agnes, as the young doctor ceremoniously handed her out of the wagonette. "And there is Inez!"

Nixon turned his head. But already between him and the Cuban maiden was that genial son of Anak, Frank Lorimer! "The white brother's" voice was as soft as the cooing dove, and Nixon, blinded only as regarded himself, observed a light in his chum's eyes far different from the dancing fire "at the other fellows."

The mental pabulum of Vassar, the rosy hours of young womanhood, and the magnetic companionship of the American girl, had developed Inez Romero into the subtlest, tenderest, strangest, thrilling, semi-foreign loveliness! "She is a stunner, as friend Frank has it!" thought Nixon, as he greeted the graceful, dark-eyed beauty in the language she loved.

Led by the daughter of the stately old refugee, the young physician entered the room where the King of Emeralds was floridly waving his delicate, thin fingers in futile attempts to convey sign language to two bustling country practitioners. A colloquy with farmer's rosy housewives was more in their line than exchanging "beso las manos" with a distant relative of the Cid Campeador.

With all due courtesy to his brethren who were glad to be relieved of the stately enigma now "developing" his views in sonorous periods to the New York doctor—Nixon proceeded to arrange for the quiet and comfort of the ardent and enthusiastic old Cuban. A half hour later the effect of Doctor Jim's Spanish and some singularly powerful bromides caused the silver gray head of Don José to nod gently back into the cushions of his chair of state.

"Sea por Dios! Muy sabio—pero—muy joven!" benignantly whispered the General to his beautiful daughter, kneeling at his feet, as he listened to the Doctor's pledge to hear the whole history of the case early the next day.

"I will return in the evening and confer with you, Senorita?" softly said Nixon, as he left the white robed Murillo-faced girl bending over her delicate sire. "He looks like a marquis of the old regime," thought Doctor Jim, as he turned away to where a certain pair of blue eyes were now bidding him to the genial hearthstone of Edgecliff.

CHAPTER II.

THE ALTAR TREASURE OF MARACAIBO.

OUT of the glen where Villa Romero nestled under its old elms and chestnuts, hardby a dancing brook which babbled as it ran away to join the Kill, James Nixon—"personally conducted"—sped on toward Edgecliff.

Doctor Nixon never could recall all the successive tableaux of his first evening in her presence. The mantle of Romero had fallen across a prosaic everyday life, into whose gray warp roguish Don Cupid was already twining threads of gold. The consideration of the still distant emeralds of legendary existence was now eclipsed by the living sapphires of Ethel Lorimer's beautiful eyes!

Mrs. Lorimer, anxious and preoccupied with the fate of the feudal looking old cavalier, left Doctor Jim to a quiet consideration of his own "case!"

Strange to say, while Miss Ethel dropped into a frank open friendship with the son of Galen, her brother during the return drive only lifted his head to say to his mother: "Are you as fond of Inez as ever?"

"She is a part of our daily life, Frank," replied the fair widow. "For while the General easily communes with us in French; when at all carried away, he drifts at once into Spanish! So I lose him for a time! The wrongs of Cuba, his strange quest for the old family hoard—and the past in which he lives, carry him away. But Inez is a blended American and Cubana. She is moonlight and sunlight!"

Frank Lorimer sighed the sigh of the social sinner. He had projected himself into the orbit of this dark-eyed queen of night, with undue carelessness, and as Dian leaned over Endymion, so the sweet presence of the Spanish patrician seemed to wrap him in a cloud mist of love's witching fascinations.

Despite the beauty beside him, James Nixon was

forced to think of his new patient whose singular pre-occupation argued a cerebral excitement very dangerous for a man of his years.

"Allow me to ask, Madame, the nature of the General's occupation—and his habits?" he queried.

"I have known Don José ten years," responded Mrs. Lorimer. "He has been a model of the measured abstemious elegance of the better class of Cubans. Stately and retiring, he has busied himself with Inez, with the direction of Felipe's education, his morning walks, his afternoons *al fresca*, and his evening intercourse with us. His habits are almost soldierly in their regularity and, when not driving with Inez, or dreaming under the old chestnuts, he is turning over the books, maps and plans in this quaintly decorated library. I have never seen company at his house, save his banker 'Munoz,' from New York. Once or twice, a few Van Dyke bearded visitors have flitted like bats around the old place, usually at such times as the New York *Herald* hurls abroad the tidings of contemplated risings in Cuba. A measured elegance in living causes me to think that General Romero has ample means in Munoz's hand. He receives very few letters, and I have never seen him excited save in his recent agitation about the 'lost treasure.' I believe Padre Vicente Guerra has aimed to smuggle out a few of the family heirlooms secreted from the greedy Spaniards. There is fine plate, some good pictures, and bric-a-brac of exquisite taste, in the old nest. His servants are all notable, sturdy glen dwellers here, save one old spectre who was his companion in the guerilla wars of Cuba."

"And Inez? Does she know aught of the family history?" asked Nixon.

"She was so young," answered Mrs. Lorimer, "that she remembers little but the magnificence of their hacienda at Jibacoa, and the wild tumult of her father's flight, after the last rising!"

"How did the General himself escape?" queried Doctor Jim.

"When the Lone Star flag of Cuba went down in the shadow doom, Don José, who had fought himself up to special outlawry, made his way to the coast disguised

as a negro, and followed by faithful old Basilio. The first canoe on the shore, with some gourds of fresh water and clusters of bananas, fitted him for a desperate voyage on the broiling blue expanse of the Caribbean. Paddling and drifting till out of sight of land, an American logwood schooner luckily picked them up and landed them at Key West. Since then Don José has lived here tranquilly, save by the annoyance of furtive Spanish spies, who connect the old lion with any strange movements of the present. This is all I know of him, except that he is the most charming of men, a devoted father, a devout Catholic, a patient, placid nobleman. He has taught me chess, his antiquated game at cards, and I vibrate between his table and my own. Voila tout!" said Agnes Lorimer.

"And do you like the old General, too, Miss Ethel?" hazarded Nixon.

"He is the dearest old cavalier alive," enthusiastically replied the young heiress of Edgecliff. "A symphony in gray and yellow with a golden heart. But one touch of crimson lights up the calmness of his soul. It is the memory of his dear comrades, the passionate proud hacienda gentry slaughtered in the desperate fight a l'outrance for Cuba Libre. As for Inez, we belong to the same secret society at Vassar, and are sworn sisters besides." Ethel triumphantly rattled her trophies of that college as mystic and fearful as the insignia of Rosicrucians.

A mad thought possessed Doctor Jim. "Can men be initiated into those sisterly fraternities?" He hurled his whole odic force at the pouting beauty.

"By no means!" decidedly replied Ethel. Then she doubtfully added: "They may be eligible later, perhaps."

"I hope that I will be the first chosen," pleadingly remarked Doctor Jim. "And I shall rely on you to propose my name."

She dropped her softly shining eyes in confusion and reserved the momentous question of Doctor Nixon's eligibility for a future consideration and a moment after cried merrily: "Here we are at Edgecliff."

The sun dropping behind the blue crests of the

Highlands, rested on no fairer scene than beautiful Edgecliff, in its romantic shaded valley. Before the evening star shone out, Doctor Jim, piloted by the blue-eyed chatelaine, who had beamed on him, knew all the varied beauties of the revolutionary mansion. Lawn and meadow, garden and arbor, lovers' rambles and points of vantage were, one by one, proudly exhibited.

"I shall leave it to brother Frank to show you the windings of our old home itself. I am the ruler of the Happy Valley. And, on my heath and lawns, you are subject only to my orders," laughed Ethel as the dressing bell rang.

In all the gay chatter of the table and homecoming of Lorimer, now a rejuvenated young sun god, Doctor Jim was singularly distracted. He studied not the diamond windows of the room where Benedict Arnold, still a hero in blue and buff, had drunk Madeira with Washington. He listened not to the legends of Israel Putnam and the slashing Wayne, the graceful anecdotes of Lafayette, L'Enfant and Kosciusko. For beside him, replete with the tender sweetness of spring, her bosom rising and falling in the rich tide of her young life, Ethel Lorimer knitted around him the invisible meshes of the snare which always brings the lion down.

The subtle recognition of his unspoiled manhood, the profusion of his mental gifts, gave the newcomer the glamour of a young Apollo to both his hostess and her daughter. From its vantage ground, among Queen Anne plate of the old West India mahogany sideboard, Washington's glass—filled with the brinked up Madeira, dear to Knickerbockers—inspired the dark-eyed visitor to his happiest flight, in a neatly turned toast to the mistress of Edgecliff.

As James Nixon set down the ringing crystal, he glanced at Ethel, her rose-tinted cheeks glowing with all a girl's enthusiasm, and his mind ran on to the days when peradventure she might reign here in the halls hallowed by patriotism and sacred to hospitality.

A hush of unwonted gravity fell upon the circle as Mrs. Lorimer remarked: "Doctor, I will send the car-

riage over with you this evening, whenever you wish to see your patient."

Nixon started and passed from one phase of nervous disorders to another. For the rosy Hebe at his side had chased away the vision of the old General José Romero's long thoughtful face, with its overhanging forehead.

"I am deeply interested in the Don's recovery," continued Madame Lorimer. "We have long divided each other's sorrows, and our children have grown up together."

"I will go over at eight o'clock, then, Mrs. Lorimer!" gravely said Doctor Nixon. "I wish to confer seriously alone with Miss Inez. I presume the son would be of no use."

Both the ladies shook their heads, more in sorrow than in anger.

"I told you Felipe was only good to fill up a hole in the air!" triumphantly remarked Frank. "I will drive you over myself. There will be a lovely moon, and I can also confer with Miss Inez," he roguishly added, "while you have your first innings with General José."

"Tell me what you know of the coming priest, the Padre Guerra," said Nixon. "It seems that this man is the center of the newly-exciting influences sweeping your old friend off his balance."

Mrs. Lorimer, serene and calm, measured in her moods, said slowly: "I have seen Father Guerra once, years ago. It was when he came to place this refractory Valdes boy at school near us. The man is peculiarly repellant to me. He may be of a much lower social grade than Don José. I would call him crafty, austere, harsh, and capable of holding the lash over a gentle nature."

"That awful man, mother!" cried Ethel. "He always frightens me with his gleaming coal-black eyes, his shaggy brows and his abrupt, harsh ways."

"Just the sort of man they hang in Texas when they find him near a horse ranch! lightly said Frank. "In externals you will find Vicente Guerra perfectly useless for decorative purposes.

I suppose he bullies the pillar dollars out of the peons and snugly feathers his nest. Still, he seems to have the old boy's confidence. Mark me, Doctor James!" he continued earnestly, "if there is any future villainy worked on the General, this beetle-browed padre will pop up, Jack-in-the-box, right in the middle of it. His own hopeful nephew is leading Felipe away. The lads have both just money enough to spoil them. I fancy, too, that Juan Valdes is a general spy in his uncle's interest. It may be that the priest is feathering his nest down there, and is a secret agent of the Spanish government."

"Miss Inez?" questioned Doctor Nixon.

"Despises both the mestizo priest and this scape-grace Juan; for these people connect her only with the dark memories of her childhood. Now, *mi amigo*," said Frank, "I will soon show you the very prettiest trotter in the Fishkill valley."

He set forth his cheroots and left Nixon a willing captive to the ladies on the portico, remarking, "I'll be round in ten minutes."

"Can it be to the advantage of the church to keep Don José away from Cuba? Does the Padre enjoy the revenues of Jibacoa?" suggested Doctor Nixon.

"I cannot tell," regretfully answered Mrs. Lorimer. "The General's gallantry in the field caused his especial proscription. It seems the banker handles all his usiness. Don José is so helpless in practical matters. He accepts prosperity with modest thankfulness, and adversity with graceful resignation. 'I have given my whole life for Cuba Libre,' he said once to me. 'My heart is buried with my dead wife. Only little Inez and the ashes of life and the dying embers now remain. For Felipe—is—what you see,'" he added with a sigh. Then she sighed, "God help Inez if her father should die."

"And what would become of this friendless beauty?" questioned the young doctor as the yellow wheels of Frank's chariot glittered in the shrubbery.

"As long as a stone stands of Edgecliff, there is a home here for Inez," quietly remarked the lady of the manor, adding earnestly, "Seek to calm the

Don's mind, I beg you; to discover the truth of the romantic visions which so recently have come upon him. I hope," she said, timidly, "that General José will not involve himself, risk his capital, or be led into ruin by this crafty priest. I am afraid; it may only be some scheme to lure General Romero down there within the reach of the cruel Spanish authorities."

"I can only promise my professional help, Madame," replied the young doctor, heartily, "but I will confer with Frank, and we will both watch over Don José, his son and Inez—for your sake. At any rate, he is always safe in America. The days of poison and the stiletto are over. As for the Spanish Government, it has no more power than that of Liberia to remove him from here."

And, as they drove away, Doctor James turned his head to see the fair mother waving them adieu and leaning upon the rosy goddess, who seemed to have caught all the sunset gold in her tresses.

"You see," said Frank, as the mare's heels clicked along merrily under the spreading branches, "the dear old boy has the face and manners of a Don Juan of Austria, the principles of the Cid, and is just about as suited to our later day as a culverin in a Hotchkiss quick-firing battery. His delicate visits of ceremony to my lonely mother, his many acts of family kindness have made him one of us. We must stand by him. I count on you, dear Jim, to get the weathergage of the old Don's phantoms. He is shy, proud, sensitive, confiding and simple-hearted. I hope the black and yellow padre won't fleece him. But here we are."

And with all the dignity of a first-class whip, Frank Lorimer reined up his splendid mare at the portico, where Inez Romero in fleecy white with a great cluster of red roses in her breast, stood silently awaiting them, an embodied spirit of all the dreamy loveliness of that starlit August night.

The three young people conferred a few moments, before the doctor "officially" crossed the threshold. In the soft melting accents of her lovely sisterhood of the magnolia land, Inez Romero's simple story was

soon told. Timidly raising her eyes to Frank for confirmation and encouragement, the maid of Jibacoa recounted all the leading incidents of her childhood.

"I see now, that in the four years of my absence with Ethel at Vassar, my dear father has relapsed into the buried past. The villagers are not congenial to him. The brisk, lively, electric amassers of wealth who play at retirement in the new villas here for twelve hours a day, and then whirl away daily to Wall street for another pull at Circe's cup—simply stun and rebuff him."

"I know that you will at once gain my dear father's confidence, doctor," added Inez. "For to you he will open his heart." And smiled the gentle prophecy.

"Do you know anything of this past which weighs upon and harasses your father's mind?" asked Nixon, as he gazed admiringly at her beauty.

The girl paused and slowly answered: "I was so young when we were driven away from Jibacoa that I cannot fix my memories clearly. I knew that my beloved mother used to bend over me in prayer, in my childish days! I can see her now—the gentle wistful smile, her loving tender eyes, her sweeping hair falling in perfumed wealth over my face, the camellia on her bosom, and the red roses in her tresses. Dear Father to-day treasures the golden crucifix which she was wont to press to her lips as she murmured, after kissing me: 'May the blessed Virgin, Star of the Sea, spare you from the curse of Maracaibo!'"

Doctor Nixon started! There was then a *histoire de famille*!

Inez continued sadly: "My negro nurses often frightened me with their vague gibberish about the family inheritance of woe! When General Romero left the wreck of Cuba's hopes on the last desperate field of rebellion, it was only to guard Felipe and me that he avoided the very last death struggle! But I could never bear to question him, though often burning with childish curiosity. My mother's death, the downfall of the patriotic cause,—the confiscation of our vast estates,—his approaching old age, all these things made me refrain! I see how he has now drifted away

into the past! On my homecoming I frankly said: 'Father, let me divide the burden of your sorrows. Tell me all!' Then laying his dear hand on my head in benediction, he softly said: 'Not yet, my own Inez! Some day you will know all! Alas! Poor Felipe! You are God's child, Inez Marie Estrello,—but my son lies under the grim doom of the Romeros! The fatal knowledge will too soon come to you. After—after I am gone.' And more he would not say. From Felipe, I have gathered up by patchwork shreds all his gleanings from our old retainer Basilio, and from this young Juan Valdes—a human magpie. In the olden days an ancestor of ours, Fernando Aguilarde Romero, a gallant cavalier, smarting under an outrage of the tyrannical Governor-General at Havana, fled and joined Capt. Henry Morgan, and served in his attack and sack of Maracaibo in 1669. During his absence, while fighting the wild tribes of Nicaragua under the castled flag of Spain, the Governor-General hounded his young wife with insult. On his return Fernando threw his glove in the cowardly tyrant's face, cut his way through the astonished guards and joined the half-crazed band of French, English and Basque buccaneers. A son of the church he was outlawed, a price was set on his head, and the doom of the Romeros dates from those awful days when Morgan's men held high revel in the desecrated Cathedral of Maracaibo. It was then that the curse of excommunication came on us. For murdered priests, ravished nuns and the rifled altars stirred the soul of fugitive Fernando Aguilar. Only my father and Padre Vicente Guerra know all," the pious girl whispered, crossing herself. Then she continued, impressively: "I know but this, that my father would fain solve the whole mystery before he dies. The curse rests alone on the men of our race. And yet we helpless women suffer as the rest. For all who marry into the Romero line droop and die. The old story goes that the last of us, a woman, shall pass out, free of the malediction of God's vice-gerent. It is supposed that there are valuable old papers secreted still about Jibacoa. For in his old age Don Fernando Aguilar, pardoned by a new sovereign,

builided the halls where our family has since reigned. Some documents yet extant point to the full history of the affair, as being secreted in the old Hacienda. For according to legendary romance the vast treasures of the plundered Maracaibo cathedral are hidden yet in some unknown haunt. Even in our time the negroes say that sword in hand, the grim specter of Fernando Romero stalks on guard around the lonely walls of Hacienda Jibacoa. To discover the past in all its shaded history, to atone, to restore, to make restitution and peace with Rome at last, has become my father's waking dream."

Doctor Nixon lifted his head. "I thank you, my dear young lady," he said. "I begin to see that we must make a golden circle around your noble father. This strange legend probed to the uttermost must at last clear his mind, and no rough skepticism must be suffered to drive him on into gloomy self-devouring. I shall try to gain his whole confidence and then confer as to his physical treatment with the ablest men of my craft. While he cannot venture under the bloody flag of Spain, if there be news of moment in this coming priest's budget, we must take steps to reach the Hacienda and solve the riddle."

"Count on me," earnestly said Frank Lorimer, with a glance at Inez which caused the gentle Cubana to tremble in a sudden confusion, and lead the way to the presence of the lonely old Don.

"I feel," whispered Lorimer, "that the thing is destined to mold some of our lives strangely."

"It is a case which will make demands on a considerable part of my time," guiltily remarked Nixon, who could not ignore the fact that the "professional assistance" of Miss Ethel Lorimer afforded to him a great support in the investigations of all the tangle around the strange family remnant.

The young doctor softly followed his gentle guide over the threshold of General Romero's sleeping apartment. The windows were open in the great airy chamber and the rays of the August moon struggled victoriously with the gleam of a silver night lamp. Extended on an iron military couch, the General's face gleamed thin

and yellow in the half shadow. His strongly marked features were peaked and wan, with the exhaustion of his excitement and the relaxation of the sedatives. His flaccid fingers were closed upon the cherished golden crucifix which had received his wife's last kiss. A murmured "Buenas tardes, mi querido Señor!" greeted Doctor Jim, whose digits closed upon the old refugee's pulse.

The angular shapes of the veteran's once mighty frame recalled the matchless Spanish infantry—that chivalry which broke the sway of the mighty Saracens of Grenada. It spoke the heroes of Lepanto, the steel-clad warriors who carried Spain's proud flag from Italy to the Netherlands, in a march dwarfing the feasts of Hannibal and the great Napoleon.

As Nixon approached his couch the old Don opened his eyes and with a few words of welcome beckoned him to a seat.

With a gentle inclination of her head Inez Romero left leech and patient alone; led by love's mysterious clue she rejoined Francis Lorimer, Esq., of Edgecliff, who, strange to relate, "had much to say to her on private account."

The young doctor busied himself with his notebook, after a few perfunctory questions. He well knew the shy, proud Spanish nature shrinking within itself at the touch of the intrusive stranger. No mimosa was ever more jealously self-protective in instinct than the haughty yet gentle Cuban individuality.

Bearing the burden of his sorrows alone, wrapping Inez in the mantle of a tender and protecting love, the General had seen with vague alarm his spirited, idle son drift away into the useless circles of "Do-nothing Young America." He had at once recognized that the needed social background for a Romero had vanished. Storm and battle, splendid vice-regal courts, the gilded luxury of slavery.

At length the General, resting upon his elbow, passed his thin hand over the temples still throbbing with the vague weariness of the intensely powerful antispasmodic. As the Don's head fell back helplessly, Nixon leaned over him. "*Hijo mio!*" murmured the General,

"I must be ready to meet Padre Vicente at New York. Shall I be better? I must go."

Doctor Jim calmed the wearied sufferer. "You will be up in a few days. There is nothing dangerous."

"*Sea por Dios y la Santissima*" devoutly murmured Romero, crossing himself. "For the Padre brings me tidings of great moment. I must go to him. A fortune—a treasure—for my Inez."

"Let me be your man of affairs as well as physician, General," earnestly replied Nixon. "Your son or some one sent by your banker must meet Padre Vicente and then bring him up to you here. When does he arrive?"

"In four days," whispered the don.

"Then I will be the bearer of the news to your son, and so answer for the Padre's safe arrival. I go down to New York as soon as you are better, and I will gladly serve you."

"But you will return, my son!" the veteran murmured. "I have that to tell you which I would have the young Abogado Don Francisco know! He will always be here with his noble mother to watch over Inez, for alas! Felipe is light of head and hard of heart! There is no place now for the sons of Cuba! And the young Lorimer is a noble youth."

"I will soon return, General, and I would now suggest that you allow me to telegraph Don Felipe to join young Valdes in greeting the Padre!" The physician was earnest and very anxious to follow up the mystery.

"*Mañana! Mañana!*" sighed Don José! "I will now tell you of the weighty matters pressing on my mind! I was born rich, as all Cubans of rank are, and never dreamed that care, sorrow and ruin would cross in victory the threshold of the proud Romero's. Fiery and ardent I was sent across the sea to Paris by my father to learn the first lessons of life. General Tiburcio Romero was royal commander of the district of Matanzas. He was sternly loyal to Spain, and his unforgiving eyes saw unmoved the death of Lopez, Crittenden and the mad rebels of my early boyhood! Absent with his troops or shining in the stately festivities of Concha's

was gloom in my heart as I listened to the chanting of the frightened acolytes. The vain pomp of a public funeral at Havana did not console me. I had lost my father on the threshold of a budding manhood—his soul wandered in purgatory—and the story of the past seemed an overhanging curse. The treasure is lost to us forever!”

The old Don raised his weary eyes to the picture from which Panchita Concha's eyes still gazed down in undying love upon the lover of her youth. Tears slowly trickled through the veteran's wasted fingers as he brokenly said: “There is a holy of holies! I cannot tell you of the paradise which she made for me in the dark old home. I was promoted, was trusted. Wealth flowed around us. Felipe and Inez then came to gladden the halls where Concha's bravest general had died unshriven even as died the accursed Fernando Aguilar.

“I forgot in this happiness the overhanging doom. While not on duty I vainly spent my whole time searching for the leaden box hidden by my father's hands. It seemed to me that if I could unravel all the mystery of the past the shadow would be lifted at last. I concealed my quest from all. Fray Anselmo slept beside his gallant patron, and VICENTE GUERRA, a man of singularly vigorous mind and precocious talent, became our household chaplain.

“When I saw that sweet Panchita feared my strange, eccentric ways—my groping over the old hacienda—I then gave up to VICENTE GUERRA a part of my secret. He has carried on for years the search and now works alone. Though church preferment has often been offered him he has clung to my ill-starred race. Ah!” groaned the enfeebled General, “the awakening came all too soon. In that year of mad revolution of ‘forty-eight’ the Cadmus teeth were sowed over the world. I feared to own my thoughts to a living soul. I even concealed in confession, God forgive me.” And the sufferer beat his breast. “The oaths I had once taken, awful oaths, my memory shudderingly brings them back now, of fidelity to a mad dream of Cuba Libre.

"As a Spanish officer of Concha's staff, as a member of his military family, when I rode out in the moonlight to join the armed rebels in the field, I stood at last under the curse which descended from our mad-dened ancestor, the Buccaneer of Maracaibo. I dare not own how the secret emissaries taunted me to the freed, with accusations of cowardice. I was young—my blood was hot. I had been entangled in Paris; but behind me I left that angel from whose clinging arms I tore away to become a desperate rebel—at the call of a shadowy secret society which claimed me body and soul. The frightful folly of youth."

James Nixon's eyes were riveted on the old man whose eyes now gleamed with the reflected tenderness of the dear dead days. The young physician gently brushed the clammy drops from the old Don's brow.

"I lost her—that was the stroke of all; my friend. For a time—only for a time; for I go to join her soon. You have seen Inez, *pabrecita, alma de mi vida!*"

There was a transcendant smile on the General's pale face. "She must have friends to love her after I am gone. You will soon know Felipe, poor boy. The unfortunate lad was raised in scenes of blood and terror. Noble old Concha spared my children. He sent them to me—after my escape. I was old, broken and saddened and wretched, but he gave me my children to soften the gloom of all these years of exile. Viciente Guerra brought them here secretly. Concha could not stay the proscription and the bitter confiscation. I have nearly exhausted all the funds which I had placed in Munoz's hands. The Padre has smuggled out a few mementos saved from the thieving Spanish soldiery; but thanks be to the Virgin." The old man drew out a letter: "Guerra has now found the lost box. Under the altar of the old chapel which was wrecked lately in an earthquake Fernando Aguilar had stored the fated secret. I live but to gain once more the pardon of the church. For my Inez's hand will be the stainless one. I will atone. The curse will pass away. The emeralds! the emeralds!"

Then the doctor bent over his patient, who sank back senseless.

CHAPTER III.

THE VEILED SECRET OF THE LEADEN CASKET.

Two days later, Mrs. Agnes Lorimer, serenely happy, listened to Dr. Nixon's triumphant account of Don José's rapid amelioration.

But one pang rent the heart of the proud, young physician. He was ready to depart on the morrow with the lank, old, yellow shadow, Basilio, to drum up the two flighty young Cubans and hasten the padre's coming. To obtain his own month's leave was a mere formality, but to leave, for even three short days, Miss Ethel filled his bosom with most unwarranted mis-givings.

"It is certain," said Mrs. Lorimer, "that the Don needs counsel and friendship. He is as simple as a child, and it is to you," she gazed on the two ardent young men, "to you alone he can look for loyal backing. Munoz is liable to the temptations of the Spanish Government. The priest I never liked, and I feel that we three women will find our metier in watching him. The young men, Felipe and Juan, are practically useless. So General Romero must look to us for the support which will lead him to his shadowy emerald crown."

To cheer the recluse, Frank Lorimer had promised to remain as his companion. Sundry thoughts of Inez's dainty fingers waking the chords of her guitar made Lorimer quite resigned to his term of homeguard duty. And, later, there was a perfect Nirvana of satisfaction on the gravely professional face of Dr. Nixon as he "threw physic to the dogs," and hovered in the drawing-room while Miss Ethel intoned a ditty exactly suited to his fond imaginings.

"I need no moon or stars to guide me!" its somewhat florid words began. They took a new significance when borne aloft on the waves of that fresh young

voice and seemed to beat at the very gates of Doctor Jim's soul.

Next morning, with many flourishes of diplomatic courtesy and some measured sage counsel of a soothing nature, he left the General waving his sombrero like the banner of Spain in the hands of a champion as he drove away to the station with old Basilio sitting behind him in the dogcart, his unsubstantial nankeens flapping over his shrunken shanks—his air of resigned melancholy—the faded grace of self-surrender to a master's will recalling the days of Cervantes. The old servitor rolled his cigarito in storm and sunshine, submitting himself to the care of God.

His bearing was that of the ark, with the manners of the seventeenth century, and yet, in his own dreamy, listless way, he rattled around like an animated skeleton, noiselessly anticipating the slightest wish of the one he served.

"I hope you will not see any of your medical friends in the train," laughed Frank. "They will accuse you of galvanizing a corpse from the Cathedral churchyard of La Habana."

"He *is* a funny old relic," muttered Doctor James, whose mind was intent upon the euphony of Ethel Nixon, as a matron's name in the days to come. The *happy* days! When patients with plethoric purse and judiciously variegated disorders would throng his ante-rooms.

And so it was that in a happy daydream Doctor Nixon reached his office in Gotham. He had even now a local habitation and a name in modest gilded letters. Unfortunate wanderers might here discern that "James Nixon" sported M. D. by virtue of private worth and due public license.

Doctor William Abercromby, who shared Nixon's office, shouted in glee as his friend entered followed by Basilio. Abercromby was an ingenious youth, a friend of friends, whose one treason to Jimmy Nixon was the secret capture of the first patient. It is true that Abercromby only gravely shook his watchchain and bowed as the sufferer, with trembling hand clattering the knob, asked, humbly: "Is the doctor in?"

'Twas a youth, resplendent the day before when he sallied forth with crimson colors and hope in his heart—good store of the green shekels of the realm in his pocket—to see the “football game.” “Standing with reluctant feet,” the patient could merely confess that he had a “fearful head on him.” In exchange for a crisp five-dollar bill, he received the secret sympathy of Doctor Abercromby and the just proportions of a dose of bromide, preceded by the cabalistic R, and proudly followed by the menacing flourish of “William Abercromby, M. D.”

Then the generous traitor, after debating upon the propriety of framing this “firstling of fortune,” “blew it in” with his great colleague, Nixon. And the mantle of Elisha and that of Elijah were both cut after the same pattern.

The patient Basilio was sent forth with carefully arranged orders how to gather in young Felipe and Juan, two boys whose principal duty in life was vacantly gazing over the footlights of the Casino and Koster & Bial's; their soft, fierce, panther-like eyes glowing approvingly upon various members of the star-kicking ballet, who had dubbed the two lads “Partaga” and “Henry Clay.”

Doctor Nixon sat all the afternoon at the feet of one of those men simply great and modestly cautious, who hold up the grandest of all professions, far above its quacks, pretenders and itinerants.

“My dear Nixon,” said the expert, “you interest me in this case. There is either a truth or a fiction here. From what you tell me of the refined spirituality of the old Don, you must beware how you suddenly sweep away the dreams which have haunted his darkened soul! A rude shock might overthrow the old General's mind. A bitter disappointment would simply crumble him up in a lifeless heap. Your role is more that of a watchman than a physician!”

After a long consultation, reinforced by his senior's experience, Doctor James returned to his office, where he found Basilio the wise, gliding furtively about the hallway, lest by the way of the nearest saloon the thoughtless youths whom he had succeeded in finding would gravitate back to the “Tenderloin!”

A small pagan in dirty blue and an unnecessarily large cap handed Doctor Jim a telegram from the Merchants' Exchange agency. Its contents, "Steamer 'Santiago de Cuba' coming in passed Sandy Hook 3 p. m. At wharf at nine," decided the young man with two saffron colored elephants on his hands to take these eel-like captives to the club for dinner!

"Noblesse oblige!" he murmured. "They cannot run away from the table!"

Nixon had an opportunity to quietly examine the youngsters while he closed his slender office duties. There was no doubt as to "which was the merchant and which the Jew!" Though Felipe Romero was as pointedly listless as his companion, his spirited graceful face with its oval curves, his soft manner, proud and yet winning, his elegant figure and delicate hands marked him as the caballero. He was evidently led by his *ame damnée* Juan Valdes, a robust, heavy set youth, with high cheek bones, a malignant scowl and the halting, hesitating manner of the mestizo—half sycophant, half spy. The gleaming white teeth, heavy jaw and oblique eyes, with a long, muscular arm, showed a dash of the wild blood of the Sierra Indians. Nixon smiled as he verified the furtive glance and peering manners of Juan.

"A heredity of bending around the tree trunk to throw the spear or shoot the bow. A modern savage but half tamed. If the uncle resembles the nephew he is by no means a prototype of Sandalphon, the angel of prayer," mused Doctor Jim. "A sort of ghostly confessor who might 'stand the sinner up' in a dark place on earth and go through him, before consigning his spiritual elements to the rotary furnaces of the place Mr. Beecher 'took no stock in.' Yet, rugged and intelligent enough. I may mistake the sturdy cross-blood for a malignant strain."

Tobacco, that great civilizer and open sesame of friendship, brought them all on the plane of an easy *modus vivendi*, while waiting for the "Santiago de Cuba" to dock.

"There is my uncle," suddenly blurted out Juan as he lurched forward to the side of a heavily built, dark-

faced man of middle age. The broad-brimmed straw hat, long alpaca coat and Roman collar bespoke the priest on his travels.

"Your father?" demanded Padre Vicente Guerra in a tone of authority, turning to Felipe, as Juan laid hands listlessly upon the stout bag in the priest's hand.

"He has been sick. He is all right now," carelessly said Felipe. "This gentleman is his physician, and has a message for you."

The padre bowed with attentive humility. The sullen brow, the determined chin, the bold, high cheek bone of the nephew were there, but dark lights deepened the ugly glint of the padre's eyes. In one side-long sweep he had sized up the young American, and Nixon felt the shiver which the touch of a serpent brings.

"One of the wise ones—the dangerous ones—a man in whom there is no mercy,—if no guile," decided Doctor Jim, and their instinctively hostile natures recognized a born feud of antagonism. "There is the brazen corselet beneath the strong man's gown," decided Nixon, and the alarm clock of his nature was ringing out, "Beware!" before the two seniors had exchanged a few words of mutual explanation. Then Nixon frankly said: "Padre Vicente, have you the missing papers? It is almost vital to Don José's cure that you should join him at once. We might take the midnight train and you could be with him in the morning. I will go back with you."

The priest replied evasively and coldly: "I need rest. I am also charged with some missions of the Church. I must go now to the hotel frequented by the foreign clergy. Moreover, the tidings of Los Olmos are for the ear of Don José alone."

Doctor Nixon had not caught the full chilling offensiveness of the father's manner. The mestizo's pride had been hardened by domination over the flock which lingered near the vacant halls of "Los Olmos."

"But he has told me all," cordially insisted Nixon.

"Then, Señor, there rests nothing for me to say," defiantly remarked the padre. "I will go alone to my inn, and to-morrow night I will arrive at Villa Romero.

You may say so, if you return to my friend—and your patient.”

James Nixon's face flushed, but he restrained any impatient retort, thinking it would be a poor debut to quarrel with this insolent cleric. “And why should I? Jealous and proud of his success, he may wish yet to reign over the hacienda of Los Olmos at Jibacoa! He may yet long for the time when the Romeros may reign in the old prestige!”

So Nixon gently said: “As you will. I only wish to have the General's mind relieved as soon as possible. Shall I leave these young men with you? For I return to Edgecliff early to-morrow.”

“Yes, my friend,” rather pleasantly answered the mollified padre. I need to discipline this wild truant, Juan. As for Felipe, there is much he can tell me, which will spare fatigue to Don José. General Romero is my penitent. What he tells you of his secret is his to give. What I might say would be an indiscretion, perhaps a treason.”

Doctor Nixon was nonplussed. The oily fluency of the stubborn looking padre showed him a master of human diplomacy. Though ruling a small world, his flock a humble one, yet the wary duplicity of Spanish official life, the easy winking blindness of the Cuban social entoinage, the play of the ardent passions of three generations, trembling under his voice, gave to Vicente Guerra the whole range of that wonderful theatre—the human heart. And as master, backed with the thunders of the Church, he reigned over the seething whirlpool of human passions by the silver sands of Matanzas Bay.

Nixon saw that the priest knew his power. He turned and left them in the night, the boys lurking with eyes eager for escape near the stern padre, who now clutched the substantial portmanteau which Juan had listlessly thrown down under a pile of cigar boxes, parroquet cages, bananas and the worthless travel trash with which tourists will make themselves guys. Standing there in the surging throng of hotel cabmen and custom officials, Vicente Guerra guarded in his broad strong hand the precious deposit which the

earthquake shock had exposed in its hiding place under the altar of Jibacoa.

"They are a nice lot of picturesque vignettes of Cuban development," muttered Nixon. "Never mind, I will keep my weather eye fixed on you, *mi padre querido*."

And Doctor Jim calmly said: "*Hasta Mañana!*" and went off alone to dream of Ethel Lorimer, the golden-haired.

The next day while Nixon lingered in the hours of a summer afternoon preparing the now wildly-excited General for the momentous interview, he listened to the gentle cooing of Lorimer and Inez on the sheltered veranda.

Madame Lorimer and Ethel had learned in a brief council of the guarded coldness of the padre. "That's his way," lightly remarked Frank. "A sort of human dagger, he gets into one's heart and works around to make a place for himself."

"Yes," said the gentle widow; "he is a powerful man, of self-control, and one whom I distrust—a man always to be watched, and who could be dangerous, too, I fear."

"*Gracias a Dios!* He has come!" cried Don José, striding up and down the room in his restless march. "I shall soon know all. Why did he not come right up here with you?"

Nixon very fairly reported the priest's official necessities, but was unable to add that at that very moment Padre Vicente Guerra and the Spanish Consul-General were double locked in the library of that official's residence in New York. When the priest rose to depart for the train the Consul-General whispered: "If you succeed, if you are true to us, you will yet be the Bishop of Matanzas. A glittering promotion!"

And so at last all the secrets of the leaden casket, and some others untold for years, arrived with the black-browed padre, who strode over the threshold of Villa Romero with the air of a master at the late hour of ten that night. He had brought the two young wolves of Tenderloin society back, awed if not tamed, and, with a perfunctory greeting of parental blandness, he

passed Inez over to the welcome society of El Señor Abogado Lorimer. There was a quiet relegation to his professional sphere, in the attitude of the priest to Nixon.

Then, amid the unwonted bustle of the lonely house, the sound of earnest voices was audible until two o'clock in Don José's own sleeping room. The padre was lodged in a chamber adjoining, and the doctor at last, fearful of harm and wearied out, called a halt, and, entering authoritatively, sent the old General to his nightly rest.

The eyes of the veteran shone out in a dangerous brilliancy,—his hand was fevered, as he whispered, with superstitious subjection: "Come to me early, my son. I will then tell you all."

Padre Vicente had now donned his long black robe—the invincible armor of the Church—and flitted along like a ghostly spectre to his room, in silence, with a grave inclination of his head. In a moment his voice was heard in the routine of his breviary,—and secure within his fortified lines, the Cuban padre was thus ready to take up the fight which priests and doctors have waged from time immemorial in the gloomy anti-theater of the rooms of the sick, the dying and the dead. For, between them, they have—always—the last word.

The old manor house of Edgecliff sheltered four weary heads that night, twisting uneasily on their pillows. To Nixon's astonishment when Frank Lorimer reined up the Mambrino mare at the door, the mother and daughter were hovering still awake in the great hallway like Peris on guard, at the forbidden gates.

"Tell us! tell us!" cried both ladies in a breath.

Dr. Nixon gravely replied, "To-morrow."

It was a hard fate,—a poor return for all their watchful sympathy. Mrs. Lorimer nodded away bedward murmuring, "I do not like this delay." While Ethel pouted a "good morning," in place of a "good night." "I only hope the dear old Don will surely find the emeralds,—and that Inez will have bushels of gold."

This hearty exaggeration of schoolmate love made

James Nixon smile as he laid his tired head upon his pillow.

"I shall have trouble with the padre!" grumbled Doctor Jim, as he hurled his raiment all around in the wild freedom of the bachelor. "But I will make it a waiting fight! So, go in now brother Vicente, and take the first innings!"

He was slightly startled on approaching Villa Romero the next morning at the sound of irregular fusillade in the sheltered grounds of the old mansion. He turned inquiring eyes to Frank, who said with an air of experience: "Only those two young Cuban devils practicing with their revolvers! Now cometh the sons of Belial; for the farmers in a radius of ten miles know these two imps of Satan! Two things they can do—smoke endless cigarettes, and ride the horses picked up in the pastures, half to death; for a hair "riata" noose serves them to manage any four legged thing in sight. The old General will have a soulful time. Between the black raven perching at his side, keeping up his croak of the olden days, and this picket guard of the devil, his nerves will soon settle for good—over there!"

And Frank pointed to the gleaming tombstones of the Fishkill village cemetery, as he flicked the Mambrino racing along in the crisp summer morning. "I've an idea, Buster, he quietly said, "that you had better let Padre Vicente have the cards and the deal! Pardon my profane simile! Play a waiting game! The cloven foot will peep out from under that flapping robe at last! I'll have Inez put old Basilio on also to watch the priest, for the old spectral servant is 'muy sabbio,' and don't you forget it!"

"What do you fear, Frank?" questioned Nixon.

"I'll tell you," sharply said Lorimer, "I propose to see that Inez gets all that belongs to her,—in law and right."

The rogue blushed and then closely examined his whip stock. "This man has too much vim for a padre. For him to live without a purpose would be an impossibility. I know what occupancy and enjoyment mean. Now Padre Vicente (I speak after the

manner of the flesh) is a 'big-bug' down there on the coral reefs of Matanzas, and 'rules the roost' just as long as Don José is proscribed. Vale Don José!—where Felipe and Inez come in! Felipe will die of a knife thrust, or in some uncanny way. He fears nothing—but any form of useful work. Inez will then be helpless. The ultimate destination of the Romero estates is to enrich the Church, the viceregal treasury, and the collateral family of the padre. He will meantime enjoy it—in their name."

"You may be correct," said the laughing doctor. "There is a sweet serenity in Padre Vicente's smile which tells me he will be heard from, when the subject is dissected."

"Right you are!" remarked Frank. "And he will want the best slice. "Do you note how the padre sprung to his work, like a star actor belated in arriving at a 'one-night stand'?"

"Yes. He layeth hold with his hands—like the spider which is in king's palaces," gloomily remarked Nixon. "And Inez—will she not work against these possible schemes?"

Frank Lorimer burst out: "She is the simplest, dearest, sweetest, most unsuspecting"——

"Skip all that!" sternly said Nixon. "Keep to the solid facts."

Then Lorimer's eyes gleamed wrathfully as he descended again to earth. "The padre will go through that simple-minded girl's store of knowledge like a burglar into a bank vault. She can only trust, love and suffer. And, besides, you see Felipe is no earthly good."

Nixon bowed. "Save to the jewelers, florists and tobacco merchants of New York and the chorus of the Casino. You and I must stand by the old Don for"——

There was a silence, in which the free hands clasped and the hiatus could have been filled by the bracketed insertion:

{ Inez's }
{ Ethel's } sake!

"I must trust all to your coolness," whispered Lori-

mer, as Inez, tenderly clinging to her father's arm, came out to them.

"Papa is so eager—so excited! I am so happy that you are here!" she cried, while her animated face expressed far more than her words.

In five minutes James Nixon had led the Don to a shaded nook under the chestnuts, where he trifled with a morning coffee, while the General began his relation.

"I feel myself ten years younger, *hijo mio!*" exultantly chuckled the veteran. "It is a wonder—a wonder of the Blessed Virgin! In my absence Padre Vicente has had the entire control of the whole plantations as well as the house of 'Los Olmos.' A government overseer and a guard sent by the Alcalde of Jibacoa have attended to the making of the sugar crop, and prevented all further spoliation. In these long years my untiring friend has vainly searched for the faintest trace of family papers undiscovered. For all the archives, save the Paris records, were removed and despoiled by the legal authorities of the Crown at Havana. Nothing—nothing rewarded Vicente's examination of every piece of old furniture, of all the rooms; even the wainscot and floors has he probed with care. When the great earthquake of last month came, however, the first thought of the good priest was to run to the chapel where the frightened women and children had all gathered. There the high altar was lying prone. It had fallen backward, and, marvel of marvels, none of the sacred vessels or its treasures were seriously injured.

"The displaced stones of the three steps unheaved showed a small crypt beneath the altar, which had been reached by a trench through the foundations of the rear wall. This had caused the overturning of the altar, while the chapel itself stood firm. The good padre, clearing the church for the rearrangement of the sacred objects, alone approached the ruined shrine. Astonished, he beheld within the exposed crypt a stone block, apparently hollow, but closed by a slab. He thought the stone receptacle perhaps contained the ashes of the dead; but the shattered slab disclosed a flat leaden casket or case. It was still firmly

clamped, riveted and sealed. This precious deposit he has brought to me intact. It was a struggle of conscience with my friend. But his fidelity to the Romeiros at last triumphed. The origin of the secrets there hidden date far back, beyond my own outlawry or proscription! For even Fernando Aguilar was amnestied in his capacity as noble and warrior, and only took the common ban of the 'Maracaibo anathema maranatha' to the grave with him! So, under pretense of effecting the repairs to the consecrated chapel, Padre Vicente came to me with the unvoiced story of the past! We opened the case together last night!"

"And you know all now?" eagerly asked Doctor Nixon.

"Alas! my son," groaned the feeble General, whose clock of life was now running slowly under the relaxed excitement, "I know but half the story! The document is in the obscure old Spanish. The only thing found in the case, save a jewel which we estimated to be of great value! Padre Vicente suggests its being sent to Spain to be compared with documents of the time by the priests of the church. I will leave it with you to examine! Perhaps your young eyes may discover some key word! I see the padre is beckoning to me! It is the hour for my morning devotions—so long interrupted!" And the veteran tenderly placed a folded document wrapped in folds of silk upon the table.

Doctor Jim's hands trembled nervously as he unrolled the covering! By hazard his eyes strayed to the veranda, where the padre stood glaring at his professional opponent from the door. There was no mistaking the reluctance with which the priest followed the tottering old General into the house!

"I must be a lively-witted man, or this padre will close and bar the door of the past. Once in his hands, the paper might be kept from me. If sent to Spain, it may be artfully lost on the voyage. Dare I copy it? Have I the right? And I might even then miss the key-note of the hidden mystery."

He reverently handled the four sheets of parchment which bore, in antique Spanish flourishes, the sign

manual of the unfortunate Fernando Aguilar. The ink was black and the quill made characters still sharp and clear. He retired into a summer-house and spread out the silken scarf on a table, carefully depositing the four leaves thereon. The rattle of wheels aroused him.

"Where are you going, Frank?" he called to his chum.

"To the village with Miss Romero," replied Lorimer. "I am going to see the photographer. I want some scenes and groups taken."

Doctor Nixon sprang to his feet. "Come over here as quick as you can," he called in a strange voice, which made Lorimer spring across the lawn.

"What has happened?" cried the briefless lawyer.

"I am a fool—that's all. And it will keep on happening as long as I live." With this Nixon whispered several sentences in Frank's ear which awoke all the dormant activity in that youth. In three minutes the cloud of flying dust in the glen alone told that the Mambrino mare was doing almost a racing pace.

When Miss Inez appeared on the veranda ready for her coveted ride there was sweet wonder in her eyes as she saw not her Lochinvar.

"He will be back in a short time," apologized Doctor Jim; "a sudden telegram demands an instant answer, and I am charged to beg you to kindly wait for him."

The pouting damsel was fain to be content with a morning visit to her silent friends, the fragrant roses of Villa Romero, while Doctor Nixon, with his watch on the table, counted the minutes as he glanced over the stately words of the old chronicle. These took his mind back to the wild days of the seventeenth century as he pored over the quaint characters of the old legend. It seemed as if the breath of the past was sighing mournfully in the trees. "It will take me at least a week to decipher all this, and will I ever see it again?"

The young man thought anxiously, but his heart bounded as Frank Lorimer came striding over the flower beds.

"Walk up to the stable! Quick! He is there in the

harness room! I will stay here and hold the fort with Inez! When you are done, come out and stand in the stable door. I will be on the watch and join you. Thompson is a good fellow and as quick as chain lightning!"

Doctor Nixon walked smartly to the stable, holding the precious leaves hidden under his coat, and was delighted to see inside it a young fellow, whose Romeo air and oiled locks bespoke the village photographer, who exclaimed with a nervous air as he quietly locked the front door: "All ready, sir! I'll do you up in fifteen minutes!"

The implements of his magic art were scattered around on the benches. There was nothing of the "higher orders" in the flashy garb, the stained fingers and imitation diamond pin of the artist,—but he swung his landscape camera at once into place with the calm air of a master of the art! "I brought along a dozen boxed plates, and all you have to do is to follow my directions."

Swinging open the rear door quickly for light, and whipping out a dozen sheets of varied colored back-ground paper, the photographer sprang to his work! When he glanced at his watch in triumph as he snapped the last negative case and cried: "Twelve in seventeen minutes! Not so bad! Now, sir, if you will stand in the door of the stable and call up Squire Frank, I'll have all these things over the fence and hidden away in the bushes in two minutes. Mr. Lorimer will take my cases over to his house. My boy is on the way with my own trap,—and in two hours I will have developed these negatives and leave them safely locked up in Mr. Lorimer's room. I can come up to-morrow to Edgecliff and print you off a bushel of them. I suppose you do not wish the negatives touched."

"Not a line! not a spot!" imperatively cried Nixon. "I will pay you for all your extra trouble."

"You can't do that," laughed Thompson. "Squire Frank has given me a twenty dollar bill, and so I am 'squared' forever! I will tell you, though, one of these leaves has been damaged. Somebody has scraped

out some of the words, and I call you to witness that I never touched the parchments. I suppose they could not rub out any words once traced, and had to shave a clean place. You can easily tell where the words were altered. Hold it up to the light! The thin spots show! I saw them at once, as I took a glimpse of the negatives. It's on the third sheet you gave me."

Lorimer came striding up the gravel walk! There was nothing in the deserted harness-room five minutes later to indicate that the room had been a temple of Daguerre's mystic shadow picturing. When the half mollified Señorita Inez smiled back at Doctor Nixon, he was standing with the precious manuscript pressed to his bosom.

"It is for you—for your future!" he murmured. "I fancy Padre Vicente has lost a trick this very morning! Scalpel against gown! I shall not oppose your father confiding the document to the experts of the Church!"

And as he then took his seat in the arbor under the gleaming rays of the summer morning sun he carefully examined the shaved parchment leaf. The thin spots were invisible to the naked eye, and only by holding it up to the brilliant light could the difference of shade of the background be seen. There were four words on the page which seemed to have been carefully erased or written over a thinner place. Unfamiliar with the text, the volunteer expert could not attach any meaning to them as yet.

The sound of voices suddenly startled him. "It will be his game to politely regain possession of the document! This may be my last chance!"

And drawing out his notebook Nixon traced a fac-simile of each word, in position as found, with little regard to the context. A blank line on either side indicated the relative position of the words on the page and their sequence.

Hastily shutting his notebook, he thrust it in his bosom as the padre came swiftly striding up to him,—over the fragrant grass.

James Nixon's morning salutation was most courteously received and the two men then rejoined the General, who lay extended in a hammock swaying

gently in the sunlight. The veteran's eyes gleamed anxiously as the young doctor neared him!

"You have read it?" he said.

"Ah!" replied Nixon, "it will require some study on my part to decipher its whole meaning. If the padre would read it to me it would save me perhaps a week of study and delay. His life spent among the records of the church makes him your only counselor in this very grave affair."

The gentle flattery of the remark, and the evident desire not to meddle, pleased the churchman mightily.

"We have much to confer about, Señor Don José and myself!" courteously replied Padre Vicente. "This evening, if you will honor me, I can give you from eight to twelve."

"That will suit me exactly!" good-humoredly remarked Doctor Jim, "and I will therefore return and visit my patient at that time."

"*A sus ordenes, por la tarde!*" murmured the priest as the doctor turned to go, after a few words of general medical direction. There was no mistaking the gleam of quiet satisfaction with which the churchman saw the field abandoned to him alone.

"I think I will now let you play your little game in the lead," mused Nixon as he strode happily along.

It suddenly occurred to him that an exploration of the environs of Edgecliff, under the guidance of Miss Ethel, would increase his store of revolutionary memories. "Nothing like going over the ground with one intelligent person." "The intelligent person" at that very moment was straining her eyes, like Sister Anne, to see the form of the returning guest. Doctor Jim, pausing in his slashing stride down the leafy lanes, bethought him of his notebook. As his eye fell upon one of the pages he had copied he started. There in the form of a cross were arranged the four words:

—————"la"—————
 ————"Debajo——puerta"———
 ————"mayor."—————

"Under the great door," mused James Nixon, as he stood there.

"What is under the great door?" It rushed upon

his mind that the quaint self-accusation of the old cavalier turned freebooter had been confined to telling a part of the story, only; in the recital now in the priest's hands.

"I have it!" cried Nixon. "The secret of the Leaden Casket! There is *another* deposit, perhaps the stolen spoil of Maracaibo, *under the great door!* And so for centuries the foot of the friend and the stranger may have trodden over the fruit of crime and the origin of the curse of the Romeros. This is a happy accident of the village photographer's discovery. He is a sharp fellow. Perhaps the sly priest may not find it. The words need to be read together as a whole—apart from the body of the document, to have a clear meaning. I will trust only to Frank. If I tell the poor priest-ridden General, the ghostly confessor will worm the story out. What if he should visit Los Olmos the first and at once remove the deposit, or instantly so instruct his agents down there now? Some one of us must get there before him—he must be flattered and detained here, and then once in our hands with the treasure or the remaining part of the story of the past we could checkmate this moody priest. Frank, Inez, myself—who could go? Our absence for any length of time could not be well explained. There is but one who might be trusted, if a loyal drop of blood is in him. It is Felipe. For the sour-faced padre is surely no friend of his. When I have grasped the full import of the story, after the conference of to-night, I can decide!" was Nixon's conclusion as he strode up the green lawns of Edgecliff.

A golden-haired watcher awaited him, but the birds seemed to be twittering: "Felipe must go! Felipe must go!"

CHAPTER IV.

FELIPE'S QUEST.

FRANK LORIMER was busied with other matters than old legends on that tête-a-tête ride. The enchanting flashes of two Spanish eyes drew the young man's heart far away from the fan palms, the mango groves and orange shades of Los Olmos in the golden hours of the happy afternoon!

Lorimer had said to Nixon as he prepared to escort Miss Inez homeward: "I do not like to leave Don José cooped up always alone with the raven of the Antilles? So I'll take the Señorita back. I have set Inez to watch his every movement. I think, in the grave state of the General's health, that she should now be made acquainted at once with all the future resources of the family and her coming responsibilities. Felipe belongs to the class the villagers designate here as 'of no earthly good!' I've charged her to find out about the padre's probable stay, and to also sound the General daily as to all proposed movements. Now Thompson has already fixed his negatives, and he says that they are remarkably good. I will be in the room, or rather, on the roof, with him to-morrow, and see that he prints only two good proofs of each. The plates shall not leave my sight. In the meantime, Buster, they are now safe with two Yale locks as guardians in the closet where I have enshrined my tresses of hair, old slippers, dried bouquets, photographs, and all the poor trophies of my college career."

"It must be a large, very large closet!" suggested Nixon.

"Ah! not so large!" retorted Lorimer. "'Young-man-afraid-of-his-record' has very few scalps on his belt. I am but a poor Don Juan. My own austere life proves that."

"Take your austere life away with you—and mend

your ways," laughed Nixon. "I am going out riding. As for you, I can easily see whither you are drifting."

If Doctor Nixon did not attain a fair idea of the legendary history of the Fishkill valley on his afternoon drive it was not for want of time given to the subject. His close attention to the words of his lovely cicerone was remarkable, yet he lingered not upon the traces of the men who nobly fought that we might be free. The spectacle of Ethel Lorimer, her graceful form swaying at his side, her soft voice rippling in music, the dreamy afternoon sunshine, the breath of flowers and the hum of bees carried out of his mind the visionary men in blue and buff—

"The brave Continentals
In their ragged regimentals!"

For, near him, the golden-haired child of Vassar brought into his life a living picture of love-tinted blue and gold. They wandered along under green apple boughs, while the pony nibbled aimlessly at the sweet clover of the country roads. The scene was peaceful and lulling. Yet the cardiac disturbances were vastly increased, as they drove homeward.

It was not necessary that the son of Æsculapius should fall into love. He was gently drifting down the tide—drifting with a beautiful woman at his side, to where the waters meet and flow on to join the river of life seeking the unknown sea!

It was in the absence of Frank Lorimer, a willing prisoner at Villa Romero, that Nixon dined, his mind centered upon the evening tryst with the oily churchman.

"I will be as wax in his hands," mused Doctor Jim, "and yet be as sly as the little darky who 'won't say nuffin to nobody.' Padre Vicente will find out later that I can keep the secret of the leaden casket—not dig it up out of the flourishes of the document. Should this treasure, itself, be discovered there are two dangers before us. Don José, a proscribed rebel, may not legally claim any treasure trove. He is powerless! Cuba Libre 'has laid him out' forever. Pardon to him is out of the question. Again, if the emeralds should

really prove a find of value, they would either be claimed by the Church, or petered through the priest's hands, and very little would reach Inez. The old Don's anxiety for her future shows that he may have but a slender store left of the 'necessary evil'—the all-powerful 'shekels!'"

James Nixon was not astonished to find General Romero sleeping the exhausted sleep of a worn and wearied man when he reached the villa. The padre was already pacing the library in some expectation. He raised his head in a grave salutation as the doctor passed into the Don's room. The long gown and clasped arms, with the singularly awkward headgear of his grade, "left the shadows floating on the floor."

It was patent to the doctor that this Cuban had come to stay, that the whole household obeyed him, and that no one dared oppose his slightest wish. The old man was lying on his couch under the picture of the dear dead woman who had guarded his dreams so long. A gray shadow, lingering reluctant at death's half-opened door he seemed, and now in his sleep, he stirred and murmured: "*Inez! Pobre Inez! Mi querida!*"

James Nixon sighed and muttered:

"The way was dark, the night was cold,
The minstrel was infirm and old."

He is on his lonely way to join the choir invisible." And in the hope of serving the despoiled heiress of the decayed old line, the unhappy Romero, the American joined the priest as the bell chimed eight.

"I will read you now this fearful record, Señor," said the priest, as he seated himself at a table, where the precious old document lay in readiness. "As the representative of the General I only ask that you will make no private notes of this grave communication. There are before him long days, weeks, years of atonement for this vast impiety, imposed by the Almighty upon the innocent ones who bear the name of Romero."

"I will endeavor to shorten their penance," energetically decided the doctor, as he placed himself where the light would show him every movement of the priest's face.

"I will give you each sheet to read after me, Señor," chanted the padre in his impassive monotone, "that you may verify my poor elucidation. It seems all simple enough, but, alas! this secret is only the story of another secret, and two days have given me so far no key to the obscurity of the story. It may be that Fernando Aguilar's mind was enfeebled; that he, in his remorse with a clouded memory, forgot the very knowledge he would transmit.

Nixon bowed in silence.

"Thank God, he knows nothing," mused the watchful doctor. "And I have the triple set of negatives. I will secrete one set at Edgecliff, deposit one in the safe deposit vaults, and hold the other for my own study. His sly arts are now powerless, for the sun god has painted every line and hair-flourish. I have outwitted you, my clerical friend."

It was almost a useless formality to ask if the padre objected to smoking, so James retired behind a cloud as the priest purred out the words slowly. Doctor Nixon's mental translation was also designedly slow; for phrase after phrase was read over again as he gained time to think of the meaning of the concealed words of the veiled secret. His Americanized version was fixed in his mind as follows :

TO MY DESCENDANTS :

I, Fernando Aguilar de Romero, sometime Knight of the Order of St. James, and of His Catholic Majesty's Ejercito Real, have caused this relation with my own seal and firma, to be deposited under the altar of the Chapel of Los Olmos, in the year A. D. 1685, being now old and grievously suffering from my wounds.

It is not to my faithless wife nor to my children now of tender years, that I may confide the story of my absence of seven years from the Isla de Cuba.

May the blessed Virgin guard the secret here confided till all have passed away who might suffer by my relation of the truth. The secret of the riches stolen from the altar of Maracaibo is here given to the trust of Almighty Providence, to guide and dispose as it may seem best.

Know then, my descendants, that I was chased to a refuge with the buccaneers (the enemies of His Catholic Majesty) by the resentment of mine enemy, the Captain-General of Cuba. I dared not repair to Jamaica, whither Captain Morgan had sailed, for I had battled with the English at sea, and in Campeachy, and the kingdom of Terra Firma, which is Costa Rica, lest I be bound and sent to my enemy or taken at sea. I escaped with some Carib boatmen in a perogua to Cow Isle, from where the valiant Captain Henry Morgan essayed a descent upon Venezuela.

To my spouse, Señora Dolores, I had given none of my designs, when I embarked her and my infant son, Diego, upon the plate galleon then setting forth for Vera Cruz, where her brother Don Alarco de Guzman was royal governor.

But the Captain-General, Hevera, bitterly sought my life for that I had sent my beautiful wife away out of his power. I fain would have passed for one of Morgan's Basques, Frenchmen or Walloons, and so made my way out to old Spain by Venezuela and the Guianas; for mine ancient enemy, Sir Henry Morgan, and his bull-dog English were the most grievous foes of Spain, and I had battled with him at St. Catherine's Island, Puerto de Principe and Porto Bello.

Lest he torture me as a spy, I made haste to shave my beard and to join one of the seventeen vessels of which the valiant Welshman was chief.

The followers of Pierre Le Grand, Roche Brasiliano, Pierre François, Bartholomew the Portugal, Mansueld and Lolonois had all flocked to join this devil man, Morgan.

It was a band of human devils. Lolonois being dead now, miserably perished in Nicaragua, the old Welshman was king of the Caribbean. The deeds of this last exceed even that fiend of fiends, Lolonois, whom the Indians stripped of his flesh while still alive in Nicaragua, burning his bones and casting the ashes in the air. So rendered they justice to their guilty captive.

In a common soldier's leather doublet, I, a nobleman, did daily upon my guard duty, as we sailed away to Savona, being at the point of starving for want of

provisions and grievously becalmed. The fleet of our company was scattered, and after long waiting but eight vessels and five hundred men were come near at hand. There was a certain French captain of Lolonois who, knowing all the entrances of the Lake Maracaibo, at last persuaded Morgan to rifle and sack the city of Maracaibo, for that the priests and people had hidden there vast treasures two years before, which the greedy Lolonois found not. This had been revealed by a grateful prisoner whose life the Frenchman had saved.

It was in March, A.D. 1669, that our band gallantly forced the forts of La Vigilia and de la Barra, and the city of Maracaibo was finally taken and given over to horrible sack and rapine.

I, Fernando Aguilar de Romero, was cast in a watch of seven men, all bloodthirsty enemies of Spain. I was put with them in the attack and forcing of the great cathedral, for the town lay at our mercy. In the great cathedral the main guard of our commander made its post after the victory, and for three days the place was wrapped in flames and the yell of the ravished rose high above the groans of the dying.

On the second night of the sack, my companions called me to where they had hidden the sacristan of the cathedral and the vicar-general of the diocese, who had once seen me in Cuba. These miserable men were then bound and put to the rack and the most horrid and ingenious tortures. I feared to hold my own hand back lest I should be slain myself; therefore, I dared not discover myself to these sufferers as a Spaniard.

Every day the wretched people who had fled from the living hell were dragged back into the still blazing city, and there was great rage among the victors for that the spoil was miserably small! For these Captain Morgan gave liberty for all manner of tortures to discover the vast treasures whereof Lolonois was also foiled.

Three weeks this diligent search was kept up and divers hundreds of innocent men and women perished *horribly*. Captain Morgan being foiled as to finding

riches made haste to victual his fleet for the attack of Merida and Gibraltar, which is by the Gurinas.

On guard at the tent of the pirate commander himself I heard the great corsair and the French captain within in deep converse, and they wotted not that I spoke Spanish.

The wine was free in their heads, and they boasted of the store of gold and silver and emeralds they would yet find in Merida and Gibraltar. The Frenchman related unto Morgan that all the great treasures of the cathedral had been removed or hidden. "For wist you," said he, "Lolonois got naught but the great silver candlesticks, the pictures and the silver bells when we sacked the town, and these we took away to Tortuga;" whereat Morgan in a rage bade the captain of the guard to single out for torture to the last extremity every religious taken.

Then the French captain told of a vast number of great emeralds of enormous value beyond the mind of man to know, which the Muisca of Tunja and Bogota had fearfully given up as tribute to the priests for protection of the Magdalena tribes. He said: "The Conquistadores, aware of the value of the gold and silver bars, knew not of the enormous price of the emeralds, far beyond any known in the world. The sly Muisca priests of Venezuela had long received and hoarded them. These matchless jewels were thus all sacred to Bochica and Chia, the goddess of wickedness.

"It was a collection made in the tribute coffers of the gloomy temples of this awful goddess. There was an open stone chest before each golden idol in the shades of the Lake of Guatavista, and there the Muisca timidly deposited their bribes—that accursed stone—the emerald of the Magdalena. Far above the gold and silver, the dyed cotton and choice, perfumed wax, the wily Xequés prized these rare emeralds, which they secretly hid while teaching their poor dupes that the Sun and Moon god had silently swept away their previous offerings. The bearded villain Morgan then sprang up with a fearful oath. I shuddered, standing on guard UNDER the shadow of THE folds of the GREAT DOOR."

As the priest read these fateful words Nixon chilled to ice with the reflex of his strange mental agitation. But Padre Vicente only chanted along in a perfunctory way and concluded the reading.

"Morgan rushed out at once and ordered the assembly and torture of all the priests. It was a night of hell's own dark work. My watch mate was one of my seven companions. He sped away, and then the band who ruled me hid the vicar and the sacristan in a remote forest glade. I dared not betray myself lest I die the death. The other religious prisoners soon perished by fire, by the rack and all inhuman butchery, but none of them betrayed the place of hiding of the Muisca tribute. I of a verity knew later they wist not where they were. For the vicar, the sacristan and the Bishop of Maracaibo (gone back to Spain) alone knew where the emeralds had been hidden from Pierre Lolonois.

It was while Captain Morgan, now beset, prepared to storm his way out of the lake and destroy with fire ships the fleet of Don Alonso del Campe y Espinosa, that these seven devils to whom I was bound inhumanly roasted over a slow fire the Vicar-General and sacristan till they at last gave up the secret. We were left behind to guard the cathedral (now a strong place of arms) while Morgan stormed and sacked Gibraltar and Merida. They forced me to stand guard while I heard the poor priest with the voice of dying agony curse us all and then give us over to eternal damnation! When my comrades sped away to begin to spy around the great altar for the signs of the crypt where the millions of pieces of eight, in emeralds, were hidden by the Bishop's secret order, I tried to soothe the dying moments of the Vicar.

The poor sacristan lay dead at our feet! In Spanish I kindly addressed the man of God. He turned his eyes on me! The eyes of death are keen of sight. At last he knew me! And he groaned: "The innocent hand, the last of your line, alone shall break the bond of this curse, a woman's it shall be, after sorrow and woe has left your proud halls vacant!"

I shuddered and fled from him in mortal fear,

The villains toiling, at last found and carried away the great hoard of gems.

How we deserted at Jamaica when Morgan sailed away for the sack of Panama; how we concealed in our bags bullets and powder, as well as the two great leather sacks of uncut emeralds, I have told, in another relation and confession.

It was two long years before I was left alone naked and accursed on a lonely strand. My vile companions were dead, and the awful secret of the robbing of God's altar was mine alone! Of the treasure for which these seven men perished, bootless—where it now lies hidder.—and my long wanderings with them, chased by Indians and Spaniards, the other relation tells.

I bury with this document one emerald, as each murderer took but one from the store as a token.

When I was rescued at last by chance, on a hostile shore, I told a wild tale of my capture by pirates and being thrown ashore among the Central American tribes.

Herrera, the beast, was dead. I made my way safely to Vera Cruz, and in sorrow and sadness my spouse saw me once more, but sadly broken with age. To her death she knew not of my seven years' history, and I confide to the Blessed Virgin alone this true story of my crime. I have been suffered to drag out my days here in peaceable neglect, but the hand of God has been heavy upon me.

I dare not approach the holy altar. The sacraments of the Church are denied to me, for I killed with the sword, at Maracaibo, and my seven devils, of whom I was possessed, made me aid in the most horrible death of the Vicar-General and sacristan. I, too, profaned the altar with my own hand, and to save my wretched life I lost my soul!

It was only to look upon the face of my wife again that I sinned. And as a good woman brought the curse innocently upon me and the line of Romeros, so shall an innocent woman take it away forever.

You that read, if God wills, will find the secret here hidden of the true relation of where this great treasure

now lies. And if God wills not, then so be it. Amen. And "*Dios perdoneme todas mis culpas!*"

Done at Los Olmos, on the feast of St. Jago, A.D. 1685.

FERNANDO AGUILAR DE ROMERO.

When the priest ceased the reading, he fixed his gleaming eyes upon the young doctor as he remarked, "Here the relation rests. There is naught in all this but the shell of another secret. What think you? I find nothing of value, save the story of a horrible outrage upon God's Holy Church and the jewel which Don José guards. It has been roughly polished!"

"It is a dark mystery," said Nixon, gravely, as he rose. "I must think over the whole matter." Then, with courteous thanks, he rose and went out into starlit gardens to escape the burning eyes of the baffled priest.

Did he have the clue? His heart beat like a trip-hammer.

For the four erased words seemed to suggest another discovery.

"Where are you going?" cried Lorimer as Doctor Jim bade the young Señorita "Good night."

"I'll wait up for you, Frank," heartily answered Nixon. "I want to think things over a little, and I beg you will bring Miss Inez over to-morrow for breakfast. I think we all should have a little council of war."

"Are you in sight of the emeralds yet?" eagerly whispered Lorimer.

"No! But I am lingering on the threshold of the past. Don't be too late! I am going down to York to-morrow and I want those prints on my return."

The half-mile was a short one, as the doctor swung along in the broken moonlight. He was only disturbed by the discovery of a little bit of gypsy lovemaking; for he unearthed a moonlight tryst of the two Spanish bats with some of the too susceptible lasses of the village.

"Young imps of Satan! Mischief still for idle hands," he murmured. But Nixon finally resolved on

his plan of action as he leaned out of the window and puffed long draughts of Lalakia on the rose vines to the discomfiture of the earwigs. "I will get out of the way to-morrow afternoon. The great town of Gotham shall purvey unto me all the literature of the Buccaneer clan. I'll set Abercromby at the Astor and Lenox Libraries too. A powerful microscope in my possession and I will then go over the prints 'secundem artem'. I flatter myself that if I cut up a series of them, one line only on a slip, and shuffle them up, having them translated by different experts who only see a part, I can then reassemble the strict literal redditions pinned to each part into a proper translation of the whole. For the priest may have craftily dissembled, and the high-flown phrases of the noble renegade are a little too much for me."

He immediately took counsel with Lorimer.

"Buster," said the latter, "I know these people. My mother and sister have watched their daily life. I will not 'chop logic' as to your right to withhold the hidden emphasized words. Naturally it is the grip of the whole situation. If we do not get there first I fear that Don José will remain the possessor of but one emerald. His local knowledge, his power of using the secret correspondence of the Church and messengers of his own, his ability to delay and copy the last chapter of the old story—all this puts us virtually at his mercy—if he knows!

"If the General knows, the priest will divide the knowledge at once. We can tell what Inez can do to aid. She does not know even these details as yet. She has not seen the document. If her father does not tell her all frankly, before your return, it is probable that the priest has sealed his lips. Mark you, it was Romero himself who pushed you out into the open, by sending you to meet and confer with Padre Vicente. And the churchman is sly enough to know that your own professional oath as well as mine seals our lips as regards outsiders."

"There is but one way," suggested Nixon. "Felipe is no hero, but if he could get quietly away to Cuba, and get the hidden additional deposit, then we would

be safe to let Inez and the boy know all; for he hates the priest with the stern resentment of original sin."

"I could stay here with my mother and sister and guard Inez and could easily follow the priest if he goes to York. He is too sly to write or telegraph important news from here. You might post Abercromby. He could 'pipe' the padre off a bit, if he goes away with the document. So you will be free to slip down with Felipe to Matanzas and find the buried secret of the leaden casket," was the reply of Lorimer.

The doctor was startled; it seemed such a bold plan.

"And my patient? What explanation could I give? How could I get Felipe quietly away and down there?" he faltered.

Frank Lorimer laughed. "It's as plain as mud! as we used to say. You can leave your written directions with the village physician, who can visit Don José twice a week. If there is anything wrong then, let him telegraph down to your 'big gun' in New York to come up and see the General. You can do this trip like a charm in three weeks. Wait a few days. Let the priest be deceived into good humor with your New York trip and your absence of special 'crowding in.' I will make Inez post Felipe to join you quietly. That young Ishmael can slip away, as is his wont, for a descent upon New York. Let him join you and go quietly on the Havana steamer. There are two sailing each week. Diabolus, Jr., Juan Valdes, will ramble off to look for Felipe, but not find him till you return. Felipe, in his lazy, careless way, loves his sister Inez a little. He loves money and pleasure even more. The two last will lure him to Cuba's sefioritas and monte."

"But if he should blab? Can I trust him?" said Nixon. "The priest's nephew might betray our purpose."

"My simple son of Galen," smiled Lorimer, "you don't tell him what you are up to with him till you are safe down there, do you see? It will be a lark for him to go. And he has been years and years up here. No one can possibly recognize him. The padre will be

still busied weaving his web around Romero here and poring over the papers with his priestly crew in New York. I'll spot him pretty close. In any case, you get there the first, and have the 'corpus delicti' a safety in your hands. After that we can laugh at fate, if there is any treasure to recover. For you can go aboard any man-of-war we have there or else deposit the papers, sealed, in our Consulate General, in your own name. Felipe, of course, must not know the contents. In this you must show all your nerve. When that deposit is opened it must be by Inez's own hand, which will break the seal, the charm and the curse at once."

"Lorimer, you are a genius," remarked Nixon. "I will telegraph to my Uncle Bradford, who is on the flagship down there. He can always get a week's leave. The plan is the only one. You are right."

"The thing is to move in the affair before the padre may make a discovery. Now, let us turn in. I'll do the photographic business to a charm, and on your next visit to New York you can make every secret arrangement for your voyage. I will have Felipe all primed for a trip. He will not know where he goes till you take him on the steamer. I will also hypnotize the lovely Inez to do my bidding." And Lorimer softly laughed as he said, "Good night."

Nixon's dreams that night were fevered and graphic. The moonlit reefs of Cuba, the breeze swaying the tropical jungle, the strange faces of the motley plantation crew, all these were mixed up with vignettes of the pale-faced old veteran, an emerald in his trembling fingers, and the stern faced priest crying: "Forbear! It is mine!"

Yet the simplicity and invincibility of Lorimer's plan pleased the doctor when he sped away to his morning visit. "It will settle the dream of years forever. If there is any shadowy crown of emeralds awaiting the old Don we will soon know it. It will be a good vacation trip. There will be no harm done. And, if the papers should be there, then I can guard them for the rightful heir. I will be master of the whole situation, and, supported by my friends here, can render justice to Inez and Felipe," cogitated the latter.

Next morning the Cuban priest was pacing under the splendid old trees of the park in earnest converse with Inez, as the two young men came up. "I'll have a few words with the Señorita," said Lorimer, "and then hie me back to photography. I will send my mother over with the victoria to bring you at twelve."

Doctor Nixon and Padre VICENTE exchanged a cordial morning greeting. The young man's *suaviter in modo* had lulled the priest, whose power was more potent over his inferiors than his equals.

Guerra sorrowfully said: "Don José, alas! disappointed, baffled! a sore blow to his childish hopes! We have gone over the whole document a dozen times. It cannot give us what is not there. Only an expert of the Church can give a final decision. Go in and comfort him, my son!"

Lorimer found time to whisper to his friend before he departed: "The girl knows absolutely nothing! She is in the dark as to all—and—Felipe, too! So we are safe—as yet."

"Then Padre VICENTE means to engross the future direction of the whole affair," answered Nixon and entered the house.

The old Don was sitting up in his bed with his emaciated fingers nervously threading a rosary as he turned his eyes fondly upon the young American. A glittering light twinkled in his eyes, as he querulously said: "And, *hijo mio*, you have heard all? What think you? What shall I do? What shall we do?"

Doctor Nixon delayed a few moments while he professionally busied himself with the old man's condition. The need of stimulants, of holding up the mirror of hope, of sustaining the fever of his life dream, was apparent. "What does the holy father advise?" said Doctor Jim, with cautious casuistry.

"Nothing beyond submitting the document itself to the ablest scholars available in New York,—and perhaps later in Havana. He is my last, my only hope. He will go down to the great city and busy himself with the study. Alas! I shall never see the lost emeralds!—And why should I?"

His gray hair falling over his temples trembled as

he bowed his head. "I will make a *novena* for the soul of the sinful man who brought this ghastly shadow upon the name of Romero! In fasting and prayer I will atone, for the sake of my innocent lamb, Inez. It is not for myself I would have wealth, but Inez, my child of sorrows, she should have been truly called Dolores! I must speak to you, to the Abogado, to the gracious lady at Edgecliff. *Valga me Dios!* I feel my lamp of life fluttering low in the socket."

Nixon easily divined that the old caballero was fearful of the future welfare of his child. He dared not break the fairy chain of the golden circle to soothe the veteran. Full well the doctor knew that Lorimer was busied, strangely busied, with dreams of lightening that future. He responded at hazard: "She is the last of the Romeros, the innocent woman hand. Fate owes her this one reward—and also the fulfillment of the strange prophecy!"

"Alas! the veiled secret of the leaden casket!" muttered Don José. "See, my son!" He handed to the doctor a single emerald stone of unusual size. It had been roughly ground *en cabochon*, evidently by rubbing it with other stones of the same class. Its irregular facets and undisturbed natural oval proved that no skilled lapidary had reduced it to its present form. When with a semi-superstitious awe Nixon bore it to the golden sunshine-flooded window, its sea-green depths and rich velvety brilliancy spoke of the beautiful spirit of light prisoned in its adamantine heart.

"It is the accursed spoil of the past," murmured the old man. "The price of a human soul! And there were hundreds of these gems—hundreds! I am told by Vicente that this single stone is of a very great value. If I could only find the hoard I would richly atone."

Nixon gently tried to calm the old soldier's "fantastic self-reproaches."

"General," he said gravely, "your doomed ancestor was driven by foul wrongs to shelter among these wild corsairs. He struck not willingly at his own kindred. Moreover, the treasure was never the lawful

property of the Church. And, note you too, he died a true and loyal man. He ended his days by his own fireside. In generations, this defection has been atoned, and you must not burden your declining years with the sorrows of the past. Should the secret yield to the old prophecy, then let your daughter be honestly the keeper of the emeralds. They are her inheritance, if ever found. Hers alone!"

"I will counsel, after fasting and prayer," murmured the General faintly as he leaned back, the jewel in his hand.

Doctor Nixon was not astonished at the padre's sensible coöperation when he led him apart and authoritatively forbade any diminution of the old man's strength. "I will guard him and remain with him," said the priest gravely. "For much remains to be done to pierce the mystery. But there is certainly a treasure, and I will find it," he added, with lambent gleaming eyes.

That afternoon, in the retirement of Lorimer's den, the two young men safely pored over the copies of the document which baffled the priest's plan of shutting all others out of the quest.

Nixon was provided with all the preliminaries of his inquiry as he set out for New York. "On my return I will announce the fact of my being called away for a few weeks," he said, dubiously, for, on the threshold, Miss Ethel Lorimer laid upon him her fairy commands for a short absence.

Rejoicing in being at least one step nearer the Muisca treasure than his secret, for Nixon dreamed all the way to New York of the eyes which would brighten at his coming.

CHAPTER V.

WAIT TILL WE HEAR FROM NIXON.

DURING the temporary absence of the doctor Mrs. Lorimer betook herself daily to Villa Romero to slake the curiosity of a typical daughter of Eve. If the Lady of Edgecliff flattered herself that the adamantine composure of Padre Viciente would yield to her bonhomie, she met with a signal defeat.

"Perhaps he detests heretics," murmured the fair widow. But the active, energetic priest went ever smoothly on his silent way, and soon gathered up the threads of the household into his sinewy brown hands.

There was no new life infused into the dreamy entoinage of the bewildered and sorrowing veteran, but the hand of a new master was there. The three days of Doctor Nixon's absence made even the placid Inez tremble for her own future. For the voice of the padre now dominated all, and the sick room of the old General was sacred to the "ugly blackbird," as the restive Felipe denominated Padre Guerra. Basilio, with superstitious awe, ministered to Padre Viciente's wants. The loud voice of admonition or the resonant sound of the holy office of the Church alone was heard in the wing of the old mansion where Don José was sheltered.

"He has stolen my father from me!" cried Inez throwing herself on the motherly breast of Mrs. Lorimer, and the Cuban girl's eyes flashed in resentment when, for the first time, Padre Guerra led her away by the hand from the side of the General. There were papers, maps and plans, littering the table. And when the offices of prayer or penance busied them not, the two men there closeted were poring over the old documents, so far a Gibraltar of invulnerability.

In the shaded walks of the glen, Inez poured out her passionate plaint to her rebellious brother. For Felipe wandered there with her now, big with the *secret of his impending voyage.*

"'Tis a cursed old raven!" moodily said the boy. "How long stays he here? I hate all his mummery. Priests! Priests! Ever hungry for money! Our father has long nourished the yellow snake. He means us no good!"

And the young Cuban's hands slid angrily into his vest, where he carried the *cuchillo*, whose silent stroke has ever spoken the Cuban's sudden vengeance.

"Patience, Felipe!" begged Inez. "Our friends are true. This dark man has much to tell our father of his old *companeros* of Cuba, of the fate of his friends. And, perhaps, he may help us to discover the treasure papa dreams of."

"Yes! As the wolf helps the lamb," energetically cried Felipe. "I am a boy, no more. When I come back with the *Americano* I will chase him out, myself. For can you not see that our father weakens daily?"

It was too true, for there was no cease day and night to the round of wordy lashing of the soul, and gloomy rebuke heaped by the *padre* upon the memory of Fernando Aguilar de Romero.

Frank Lorimer's spirited counsel caused Inez to openly claim a daughter's rights, and she then resolutely placed herself at her father's bedside.

"I am the last of the Romero's to bear the name as maid," she sobbed. "Tell me, my father, of your daily cares, for Felipe is but a wild boy at heart, and I would divide your sorrows. I claim that, even if I share not your confidence."

So at last the General gave to her gentle ears the record of the past, and with a prophetic misgiving told her all. In vain did Padre Vicente fume and frown, the spell of the gentle mother's eyes shining down from the wall, aided a daughter's fond entreaties.

"Think, *padre mio*," said Inez, "if I were to lose you, what is the world to me? Alone, friendless! An exile in a strange land."

"There is the convent always," murmured Don José, "and Padre Vicente will be near you to aid."

"Sooner will I toil as a servant!" cried Inez. "I know not why, but he is no friend at heart to us. I feel it! I know it. And, in this free land,—he can

make no claim on me. No, my father! Tell me all. Let your love guide me. Let my mother's memory bless me. For I fear this cold man who is a stranger to me. If you have known him in the past, his claims are on you alone. I fear him! Oh, I fear him!"

The old Don pressed his daughter fondly to his breast. "Ah, my Inez!" he said, glancing timorously at the door, for the priest found many occasions for furtive entry. "Then I shall tell our gracious friend Señora Lorimer, of the little store I have saved for you alone. Felipe must never know. He is wasteful and lazy. Poor lad! And yet I have deprived him wrongfully of his birthright. But for my madness he would be the lord of Hacienda Jabacoa and perhaps high in rank and station. Ashes of Life! My dead youth rises up to accuse, to reproach me!"

The old man's head was bowed, and his eyes were tear-laden as he whispered: "Listen! *Alma mia!* Padre Viciente goes to New York soon. He will try and read the secret of the old chronicle. I will tell you when to bring Señora Lorimer to me. She is kind and noble at heart. She loves you. To her I will tell all before you, and the young Abogado will be a brother to you."

The old veteran sighed, but never saw the crimson flood which tinged the pale face of the Cuban beauty. For Inez head was bowed and the trembling hand of love rested on her dark tresses.

The girl started up in a sudden fear as the harsh voice of the priest broke the silence. "It is the hour of prayer," he said, and so the black robe threw its shadow again between the loving girl and her sire.

"*Vayase V. con Dios, hija mia,*" murmured Don José. "If the treasure should be found, then—then I could die in peace!"

The stern priest pointed to the door. And the girl went silently out of the room.

The strange preoccupation of Dr. James Nixon astonished his intimates, as he sped around in Gotham with an unprofessional hurry. "What's up?" they asked.

"I'm going away on a little hunt," he jocularly

remarked, "and have much to do to prevent a shock to the vitality of my innumerable patients."

In the hurry of the three days William Abercromby, M.D., was a tower of strength. He had dug up the last quaint detail of the romance of the Caribbean in the great libraries. Sundry musty folios and octavos were assembled under lock and key in a "fair cedar chest" in the placid office of the two embryo medicos.

"I believe the healthful air of our lair would set even a mummy at dancing Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" confidently admitted Abercromby. "If I take a newspaper its death-column shrinks! Even the janitor tells me he never hears of any sick people around here."

To this Nixon asked jeeringly, "Can I have been changed at my birth? Was I really designed for a stock broker, or an auctioneer, or perhaps a leading boniface? I evidently have no place with the dead and dying. I can only heal myself."

"Speaking of being healed, my festive filibuster," laughed William, "*Heel* yourself! You go into a land of dagos. I will back this hammerless 38 calibre revolver against any *navaja* that ever flashed in an assassin's hand. It is like Frank Lorimer's Mambriño mare. All you have to do is to hold her straight and let her go."

Doctor Jim replied. "Put it up! By this I do not mean you are to pawn it, but get it out of sight."

"Not a bit of it," resolutely said Abercromby. "Many a good man has made a premature and indifferently developed angel for a sudden want of this very kind of 'selected hardware.' You do not know what may happen. I have a nice little combination of a money belt and forty cartridges, with this 'nicked chamber of horrors.' You will promise me that you will carry this on the trip, and till I give you leave to unarm. Seriously, Jim! You will run into some snag or another in this current of blind adventure. You will be led very far away from where you started, my boy. You are now only at the fork of the road!"

The departing comrade's brow grew gloomy and his face hardened. "Perhaps," said Nixon. A strange chill came over him. They were alone in the office, and

the moonlight fell upon the merry crowds passing in the lighted streets.

But, far away, at Villa Romero, Inez had led Felipe out into the fragrant groves and wandered up the glen away from the house. She was giving her last sisterly counsel to her light-minded brother.

"You will have now a chance to show yourself a man, *mi hermano*. To help me—to help yourself. To-morrow the American doctor comes here and he will take you away! You shall have money, all you need. You shall find I will guard our father, and watch the plotting priest. For there is something he knows—something he would have—something he would rob us of—or grasp for his own dark ends. Swear to me that you will be a man, for our mother's sake. And never divulge your going away to Juan. Not a word of where you go—of what you do. For he would tell his uncle. Oh, *Madre de Dios!* How I fear that man!"

"I will obey you," said Felipe, startled out of his usual lazy calm. He was really brave and loyal at heart, though he knew it not. There had never been a single coward in the long line of Romeros.

"I trust to your honor, Felipe," said the beautiful girl, as she stood in the broken moonlight. Her graceful figure swayed with emotion, her dark eyes gleaming in a thrill of tender love as she faltered: "You are young and heedless. The head might go wrong, but the heart never. Swear to me now on our mother's crucifix that you will never tell any one of your quest until I bid you!"

Then the young caballero kissed the cross and muttered in a broken voice: "I swear!"

They started as Inez solemnly said: "Juan is the padre's assistant, I fear."

"What is that?" exclaimed Felipe, springing quickly to the shrubbery. "I thought that I saw some one moving."

Their nerves were unstrung with the agitation of their first parting.

"Perhaps only a dog! It was nothing," said Inez, as the brother and sister wandered back, hand in hand, to the lonely house.

Nixon and Abercromby sat late that night in distant New York, in a last conclave over the secret expedition. "Don't fail to call on me in any way, Nixon," said his friend. "Money—telegraphs—anything! Watch every one around you, and for God's sake look out for that imprudent young Cuban. He is about as manageable as a young tiger on a silk string. One jump and you lose him forever. Get to that secret deposit as soon as you can. If you linger, the padre will surely be there before you. Mind your eye and God bless you! If you unearth any emeralds of the kind and size you described and identified, Tiffany's buyer says they are worth ten thousand dollars apiece! For such a hoard men will plot, will betray, will even murder. I trust you in all but your own honest nature. For foul play only is what I fear! Don't be led into any trap—into any false position."

"What do you fear?" said Nixon. "The Spanish boy will be true to himself, will he not?"

"Perhaps," answered his chum. "I will warrant, though, that you will run against the unexpected before you are done. The great thing is to prevent any special hubbub about your departure, so as to keep Don José in quietude. If he should note Felipe's absence and make a racket, then your yellow enemy might be alarmed. But, Nixon, if you make a natural exit, the padre will be overjoyed to have the field to himself. He will put the old relic through a *novena*, and perhaps make him swear to yield up the spoil if it is ever recovered."

"Don José will never do that," firmly replied Nixon, "He has a melancholy faith that the prediction will accomplish itself in some way. Though I really think he has little provision made for Inez's future, and the shadowy 'châteaux en Espagne' of his confiscated estates, are about as real, about as near to the helpless girl, as these green-jack-o'-lantern emeralds. She is almost helpless in the priest's hands. He wants to lock her up in a Cuban convent.

"If this is so then mind your eye, Nixon," gravely replied Abercromby. "From what you tell me of the priest's resolute character and his haughty gall, he will

go in for the futurity stakes—as a winning dark horse. And, how do you know but what the priestly chronicles have described in detail, all these secrets of the past? It's but a run over to Cartegena and Maracaibo, and the Bishop of Merida is sure to have all the old records. You may be assured that Inez's future is in your hands—or the padre's!"

"I know my responsibility," soberly replied Nixon, "and I'll have what's hidden under those two mystic stories or I'll never come back!"

"Depend on me," gaily cried Abercromby the next morning as Nixon boarded the upriver train. "On getting your telegram I will put all aboard the *Santiago de Cuba*, and take two first-class tickets for Henry Morgan and Antonio Herrera. Let the lad come right down here by train. I will meet him at the South Ferry Hotel. You can then take the West Shore road and come to the steamer by Jersey City. There's little chance of anyone following you both in that way. Now I'll bet you a champagne breakfast if you ask the old Don to see the manuscript or the emerald, that you will find the padre has spirited them both away—in your absence."

"Done!" laughed Nixon; yet he started in surprise as he closed an examination of his patient that afternoon.

"I had hardly time to examine the document, Don José," remarked Nixon carelessly, "and as I find you so well, I can easily make a little trip which I had in view. I would also like to see your beautiful gem."

"When you return, my son," replied the courteous old rebel. "For my good priest Padre Vicente has already submitted them to the experts of the church in New York. It may take a season of study to decipher any hidden secrets of the paper. A special messenger came here and conferred with us. One sent by those who know all the history of our beautiful island. And we have hopes—yes, hopes. If Inez were only made sure of her future, then," smiled the old man patiently, "the sooner I see my lost wife again the happier for me." And his wandering eyes sought the gentle face of the dead smiling down from the wall.

"I do not like to leave you," doubtfully said Nixon.
"But you are in such good condition that I will go gladly on one condition."

"Name it, my son," the general eagerly assented.

"That if you are ill you will permit your daughter to telegraph for my associate in New York, Dr. Abercromby. He will bring with him an expert who would be only too happy to meet and know you. Thus I can leave you happily."

"I promise," the graceful old Cuban answered.

And Nixon most joyously cried: "I am free, then, to go to-night!"

The padre entering, was in his blandest armor of perfect self-control as he watched the leave-taking of the circle of young people.

The road wagon which was to convey Doctor Nixon to the station presented a sportsmanlike appearance with a gun case, fishing rod, and sundry objects of pleasure travel. There was some little soberness in Nixon's good-by to Miss Ethel Lorimer. "Watch over Miss Inez while I am gone," he said. "Her father needs brighter company than the gloomy priest. Is he not fond of you?"

Miss Lorimer pouted: "The General is my especial cavalier!"

"Then Inez to go in with you and brighten up his loneliness. It would cheer him. And if you see any strangers, anything unusual, around Villa Romero, do not fail to tell your brother. Promise me this, for Inez's sake—if not for my own!"

The girl's face kindled with a happy light, as she said: "I promise for all our sakes! You must win great renown in the strange case. Tell me, do you think there is really a concealed fortune?"

"I do not know," doubtfully remarked the doctor.
"But there is some scheming around the General which smacks too much of this world to be spiritual. Do you know if he has any other property?"

"I can only tell you this," thoughtfully replied the bright girl; "Mr. Sheaver, the president of the village bank, told me that he had the custom of

sending the General's coupons always down to New York for him to be cashed quarterly."

"Then he must have some securities," mused Nixon, "not in Munoz's hands. I suppose the padre will perhaps go in for those."

As Nixon drove away he imparted to Lorimer his sister's chatter. "We may be on a false scent, Frank," he said gravely. "It seems that General Romero has some affairs outside of the banker Munoz's hands. Has he accumulated a special deposit for Inez? It may be more than we know. Now, who knows but that Padre Guerra has fabricated these old papers to excite Romero! There is one thing certain—he has come to stay. He may be only scheming for the old man's savings.

"I tell you your mission at home is as important as mine," continued Nixon. "Your duty is even more complicated. You must probe this while I am away. I am uneasy about Felipe. Is he to be depended on?"

"All right!" cheerfully said Lorimer. "Juan is away amusing himself at pond fishing, and he dare not openly disobey his iron-willed uncle. I posted Inez to have old Basilio watch the boy. Felipe, roaming around the village as usual, will take the evening train alone. I will telegraph to Abercromby the very moment I see him aboard. I will also see young Arthur Sheaver, the cashier of the bank. He is an academy chum, and will tell me anything he may know about the General's securities. So on your return I will have all the points."

"Good!" answered Nixon. "I feel that this is a serious matter. I'm going to run up the river as far as Rhinebeck. I'll cross there and get down unobserved to Jersey City. But we must hurry. It's near train time. Hello! That's strange," added the doctor, as he watched a farmer's light wagon trundling on after them.

"What?" asked Frank, in a half doze of reverie.

"That fellow drives pretty good stock. We have not left him a length for the last mile."

"Oh, those fellows all breed smart horses for the

market!" laughed Lorimer, as he touched up the Mambrino mare.

At the station the grip of the "Skull and Bones" told all that the two friends would express.

As the engine whistled, Lorimer did not see, as he pushed his way to the telegraph office, a lad squirm out of the wagon rattling up and catch the very last car of the up-river train.

"I flatter myself that was a particularly neat job," remarked the young lawyer as he retired from the telegraph office. "I will defy anyone to find out whither Nixon is bound!"

And yet a youth buried in a corner of the long car never once lifted his glittering black eyes from the stalwart form of the doctor.

"He must not see me," mused Juan Valdes, as he muffled his neck and face with a scarf of convenient thickness.

That night at twelve the tenant of Room 42, Taylor's Hotel, was heartily rejoiced as a telegram was brought to his door. For it told "Mr. Henry Morgan" that his chum had caged up the festive young panther, "Antonio Herrera," at that famous "Fisher's Boarding House," the South Ferry Hotel.

"Stole away and the coast clear," thankfully muttered Doctor Nixon as he "turned in" for the night. But while he slept a brown-skinned, bright-eyed Spanish lad chatted with the "all-night" porter, who became very communicative under the influence of sundry cigars and frequent liquid refreshment.

"That's his baggage there, yer see, and he's in the call list for six o'clock," the porter volunteered. At six promptly the hovering Spanish lad across the street was watching with gleaming eyes the two entrances to Taylor's hostelry. Then as "Mr. Henry Morgan" came out and walked briskly down West street to where the *Santiago de Cuba* was pouring out its carbon clouds, Juan stealthily followed, chuckling to himself: "Ah! Carajo! now I've got him."

Thirty minutes after, the *Santiago de Cuba* glided out into the dancing waters of the North River, and Juan Valdes, stowed away in the chief steward's

room, his furtive eyes gleaming, laughed in triumph. "Felipe and the Americano, bound for Havana. I shall earn the padre's *regalo!*"

The gray mist of Sandy Hook closed around the swift steamer, which was well on her way to Cuba before the sunset gilded the Jersey coast.

Two hours after, Frank Lorimer walked the portico of his old home in a rage of baffled apprehension "The devil is to pay! For there is no way I can warn Nixon save by telegraphing to his uncle on board the *Kearsarge*. It may be a week, two weeks, before he gets it. The flagship may be away cruising. I must go down on the morning train and meet Abercromby. For it seems, after all, the fight is not to be here. It is down there!"

Lorimer read again the yellow slip as he consumed a last cigar.

"Followed our man to the Spanish Consulate General. He stayed there two hours. Fear something wrong. Party left all right."

"What the devil was the priest doing at the Spanish Consulate General's?" muttered Frank Lorimer in a vague alarm. And where is Juan anyway? that bothers me too. I must see Abercromby. Has the padre discovered the hidden clue in the parchment? If so, then all is lost. He could cable to Cuba and be first on the ground with his imps."

The lawyer guessed correctly! The Comandante at Matanzas had already received a cipher dispatch, which caused him to be on the alert for "filibuster" spies. He was a fiery Spaniard who burned to repeat the quick butchery of the Virginius affair.

Unsuspecting of the cable, Doctor James Nixon was busied every moment as the *Santiago de Cuba* sped over the Gulf Stream, on past Bermuda. By stern repression he had finally conquered Felipe's aimless wanderings over the boat. "You may be known to some one," the young American insisted. "These vessels are all crowded with adventurers, spies, secret customs agents, and we may be dogged and followed. Be a man for your own sake, Felipe, and for your sister's."

So in the brief voyage Nixon vigorously enforced his prudent directions to the end that Felipe consumed unnumbered packets of papelitos and diverted himself with a prodigious amount of sleep. Hour after hour, the doctor pored over the singularly exhaustive collection of Caribbean literature scraped together by Abercromby, who did nothing by halves. Even in "Tom Cringle's Log," "The History of Lafitte," "Henry Gringo's novels" and quaint old Spanish and French tomes, there was congenial pabulum in the "*olla porida*" raked up by his chum.

"It is a strange quest," mused Nixon, "but I will probe the old story and at least baffle the sneaking padre for the time being."

But his mind was filled with many dark forebodings as he closed his last volume when the *Santiago de Cuba* sighted Morro Castle and the overhanging fortress on the hill.

It was a strange quest, this dangerous secret visit of Felipe!

And disappointments began at the very landing. There was no American war vessel in the harbor! The first chattering boatman told the doctor that the *Kearsarge* had left the day before for a week's cruise.

An angry wrangle with the customs officers over their baggage delayed their arrival at the railway station. Even as they drove up the train they wanted to board pulled out without them, speeding by them on its course for Matanzas.

"No train till to-morrow morning," stormed Nixon, who feared a night in Havana. Felipe might go astray.

And the boy, with a scared face, turned and said: "*Carajo!* if he were not in New York, I would swear that I saw Juan's face at a car window."

To which the doctor gruffly said: "Impossible," as they sought an hotel.

BOOK II.
IN THE GRASP OF THE SPANIARD.

CHAPTER VI.

“PASADO POR LAS ARMAS.”

“The devil fights against me!” snarled Nixon at the obscure side street hotel which the doctor chose as a hiding place for the night. “If we had not missed the train by these insolent officials’ twaddling, I would have already had the boy safe in the little village of Jibacoa.”

The young American had taken two veranda rooms on the second story, and through the long summer afternoon kept watch over his restless charge.

“No one knows me. I was only a child when I left Cuba,” morosely muttered Felipe with remarks such as: *Yo no soy peon!* and other indications of social mutiny.

“See here, Romero,” sharply returned the doctor. “You have given me your word of honor. Now, if you make any outbreak here I’ll abandon you without money and go back and tell your sister you are no caballero. Remember where we are. Your father has only you to depend on in the world. This is the one chance of your life.”

“Tell me what I came here to do, then,” insolently cried Felipe. “I am no baby!”

“Not till the hour when we reach your birthplace,” resolutely said Nixon, as the angry youth betook himself to fresh cigars and some claret cup, and mooned away the dull hours, gazing down from the palm shaded veranda at the throng pouring by on the shell-paved street. The doctor, busied with maps and plans, tied

the boy to his side for a time by questions as to the topography of the hacienda, its features and the village of Jibacoa. Felipe sullenly gave up what scanty information he had.

"Thank God, the wild youngster has no money," mused Nixon eyeing him askance; for flashing-eyed señoras in passing volantes cast side-long glances at the oval faced young patrician exile—the rattle of dice, click of billiard balls, and gay shouts of the gamblers rose up from below.

Officers dashed by on splendid steeds, the cry of the *fruitero* and lemonade seller arose, and the lad grew craftily silent as the evening fell. Nixon was deceived by his apparent quiet, and alas! he knew not that Inez Romero had pressed all her slender hoard of golden savings upon her heedless brother. In New York Abercromby had sternly watched the Cuban, so that the ready gold was now itching the boy's palm, as he thought of *monté*, *faro*, of the burning words whispered in his own tongue by beauties swaying in the *fandango* to the melodious monotony of the guitars.

"I must get him quietly out of Havana, and then, by Heaven! I'll take the first schooner from Matanzas to Key West, when our search is over. If he should break away from here it would expose all, and so win me the old General's undying hatred"; cogitated the American.

So Nixon, ordering a dinner in their rooms, kept the boy in sight as he worked, and rejoiced in the penniless condition of the young sybarite. "He won't stray away far without cash. Money the basis of all fun, the root of all evil. 'No money, no honey!'" chuckled the Doctor.

But James Nixon did not notice the triumphant gleam of the lad's eyes when he lounged off to bed.

"I can depend on you, Felipe?" he said heartily, as the boy pleasantly waved his cigar and went to his room humming an old Spanish love song. A true son of Cuba.

The American sat till late pondering over the morrow. "We have the whole afternoon to reconnoitre the hacienda and the old church. I can at once make

up my mind what work is to be done to dig under or pry away the sills of the door. '*La puerta mayor!*' The construction may tell me something, and I fancy it was under the door of the hacienda itself, the old repentant buccaneer volunteer hid the other half of the story. My God! If I only knew how to act! There must be no mistake! No throw away of time! It is madness to think that the boy Valdes is on our track. Impossible!"

With great circumspection Nixon strolled out to the cable office and sent a dispatch to Abercromby. For prudence sake he gave no address or signature. Only the following words told the story:

"Havana. Here all right; delayed one day; get there to-morrow."

Then he lay down to his troubled sleep, slipping the hammerless revolver under the pillow of his bed.

The young man was content, for he had peeped into Felipe's room and the lad was already in his bed. He took a last look at the sparkling heavens, with the great stars swimming on high, trembling globes of light in the thin-drawn blue. The magnolia incense breathed in damp richness from the groves, where great palms over-topped the orange trees, and the sound of laughter, the rich, happy laughter of love, reached him, broken with the tinkling thrill of humming guitars.

"A land of *siestas*, of *manana*, of *dolce far niente*," he sighed softly, as he lay down to dream of the buccaneers, whose devious track he was still wandering; fierce Lolonois, the inhuman Morgan and his hellish crew, and the stern face of Padre VICENTE Guerra.

He awoke in the sulky gray of the early dawn.

A loud fracas in the adjoining room called him quickly to Felipe's aid. Pistol in hand he ran in, to find several hotel servants trying to control the youth, flushed with wine and maddened by debauch. The truth flashed over him. Breaking his word, the boy had stolen out and made a night of it!

It was with a sad heart that the young doctor battled until near train time to bring the foolish prodigal up to traveling condition. And in a corner of the seat, his eyes downcast, and coiled up in guarded moroseness, Felipe Romero cowered until the Matanzas train swept

around the beautiful, varied shore into a little cove in the early afternoon. Then he stubbornly said: "This is Jibacoa."

There were only a few natives, half naked and dull-eyed, hanging around the little station near the coral reefs of the encircling bay. Out on the sapphire sea a few white sails gleamed as James Nixon strode out into the furnace glare of the sun. An ox-cart near, with a lazy peon, afforded them means of transport for their luggage to the little hamlet clustered on the cove, where a few whitewashed adobe houses looked out upon the beautiful *cayos*, whose green island forms were snug retreats for Carib fishers, wreckers, cigar smugglers and illicit traders. A few canoes and piroguas were anchored in the little port.

Nixon had reserved his whole moral force for one last appeal to the repentant Felipe. For the "flesh-pots" were now only a memory, and the boy's aching head and emptied pockets left him at last powerless in Doctor Jim's hands. He hung his head sheepishly as his mentor said sharply: "At least you can tell me where Hacienda Romero is now!"

"Half a league up that road," the boy replied humbly, pointing to a wide gap in the dense, tropical sea-line forest of varied fruit-bearing trees.

Nixon's eyes rested on a rider urging a pony away at full gallop in the glaring sun; then he noticed a few frowzy-looking soldiers lounging about the little railroad and telegraph station. The impudent, barefooted rascals were glowering at the Yankee "gringo." Their linen raiment was half ragged, but a belt with revolver and saber bayonet, two heavy cartridge pouches and the gleaming brown rifles showed them effective for butchery, as they leered at the doctor with the fierce, cowardly brutality of their kind, their fingers itching to try the oiled trigger on the American.

"Are there always soldiers about here?" questioned Nixon, vaguely uneasy.

"Yes," said Felipe. "The Guardia Civile, and they are a rough lot. Regular throat-cutters!"

"Do you know if there is any kind of a hotel at Jibacoa village?"

"I'll go up and see," answered Felipe. In a few moments he returned. "An old Frenchman has a little tavern there," he said.

"Let us get in there under cover at once," cried Nixon. As he followed the ox team on foot, he turned his head and noted the soldiers in gathered clusters eyeing them curiously.

"I have got to be somebody in particular down here," mused the American, who was careful to have no compromising baggage. "Henry Morgan, a wandering Yankee traveler, a magazine writer, artist and photographer. Yes, that will do! They cannot object to my presence. As for Felipe, his face explains his character—young Spaniard of large leisure and no special aim in life, Señor Antonio Herrera. But how shall I ever get any common sense into the lad's head."

Two hours later there was a returning *entente cordiale* between the American and the exile. A dip in the cove, a fair meal, a couple of ponies brought up, and with a bundle of cigars and notebook, James Nixon was ready for a first reconnoitry trip. The old French boniface—a sailor cook cast ashore—offered boats, fishing and several amusements to delay his patrons. A few jack tars now and then made the lonely inn their haunt, and smuggling seemed to be the veiled occupation of the alert, cunning beach-combers of the shore. For Key West was conveniently near, and the Cuban cigars trebled their value in a twenty hours' run.

The doctor took the lad out on a jutting crag by the soft lapping waves of the blue sea. "Let us begin again, Felipe," he said soberly and kindly. "You are young and very thoughtless. Help me out in this journey and I will take you back to Havana and give you a charming cruise on an American man-of-war. I can make it pleasant for you in New York too. Only be silent, wise and watchful here. Will you be ruled by me for a little time?"

"Yes!" said the boy, a gleam of his better nature lighting up his face. "I was wrong. But the young officers asked me out for a lark! And it was Cuba—

my own country. But tell me now, what are we here for?" He was eager; the spirit of his race shone in his eyes.

"When we are at Hacienda Romero, I will tell you on my word of honor. Your hand, *compañero*! Off we go!"

"You are to let me know who I am or where we came from!"

"We are only travelers and going to Matanzas, then back to Havana." With this Nixon mentioned the names and occupations he had devised for them, as they ambled along at the lazy, shagging gait of the Cuban pony.

They made a wide detour which left the railroad station at some distance. Then they rode into the avenue where cocoa and palm, pineapple and orange tree were tangled with climbing vines of tropical profusion. The mango groves swept down to the very sea, the bananas in great green clusters high above them.

The air was still, and the sunlight poured in a torrent through the broken shade, where the discordant screams of parrots and the chatter of monkeys announced their coming. Through bits of rich prairie savannah they caught glimpses of rolling wooded hills, rising back to the serrated blue mountains where for ten long years the Cuban rebels held the interior of the island against an army double the hosts which Washington ever saw embattled in fight. At the end of his journey, his heart beating in oppressed loneliness, Nixon suddenly remembered that he was destitute of all mechanical appliances for the work before him.

"It is, after all, a simple thing," mused the young American. "A lonely old man ridden by his nightmare memories would not make confidants of servants. The papers may be such that, if found singly, they would benefit no one. A little aid from lever or shovel, a pick or any old gardener's tools may help me. Even an axe and spade may release the deposit."

An hour after they had entered the beach line tropic forest, Felipe led his companion out over a rolling ride down into a beautiful glen where a crystal stream wan-

dered. The ponies eagerly drank of the sparkling waters, as the Cuban said quietly: "We will be there in a few minutes. Shall we go right to the hacienda?"

"Let us ride up and take a look," answered Nixon.

Then from the higher knoll the boy pointed down to a mass of irregular buildings, headed by a square-towered chapel, indicating his birthplace, his own forfeited heritage.

"There is the house!" he said simply. "The rancho is ten leagues square, and in old times was the first place on the north coast."

The wearied horses dropped their necks gladly as the travelers drew up in a clump of trees from which the whole front of the hacienda could be seen. A great irregular white mansion, in a lonely park overgrown with tropic growth, lay below them, the tiled roofs gleaming red in the afternoon sun. A stone wall surrounded the building, which was of several stories with a clustered mass of single story adjuncts, suited to the former state of a "great family." A hundred paces from the house the chapel showed its square bell tower with a pyramidal tiled roof above the rank trees of the abandoned gardens. Beyond were a few straggling adobe huts, a clump of thatched sheds and a series of abandoned slave baracoons.

"Shall I go down to the house?" demanded Felipe.

"No, my boy, let us ride over to the church. I see that the great door is open. And anyone is free to enter the house of God. Remember, now, no one knows who we really are."

As they rode up to the lonely chapel the American saw two or three dark forms fitting around the old servants' quarters. A few hungry-looking pigs roamed vaguely around and soon a half dozen energetic dogs vociferously raised an alarm.

"Stay here with the horses a moment, Felipe," said Nixon, and he sprang off, walking briskly over to the deserted church. There was no sign of life as he stood under the great arched door of the main façade. A single round window gave light to the eastern front, a low square tower at one corner was flanked by the tall belfry at the other. A great crucifix fifty feet

in height was planted on a stone pedestal of four tiers before the entrance, and a fantastically carved wooden image hung weather beaten upon the moldering beams of the cross. Stone images of the apostles in niches with faded gilt aureoles were tottering upon the walls, rent and split by the earthquake.

A hundred feet in depth and fifty in breadth, the interior of the chapel was only a confused mass of wreckage; ruined side altars and shrines, the religious furniture and time-stained pictures and images, all attesting the shattering force of the dreaded *tremblor*.

The fierce light of the afternoon streamed in through the broken side windows as Nixon hastened to pick his way around the high altar.

Upon slabs and wall tablets lying crushed under his foot, the American could still read the reported virtues of the Romeros of the past. The foundation slabs of the high altar, tilted and yawning in disorder, showed the spot from whence Padre Viciente had unearthed the leaden casket.

The American woke as if from a dream. "Nothing here," he murmured, and, swiftly retracing his steps, he passed over the holy water fonts lying prone in his path and stood under the arched doorway. "This is no '*la puerta mayor*,'" he said in unconscious self-address. "Nothing else in sight but the two sacristy doors. Here would be no hiding-place."

So he strode swiftly out. At a few paces distant a strong, substantial adobe house, square and roomy, was evidently the padre's domicile, for it alone bore signs of habitation, save the faint blue smoke curling up from the scattered village of the peons.

Nixon turned to rejoin his waiting companion. "It must be under the hacienda entrance," the explorer decided.

As he thought this, the door of the priest's house opened slowly, and a woman standing in the opening cried out suspiciously: "*Quen vive?*"

Nixon quickly turned the corner of the church, and, striding back to Felipe, said: "Go down, speak to that woman and tell her we are passing travelers. See if you cannot get her to prepare a meal. For we must rest

and bait the horses. Be in a hurry, for I wish to get a look at the hacienda itself before the sun goes down."

Nixon turned his delighted eyes upon the superb beauty of the splendid landscape. "The old Conquista knew a thing or two," he murmured. "And that beautiful stream furnished water for their flocks and herds."

From the church he had seen the rear view of the hacienda, with its feudal adjuncts of corrals, pasco, great tiers of rooms for the servants and other retainers, and also the vast offices suited for all the wants of the lord of a single tract ten leagues square—now an abandoned paradise!

"And this is the work of mad Cuban rebellion and heartless Spanish brutality. Cuba lies bound, impoverished, helpless and bleeding under the misrule of the weakest royal line in Europe. For the court of Madrid has thrown away the whole New World in four centuries."

Felipe came bounding back with a smiling face and cried: "The woman is civil enough. She will do what we wish. Let us come down now with the horses. It is a good chance. All the guardians are away at a big *fiesta* at Matanzas, and she says we can take a look at the old hacienda besides."

As the doctor sprang on his horse he saw four mounted men spur out of the wood at some distance, their arms flashing in the sun. They rode up behind the hacienda, and a boy standing on a knoll seemed to be beckoning to their leader, a single horseman, who galloped out to him.

"Again these prowling soldiers," he exclaimed. "They seem to turn up like Jack-in-the-box every time."

As he rode up to the padre's door, some sudden presentiment of danger flashed on Nixon's mind, for he mechanically said: "Felipe! Talk to me in English only. I don't want anyone here to know that I speak Spanish. If the woman asks what I am, tell her that I am the Yankee artist and photographer."

The young fellow nodded.

"Does she know you, this woman?"

"No, I think not, and yet it seems to me that I remember her faintly." The boy's answer was careless and indifferent.

"Ask her if we can go over and see the hacienda while she prepares our meal," earnestly whispered Nixon. "Once over there I will tell you for what we came here."

The boy's eyes sparkled with sudden excitement as he cheerfully cried: "All right."

Nixon was conscious that the woman was eyeing him keenly as she stood in the rear door and lazily called to a "mozo," who slouched up and then led the horses away after carefully depositing the saddles, bridles and blankets on the tiled floor of the rear veranda.

The woman listlessly said to Felipe: "You will find the whole inner line of the hacienda open. The men all sleep there. Only the front doors are barred. Go in at any of the back entrances. There's nothing to see. Empty rooms! *Los soldados* have carried off all the little things."

"That's just what I want. Be quick, Felipe. Let us take a turn around the priest's house and then quietly get over the park into the hacienda."

The housekeeper had opened the doors of the padre's bungalow with the mechanical hospitality of the Latin American races. A sullen pride rather than good will was manifested in her indolent motions.

"Quite a well-kept household!" remarked Nixon as they wandered along through the spacious rooms of the substantial masonry one-story house. Its heavy mahogany beams, its four foot walls, double shuttered windows and cool brick floor, spoke of the practical sense of the vanished builder. The double roof of great semi-cylindrical red tiles was proof against both heat and tropical storms. The splendid old-time darkened furniture in rich heart mahogany was evidently part of the hacienda property saved from Paul to fall into the oily clutch of Peter. The rooms were furnished with iron and brass beds of tropical lightness, where great drooping lace curtains gave an interior vantage ground wherein to fight the mosquitoes.

It was evident that the padre was not averse to

hospitality and good cheer, as the huge dining table proved; for a delegation of the Table Round could be placed about it in stately ease. A carven sideboard showed the quaint pottery of the tropics with silver flagons and table furniture of ancient design.

Cool, spacious, and well furnished, the padre's home was on a scale which enabled him to set forth good cheer and give the ample room needed in the sultry land to all the passing officials. The great ollas hanging in their corded network, the store of tropic fruits at hand, and the evident comfortable provision showed that there was a well ordered system in the menage.

"I will warrant, with turtle, fish and oysters, the spoil of field and forest, the remains of flocks and herds and the offerings of the faithful, that Padre Guerra lives like a fighting cock here in the shadows of the past;" thought the American.

It was literally true. For several specimens of the very finest black Spanish cocks were tethered by leather strings to the table legs in the various rooms, so as to judiciously prevent a battle royal.

A furtive glance at the woman who watched them with an ugly glint in her luminous dark eyes and Nixon leisurely moved out of the door.

She stood, her gleaming brown arms poised on her hips, and leaned in unconscious grace against the masonry of the front entrance. Her dark hair streamed down over the dazzling whiteness of her light muslin gown; golden earrings of quaint design, with a beaded, cross bearing necklace of West Indian gold, lit up her simple dress. The tropical richness of her splendid form showed all the ripeness of life at twenty-four, as an easy, self-conscious, half-insolent smile played on her lips now parted to show the pearly teeth which a belle might envy.

"Rather a prepossessing Dorcas," mused Nixon, "and yet there is a suggestion of infinite deviltry in her cat-like stride and easy grace. I will not bother the coffee-colored queen very long, for if I have aught to do here it can be achieved to-night or in another visit. Yet how shall I have access again when the guardians return from their fandango and *monte* at Matanzas? Some of the older people might recognize Felipe."

"How did she recognize you?" asked Nixon, curiously, as they strolled back to the house.

"I suppose by the family face," laughed Felipe, "for she said flatly: 'You can do what you wish to here. I know that you are Felipe Romero.' I could not deny it. She was raised on the place; I may have played with her as a child. She is not so bad looking," added the boy, who was now restored to his nerve tone after the little flurry of dissipation.

"Let us hasten to the work, then," eagerly answered Nixon, "lest some of these Matanzas revelers return."

So they moved along slowly to the heap of tools by the cistern. Selecting several implements suited to his work, Felipe bore them into the great hall leading to the front door. To the doctor's delight there was no trouble in closing the rear shutters so as to prevent the light shining out into the darkness, to give any warning of their presence.

"The front door is tight enough; there will be no trouble there," thought the American as he knelt down in the stillness of the early evening to examine the joints of the middle slab, under which he hoped to find the object of his search.

With his heavy knife he tried the old mortar. "If it is anything like Roman cement, I might work all night in vain, and have to split the stone with powder, or drill it. That would be out of the question, and this lucky chance might be lost forever."

To his irrepressible joy, the old mortar was soft and rotten, evidently the work of the sea breeze and moisture in the olden days. He began cleaning the joints, then turned his head to set Felipe to work to aid him. "That knife of his will come in play here," decided the American.

A distant gleam of light flitting in and out of the vacant rooms showed where the boy was wandering. Leaving his own dark lantern on the slab, Nixon followed Felipe, his own footsteps sounding hollow in the ghostly silence of the deserted hacienda. Turning from one passage to another, the doctor saw Felipe standing near him in a doorway, his form shadowed against the doorway.

"Come here and help me," he said earnestly.

As he spoke the figure seemed to vanish: *then Felipe, light in hand, entered the other end of the passage.*

Nixon started in alarm. "Did you see any one? Where did you come from?" he whispered.

"I have been in here all the while," said the boy, dreamily, "for I have found my old chamber. And I remember my mother's room, too."

"Can this old den be haunted?" the American thought rapidly, as he returned to his work.

There was no sound as they stood listening. Nixon forgot that bare feet are noiseless.

"Don't leave me now," he said. "When we get all the seams clear, I think we are strong enough to pry up the stone. If we can lift up one edge, we may roll it off, balancing it on one of these bars as a roller."

The two athletic young fellows toiled eagerly for half an hour. Finally, after splintering a corner off the gray slab, and prying up, their bars together, they raised the stone out of its bed and lifted one edge of its four-foot length over the nearest slab.

"We must take these tools all back where we found them, Felipe," remarked the excited American, as he arranged a roller deftly so that they could return the stone to its place after digging beneath it. "Did you bring one of the spades?" he whispered, for in the silence of the tropical night, with only the shrill *cicadas* breaking the hush, his voice sounded strange and unfamiliar.

"Yes, two of them," laughed the boy. "I don't like this hard work."

Rising, they resolutely heaved till the slab was lifted up, rolled away, and left a bare surface of sandy soil below it. Grasping a spade Nixon muttered energetically: "Dig down—here in the middle—hurry!"

"It's too much like digging one's own grave," grumbled Felipe as he bent over the unfamiliar tool of Adam. But with straining muscles the young American was silently throwing up great spadefuls of the yielding soil. He shuddered in a nervous tremor as the blade of his spade at last struck an object harder than the sandy soil loosely thrown in. In a few mo-

ments he had uncovered a small leaden chest similar to the packet brought by the padre.

"Quick now, my boy! For your life!" whispered Nixon, as he lifted the case aside. It seemed in fair condition, for there was very little moisture in the soil. Then he worked on like lightning, refilling the chasm and trampling the earth in with his feet.

"We must get back to Jibacoa as soon as the horses can carry us."

"Is it the thing you came here for?" asked the lad, as they sprang to the stone and rolled it back to its place.

"Never mind the joints. Let us get away," cried Nixon. "Pick up the tools." With the box under his arm he strode along, an implement in each hand.

They neared the coping of the cistern whence the tools had been taken. Nixon dropped the implements.

Then they turned to go back for the lantern and the remaining utensils, but a dozen dark forms darted out of the shrubbery, crying: "Halto!" and the foremost grappled with Felipe.

By a sudden inspiration Nixon dropped the precious box quietly into the cistern, and extending his arms, cried: "*Yo soy Americanos!*" as the click of hammers told of armed men making ready to fire.

Suddenly there was a yell of pain as Felipe's knife flashed in the starlight; next the sound of a crashing blow as a carbine butt felled the unfortunate heir of the Romero curse.

Nixon was grasped by a half dozen sinewy arms and quickly dragged along the portico to where a man stood now, lighting the rear doorway with the dark lantern used in the work. Groans of pain followed the American and he twisted his head around to see Felipe lying senseless by the side of the man he had stabbed.

The light flashing in Nixon's face blinded him. A Cuban officer of the coast guard stood glowering there, cocked revolver in hand. His harsh voice rang out: "It's not he; it's the other fellow I want—the Cuban."

"He's safe enough," growled an old sergeant. "We'll have to carry him or get a wagon. He is laid out; for he stabbed Moreno deep in the chest."

"Who are you?" fiercely demanded the officer, as Doctor Jim winced under a couple of turns of a riata pinning his wrists until they were crushed as in a vise.

"I am an American traveler," answered Nixon in Spanish. "A peaceful tourist; and this outrage is a brutal one. I demand my liberty, and my friend's too."

"What do you here? Search him!" cried the officer. Menacing the doctor with his revolver, he growled out: "Some damned *filibustero!*" while his prisoner was roughly deprived of all his personal articles.

"Thank God, the leaden casket is in the cistern, and they may not find it," thought Nixon. Then he cried to his captors, "I will explain to the proper authority."

"Get them up to the house!" roughly said the officer. "You had better take a cart to carry that other fellow down to Matanzas. The Comandante there will make you talk, damned quick!"

The soldiers then strode along to where the band had propped up their wounded comrade, and were eagerly examining his hurt while a squad roughly shook up the stunned and bleeding Cuban boy as they dragged him away.

While this was going on James Nixon was unceremoniously hustled along to where the padre's house-keeper was slatternly flirtatious, as the officer said most familiarly: "Manuela! who is this Gringo fellow?"

"I don't know, Señor Capitan," she answered, as she set forth the ready rum bottle and a box of cigars. "But the boy with him is Felipe Romero, the old rebel Don's only son."

"Old Romero, the exile, you mean?" cried the Captain, starting up in ferocious joy.

"Yes! the old General," answered Manuela. Then she called up some Indian women to bring food for the soldiers pouring in. She seemed to be a she-devil queen now.

"Well, I will take one of your wagons and go on to Matanzas with him to-night," growled the Captain, with a triumphant leer. Calling the sergeant he hastily

ordered; "Search that wounded fellow well. The youngster! Then look into their saddle pockets and all their other traps. Rest the men for an hour and get something to eat before we start back. Leave two files to watch over this Gringo. Keep him separated from the other fellow. If he tries to speak to Romero till we get to Matanzas shoot him—that's all. Come, Manuela," he leered, and the two passed into another room.

In the pale moonlight of the midnight, Nixon on a led horse, his hands tied before him, was hauled away, a heartsick prisoner, on the Matanzas road. The command moved slowly along, the half-drunken soldiers singing and wildly shouting: "*Muerte a los filibusteros!*" as they guarded the creaking cart where Felipe Romero lay tightly bound on a truss of straw.

Nixon was stupefied with suffering and fatigue. Even hunger and thirst oppressed him as he fearfully repeated the Cuban lad's gloomy words: "It's like digging one's own grave!"

In the sickly glare of a tropic daybreak the man who had found the packet "*debajo la puerta mayor*" was thrust into a common felon's cell at Matanzas. "The box is safe, thank Heaven!" he murmured, as he sank down on a rude pallet.

It was high noon when James Nixon, bruised and fainting with thirst, awoke in the sultry shades of the filthy Matanzas calaboose. He was alone in a square cell with a little grated window, and as he struggled to his feet he eagerly seized upon an earthen crock of water which stood in a corner.

Rubbing his eyes, it seemed all a hideous dream. The ghostly, curse-haunted halls of Hacienda Romero; the hurried toil of the evening hours; the wild *melée*, and the dragging away of Felipe.

"My God! where is the poor boy?" he murmured in agony. "He may be now imprisoned as a dangerous felon, for he struck with ready knife. The box lying in the depths of the old cistern may be found again, but the last of the Romeros—Felipe! what of him?"

Then Nixon, familiar with many stories of heart-

rending Spanish brutality, shuddered as he thought of the rash boy's position. "He has not a friend in the island. I must face the Comandante here. I will telegraph at once to the Consul-General. I will demand the presence of our Consul. By the eternal! if the *Kearsarge* were only in the harbor, Bradford could soon induce the Admiral to act."

The lonely American was well-nigh frantic. In desperation he beat upon the iron cell door with the heavy earthen water jug, which shattered in his hands at last. As the jailer came clattering down the corridor a cry rose from the adjoining cell: "*Los soldados! Los soldados! Algun pobrecito sera pasado por las armas!*"

Springing to the little window Nixon saw a firing party of a dozen, with trailed arms, swiftly crossing the interior parade grounds of the cuartel. The soldiers were laughing and twisting their heads around, snapping their gun-locks in a merciless bravado. They leered at the pale face watching them spell-bound. Their jeers and jargon were borne to Nixon's ears as they sped swiftly along out of sight.

"I demand to see the Comandante!" roared the prisoner, who had now lost all self-control in his pent-up wrath.

"You'll see him soon enough. Gringo," bluntly answered the jailer. "He will make short work with the *filibusteros Americanos*. Now, you keep quiet, or I'll gag and double-iron you. This is a poor place for *filibusteros*." The brutal jailer laughed as a heavy explosion re-echoed down the yard, and wreaths of thin blue smoke floated across the parade ground.

"There goes one of them now. You may be the next. Your turn will come soon enough."

The scoundrel went jeeringly away, rattling his heavy keys.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KING OF EMERALDS.

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon when a guard arrived to escort Nixon before the dreaded Comandante. The officer in command was the same who had so vigorously flourished his cocked revolver in the face of the unarmed prisoner the evening before.

The doctor was a man of peace, but he eyed this gentleman truculently and growled: "I would give my hopes of future lucrative practice, you wretch, to have just five minutes alone with you on equal terms!"

Then Nixon, still handcuffed, was jostled around by two dirty soldiers to a place reasonably near the desk, where Colonel Dominguez lolled back with his saber and two loaded pistols within reach.

A half dozen officers were lounging around the great room, and the tatterdemalion guard stood in array near the door. Their ragged appearance brought no smile to Nixon's lips, for the echoes of that heavy discharge still lingered in his ears.

The silence was broken by the Comandante's rough voice, as he fixed his glaring black eyes on Nixon.

"Who are you? Your name, your country, your station?" the soldier demanded.

The American returned the insolent stare and replied defiantly: "Send for the American Consul, take these irons off, and I will answer. Not till *then!*"

The young officers all sprang up at the bold speech of a lonely prisoner.

"What are you doing here?" the Comandante continued, with no regard to Nixon's answer.

A secretary scribbled away in a corner, and gloomily eyed the American as a possible victim of the next official target practice. The tyrant scowled as the prisoner stood mute.

"Put it down that he does not answer," he shouted. After a dozen more inquiries the Colonel leaned back

in helpless wrath His eye rested on the officer who commanded the guard. "Did you arrest this man?" he wrathfully cried.

The officer saluted. "I found him breaking into Hacienda Romero at Jibacoa with another *filibustero*."

"The Cuban who was shot this morning, you mean?" was the Colonel's rejoinder.

The officer sprang forward, for Nixon staggered and fell prone on the tiled floor. For the fatal crash of the guns was ringing yet in his ears, whose volley made poor lonely Inez in truth the last of the Romeros. Then in a sickening stupor he heard the Colonel say carelessly: "Did you arrest anyone else lurking around there?"

"Yes! there was a young lad who seemed to have no special business there, but we searched him and he had no papers on him like the Cuban. I left him there with the Intendente, whom I met coming back from Mantanzas. Manuela, the housekeeper there, had a peon guarding him, and I told her to let him go in three days if you did not send for him."

"No papers on him, you say?" queried the watchful Colonel.

"Nothing," respectfully answered the man.

"Then send a trooper up and tell them to let him go where he will," the Comandante ordered. "Were the articles found on the fellow?" demanded Dominguez.

In a few moments Nixon had the satisfaction of seeing the Colonel calmly enjoying his cigar, as he curiously turned over all the personal articles taken from him the night before.

"The prisoner had no papers at all? Nothing in his saddle or small baggage?" sharply continued the official.

"Not a thing! It was Manuela who found the *filibustero* papers in the Cuban's saddle pockets and brought them to me. This fellow let the other do all the talking. He pretended there not to know a word of Spanish, which he speaks well."

"Where did the two come from?" said Dominguez.

"They came from Havana and lounged about a

little hotel at Jibacoa Bay. As soon as I had your telegram to arrest them I watched them from the moment they left the railroad train. I let them break into the old Romero place, for I thought they would meet more of the gang there. But it seems they are only robbers, pecarones, ladrones, for they were poking around the hacienda to find something of value."

Nixon bowed his face in his hands to conceal the bitter tears. "Poor Felipe! Poor slaughtered boy! Betrayed! And by whom?"

Then the fatal imprudence of Felipe at Havana returned to the doctor's mind. "Some of the officers may have discovered his secret while tipsy," he sadly mourned. With this the thought came to him of the lonely old Don, of the beautiful sister, now alone in the world, and of the exposure of the whole voyage to the resentful Padre Vicente Guerra. "How can I ever answer for this innocent blood?" he groaned as he thought of the boy dying alone in the hands of the brutal guards.

"I do not see any American papers here," said the Colonel finally, as he gathered up all Nixon's possessions into a heap before him.

The boom of a heavy gun suddenly echoed over the bay and shook the rattling casements. It was followed by another, and another, until the port salute had been fired. The prisoner sat as in a dream while an adjutant hastily entering saluted and reported:

"The United States man-of-war *Kearsarge* is entering the port, flying the Admiral's blue peter!"

Colonel Dominguez started as Nixon raised his head and fixed his clear dark eye upon the military bully.

"I must go and make my official visit," he hastily exclaimed. "Captain," he added, "let the American Consul be sent for, and permit him to see this fellow. Of course, if the Consul should demand a private interview you can allow it. As for the other prisoner, he was a Cuban born, and the rebel Romero's son. He knew when he brought these papers that he took his life in his hand."

The whole gang of satellites sprang wildly up as Nixon in a ringing voice cried: "Liar! The boy was

innocent. The papers were stuffed into his saddle by your own dirty spies!"

"I'll make you answer for that, you villain!" shouted Dominguez, his saber half drawn as he sprang forward.

"Coward! you dare not," answered the infuriated Nixon. "The *Kearsarge* is in port, and the Admiral is my friend!"

Colonel Dominguez turned pale as he stood there quivering in rage. "See at once if there is any truth in this fellow's story," he said in a low voice as he went clattering out to where the horses had been hastily caparisoned.

All the way to the embarcadero the plunging steed reared and snorted under the merciless lunges of Dominguez's bloody spurs. "*Carajo!*" he muttered. "I have the Governor-General behind me. For the telegram was sent two hours ago as he ordered."

It was a busy afternoon in the official circles of Matanzas. The bay was ploughed with boats going and coming in the ceremonies of the hated republic, exchanging its thin-veiled politeness with the bloodiest crown in the Old World.

James Nixon, a haggard-eyed man, was only half an hour closeted with the excited American Consul. The incumbent happened to be a man of energy and decision.

Before he had been five minutes with the enraged prisoner the consular secretary was speeding away to the *Kearsarge* with a brief letter to Fleet-Surgeon Bradford, U. S. N., scribbled on a leaf torn from the Consul's note-book, and the official himself was demanding a fitting room and refreshments for the prisoner. This was speedily granted. Then the interview concluded with these words:

"All I ask of you, Doctor Nixon, is to remain silent," said the Consul. "I will find out in regard to the poor, butchered boy. I shall send a telegram at once to the State Department, and if you are right I will see that the Associated Press correspondent gives this to the civilized world. If General Romero is a naturalized American citizen, then the boy was simply assassinated! And yet I can see no object in his wanton murder."

"Alas, my dear friend," muttered the prisoner, "the lad is dead. The last of a historic line; it will bring his old father's head low soon enough. A sister's broken heart, too. My God! This will shadow my whole life; for I brought the boy here. Would to God that I had died in his place."

"There will be reparation for this outrage," energetically said the excited official as he strode away.

"Alas," muttered the prisoner, "the meanest government does not hesitate to brave the American flag. The solid phalanx of seventy millions is insulted by every popgun South American republic. As for Spain, the Virginius blood is hardly dry yet. Cuba has always been a shambles for the unprotected American."

"Ah, Nixon," cried the Consul, on his return two hours after. "There never was a sadder story. The poor lad, still suffering from a blow on the head, was thrust into a cell. Dragged before the Comandante he was confronted with the papers claimed to have been found among his effects at the priest's house. Without a friend, without counsel, without a single half hour for thought, the brute Dominguez called in a drumhead court of those base fellows you saw hanging around him. The boy, ignorant and heedless of what was passing, gave spirited denials and claimed American protection. On his Cuban appearance and the papers, which seem to have been of a revolutionary nature, the court, assembled at ten, convicted by eleven. The boy, led back to his cell, at half-past eleven was marched out to the quadrangle. The under jailer was touched by his superior refinement and the spirit of his bearing. 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' A priest was dragged in hastily and the poor boy had just ten minutes given him for a brief adieu to earth. The last thing he did was to draw off a little gold ring. Here it is. '*Por mi hermana Inez. Mi querida!*' And for his father a lock of his hair. "By jove, Nixon! that lad went out without a tremor to the firing place and cried: '*Viva la Cuba!*' as he sprang into the air blown off his feet by a crashing volley."

The recital was interrupted by the entrance of a young Cuban officer of the Guardia Civile, who saluted the Consul.

"Colonel Dominguez leaves this instant for Havana on a special train. He requests you to join him, as he will order the instant release of this gentleman. There is an American naval officer waiting in the Comandante's room for your friend."

Such was the sentence which ended James Nixon's first and last interment within prison walls.

"Wait here for a few moments, Doctor," cried the Consul, as he sallied forth. "I will have all your property brought here and Surgeon Bradford escorted to you."

"I must not let this young fire-eater meet Dominguez," mused the Consul. For there was a steely glare in Nixon's glance which spoke of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, the red draconian code of Moses.

With a rush and a bustle portly Surgeon Bradford, U. S. N., hurried at last into the cuartel.

"My God! Jimmy boy, but you have had a rough time. All right now. And that skunk Dominguez has cleared out for Havana. He left orders for you to be sent back with honor to Hacienda Romero, the horses and saddles to be delivered to you, and all expenses paid.

"The Admiral has already sent for the Consul and a joint report to the State and Navy Department will be telegraphed. So you are all right."

"All this will not bring back the murdered boy," faltered James Nixon as he grasped his uncle's hand, while his voice trembled. "I am accountable for Felipe's life."

"Stay! Perhaps not so. James," soberly said the handsome old surgeon, a blue and gold ladies' pet, as he unbuttoned his white frogged relief jacket, "an open telegram to me for you was repeated on from Havana here. I got it on the ship before I knew you were in trouble. I can't make it out, but it looks as if there had been some foul play."

"BRADFORD, 'Kearsarge,' Havana.

Notify Nixon that boy Juan has disappeared, may follow.
Beware treachery.

ABERCROMBY AND LORIMER."

Nixon swore a bitter oath as he read the lines.

"If this little scrawl had reached me at Havana," moaned the doctor, "it would have saved the Romero line and prevented a murder. Felipe was tracked and betrayed. It's the boy and that damned priest."

"And all because dear old Toplights wanted a breath of sea air," sadly answered Bradford, "for we hadn't a blessed thing to do. Such is life! Such is fate! So runs the world away! Now, my dear fellow, get your traps from these chocolate scoundrels and aboard the *Kearsarge*. I only wait the hour when Uncle Sam will turn the gray-eyed lean Southerners loose and grab the island. Oh, Jonathan! How I would like to see Spain get a licking. That wrinkled old Spanish hide is itching for it."

"Uncle," said James Nixon solemnly, "I have a weighty trust to perform—a solemn one. My honor, the fate of a family, lies, like truth, at the bottom of a well, up at Jibacoa. I must go back there. The Colonel has ordered all the honors. I leave the vengeance for this murder in official hands."

The Consul rushed in. "Come along now, Doctor. I have a carriage waiting. My house is open for you both. And you must get your articles. Come and inspect them."

"You don't go back to any Jibacoa alone," resolutely remarked the surgeon. "See here, Mr. Consul, I'll have the Admiral send Nixon up on that steam launch to Jibacoa. Some blue-jackets apparently unarmed can step ashore with him. But every man jack will have two revolvers in his boot legs. I'll go along also, and if there's any blood-letting, I am right in that line. We will get under your mahogany on our return. You stay to do what you can to avenge this poor butchered schoolboy."

"Your plan is a good one," said the Consul.

As the trio walked out of the cuartel, Nixon turned on the under keeper who had sorrowed over poor Felipe.

"Where did they bury him?" he asked as he handed the turnkey a gold piece.

"Señor," said the Cuban, "I am poor but I take not the price of blood. It is in the Campe Santo; I placed a cross there myself to mark the spot. Just a rude one, but a cross with the date and my own *firma*."

Nixon turned to the Consul. "The boy came with me. He shall go back with me. Will you demand this, and have the body prepared for shipment to New York at once? I shall take the first steamer as soon as I have recovered my property at Hacienda Romero, and restored the horses to the innkeeper."

So Nixon slept under the Stars and Stripes that night, and groaned that he could not open a double broadside on the cuartel, where Romero's murderers were laughing over their cards at the poor dead boy's plucky death. "But we missed the Gringo," they growled.

The young adventurer could scarcely believe, as the launch swept in Jibacoa Bay next noontide, that but two days had dreamed along in the golden sunshine and Felipe Romero slept cold in death. A party of American jack-tars escorted him, and Nixon was sternly silent as he drove up the beautiful palm-shaded road to the old hacienda. When the blue-jackets examined the priest's house there was no one to meet them but the consular secretary. "The property is here," he said, "but the sly woman has cleared out."

"And Juan Valdes with her. Yes, it was Juan," cried the doctor.

For now the two strange encounters came back to his mind. "I will warrant Padre Viciente knows already of the murder. But one thing he does not know!" Turning to his uncle, the young man said: "I dropped my paint box in an old cistern down there. Send the sailors down with me."

Nixon had prepared a cord and a light grappling iron. While his uncle wandered through the deserted halls, where some of the beautiful women of the Romero line had swept along in satin and jewels, the doctor held his breath as the handy sailors brought up

an assortment of tropical snakes, *dissecta membra* of all kinds, and finally a leaden case, all covered with dirt and slime.

"Yes, that's it. That is all," he said, as he stood gazing at the object lying at his feet.

"I am afraid it is badly damaged," remarked Bradford, who came up as the men laid it on a stone to drain and dry in the sun.

"Oh, that's of no consequence," carelessly replied the young doctor. "Let us hasten and get back to Matanzas as soon as you can. I must telegraph to Abercromby and Lorimer. Pray God the soil of Cuba may never be pressed by my foot again, until the Stars and Stripes wave over it."

He strode on, with the leaden casket under his arm, down the abandoned garden and climbed the hill to the priest's house, where the ambulance was now ready. He kept his eyes turned away from the darkened hall, where it seemed he could see graceful Felipe Romero petulantly toiling at digging his own grave!

"I have it safe, the record of a blood-stained treasure. Blood-bought again from the keeping of the dead years. And may this blood not be shed in vain. For if this box be ever opened it will be by an innocent woman's hand, and the last of the Romeros."

So, heavy hearted even in the hour of this success, Nixon sailed back over the darkening seas to Matanzas and the *Kearsarge*.

A sigh of relief escaped the young doctor's breast as he hastily strode below to the stateroom of the fleet paymaster, and that businesslike official cheerfully locked up the rusty leaden casket in the safe where the great stores of Uncle Sam's good green bills were snugly tucked away.

A rap at the door announced an official message.

"Admiral Toplights's compliments to Dr. Nixon, and he would be glad to see him at once in his cabin."

"There you are," growled the paymaster. "Old father Toplights has some fatherly counsel for you. And mind you don't forget what he says. For he has the kindest heart and the longest head in the service."

Nixon sought the rooms once occupied by Winslow,

and from which on that Sunday morning off Cherbourg the rosy-faced old sailor cheerfully emerged, saying as the *Alabama* swept out into range showing her big Blakely teeth: "Take their first fire, Thornton! Get their range. We'll see them a little later!"

"Ah, my young friend," earnestly said Admiral Toplights, "pray be seated, and give me your immediate plans and wishes. As the survivor of this unfortunate affair you are a marked personage in Matanzas. Pray let me have any letters or telegrams you wish dispatched at once. Have you any important business in the town?" The fine face of the Admiral was clouded and thoughtful.

"Only the immediate removal of young Romero's body," soberly said Nixon. "I have a very valuable deposit in the paymaster's safe—that is, a very important one. Otherwise I am all ready to step on the New York steamer, which sails, I believe, in two or three days."

"Ah, very good," answered Admiral Toplights. "The Consul has already reported that the remains of your poor friend have been delivered to him, but the port authorities and the steamer agents absolutely refuse to allow the case to be shipped. They allege a fear of New York quarantine. So no way is open for you to reach New York soon, unless you leave the trust of honor to the Consul."

"I must go back to New York at once. This poor boy's father is my patient. I fear the result of the news which will reach him from the outside. I must send some telegrams and letters; but I'll not desert poor Felipe. Together we came, we have succeeded in a very grave mission, and he must be borne back by me. I dare not trust the other deposit, a grave family matter, to any hand but my own."

"Then, Doctor, favor me," said the puzzled Admiral. "Let me think things over till after dinner. Write all your telegrams here at my table."

The fleet staff lieutenant then entering respectfully handed to Admiral Toplights the bulky morning mail.

While Nixon's fingers traced dispatches to Lorimer, to Abercrombie, and to Inez Romero, he was startled by

the Admiral crying out: "Sailor's luck! A telegram from the Secretary to detach the *Yantic* and send her north at once to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. She is at Havana. I will order her here, for I wish to send some 'time expired' men home on her. So you, your valuable deposit, and all that is left of this poor lad can go north at once, on the *Yantic*. It also," he said heartily, "saves you all expense."

"Admiral, I am more than grateful," murmured Doctor Nixon, as he warmly pressed the hand of the kindly commander. "General Romero shall learn of your great courtesy, and his thanks as well as the boy's sister's gratitude you will learn of later. I—I dare scarcely face that poor girl," he faltered. "She will be alone in the world soon."

"Stay a moment, Doctor," said the Admiral, as he took the telegrams. "I will also order that when you wish to go ashore, two watch officers and a dozen sailors shall accompany you. It's not an official guard, but it amounts to the same thing," the old warrior grimly smiled.

That night by the winding Hudson a hurried messenger rode up to Edgecliff with the fatal words which told anxious Frank Lorimer of the finding of a packet and the untimely fate of the poor lad.

"Do not inform General Romero till my return. Coming on U. S. corvette *Yantic*. Letters by this mail."

The next morning, leaning over the brass-bound rail of the gallant old *Kearsarge*, James Nixon was snuffing the cool, fresh morning breeze as the deck officer reported: "There's your boat coming in."

Doctor Jim's heart bounded in happy relief as the tall spars of the *Yantic* swept up on the blue margin of the sapphire sea. He turned his eyes to the port, and his brow darkened as, with black smoke pouring from her funnels, the New-York-bound steamer passed swiftly out from her buoy, her decks black with passengers.

"Curse this Spanish chicanery," ejaculated Nixon. "That packet will be in New York four days before the *Yantic* can reach Sandy Hook. I would *have been* sailing away on her but for those brutes."

And Nixon's eyes rested dreamily on the steamer spurning the quiet waters into great foam flakes, as the twisting screw thrust her along over the fairy coral reefs below, where under the sparkling brine the myriad flowers of the sea and vast treasures of under current life made the blue depths a wonder and mystery of beauty.

"It is an earthly paradise," he mused. "Beautiful, beautiful Cuba. But this paradise has its serpents."

This was truer than he knew, for one was departing from it; Juan Valdes's black dancing eyes were even now glittering at a port-hole of the passing boat. *The spy was first away!*

"I will beat him up there! Anyway, I have earned the padre's regalo," Juan muttered. "I have done his bidding and the Yankee has been foiled. He has got nothing. Felipe is safe. He won't talk!" And the stony-hearted young scoundrel laughed as he twisted up a corn-husk cigarette.

"There is a single gleam of comfort," mused Nixon. "Guerra shall discover naught from the manuscript. For the case shall be instantly deposited in New York behind many bolts and bars, and when Miss Inez Romero breaks the seal of the past, she shall be alone in one of the rooms of the Safe Deposit Company. General Romero shall not know of this find until the padre is far away with that yellow devil, Manuela, at Jibacoa. For the priest would bully the truth out of him."

By the prudential wisdom of the Admiral, the case which was Nixon's mournful charge was directly sent on board the corvette. The intention of the young doctor to depart was hidden even from every member of the ship's company. The fleet staff lieutenant, the paymaster, and Surgeon Bradford alone shared the knowledge of the Consul and the Admiral. Nixon's slender baggage was secretly removed to the *Yantic*. It needed but six hours to transfer the home-going crew to the cruiser lying with her fires banked near the flag ship. The Consul had repaired alone to the departing vessel, and no one knew when Surgeon Bradford and Doctor Nixon slipped on the *Yantic's* quarter-deck

that a new ward-room guest swelled the merry circle of the bright, brave hearts clustered around the hospitable mahogany.

But the little package under Nixon's arm was safely hidden behind steel plates before he sat down to the last conference with his two friends. "I am now ready for the hardest duty of my life," said James Nixon, as the men began to tramp around in a wild war dance above the anchor.

"Do not forget, Doctor," returned the Consul heartily, "use me in all and every way, for your return would be impossible. There would be no official objection, but you would be quietly assassinated, that's all. Oh, I know my dear Cuban friends, my Spanish 'compadres,' very well. As for me, I am as safe as can be. Nothing kills a consul. They say so at Washington. 'Few die and none resign.'"

"Do not forget, James," cries his gallant old uncle, wringing his hand in farewell.

The young man paced the deck as the *Yantic* rose with long, defiant sweeps on the breasting surge, and marked the last flashes of Matanzas light.

The stout ship danced on northward, while James Nixon found on his sea-tossed pillow a haunting vision of eyes which would brighten, "burning yet tender," on his home coming.

"I shall never forget this unobtrusive kindness and the *Yantic*," heartily said Doctor Jim as he stood with the executive officer five days afterward when the stout old cruiser showed her nose resolutely under Brooklyn Bridge and nestled lovingly on the muddy waters of Wallabout Bay.

"She is," proudly replied Lieutenant Walsingham, "a hospitable ship—a good old tub with a fine war record, and has done more sea duty than all these pastry cook pets, the White Fleet. Now, Doctor," added the lieutenant as he swung his trumpet in recognition of a chum on the "Philadelphia," "I know that you are now anxious to go ashore. Let me suggest that I send your embarrassing charge, the body, under a decent guard to the Naval Hospital variet here for a few days. I will not take my leave for three weeks. Telegraph

me to the yard, I will meet you and you shall have all the decent facilities we can give. Now, get your things together. I'll send my own man over to New York for you. He has to go with a letter from me, anyway."

Then he cried, "Hello! are these your friends Nixon?" as a boat shot alongside. Springing up the gangway Lorimer and Abercromby grasped the returned wanderer's hands.

"Tell me," asked Nixon, eagerly, "Juan Valdes?"

"He has been back three days," said Lorimer, "and the padre has him by the ear. Mum's the word with both."

"The ladies?"

"All well," answered Frank.

"And the poor old General?" the question faltered on Nixon's tongue.

"Ah, Jimmy," sadly said Lorimer, "the poor old King of Emeralds is a King Lear now—a wreck! He is wandering in cloudland—and—you must come up at once."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VITAL HALF.

"CAN you come at once? We have a carriage waiting. What arrangements do you wish to make about —IT?"

The eager friends were sobered at the idea of Nixon's silent traveling companion.

Turning without reply the doctor presented his friends to Walsingham. "The Lieutenant has spared me all embarrassment for the present," he remarked. "I wish to go to lower Broadway, to my bank, first. Then I'll make headquarters at our office. I suppose we will take the night train home, Frank?"

"Yes," said his friend, "for God's sake come up with us this evening. Mother and Ethel are both worn out with holding Inez up in this double calamity. By jove! I forgot. Here's a letter for you from my sister."

Nixon turned quickly away to hide the red spot that burned on his cheek; but no one saw it.

"Nixon, give me your office card," remarked Walsingham cordially. "My man will get your traps over there. He may tack into a saloon or two, but he will beat into port all O. K., like the jolly old *Yantic*."

His brother officers and he warmly wrung the doctor's hand as the three friends stepped out on the Jacob's ladder.

Nixon was clinging to a small package thrust into a traveling sack. "If I live to cross Brooklyn Bridge," he muttered, "the thing which bears still the unbroken seal of the past will be put where even the all-seeing eye of the Church can never violate the secret reserved now for the one who is to lift this strange curse—the last of the Romeros."

It seemed to the young American that he bore a man's life in his hand, and that poor Felipe's passionate, boyish heart beat under his fingers.

His friends with delicacy were silent, and the doctor trailed his hand over the boat's side to cool his excited nerves. "It is charity—it is justice—it is fate—the General must never know," he decided. "For if I dared to trust him, even in case of apparent recovery, the ecret would be filched from him by the priest. Padre Guerra, it is to the death now, my yellow-faced scoundrel. For the emeralds—and for Inez's future inheritance!"

"I must wait," he mused, as he entered the carriage and drove swiftly away to the Brooklyn Bridge. "The coming diplomatic row over this murder may result in the Spanish Government lifting the decree of confiscation should poor old Romero pass on into the dark realm where his crown would be a shadowy one. I shall let the old padre make his game. We must proceed quietly to get him out of the villa."

"Where will you go, Jimmy?" demanded Lorimer as they all left the bridge.

"To the Equitable Building, Frank," mechanically said Nixon. It seemed now as if he dared not even trust the friends of his heart with the gloomy secrets so sadly sealed with poor Felipe's blood. "That dying priest's curse was an awful legacy," he mused. "Felipe murdered—the poor father crazed. And Inez, perhaps, soon to be an orphan and—perhaps penniless."

The carriage stopped under the shadows of Trinity steeple.

"I will be back in ten minutes," he said. "Then have the driver take all side streets; you cannot get to the office too quick for me."

Darting in with the crowd Nixon held tightly the sack with the unbroken case which had lain so long resting *debajo la puerta mayor*. Making a number of turns in alley and arcade he came out at a Broadway corner where a flight of steps led to the entrance of a huge steel-armored safe deposit vault. With a sigh of relief he sped down stairs. "If anyone has tracked us they will be watching that carriage," he mused.

The ready official led the young doctor into a closed corridor of the huge thousand compartment steel chest.

A click and a snap—and two heavy locks closed on the little leaden chest. Then Nixon signed two names on the register book. The official read after him, as he gave a receipt for a year's fees, the names:

James Nixon, New York City.

Inez Romero, of Edgecliff, Fishkill, New York.

"Going to be married?" smiled the official, an old friend, with our easy American inquisitiveness.

"I am thinking of it," evasively remarked the doctor as he pocketed four little steel keys and then went out quickly by the rear entrance.

"I don't like to see that bright young fellow marry a foreigner," mused the steady old official. "But I suppose she has a great fortune, some Mexican or West Indian heiress." Which proves that no one has yet discovered the art of piercing a millstone with a glance, for as Nixon sought a rear street and returned to the carriage he was dreaming of other eyes, loving and tender, not burning Creole eyes, but Anglo Saxon, blue and flashing, under golden hair of a remarkably choice type of the "Daughters of the Revolution."

Jehu, the son of Nimshi, stood not on the order of his going but whirled them away up the island, followed by the sullenly inquiring eyes of lazy policemen, and much sudden profanity from bespattered pedestrians, toned up with howls from an affrighted applewoman and startled newsboys.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Doctor Jim as they speeded along, "I am going to take the first train. Abercromby, you will be the same dear old fellow if you will hold the fort at the office. Frank, of course, goes with me. I fancy the padre will soon make a break of some kind. If we can chase him out I want you to shadow him thoroughly down here, Abercromby. The documents in the padre's possession I shall leave with him. I will make no reference to his having taken away the papers which he found. But if I am once installed in charge of the patient, then I will bring up the subject of that valuable emerald. As a man of law, Frank, it ought to be easy for you to place Inez now in the position of 'guardian *ad litem*' for her incapacitated

father, and so go on record as her attorney. That will give you the needed legal power to bully the old crow out. In case I find Romero to be really crazed, then the proper number of physicians should at once be asked by you to present the case to the nearest judge having jurisdiction."

"All right, Nixon, I can fix it up with one day's time when you say go!"

"This will show Mr. Padre Guerra that General Romero's child will be safely guarded by the *lex-loci*. Thank God! We are not in Cuba here."

"Amen!" said the two listeners heartily.

"Then you're going to let him kick himself out?" inquired Abercromby.

"Yes, with a little well-applied assistance at the right time," grimly replied Nixon. "But how in God's name did the General learn of Felipe's death? Had the padre the nerve to thrust that news on him?"

"Oh, bless your soul, no," spiritedly said Lorimer. "The New York journals published their flaring account of the shooting of the poor lad, mentioning your name as 'Henry Morgan,' though I knew who it was at once." The padre was down at Poughkeepsie on some clerical errand, and Inez was all unsuspecting of danger when a slick gentlemanly youth drove up and requested to see General José Romero. He would not state his business to anyone, but insisted on seeing the Don personally. When Inez, guarded by old Basilio, let this smart youth into the room where poor old José was dreaming of his vanished emerald treasures, and worrying over the still absent boy, the stranger stuck his card right into the poor veteran's trembling hand. It bore a name unknown to fame's clarion voice as yet.

"Look at it!" And Frank produced from his pocket-book the following:

H. KINSLEY SYNTAX,

New York Daily Calliope.

While Nixon examined, the lawyer proceeded with his story.

“ ‘Now, General,’ the bearer of that card said confidentially, as he planked himself down on the edge of the bed and yanked out a long reporter’s notebook, “you can just run over the morning’s issue. If you wish to add anything in regard to this most distressing affair I will give you a couple of columns in our evening’s edition. I am holding all the Fishkill wires. No scoop on me, sir, nary a scoop—too fly!” The wondering Don José handed the paper to Inez. I do not know how far she read the flaming head-lines before she fell senseless at the reporter’s feet. While the women took poor Inez away, Basilio tells me that the “enterprising reporter” enlightened General Romero to such an extent that when the padre suddenly returned he found our dear old friend shouting and raving in his excitement. Basilio at once sent the gardener on a run for me, and I met him myself, being on the road. Sending him on to my mother and Ethel, I arrived in time to give the reporter a few hastily chosen words, which I hope were seasonable.”

Frank’s eyes flashed as he sadly continued: “What do you suppose the effect was? The fellow leaned against the gate post and finished a few last shorthand notes, remarking to me ‘more in sorrow than in anger,’ ‘Very natural! I see, family friend and all that. Now what can you object to in this? The public want the news, do you see? Must have it.’ Then he read a few neat head-lines: ‘A Father’s Anguish!’ ‘At the Bedside of the Cuban Patriot Romero.’ ‘A Beauty in Tears.’ ‘Affecting Interview of our Special Correspondent with the old Soldier of Cespedes!’ ‘Will you oblige me also with your name?’ he added, menacing me fiercely with the point of his pencil.”

“What did you say, Frank?” quickly demanded Nixon with indignant eyes.

“I energetically damned him and the *Daily Calliope* and the public and Spain too, for all that cursed brutality in driving the heart-broken old warrior mad. But H. Kinsley Syntax was in his buggy and he swung his hat most forgivingly at me as he cried:

'A clean scoop!' I've got the wires all tied up for six hours and I will telegraph the whole dictionary to cut off the fellows of the *Evening Bugle*. They'll be up on the next train. Look out for them. They are no good.' I took his hint and put two of my men at once around the house on guard, and H. Kinsley Syntax was the first and last reporter to interview any one at the Villa. That's all," said Lorimer, as they drew up at the office.

"And the padre? Tell me," remarked Nixon.

"He talked gravely with Inez, then questioned Basilio, and has never opened his lips to us. He took the whole charge of the sick-room, through I insisted on the local physician having control of the case. Two or three Spanish fellows then came up from New York and lingered all day with Guerra. The General has now fallen into the dejection of hopeless wandering imbecility; he takes Inez for her mother. He fondles her and croons to her. As for Juan Valdes, he slunk into the Villa three days ago. I asked him no questions, and he clings closely to his uncle's shadow now. But of all this, that which struck me as very strange—Padre Guerra has never even mentioned your name."

"Ah! that is enough," said Nixon as he sprang up the stairs of his office. Then the three friends were left alone while Abercromby's man ran to the nearest restaurant for a meal.

"We have full two hours yet before train time, Abercromby," said Nixon, placing two of the keys in a sealed envelope; "just write your name over that seal. You, too, Frank." When this was achieved, he indorsed the little packet: "Miss Inez Romero, Villa Romero, Fishkill, New York, in care of Frank Lorimer, Esq., Trustee."

"Just drive down to the Fifth Avenue Hotel and get this little packet in the safe there, and take a receipt as per the address. Then to-night do you send over to Taylor's Hotel, Jersey City, and get all my traps—Room 42, Henry Morgan. Here is an order for them. The clerks know my handwriting. This will save me from any possible shadowing."

While Abercromby was absent, Nixon said gravely: "Frank, you and I have got to see this whole thing through now. Your part is to get Inez to install me legally as the family physician, and you to act as her lawyer. Here are the two keys belonging to me of the Safe Deposit box wherein Miss Inez's leaden case is hidden. Here is the receipt. Now, in case of my death you can take the girl with your mother and sister down there. You must have the first documents all locked up. The newer ones, if any be found, will be needed to complete the revelation. I will give you the receipt from the Fifth Avenue Hotel. These things must go at once into the vaults of the Fishkill Bank, the very moment it opens to-morrow. So nothing will be found on me if I should be waylaid. If aught happens to me complete this trust of love!"

"What do you mean, Jimmy?" faltered Lorimer.

"You have not lost your nerve?"

"No, but I may lose my life," answered Nixon.

"Poor Felipe was struck down in a far country. I may be paid off here at home. We cannot tell as yet what hidden influence we are fighting."

"Yes, and carry good revolvers night and day," cried Lorimer in a rage.

"I presume that Padre Vicente will make some break," suggested Nixon calmly. "He will hardly brook our control!"

"You remind me of something," said Lorimer hastily. "Young Sheaver has given me a list of the numbers of fifty one-thousand-dollar four per cents United States bonds. The Fishkill Bank has always cashed these coupons for the General, but neither the president nor the young cashier can tell me where he keeps them hidden away. Inez knows absolutely nothing. Now, if Don José has them, this priest may wheedle them into his hands for safe keeping. Good-bye to the bonds then. This, with occasional payments by Munoz from some estates in San Domingo (not under the Spanish power), seem to have been the bulk of Romero's available property."

"Ah," cried Nixon, starting up as Abercromby

returned, followed by the impromptu dinner, "we must head him off at once, then. I see it! Padre has been lingering here only to await the General's death, and will finish when he gets control of the secret of the emeralds. When we get to Fishkill I will go at once over to Villa Romero with you. Remember, Padre Guerra and Juan are two desperate men. Not that I fear, but I may need your action at once. You will see where the padre may forget himself. He will lose his temper at last."

It was ten o'clock that night when Dr. Nixon entered the gate of the Romero villa. Mrs. Lorimer and Ethel, lingering in the garden, exchanged their agitated greetings with the returning adventurer.

"Thank God, you are come at last!" they both cried, and the amazed Nixon felt Mrs. Lorimer's hand tremble with excitement as she said: "Now I feel safe at last. For Frank to be left alone in this house of mystery is simply tempting strange fates. I fear—I know not what."

During this, a little drama of real life was being enacted in the salon of the lonely house. Señorita Inez Romero, pale as marble, but firm and womanly, signed unhesitatingly two papers which Frank Lorimer, attorney and counselor-at-law, had prepared with all due care.

To the party lingering under the trees Lorimer came striding along quickly over the lawn. "All right, old man," he said lightly. "You are in formal control and I have her letter of retainer. She will go in now with us, so be on your guard."

"Mrs. Lorimer, you can do me a signal favor," whispered Nixon. "Pray remain in the salon with your daughter and send Basilio to wait on me at the door of the sick room. I will call him in when I need him. Now," he muttered to himself, "craft against craft. The priest must show his hand."

When the doctor entered the sick room he was instantly confronted at the door by Padre Viciente Guerra, whose eyes gleamed ominously. Extended in his bed the old soldier lay like the effigy of a cavalier of other days. His breathing was faint and his lips feebly

moved in articulate murmurs. Nixon, who had already conferred with the local practitioner, made a gesture of sudden summons, for he saw Juan Valdes seated on guard at the head of the bed. The boy sullenly raised his head, and then dropped his gleaming eyes as he resolutely settled himself in his chair.

It was a clear case of two Richmonds in the field. Stepping back lightly into an adjoining room, where Lorimer stood, the young doctor was followed by the insolent churchman.

"I wish to examine the physical condition of my patient, General Romero," said the doctor, calmly. "It is of importance that he should be kept perfectly quiet. Request that young man to leave the sick room. I will now provide all fitting attendance for the sufferer. He must have skilled and proper attention."

"By what right do you dictate to me?" answered the priest, his voice thick with passion.

"By this," answered Nixon. "It is written in English and I will translate it."

When the brief legal paper was read Padre Vicente broke out in bitter words: "I will only take the young lady's own directions."

He was astounded when Señorita Inez at once entered the room, quietly remarking: "I now give over the entire charge of my father's present condition and care to Doctor Nixon."

"Will you please tell that young man to come forth," coolly said the practitioner.

There was a stubborn silence.

At a sign Basilio appeared, respectfully saluting the young physician. "I hope there will be no necessity to use any force here," continued Doctor James. "My friend Mr. Lorimer is the proper legal representative of Miss Inez. I will now leave you with my positive orders not to enter that sick room until I permit it."

The astonished priest was left alone, for the physician passed through the open door, which Mr. Frank swiftly locked from the other side. Basilio stood at the other door of the sick room.

Light as a panther's stride was the spring which

brought Nixon to the side of Juan Valdes, who started up. An iron grip on the youth's arm pinioned him, while Lorimer pointed to the door. On the threshold the party were met by Padre Guerra, who had essayed the other entrance. Twisting the struggling youth out of the door Doctor Nixon signed to Basilio, who placed himself in front of it.

"I will give your nephew just half an hour in which to leave the premises forever," vigorously remarked Lorimer. "He knows the way to the village. If he does not go I shall have my own two men put him off the grounds at once. And if he comes back—he risks his life! His refusal will force me to send *you* out of the house also, with him!"

The priest, blind with rage, gave orders by signal to Juan Valdes, who moved to leave the house.

"Stay," said Lorimer. "Basilio will go with this youth and see him off the grounds. All his personal effects will be sent to him whenever you say. Now you and he know that I absolutely forbid him to set foot on the grounds under any pretense."

"This is your work, you Yankee schemer," furiously cried Guerra. "You lured away the poor lad Felipe to his ruin."

"Did your friend the Spanish Consul-General tell you that?" said Nixon coldly. "You can apply to him for any information. Now mark me! You are simply a stranger here. For General Romero has no longer any control of his own legal actions. If you meddle I will have the constables eject you to-morrow. You may remain for a reasonable time, until General Romero shall be removed to a retreat or recover so that he can travel. But it depends upon your own prudent conduct."

The priest turned back without a word, then walked away baffled.

"Frank," said Nixon, "now take all the ladies home. Go to the bank in the morning and deposit these keys. Let your mother take Miss Inez with her for to-night. To-morrow be sure and get the temporary order appointing Miss Inez as guardian of her father. Leave your men here. Basilio and I will

watch all night. Here are two telegrams which I wish you would send in the morning as soon as the office opens."

Lorimer grasped Nixon's hands. "I am afraid to leave you here alone. Let me stay."

James Nixon's eyes flashed. "Besides my loaded revolver I have also a good club!" Then he handed his comrade Felipe's little golden ring. "Give this to that sweet girl and tell her it was the last thing her brother kissed in life—that he thought of her when he faced the rifles. This lock of his hair was a gift to the poor King of Emeralds. I cannot bear to tell Inez yet the whole hidden story of how they did him to death! Don't fear for me. Tremble only for this yellow-faced old conspirator. Basilio has a great desire to knife him, and he knows it, too. Go, Frank; I want to watch the poor old boy and study him."

Silence—silence in the sick-chamber where the young physician watched for long hours every movement of the uneasy sleeper. The veteran's fingers moved in the mechanical motions of devotion. His parched lips murmured: "Panchita! Panchita!" as his eyes, staring vacantly, rested on the picture gazing down above his head, the guardian angel of his saddened life. To Nixon's ministrations he gently submitted as he strove to read in his face the key of the dreams which thronged upon that poor old tired brain.

"There is nothing left to hope for—nothing but to wait for the 'sweep of the dark angel's wing,'" murmured the doctor, at three o'clock, as he noted the effect of a gentle anodyne. "It is ebb tide, alas! with the poor old boy."

The physician mused sadly upon the problem before him. "He may not ever recover to give an intelligent account of his affairs. Such poor provision as is made for Inez may be scattered or lost. Those missing bonds!"

Thoroughly familiar with the old villa, Nixon reflected that he had nowhere seen a safe or a strong box. "Can he have hidden the bonds away in the room? Even President Shearer has never handled them. They are certainly not in New York, for he always

sent the coupons down from here. Can the padre have taken them for deposit or tricked him out of them?"

By a sudden instinct the young doctor began to study the whole surroundings of the sick-room. The floor was of old-time stained polished oak, covered with rugs and mats. "He would not be likely to break that up. Too hard a task for a delicate man."

Beginning systematically, Nixon examined all the walls with care, and moved every curtain, even turning aside the few pictures hung upon the dark wainscot. There were no closets or cupboards and the dressing rooms were adjoining. "He would try and keep them near his bed, where he could see them if he wished to."

So, candle in his hand, Nixon inspected the walls breast high around the room. They were all shining with the dark polish of bygone years. He even passed his hands over the broad framings of the doors. Suddenly he bent to the closer examination of the facings of the doorway wherein he had exhibited his revolver so impressively to the padre. A fine line divided transversely the smooth surface above a banded moulding. The closest examination showed a faint division, as if made with a watch-spring saw.

"Here is a bit of neat cabinet-work," mused Nixon. "If I were a Yankee born I would soon find out the reason of this division."

The clock ticked away noisily in the front hall as the doctor prodded the woodwork. Finally, by mere hazard he pressed back a part of the door frame, which, sliding back, disclosed a small cavity in the boxwork of the door jamb. Some brown documents lay therein.

The next second he drew out the papers!

A slight noise startled him. Turning his head, he beheld José sitting up in the bed and clutching excitedly at the air. His lips moved in an unintelligible protest, and as Nixon sprang to his side the old man's feeble head fell back in a swoon.

Five minutes later the doctor picked up a heavy envelope which had fallen out of the opened hiding-place. It was one of the stiff pasteboard envelopes used for documents, and bore in large letters the

words: "Winslow, Lanier & Co., Bankers and Brokers, 13 Wall street, New York City, N. Y."

It was only the work of a moment to explore the little cachette. There were three other similar cases, and all were empty.

Nixon sat down and buried his head in his hands. "We have made a mistake. Padre Guerra must not go forth until the missing bonds have been found. For in these cases they were once concealed, there seems to be no doubt, and they are not far from the person of this schemer. Here is the place to study him—but New York is the point to watch for the bonds, which were probably stolen since the General's mental aberration, either by him or with the help of his Spanish friends. It is the emerald store which has held him here, a crown of ill omen to the last. I think I will surprise you to-morrow, *padre mio!*" mused Nixon.

With a relief from Basilio the doctor divided the night between snatches of sleep and studying the solution.

It was nine o'clock on a golden morning when Mrs. Lorimer and party were welcomed at the front driveway by the physician. Inez was desperately anxious for the doctor's verdict.

"I can tell you more by this evening," he said. "Jacoby and our local friend will go over the whole case in counsel. I have telegraphed for the New York specialist and also for a good, reliable man nurse. With a grave courtesy to Inez, Nixon then led Mrs. Lorimer aside.

"There is absolutely no hope," he said. "It may be a matter of a few days or a very few weeks. But I must try to bring on a last flicker of the lamp. Tonight I will tell you all, when Frank is at hand. There are some business matters which demand our instant action. Now, pray have Inez ask Padre Guerra to join us for a few moments. It is imperative."

The priest walked out upon the lawn with lowering brows. He was humiliated and abashed, and yet for all his wrath he dared not risk an open rupture almost in the presence of death.

"Padre Guerra," said Nixon, advancing and extending his hand, "do not add to this young lady's sorrows. There should be no conflict between us. I insisted properly upon the removal of your troublesome young nephew, who has caused much annoyance here. You might see at once that he continually recalls the loss of General Romero's son. As for yourself, I am content that you should remain and minister, spiritually, to Don José. But, old friend as you are of the invalid, I demand the entire control of my patient's sick-room. In due and proper time you shall have all opportunity of access to his person. Now, will you force me to use the power of the law, or will you remain and aid us in watching for the return of General Romero's reason, or the final event? I have no objections to your remaining—in fact, I prefer it, if you will only apply to me for access to him. It is for you to decide, as we have strict laws here, and I say frankly that I will do my duty as a sworn physician. Do you agree to my terms?"

His voice was even conciliatory.

The black eyes flashed out one resentful gleam at the cool young American, but the padre said slowly: "I do. I will remain and minister to my charge."

"Then we shall surely grow to be the better friends every day," cordially remarked Nixon. "Will you allow me to ask you before Miss Inez as to the whereabouts of the General's documents which you sent to New York, and also the emerald, which you are aware is of great value?"

The mestizo sullenly said: "The documents are in expert hands in the city and I have the emerald here." The ladies exchanged anxious glances as Nixon suggested pointedly: "Mr. Lorimer has begged me, then, to ask you to return the documents at once here, and also to deliver over the emerald for safe keeping. It is his duty as Miss Inez's lawyer now to take full charge of matters connected with the estate of the sick man. She is responsible to the courts now for all business matters."

Viciente Guerra strode swiftly to the house and returned in a moment with a small case, which he

handed to Inez. "I will at once write to the experts in New York and have the papers returned without delay," he gravely said. "It is the hour for my usual devotions. Can I do aught else for you?"

The doctor bowed, and the group was left wondering on the lawn as Guerra paced back to the house.

"I was right," mused Nixon, as he walked apart. "This man dare not now leave suddenly. He has either secreted the bonds here or else he awaits their realization in New York. Europe is no place to sell them."

High noon brought back Francis Lorimer, Esq., in the eager elation of success. "All right," he said, as he leaped lightly from the buggy. "The Judge signed the order at once, and I have had the keys safely locked up. All quiet here?"

Nixon nodded an approval. "I will give you just ten minutes with Miss Inez, Frank," he remarked. "Then we have a new and serious matter to meet. Join me in the summer house."

Nixon stole back into the house, and, finding Don José calmly asleep, quietly removed the four envelopes which had contained the missing bonds. They were covered with the usual private marks common to the New York dealers in such securities.

Five minutes after he displayed these secretly to the lawyer.

"You are a jewel, Jimmy," heartily said Lorimer. "Now I have a good excuse not to let his Reverence leave here till he restores the papers at New York. Abercromby can be here at eight o'clock. When our friend goes back to-morrow morning he will have the list of the bonds which young Sheaver has given me, and their New York agent can prove the quarterly collection of these. There is a special branch of the New York police force which is devoted to tracing missing securities. The first man who offers a single coupon or a bond of that lot will be promptly arrested and lodged in a cell alone. Then we can work on the padre and frighten him. Should Don José have even ten minutes' lucid interval, I must have you with me to learn of his last wishes, his will and all his San Domingo affairs. But, first, these stolen bonds! It is

for poor Inez we fight now. The emerald legacy can be hunted for later. I will trap some guilty one in a week. For the coupons are about falling due—and ready money is ready money all the world over.”

I wish I felt as confident of my patient,” sighed Nixon. “But here are my two medical friends coming.”

An hour later the great specialist gravely summed up the situation. It makes little difference, gentlemen,” he said quietly, “whether it is a mere heart failure—the action of a brain blood clot, of a sudden stroke of brain paralysis bringing final stupor and death. There is no hope.

“Be prepared for the end at any time,” added the leading light, as he stepped into his waiting carriage. “The chances are a thousand to one against any return to reason.”

That day was a busy one for Doctor Abercromby which initiated him into all the mysteries of the secret financial police life of New York. “Thank Heavens! I am done with all this Hawkshaw business for twelve hours,” said the tired comrade. “I feel as if I had honestly earned one of the emeralds; that is, if they ever materialize. But I’ve now stopped all the foxy padre’s financial games in grand good style.”

Three days later the sun slowly faded over the Hudson hills, and a silent gathering watched the sunset fires burn out upon the meadows, sweeping down far below Edgecliff. The portico of Villa Romero showed the sad circle of Don José’s friends lingering there, for the old man’s life was now ebbing away. Doctor Nixon, somewhat apart, was earnestly listening to Frank Lorimer, whose face was puzzled in its air of doubt as he said: “I hardly know what to advise. The priest is certainly very tractable. Now, you see, Munoz writes me that he has no bonds on deposit, and that he knows of no large financial investment made lately by our poor demented friend. His accounts current show the management only of the San Domingo estates, and he offers courteously the whole accounts and vouchers for our inspection. With Abercromby keenly on the watch at New York, the bonds cannot be marketed in America without our knowing it. I have cabled, and the

numbers are now on the black lists in London, Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfort and Berlin." Then he suddenly added : "The padre ! he is far too slick, too patient, too good. He has humbly lowered the black flag he nailed to the mast on his arrival. Can it be that he has sent all these bonds away by Juan Valdes, and will quietly slip away later ? You see how cheerfully he returned the old parchment."

"Yes," doubtfully remarked Nixon. "He has surely some other point to make yet ; and has trimmed his sails now to meet our breeze. Inez tells me that the priest has not referred even once to her brother's death. This is strange. Is it fear, or is it some yet darker mystery ? I do not like to leave the place until we trace out the bond disappearance. It may be poor Inez's only mainstay in the future."

Frank cast a quick glance to where the girl, now robed in deepest black, sat between her silent friends. "There are brighter days in store," softly said Lorimer in a manly tone, and the hush of the evening deepened upon them, for his friend understood—the golden heart of youth lay at her feet.

"I must take my place now at the bedside," quietly whispered Nixon as the moonlight began to steal among the trees.

"Ah!" the doctor started forward as the trained nurse eagerly beckoned him. "What is it, Simpson ?"

"Come quickly. He is awake and very much excited. I fear that the time is coming."

"Be ready with Inez. I will send the man out to you, Frank!"

A single glance as the physician entered told him that the last flicker of life was giving its weird exaltation to the dreams thronging the poor brain. Turning to the nurse who had already watched five hundred deathbeds, the young doctor said: "Simpson, how long since this mental fever blazed up?"

"Just now, sir," replied the wary attendant. "He tried to rise and has since been calling: 'Panchita! My Panchita?' and stretching his arms out to the picture there."

"Pray step out and ask Mr. Lorimer to request Miss

Inez to step here at once. Let her come alone. It may quiet him."

The dark-robed beauty glided into the room and knelt silently at her father's bedside. Her hands gently pressed his chilled palm as she murmured a flood of endearing words in her childhood's tongue. With a frightened inquiring look she turned to the doctor. "He is whispering to me and calling me Panchita. It is my mother whom he sees—not poor Inez."

"Speak to him, it may calm him," answered the young physician, as he listened to the trembling words of fond endearment falling from the veteran's lips.

The window was opened to admit the fragrant summer breeze of the still night. A silver moonlight stole in and lit up the chamber where, but one shaded lamp burned at the farther end. Behind them, rosary in hand, stood Padre Guerra, spectral in his long black robe. His murmur alone broke the hush of the moment. Among the girl's flowing locks the old man's feeble hand was wandering and his face beamed in the moonlight. He faltered tenderly: "Sing to me, Panchita, sing, *mi querida!* Now you have come back to me! I have waited for you so long, Panchita! Waited, and now you shall sing to me. Your own song." His voice was eager as he gazed up into the sheaf of moonbeams falling around him.

"What is it, this song?" whispered the doctor as the girl turned her beautiful wistful face toward him.

"A little one that I used to sing him. My mother's own song. He loved it so!"

"Sing it softly. It may recall him to you. It may break his last dream and bring him back to you again—to know you!" gravely ordered the young doctor.

Sweet and low the girl sang in a quaint old Spanish fashion. Her father's hands sought hers as she chanted in the silent night.

The song ceased, but in fond murmur Don José was still wandering with the Lady of Jibacoa. He clung to the slender young hand which would fain warm his chilled palm with the generous blood of loving youth.

"Felipe, too! I see little Felipe running to meet

us. Let us go home now, Panchita, for the moon is going down!"

With a crash a galloping horse drew up on the graveled walk before the portico of the Villa.

"Doctor Nixon, instantly! No one else," cried a sharp ringing youthful voice. "I've a telegram for him!"

Frank Lorimer stepped quickly over the threshold of the sick-room and then touched Nixon's arm.

"Come at once; only for a moment," and so the doctor left Inez kneeling by the sufferer.

Springing softly along the hallway, Nixon was confronted by a bright faced village lad. "Special delivery, and an instant answer," he said, as he gazed at his horse standing there with quivering flanks.

Under the nearest hall light Nixon, tearing open the fateful yellow envelope, read the words of portent. He cried in joy: "Checkmate, Padre Vicente!" as he studied each cheering word. It ran as follows:

"Unknown Spaniard arrested with all the past due coupons on his person at Hernandez. Money Exchange, Lower Broadway, Cuban steamer tickets found on him. Look sharp around you. Will hold the man. It is a United States arrest. Telegraph directions. Can Frank come down? Answer. Will hold man without bail.

ABERCROMBY."

"Wait a moment," said the startled doctor, as he walked toward the sick-room.

The sound of a smothered cry reached him. As he strode into the chamber Frank Lorimer was raising the prostrate form of Inez Romero. For her father's hand had relaxed in death, and Vicente Guerra was raising his voice in solemn prayer over the dead cavalier's body.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INNOCENT HAND BREAKS THE SEAL.

DOCTOR NIXON turned and quietly summoned Mrs. Lorimer and Ethel. "Pray lead her away for a few moments," and he pointed to the sorrowing girl. Then drawing Frank out of the death chamber, the doctor handed him the despatch. Lorimer sank into a chair and lapsed into an earnest study. They were sitting in the ante-room in full view of Padre Guerra, now busied with his religious duties.

"This whole thing turns now only on our handling this man properly," remarked Nixon in a whisper. "And it must be done at once. We must avoid all public scandal and he must not leave here till the bonds are traced."

"We must keep him away from this fellow in prison and work on the two separately," answered Frank. "As for Guerra, let us begin to-night. He is shocked and unmanned by this sudden event. Let me talk to you very threateningly in English, which you can interpret to him when I give you the tip."

In five minutes the clatter of hoofs told of the departure of the telegraph messenger.

The house was in a strange brooding silence. The moon sailed high over the trees and the night winds wailed a wild requiem for the dead.

"Now," said Lorimer, who had arranged the Library for a conference, "ask the padre to step out, for the constable will be here in half an hour. I want him to play him a little on the line before we land him."

Viciente Guerra looked up in grave surprise as Doctor Nixon laid his hand on his arm. "Pray join us for a few moments in the library. It is very important. There are duties to the living as well as to the noble man who is gone!"

With an air of reluctance the sullen Cuban adventurer followed the doctor. The library was well

lighted, and as the two men entered Frank Lorimer calmly arose and locked both the doors, pocketing the keys. The action was not lost on Vicente, whose furtive eyes sought the windows, but he restrained himself as yet.

"You are aware, Padre Guerra," began Nixon, "that Miss Inez is now the sole representative of her race. Left alone in the world, her lawyer and the family of Mr. Lorimer are her only friends. We must be busied at once with the case of General Romero's estate, as well as the necessary arrangements for his funeral."

Here the padre startled them: "I shall have to go at once down to New York," he solemnly said. "The General died without the last rites of the Church. He was not prepared, and there is an old excommunication still hanging over the family. I must take advice as to what form of burial I may properly give him."

Nixon hurriedly translated these remarks. His colleague's eyes answered him.

He turned again to the priest. "We will relieve your mind of any anxiety and responsibility. Mr. Lorimer, as legal representative, and myself will ascertain at once Señorita Inez's wishes. There are American priests at Poughkeepsie, and all fitting and proper funeral ceremonies shall be had. Mr. Lorimer is going hurriedly to New York to-morrow, and he can accompany you. We also have to make proper arrangements. The details of the preparation will naturally fall into my hands."

"He was my friend and personal penitent. He was not prepared," stubbornly said Guerra, who now saw a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, though unsuspecting of any grave trouble.

"Pardon me, Guerra, he was a beloved friend to all of us. A friend to every man worthy of his friendship. He was God's penitent, not yours! As for his preparation, his good, gray head was sobered in chastening sorrow. He went out on his lonely way under the eyes of innocence, and leaning still on the love of the wife who had gone before him."

"I shall certainly claim all my rights. I shall appeal

to Señorita Inez herself," cried the priest, starting up.

"Pardon me," said the doctor, as he stepped between the angry man and the door. "No one shall break in on that girl's sacred sorrow, not even you. There is no one here under your spiritual control. Still, as a guest, the only guest in this house of mourning, you have grave duties. I call on you now, both as a friend and an honest man, to aid us for General Romero's sake!"

"What would you?" replied the startled priest.

"I will tell you," answered Nixon, sternly. "A startling event has happened which throws a dark shadow upon this household and those who have had access to the sick man for the past weeks."

The priest was gazing dumbly from one hostile face to the other. A low tap at the door aroused Lorimer, who unlocked it and then spoke a few words to two robust men, who sat down on watch in the hall in full view. It was singular that Lorimer left the door open as he seated himself. Padre Guerra was a little uneasy, but he still wore his professional smile. The white teeth flashed out yet under the thin, cruel lips.

Both the Americans moved up a little closer to Guerra, as the doctor said, firmly: "A Spaniard who has been here, who has been seen hanging around Villa Romero, has been arrested to-day in New York City with a mutilated portion of valuable securities belonging to the dear General. He is in prison now, and will be kept in solitude there—and," Nixon pointed to the hall—"these officers are here now to make other arrests, for the articles stolen are of enormous value. The house, and every one in it, is now under the proper espionage of the law. Detectives at New York, Fishkill and Poughkeepsie are awaiting anyone who may try to leave here without our sanction. For Mr. Lorimer legally represents the estate, and I will aid him in tracing out the thief, whoever he is."

"Who is this person apprehended?" defiantly said Guerra, though his voice had a feeble ring.

"I am not permitted to tell you, sir," remarked Nixon, rising and gazing firmly in the padre's eyes. "But it is a person you know, sir. And, moreover, in

addition, we have brought you here to tell you that we shall also request the immediate arrest of your nephew, Juan Valdes."

"My nephew a thief! This insult—I will have a summary redress. The Spanish Consul-General will protect me!" cried Guerra, rising and pacing the room, his breast heaving in rage.

Frank Lorimer noted that the *mestizo* eyed them both, with an intense anxiety.

"The Spanish Consul-General may himself have to explain the foul conspiracy which led to the brutal and cowardly murder of Felipe Romero, Señor Guerra," cried Nixon, with flashing eyes.

"Do you think that Juan Valdes was connected with this robbery?" raged the priest, who remarked that Nixon had addressed him as 'Señor' Guerra.

"I am quite sure of it," coldly said the doctor. "You introduced him to the sick-room, from whence the property was stolen, while Don José lay there under your spiritual charge and presumable friendship. Will you produce the lad quietly, or shall we have to arrest both him and you together?"

"I defy you to arrest me. I am a priest and a foreigner, not subject to your local laws," roared the irate padre.

"If I lift a single finger," said the doctor, "those two men will enter, and you will be the first in custody. Juan Valdes we can get when we want to. He is not far away."

The shot told. Guerra sank back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. "It is a dirty, low conspiracy," he hissed. "What has been stolen?"

"That you will find out soon enough," simply said Nixon. "Perhaps this man now in irons in New York may be one of your penitents."

The priest groaned. "I can reveal nothing, even if they should tell me of misdeeds in confession."

"True," answered Nixon. "But as a man, as a priest, as a gentleman, you can greatly aid in the restoration of the stolen securities. Think it over! You may as well understand that you are under grave suspicion, as well as your scapegrace nephew. We

have two warrants here already sworn out ready for the public arrest of yourself and Juan Valdes. You also will have to prove your innocence before you can leave this house free of custody."

Lorimer's eyes were now flaming like blazing coals as he backed Nixon's words with his resolute glance.

"Go it, Jimmy," he whispered. "The padre is in shallow water."

Nixon continued: "You introduced several unknown Spaniards here during my short absence. That poor orphaned girl who trusted you blindly has been robbed to an enormous extent. The grip of the law has already nabbed one scoundrel caught in the act. Padre Guerra! You were responsible for that sick-room. You were the only one who had control here for weeks unwatched. It was in that time the half-crazed man was robbed and you cannot go forth clean-handed. If you wish to save a family scandal, if you wish to save your name, you will choose your own way to find this criminal. I will tell you for your own information that the property is valueless to the thief, for every banker of repute has now a list of the stolen securities. The same trian which takes Mr. Lorimer to the city conveys the bank officials to swear to the stolen goods partly recovered. Now, do you wish to be on hand in New York to hear the confession of the Spanish thief whom we have locked up there? I will give you half an hour to think this matter calmly over. I am now going into the presence of your dead friend, who was both gallant and loyal to all. You have seen his face for the last time if the property is not returned. When you wish to speak to me Mr. Lorimer will call me out. In the meantime one of the constables will take my place here."

"It's a pretty bold bluff, Nixon," whispered Lorimer, as the doctor turned to go, "but it will fetch some kind of a fish. I think you've touched him pretty closely on Juan."

The padre's lips twitched as the burly constable entered at a sign and seated himself in readiness in a far away corner of the room.

Lorimer's gaze rested on an evening journal before him and under it lay Nixon's hammerless revolver.

Guerra marched up and down the room, his face working in a storm of silent emotion. The glittering black eyes turned on the sturdy constable.

"Now I wonder what monkey shines this fellow has really been up to," thought the village Dogberry.

In the vexing torture of uncertainty as to who occupied the New York prison cell, Padre Guerra's brain was working like lightning. He was pondering upon the possible result of a stubborn silence. Then the open disgrace of publicity rose up before him, backed by the added fear of substantial punishment. If Juan were only out of the way," the priest gnashed his teeth as he pondered. "The boy is a reckless fool. He may get frightened and betray all he knows of the following of Felipe. He always was a liar! And who is in the cell? Is it Juan or——"

The young lawyer was still intent upon the journal; but Vicente Guerra observed that the constable never took his singularly disturbing eyes away from him in his uneasy march up and down.

"Dare I let this sharp *Gringo* go down there alone to New York? He may use threats, or cajole the other one. And I, where would I be then? Tied up here, some other favorite of the Governor-General may be put in charge of Hacienda Romero."

In the long, silent tramp the padre alternated between the Scylla of prison and the Charybdis of lost honor, place and prestige at home, with a final separation from the "flesh pots" of the Romero family. Under his breath he swore a great oath: "*Madre de Dios!* I will find my way yet to that sneaking doctor's heart if it is the work of long years." But he dared not make any sign of wrath and he feared the coming morning.

When Nixon returned, it was from the room where, in charge of Lorimer's mother and sister, the despoiled heiress was sleeping worn out with the weight of her fast-coming sorrows

"Poor child! I have given her what I cannot claim to-night for myself—the dull, inert sleep of forgetful-

ness," thought the doctor, as he walked in and made a significant sign to the constable.

He walked up to Lorimer and whispered in an ominously low tone. Then his fine personal inheritance of a Celtic temper got the upper hand. He abruptly blew out two of the four candles on the table, and curtly addressed the padre:

"You are now to go only to your room, sir. If you wish to leave it one of the two men there will go with you or call me. Now you have lost your very last chance. Mr. Lorimer in the morning will go alone to New York with his local witness and you will be removed by the officers from this house to-morrow. The warrant will be duly served on you at daybreak, and Mr. Lorimer himself will take an officer down and below in legal form. Have you anything to say?"

Still the priest stood mute.

Lorimer coolly rose and pointed to the hallway.

The constable was standing at the door, and as Frank blew out the two remaining lights the padre noted the gleam of steel in his hand. "Just in case of accident," said Lorimer, significantly. "This sleek hypocrite may have himself lugged a knife around too, in his unregenerate days."

As they neared the door the entrapped padre hesitated and gazed anxiously at the two young men, whose faces were stony. There was no compromise in their set faces. He took a single step out into the hall toward the end of the corridor where the further door was ajar, the one leading to the room in which General José Romero slept on in the calm, inscrutable majesty of death.

As they neared the room to pass into Guerra's own sleeping apartment he faltered; then slowly turned and unwillingly retraced his steps. The three men stood there under the overhanging light of the silent corridor.

"If I should be successful in forcing a return of the missing property would I be perfectly free to leave with an untarnished name for Cuba? If I should be able to use all the powers of the Spanish colony and so regain the property?"

"Yes!" imperiously answered both the young men.

"Then I will go with you to New York and help," faltered Padre Guerra.

"It was a good bluff, Nixon," said Frank, smilingly, as he pocketed his revolver.

The birds were caroling merrily in the grove around Villa Romero as Lorimer and Nixon saw the sun rise up over the hills. The two friends had stolen out together for a council of war. The doctor's eyes were haggard with watching, though he had forced his friend to rest.

"You will need all your nerve to hold in the wily padre, Frank," he said. "I can come to town this evening and meet you at the office. Let Padre Guerra make his headquarters there. He may remember quite suddenly some Spanish friend to whom General Romero had intrusted the deposit. You have Cashier Sheaver with you. Let him go down and identify the coupons and then swear to the General's ownership. Let Padre Guerra send all the letters, messages and telegrams that he wants to. Only do not lose him from sight. His own devilish ingenuity will suggest a way to retreat in honor."

"And the funeral obsequies?" anxiously demanded Lorimer.

"Don't you see," Nixon replied, "there is yet a chance to allow Padre Guerra to be present in his capacity, for the last rites will be held at Poughkeepsie. It will avert scandal. Now I shall rouse him up from his dreams of 'emeralds,' and tell him there is but one restriction upon him, that is, of remaining in your company. That no criminal action will be taken until he has *exhausted* all of his personal powers.

The priest was already up and pacing his room as eager as a tiger cat, when Nixon gravely informed him of the arrangements of the day.

"Can I send some telegrams from the village? It will save time," he said, gloomily. "Without Juan nothing whatever can be done. He knows the hearts of every Cuban in New York."

The two Americans smiled significantly. Nixon took up the word. "Write any telegrams or letters

that you wish. Mr. Lorimer will send them away instantly, so your friends can meet you at his office, where they will have every entertainment and due respect."

Padre Guerra's jaw dropped as he stepped into the road wagon, for the burly form of the constable was looming up on the front seat and his eye had the sleeping watchfulness of a mastiff.

The doctor watched the wagon flash away among the trees and then returned to his solitary place of campaign, pondering as he paced the veranda.

"There is now time for all. Time to organize our further search for the emeralds; time to move on a pressure for Inez's landed rights; time to build up, to heal, to assuage the wounds of sorrow and fate! But out of this gloomy, death-haunted house the girl should go soon, though not a step farther than the loving welcome of Edgecliff.

"Trust all to me, my child," he said to the orphan a few minutes later. "If you have lost one brother let me feel that you know you have gained another."

And Inez Romero smiled on him through her falling tears.

Every hour until train time the doctor's growing excitement burned in his veins. He bounded to his feet as a telegram was handed to him at four o'clock, in the drowsy afternoon.

"Juan here at office. Going down for conference. Come at once," it read. The signature, "Abercromby-Lorimer," told him that Inez's loyal friends were fighting hard for her.

Nixon counted the stations with impatience until the train rolled in at the Forty-second street station. There Frank Lorimer sprang forward to meet his coming friend.

"Jump into the coupe," said the lawyer. And they rattled away to the office.

"I have a strange story to tell you," remarked Lorimer, when the cab swung up to the office entrance. "Come over here for a minute with me to Mulholland's. The detective captain is over there."

Striding across the street the two friends entered a

little card room where many a conference of vast personal importance had been quietly held. For sport, politician, racing man, swell-nob criminal, the "fancy," the green goods man, and many another ingenious rascal had often whispered their secrets over Mulholland's doubtful nectar. A little side-door was there through which pretty feet had often lightly tripped, some timid and shy, some faltering, some eager, but all on the downward path.

"Now, my boy, here's the whole story in a nutshell. Juan shot in as swiftly as a shark when we arrived," began Lorimer as he lit a cigar. "I'll be brief, for I want you to have the detective's advice at once. Guerra sent four telegrams in Spanish from the station and I paid for them. Arrived here, Juan and the padre were closeted ten minutes alone in your consultation room, where I had made him comfortable, and ordered them a nice breakfast. At last the priest opened the door. 'Juan needs a smart cabman. He can be of use. Can he pass freely and not be followed?' 'On my honor,' I replied, astonished to find that the priest could muster up a pretty fair English. By noon two or three dark-faced foreign fellows looking like pictures from cigar-box labels lounged in and had a long conclave with the padre. I sent Abercromby down for the detective captain, who came up and played 'patient.' I refrained from any sign of anxiety and handed in without a word several letters and telegrams which soon arrived for my brown-faced prisoner. I was beginning to feel like poking Guerra up when Hogan, the detective, stopped me. 'You have frightened that chap already—all that you can. Let him frighten himself now a little. He will show his hand very soon. The prettiest little affairs of this kind are often spoiled by haste. He has only sent this boy out as a ruse. That coffee-colored rascal knows already just what he means to do and how to do it.' At two o'clock Juan came tumbling in, all eagerness. 'Now you'll see the fox's tail,' remarked Hogan quietly. It was true. In ten minutes the padre sent the boy out for me. I entered. 'Can one of my friends see the prisoner, who is now locked up alone, and bear him a

message from me, coming back here freely and reporting to me?’

“I quickly said, ‘Yes, he can!’

“‘Then I will send him down at once,’ resolutely answered Guerra. In five minutes Hogan and a Spaniard—name to me unknown—were speeding away downtown on the elevated. Juan ran in and out from time to time until five o’clock. Then Hogan returned, smiling, and whispered: ‘There has been a battle royal down there in the cell, Lorimer. Mind your eye. There’ll be news for you now.’

“I waited breathlessly and gave the constable orders to detain Juan on some pretext, while I conferred with the priest. Guerra came to the door at last. ‘I wish to see you alone first,’ he said. ‘Then you can have an interpreter or official if you wish to.’

“We cleared the room at once. ‘It is a very strange story of adventure,’ sullenly muttered the priest. ‘I cannot tell you all, but I may hope to return the missing securities to-night if you will agree to three conditions.’

“‘Name them,’ I said.

“‘FIRST, the man paid four hundred dollars for the coupons he bought. Twenty per cent. off their face. He wants that money and his freedom.’

“‘NEXT, I and Juan are free to go away in peace and honor and also to attend the funeral of General Romero as friends only.

“‘LAST, if you and the doctor are under the driveway of the Fourteenth Street Theater at twelve o’clock to-night, a man will there deliver to you the missing articles provided he is free to go and you swear that he shall not be watched. How I alone can do this! How I do it—is my business—as a churchman,’ concluded Guerra. That’s where we stand now.”

Lorimer ceased and then gazed at his friend. “What do you say to it, Jimmy? I told him to wait till you arrived for an answer. I did this on Hogan’s advice so as not to appear too eager.”

“Let us at once call in the captain,” answered Nixon.

The rosy-faced detective had been “swapping lies”

with his friend Mulholland. The affair was laid before him.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the padre controls these things, and you have only frightened him by persuading him that he could not negotiate them safely in any respectable foreign market. The seizing of the coupons proved this. Object lessons are the very best. Now there's a devil of a nest of Spaniards and Cubans all around Sixth avenue and Fourteenth street. This rascal must have stacked these things away for safe keeping in that funny colony, where they could be easily handed from one to another in case of a search. Better agree to his terms—pacify him—let him go to a hotel alone. I'll have his royal nibs shadowed—he won't get away! Let the boy go too. You show up there under the old theater lobby at the indicated hour. Better go well heeled. I can give you a 'gun' if you don't carry one," and he tossed a Colt's police pistol, caliber 41, on the table. I'll be near you over at Andy Phillips's on the avenue. We can soon look at the bonds. If they are all O. K., then you had better let the whole lot drift. So skip over and tell this sly dago that it's a go. You can't do better."

Seated at the table in the consultation room, Padre Guerra awaited the friends' final decision with some anxiety. His dark eyes were now quite sunken and haggard. A couple of his compatriots loungingly curled up in corners glowered at Nixon's skulls and uninviting medical pictures as they smoked ceaseless cigarettes.

The doctor bowed gravely on entering.

"We accept your proposition, Padre Guerra," he said courteously, "and if you will name any convenient hotel we will send Juan and yourself down there at once in a carriage."

Captain Hogan was a silent party to the interview.

"I will go away with my friends," answered the sullen Cuban, "and leave you the address. You can send a messenger there to tell me that all is well. I am wearied and would rest."

"Certainly," said both young men in a breath.

"Then there is nothing else required of me. I will return to the villa to-morrow evening, and remain until the funeral ; that sad duty over, I will depart at once for Cuba."

There was an awkward silence as the party prepared to depart. Nixon and Lorimer exchanged anxious glances with Hogan, who nodded affably.

"You need have no fear of the failure of the delivery of the articles," said Guerra with a cold dignity. "They are all intact, and these gentlemen are my witness that I now guarantee their return."

The ring of perfect confidence was in his voice. One of the Cubans presented a card, and politely remarked : "My house will be the home of El Señor Padre Guerra, while he honors it."

"One moment," suddenly questioned Nixon. "How will the person know to whom to deliver the bonds?"

"Juan here will accompany the messenger," coldly said the priest. "The bearer is a stranger to you both, but Juan will identify you. One of you can remain behind with him and the messenger while the other examines the missing articles."

"It's a mighty good job," remarked Hogan to Doctor Abercromby in the outer office as the delegation of Cubans filed away. "But, Doctor, for God's sake make your friends very careful. I caught the flash of that padre's eye as he passed me. He will 'turn one of these young fellows down' in a minute, if he can ever see his way to it. He's a snake, that fellow!"

"Thanks for your warning, Captain," warmly said Abercromby. "Sheaver and myself will not be far off. We'll take post across the street."

"If it was gold coin or 'good green boodle,'" added the detective, "you would not have had such an easy time, but the sly devil is surely playing some waiting game. He has things in view. Look out, and never trust him behind you. Years do not cool a Cuban's revenge. I'll be in at Phillips's waiting for you till two o'clock."

Only a few belated strollers lingered around the old theater as the bells beat out midnight. Lorimer and Nixon scarce noted the queer human driftwood of mid-

night New York as it floated by. Bold-eyed women, staggering roysterers, keen-eyed landsharks, belated Jersey men, laughing theater parties, and the homeless, wandering poor passed in a strange review. Now and then a well-dressed citizen went lounging along in that air of *bien être* which marks the man who is well fixed in Gotham.

"There is some break," muttered Lorimer as their watches both showed ten minutes after midnight. The speech was interrupted by a sharp whistle from Abercromby.

Out of a little polyglot eating house, drinking saloon and billiard room opposite, two men made their way swiftly toward them.

Both the young men were on the alert. It was easy to recognize Juan's slouching form, and yet he spoke not a single word to them but only mumbled some directions to a middle-aged man who bore an ordinary gripsack in his left hand.

"Come you—ovar hear—to el saloon, I will count ovar the property to you," said the man quite coolly in broken English.

The young men followed the two foreigners. Abercromby and Shearer quietly entered the place also. A promiscuous crowd of loungers filled the place, but in a little reading room Shearer carefully checked off the bonds by number from his list, and examined the coupon sheets. From a duplicate list Doctor Abercromby verified the tally.

"They are all here," repeated both the examiners as the sullen-faced bearer of the returned fortune calmly rolled up a cigarette.

"It is right—all right," said Nixon. "Will you have a note from us to Padre Guerra?"

"Nothing!" roughly said Juan. "Only you are all to stay here five minutes and give the man a chance to go home."

The four Americans bowed, and the two Cubans left without a word or sign.

"This is a very strange proceeding," muttered the doctor. "Let us call a carriage at once and get down to the Fifth Avenue Hotel with this."

"Briskly!" said Lorimer.

Two of the party carried drawn revolvers at their sides as the four friends in a body walked out into the street and hailed the first passing carriage. At Twenty-third street Lorimer leaped out and sent the agreed on telegrams to the padre and Captain Hogan.

Before the friends separated for the night, Abercromby said earnestly: "If I did not have this clearing-up work to do down here I would go back with you. For, mark me, the padre will soon strike back at you in some way. And he may know more of your secret expedition than you would easily credit."

"I shall have Hogan 'pipe him off' on the Havana steamer, as well as that young rattlesnake nephew of his," answered Nixon. "For the only hope I have that he will not be dangerous in future lies in his fancy that he may get in ahead of us yet and so discover the long-sought family inheritance of woe—those wretched emeralds."

The next day, in Fishkill, after depositing the recovered bonds in the bank, a sudden thought flew through Lorimer. "See here, Nixon," he said. "the funeral will not occur for three days. Let us with your mother and sister take Inez to New York. Tomorrow morning let you and I drive down from the Fifth Avenue and induce Miss Romero to open the case at once. It may be that there are reasons in it why we should watch this priest and his nephew on their homeward trip. The chance is a golden one and must not be lost."

"You are right," returned his chum. "I had not realized that we lose sight of the conspirator and his troublesome body guard when they leave Villa Romero. There might be something in the recovered papers which demands our immediate action."

"Moreover," continued Lorimer, "the need of the young lady for the ghastly uniform of public sorrow will explain, my mother and sister going with her. Spread the report that we have gone down to make the final funeral arrangements."

Seated in a private room of the Broadway Safe Deposit Company next day, as Trinity Church bells

chimed the noon, Frank Lorimer's face was awed and very grave as Inez Romero, with a shudder, approached the case lying before her on the table. The slender girl's hands trembled as she touched the leaden box. Its bands were twisted leathern straps, which were riveted to the box and twined together with a cumbrous impression of an indistinguishable seal.

Inez raised her dark eyes to Nixon. "Will you not open it?" she asked.

"I beg of you," said the doctor. "It must be your hand alone. No other's. I will sever the straps with my knife, but you must open it."

There was a hush of intense excitement as the young man finally loosened the time-stained cover of the case.

In a few moments, her eyes shadowed with tears, Inez Romero drew forth a packet wrapped in waxed and yellowed linen. Her slender fingers trembled as she unrolled the damp coverings. A roll of parchment lay before her. Handing it to Nixon she faltered. "Read it, I cannot. Poor Felipe!"

As Lorimer calmed her burst of sorrow the doctor examined.

Suddenly his face grew ashen pale. He had turned the leaves down where a rude map was pictured. Then he whispered: "Let the priest go forth! He cannot harm us. My God! It is a strange, strange story. Can it be true?"

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL FROM THE HAMMERLESS REVOLVER.

"WHAT do you propose to do? Will you remove the papers?" demanded Frank Lorimer, in breathless excitement. "Do you think there is a treasure really awaiting this child of so many sorrows?" The young man's eyes rested tenderly on Inez.

"There has been a treasure!" solemnly replied Nixon. "When we have devised a plan of safely guarding this girl from that rascal Guerra's wiles, you and I have a long quest before us."

"By Heaven! you shall not go down to Cuba. Death awaits you there!" cried Lorimer. "You would embarrass the State Department and ruin Inez's chance of recovering the estates. You are known there to everyone now."

"It is in the mainland," answered the doctor, "if some convulsion of nature or the hand of man has not already swept it away from us—the shadowy legacy of an old crime. These papers must not rest here. Now, Frank, Inez and I will copy alternately sheets of the four leaves of this last document. We can study it at home to-night. This map I will trace and deposit in a third safe place. No stranger could ever use this divided story, and, without the map, there would be still a seal upon the secret."

"How long will you be busied?" asked the lawyer.

"An hour!" Then he whispered "It will also distract her mind."

There are always writing materials in a safe deposit office.

"I will go over to the police headquarters and see that all is hushed up there, as to the strange wandering of those bonds," said Frank. "Don't you leave Inez here alone!" he added in an aside to the doctor.

"Go ahead. I'll wait here," was the response. "But it is prudent we should never come here again

together. I will introduce Inez to the manager; she had better deposit her bonds here. I have been thinking also," he continued, "that it would be a good idea if your mother and sister would go abroad with Inez for a time. She would be safe in Europe from Guerra, and we two must go down to the tropics together."

"But I would not see her then for months," doubtfully remarked Lorimer.

Nixon smiled. "You will see a great deal of her later, I fancy. Go along, Frank. Your time is not yet come, my young Romeo. The myrtle and cypress do not bloom together. Earn first the right to her devotion and gratitude, and then—love."

"You speak as if Cupid had his grip on you also, professor," murmured the blinded Lorimer as he walked away.

A strange blindness! Of all human beings in the world made for love's soft alarms, Frank Lorimer ignored his sister Ethel. In many comprehensive ways he dismissed her from his mind with that sweeping brotherly remark: "Ethel's a good girl!"

Her many perfections were not only manifest to Doctor Nixon, but his "cardiac disturbance" was slowly but surely undermining his whole system.

While Inez bent her beautiful face down over the quaint parchment, Nixon's flying fingers soon achieved his portion of the task; then with careful attention he copied every mark of the quaint old diagram appended to the parchment.

"Half of this in the bank vault at Fishkill, the other half in Poughkeepsie, no one can ever trace out the story. And by the time it goes there I will have learned it by heart."

When Lorimer returned, the steel maw of the great vaults had swallowed up the original of the copy which was now quickly divided between the two men.

It was ten o'clock before the fatigued party reached Edgecliff. Closeted with Nixon, Lorimer promptly said:

"Now get out those papers quickly, for I must know all their contents before Padre Guerra starts for New York."

As Nixon spread out the documents copied from Fernando Aguilar's narrative, he said meditatively: "Get me a large atlas, Frank, and I will see if the map conforms with any coast line that we can find. This whole thing reads like a wild brain fantasy."

The house was stilled, the doors of the room locked, as Nixon began the reading of the paper.

"Don't make a single mark, scratch or memorandum," he sternly said. "You and I must carry this burden in our heads. It must not be said that in our own eager foolishness we have betrayed the orphaned heiress of the past. Should we go on this quest there must be nothing to mark our object save the sketch in some divided form. Now listen!" and he read with intense earnestness the last message from beyond the grave—the words of Fernando Aguilar de Romero:

TO THE SAME HANDS !

Feast of St. Jago, A.D. 1685.

Beneath la puerta mayor, of Los Olmos, I leave this record for the one to whom God wills it. If it so be that the last of my line—an innocent woman—read it, then God will have found out the way.

The thieving and rioting at Jamaica of the unsuccessful buccaneers who were separated from us and defeated at Commana, near Caraccas, caused all the victors of Maracaibo to be closely spied upon. The corsair Morgan was long busied with organizing his descent upon Panama. Now, by the laws of the brotherhood, if we, "the eight," had been found to have that which we carried we would have been slain at once by Morgan as thieving from the common booty, or else murdered by the hungry comrades who came back bootless from Commana. The island of Jamaica was then a hell upon earth, for there were seventeen sail of freebooters refitting there.

All the devils of the Spanish Main were now flocking to the south side of Tortuga to join in the coming sack of Panama. We had all sworn a fearful pact to stay together, and each man had signed it with his blood, the round ring oath, "Death to the Traitor !"

We eight had a little camp of our own apart. The wenching, gaming and drinking were bringing men to the sword daily. We buried that we had in the sands under our tent, making pretense of fishing and fowling at the seashore to live alone.

Now we had hoarded up carefully our share of the spoil as divided, nigh four hundred pieces of eight per man. After a long study we bought a Carib canoe nigh to forty feet long, and secretly laded her with good supply of provision and water.

Then taking all our arms and a plentiful store of powder and ball we set sail secretly in the night for Grand Cayman Island. One of the other seven knew well that haunt, and from there we hoped to join some fresh crews of buccaneers who knew not of our serving with the fiend Morgan at Maracaibo. It was agreed on by all, that each man might divide out his due share of the plunder and shift for himself if we arrived safely at Grand Cayman.

“On the fourth day we sighted the Grand Cayman and a Carib canoe told us of four Spanish men-of-war there waiting to join others from Havana, designing to attack Morgan’s fleet. Our two Carib boatmen conversed in the tongue of these natives, and the fisher canoe piloted us ashore to where we might find fresh water. In the night we counseled and decided to push forth to some islands in the Bay of Honduras, our nearest refuge. For we would have perforce been all hung in chains if the Spaniards should unhappily find us out.

On the fifth day after, sighting three contiguous islands of great beauty and resting on the central one (note its peculiar form on my chart) we were overtaken by a tornado, and with much skill our natives weathered the storm. We were fain to depend on our Caribs, who told us the main land of Honduras was but one day’s sail away.

When at last we reached the main shore, I found out my companions’ real design, which was to march over the path of Cortez’s army into the mountains of Salvador, and there on a native vessel get down to Panama, in which great city they hoped to be free to sell their

booty to the merchants of that vastly rich place, for they were not minded to believe that even Morgan dared to attack it. Coming from the South Sea coast, they were sure not to be taken for any of Morgan's men.

Our canoe and stores of goods, which we could not carry, we gave to the friendly Caribs, who brought to us four natives of Terra Firma to pilot us up the great Aguan. I was the weakest of the band, for my wound opened again, and my gun and powder and ball were at last taken from me and given to one of the Indians. These poor natives also carried the stolen booty of the altar in four bags of rawhide, which we had made at the island, with straps for binding them on the back.

Twelve days' terrible march from the shore near Omoa brought us over the high ridge, through a great forest with store of monkeys, river-cows and tigers, out to the Aguan River. We crossed another high Cordillera, and at last found an Indian village where the Mangalile River joins the Aguan. I was nigh unto death, and yet I dared not to fall back, lest my companions slay me, for they were all black-hearted villains.

Three days' march from the village, going up the Mangalile, we came to a great narrow, deep gorge, where the river maketh a sharp bend coming from the west to the south. The walls of the chasm are high and dizzy, and on the north bank the trail for ten leagues is called *Los Disparamades*, and there Captain-General Cortez lost a third of his army while wandering over the fearful precipices.

As we marched around the great point, like unto the nose of a man, and projecting northeast from the southwest, my companions were well in advance, and I toiling feebly on after the four Indian bearers.

A great band of savages with spears and bows and arrows suddenly rose out of the rocks and poured down from the gorges. At the first sound of our arquebuses the four bearers cast down their burdens and fled into the thicket. They were not seen of the savages.

Being without my arms I ran into the rocks and quickly made shift to hide myself. The Blessed Virgin led me to the mouth of a cave or old tunnel where

the river in its flood had washed a great hole under the point which I have described. It is a vast, curious causeway going under the whole point, and about ten feet above the line of the waters.

I hearkened to but a few discharges of the matchlocks and then all was over. The triumphant yells of the savages told me of the capture or killing of my companions. Hidden in this hole or cave I laid until the next morning, daring not to venture forth. I was fain at last to crawl out to see if I could find some of the fruits of the forest. I spied around closely; hearing no sounds whatever of man, though the forest was filled with the cries of the birds and wild animals. I wandered up the gorge toward the place of the attack; there I found the remains of seven great fires. The ground was trampled around seven huge trees; from the half charred bones I discovered these wild savages had burned the prisoners, dead or alive. There was nothing left else. They had departed and carried all the plunder away.

I made haste to hide in my cave] after drinking and finding some plantains and bananas. There was no sign of the four poor natives who had fled, and I found all their burdens lying where they had cast them away. I dragged the four sacks of hide into the tunnel, which I found to be nigh unto a hundred paces long and washed out of the softer earth and rock between the harder places.

Long did I wonder there what I might do with the useless treasures. I feared to bring any away lest I should be murdered, for I was sore, spent and sickened. I designed to bind two or three logs of driftwood together and float down the river to the friendly village.

At last I bethought me; with my hunting knife and pointed stakes that I cut I digged out a great hole in the bottom of the tunnel midway between the ends and paved this hole with flat stones and made a wall of stones around it. Then covering the four sacks there I built over the top a floor of strong stones of all shapes so as to hold the whole mass in and scraped sand and gravel over it, filling the whole solid. Then I made haste to find me logs of wood, which I bound

together with vines and withes, with a long pole cut to guide me. I embarked, sitting across this little raft.

In two days, floating by day and hiding by night, I at last reached the Indian village. There, being sick and alone and unarmed, I was seized upon and made a slave. For five long years did I labor as a dog harassed by these Indians.

At last, hiding a store of dried plantains and maize, I stole a canoe and after five days of terrible sufferings I found the sea near Truxillo. Wandering half naked along the beach, I was discovered and brought into the Spanish garrison. I was like unto a human beast. A kind-hearted friar got me the boon of a passage to Vera Cruz on a galleon passing up for the King's plate.

I feared to open my mouth lest I betray myself. When I was landed at Vera Cruz even Don Alarco de Guzman would not credit me. It was only the sound of my voice which brought my beloved spouse to my side.

I dared not tell the story of my crimes against the Church, of my raising my sword against my King! My treasure was lost to me forever!

Wondrous! All the scheme of crime was woven in vain. The blood all shed for naught.

No man may now venture in the valley of the Aguan or Mangalile and hope to come forth alive from the wild Indians. The treasure is abandoned there. I make this relation as God wills that the truth should be finally known. The four bags lie there in the stone bulkhead or casing which I builded in behind a huge rock of black stone which bears half way across the tunnel. It would break the force of any water rushing through.

There is no mistaking of the place, for the south bank of the Mangalile followed up from its junction with the Aguan will surely bring one to the great nose or mountain, with the curious tunnel washed through its point.

Mindful of my past sufferings and of my awful punishment at the hand of the great God, I leave this secret now to the trust of Providence.

In God's name, so be it! The Blessed Virgin may direct what innocent hand may find the useless treasures which are buried as related.

Sea por Dios y la Santissima Virgen!

FERNANDO AGUILAR DE ROMERO.

Frank Lorimer reached forward and gazed at the rudely sketched map which marked the wanderings of the poor victim of the Spanish Governor's insult. "It seems almost incredible, Nixon," he said. "To-night we will divide and lock up all the papers. Even now Inez is the last of the Romeros."

On the morrow the two young men sat together in the Catholic church at Poughkeepsie, while the solemn strains of the mass swelled out over the dead general.

It was a little gathering, a scanty tribute of respect; but the three women in the front pew never lifted their eyes from the coffin to gaze at the half-empty church. While the white-robed acolytes swung the censer the mute incense of these women's prayers silently assailed the gate of Heaven, and not in vain. Padre Guerra sat within the rail robed in canonicals, but his voice was silent as the officiating priests chanted the high mass. In a corner of the chapel Juan Valdes glowered at the family party, while his restless black eyes sought the floor at sight of the sword and tattered Lone Star flag lying on the coffin of the poor old veteran. There was a goodly sprinkling of the honest-faced villagers of Fishkill. These men and women, sobered in their prosperous daily life for a moment, gazed in awe at the unfamiliar Romish rites of the beautiful old faith.

Clad in her deep black, Inez Romero sat as mute as one of Murillo's virgins, one diamond tear glittering on her fringing lashes. She leaned slightly forward with her graceful shoulders quivering under the heavy black robes of orphanhood, as the sweet voices of the hidden singers swelled up in passionate pleading appeals for mercy. If there is any way to reach the human heart through eye and ear the strange, solemn pageantry of the Romish faith is the most impressively touching.

The child of an Irish exile himself, James Nixon was inexpressibly touched at the lonely funeral of this alien patriot. It seemed to recall to him the scattered graves and the sad fates of those who dreamed of "Ireland, one of the nations of the earth." The men of Ninety-eight ! The men of Forty-eight !—dying on foreign fields. Cavaliers of fortune under stranger flags, casting hollow-eyed glances back in exile at hearth and home, now only a vanished dream ; rotting in prison perhaps, or dragging the chain of the branded convict—it was to this doom that the mad chivalry of old Ireland went !

And so the son of a man who died a stranger to home and kindred for sake of his native land, mourned by the body of the dead Cuban general.

Thus they reverently laid José Romero away to "sleep in the long rest."

Nixon was shaken and distraught and only bowed mechanically as the dark form of Padre Guerra crossed between him and God's golden sunlight at the open door.

"I shall not see you again," the priest said in his deep voice, and speaking to Frank fixed his eyes in a grave sadness upon Inez Romero. "*Adios!*"

But her trembling lips moved not and only her beautiful, delicate head was bowed as he passed away from their sight.

It was eleven o'clock that evening before Nixon had concluded all his duties at Villa Romero. After dismissing his friend Doctor Vosburgh he went the rounds for the last time.

Then alone and wearied he strode over the lawn under a bright starlight to "try a breather" back to Edgecliff.

Frank, in the study of the old Colonial mansion, was awaiting his friend when sharp and strong rang out two heavy reports of a pistol down in the glen below.

"My God! Nixon!" cried Lorimer as he snatched his own pistol out of the drawer before him, and raced down the road into the glen at a spirit which recalled the best he had ever done "under the blue" for old Yale. Sturdy forms followed after him.

CHAPTER XI.

"COURAGE AND QUININE."

THERE is always some peculiar mystery in the *slow* recovery of a good-looking young man, who lingers under the ministrations of a handsome young chate-laine acting as nurse.

Ethel Lorimer now moved around Edgecliff softly singing to herself, "When I am by thy side," and—other words to that effect. It was a dangerous convalescence, and the seals of that mystery were never broken.

Nixon was officially rushed into health by Frank Lorimer at last hanging out the signal, "Prepare to desert ship!"

It was not strange that the rosy little god, "going it blind," was unperceived by Frank. For he was a man of many affairs. First, in a little *junta* including Doctor Vosburgh and Captain Hogan it was prudentially decided to ignore the presence of Juan Valdes as a "public boarder" at the hospitable hands of the burgesses of Poughkeepsie. For Padre Guerra must be outwitted.

"You see," said Captain Hogan, "it saves powder, lead and rope. Some other fellow will kill Mr. Juan one day sure enough. He has got his bullet marked by that horseshoe murderer's wrinkle. I put it up this way. The New York gang who all smuggle in and handle here floods of counterfeit Cuban money, as well as do the 'spy act' for the Spanish government, gave up one smart fellow to help Juan put the doctor neatly out of the way. But as for lugging a wounded man back to New York to be easily 'piped off,' and give them all away, not so—it was not in the contract."

To this Abercromby added: "As he could not recognize me in his fever, he will simply slink away and so we have gained a point on the padre. If he returns he can then be neatly arrested for the assault."

Soon after this Frank Lorimer, after closing all the preliminary estate business at Poughkeepsie, verified at last the departure of the young patient whose lame story to the doctors was that he was shot while "fooling with a friend."

There were very grave matters to call all to New York. Padre Guerra was really embarked for Cuba. The Spanish Minister had already signified to the State Department his earnest approval of the petition duly forwarded for the return of the Jibacoa estates, and the Secretary of State of the United States of America was pleased to intimate that the restitution of the confiscated properties seemed probable, and he advised the tender of a complete withdrawal of all the personal claims of the family of Felipe Romero, as well as Doctor James Nixon, in the event of such return. The Secretary desired to impress upon Doctor Nixon the awkwardness of his own personal position, as having appeared in Cuba as "Henry Morgan." This fact might be taken advantage of to contest, etc., etc.

Jimmy Nixon won the last crumbs of Lorimer's heart already ungathered, by promptly stating: "I waive all to effect the restitution of Miss Inez's natural rights, for I feel as if I am now a brother of the heart."

This was very daintily and gracefully acknowledged by Miss Romero.

Lorimer had also quietly effected the removal of poor Felipe's remains to the resting place in Poughkeepsie where the old rebel Cuban lay now deaf to the thunders of all the Spanish cannon.

There had been mighty councils over the great problem of the attempted recovery of the strangely transported emeralds. Frank Lorimer had made very careful researches as to the wild land of Spanish Honduras and how to get there. A three days' visit to New York gave him time to gather much information from the officers of the *Yantic* about that coast, haunted ed with its old memories of Cortez, Hog Island, the place where Columbus himself first saw the mainland of America, and Truxillo Point.

This information was given him freely by "our

mess," for these blue and gold bound young patriots were now wandering back to join ship, sadly feeble in the ability to "draw on" the good-humored paymaster, who said: "I might as well take all your money and leave it in a lump over in four blocks of upper Broadway, for the florists, jewelers, theater agents and other Bedouins there, get it all." Then he prudently admonished them in a body "to get married and *settle down*," which would have been a very radical change for the bright-faced fellows whose generous sailor hearts kept them all in hot water trying to *settle up*.

During all this the "healing process" was slowly going on at Edgecliff, and it seemed that Nixon "healed" more agreeably while Mrs. Lorimer was away busied with the preparations for their European jaunt.

It was here one sunny morning, just after his emergence from a sick room, that a dapper stranger made his appearance rigged out in a cross between a yachting suit and a race track outfit.

"This here 'gent' insisted upon seeing you personally," said Dorland, the farmer foreman, as he led the visitor into a rustic arbor occupied by the patient and his nurse.

"Exactly! That's just it, personal interview," glibly remarked the "gent" as he yanked off his yachting cap and waved it, gold-foil-anchor and all, in the direction of the blushing Miss Ethel Lorimer.

There was an amused smile playing on Nixon's face as he calmly examined a card:

<p>H. KINSLEY SYNTAX, The New York Daily Calliope.</p>

"Are you the same person who called once before on Mr. Frank Lorimer?" asked the doctor as H. Kinsley Syntax deftly pulled out a flap notebook and crowded

up to the table. He was far too gallant to push Miss Ethel's alleged work off the narrowed surface, but he *did* seriously contemplate edging Nixon's "game leg" off its chair so as to get more elbow play to build up "Head Lines" for the New York *Daily Calliope*.

"Yes, I am the gentleman who did that neat little swoop on the fine old General. There was a man! Told me all. Took it like a lamb. The young fellow was 'no good.' Very rough. Forgot himself and 'hollered' at me. No manners."

"I regret to hear it," said Doctor Jim with assumed gravity. "He is this young lady's brother."

A little red spot suddenly tinted each brazen cheek of Mr. H. Kinsley Syntax as he solemnly "dished" his yachting cap. "No offense, I assure you. I suppose it's only a way he has. Regular man eater. College fellow, I imagine. Comes from that football craze and all those barbaric games. Better stick to their books. Spoils our best young men."

Here Ethel, with the "partially healed," laughed heartily until Nixon observed a "black cloud" considerably bigger than a man's hand, going down on the flap notebook.

"What are you doing there?" he ejaculated.

"I am finishing a very dashing little story of your adventure. Your good man there has told me nearly all."

Then panic struck them as H. Kinsley Syntax read off "just a few touches" of the glowing article. "Only want a few words from you personally," said he glibly, and hummed away in a professional monotone: "Description of assailant. 'Real motive.' 'Cause of old feud.' 'Beautiful heiress's movements.'"

Nixon writhed in helpless agony as he tried to leap to his feet. At this attempted opening of hostilities, H. Kinsley, who was scribbling away, interjected sympathetically: "Better lie still, it hurts you!"

With this he cast respectfully moderated glances of approval at Miss Ethel as he read aloud a few more dashes of genius:

"'A Cuban Vendetta!' 'The Stiletto Sequel!' 'Blood for a Blow!' 'The Rival Suitors!' 'Mystery of

a Foreign Heiress!' 'The Struggle in the Glen!' 'Midnight Minions Menace Murder!' 'The Lariat Trap for a Fortunate Lover!'"

"Don't bear malice," he pleaded. "Bound to have the news. Make a Sunday special column of this. What is the true color of your hair, Miss Ethel? Wish I had a kodak."

He fluttered away a little pace as Nixon roared with the howl of a chained bear untimely waked.

Then the sudden rattle of wheels recalled Frank Lorimer's "*fortiter in re*," and Mr. H. Kinsley Syntax was a thing of the past.

"Better let him print it," said Nixon to the laughing yet blushing girl. "It would only be a double dose later if we fight them." And then the "healing process" went on "a sweet uninterrupted silence."

Frank Lorimer joined in their merriment on his return when he heard of the narrow escape of H. Kinsley Syntax of the notable *Calliope*. "I hope that H. Kinsley will not get a celestial assignment before he has a hack at a wedding in these families. He is immense in the *genre* style of word-painting, and does bridal processions grandly at five dollars a column. Besides, seriously, Syntax has some of the attributes of a real journalist, and no one ever found a *real* journalist go back on his calling as a weakling or a coward. The names of Villiers, McGahan and Sala stand sponsor for their courage on the field of battle and their nobility in private life. I've known them to often generously save a woman's reputation, shield a public man's honor and touch the erring one lightly, when piles of solid shekels awaited a touch of their nimble fingers."

"You should have been a reporter, too," retorted Ethel.

"They have also made some of our great lawyers," laughed Lorimer. "But, seriously, Nixon, to-morrow night is our last in the old home for an indefinite period. I want to know when you can show a clean bill of health. I have engaged the passage for our ladies a week ahead on *La Touraine* and everything is now safe in the vaults below Broadway save the copies we want to use. Now, you and I must face the matter

of the emeralds. I have gone through every printed reference to Spanish Honduras that I can find in New York. I have seen slippery agents, traders, sailors and colonization agents. Even disgusted adventurers I have interviewed, all through the eye of Abercromby. There seems to be but one plausible story in case we do go, and that is to go simply as American prospectors or miners. It is the only way to avoid being watched, followed or murdered in that tropical land, generally described to me as 'a hell on earth!'"

"What's wrong with it?" gravely said Nixon.

"Oh, the land is a fair enough worn-out mixture of tropic jungle, cordilleras, baking plains and stony hills. The Caribs alone are 'well worth the price of admission,' and the monkeys, macaws, crocodiles and tigers, with the river cows and armadillos, are a host in themselves. But many of the officials, merchants and leading men in power are murderers, thieves and civilization's rejected misfits. To go down there I propose that separately we rendezvous at Key West, then we must get a little schooner to run us over to Truxillo or Omoa, and, with a mountain outfit of a prospecting nature, make our way quietly up into the Mangalile hills. So you, Abercromby and I will be honest miners.

"Hoho! Bill has the Honduras fever, too," laughed Nixon. "But I assent! Your scheme of playing the miner is a good one."

So the maps were spread out, the copied relations of Fernando Aguilar de Romero were keenly searched for any further hidden cryptograms and the subject approached at last in the final putting of the yeas and nays. For it seemed like a vain dream, a forlorn hope, that shadowy inheritance.

"The only question for us now to consider," said Nixon, after Frank Lorimer had gravely stated the whole case, "is to decide if it is worth while to make the attempt or not—as to whether we will find the emeralds. In other words—is the game worth the candle?"

"It seems fantastic," answered Nixon, "this hope that the spirits of the mountain have so long guarded this trust from all thieving, blood-stained hands. But look at the discoveries of the Egyptologists, think of

the finds at Troy, gloat over the millions in silver dollars raised after centuries in Vigo Bay. Somewhere in the oozy slime of that little puddle of a river called the Tiber are the seven hundred golden candlesticks of the Temple, as pictured on the arch frowning before the yawning Coliseum. Why, this deposit is of yesterday, compared with some of the finds I have mentioned. The emeralds are also indestructible by water and rust. The vengeance of God suddenly swept away all the guilty murderers, and we have the truthful words of the simple-hearted old caballero, who was driven by his wounded honor to lift the rebel sword against His Catholic Majesty of Spain. But one contingency has occurred to me—the frequent earthquakes of Central America. Should the rocky arch have been thrown down the engineering problem might mean the removal of the whole rocky point. This would be impossible, as we can only pass through and scratch over the ground without attracting considerable official attention. And then, the Honduran magnates, hating the *gringo* with all the Latin-American distrustful spleen, would surely prevent us legally acquiring a title to the ground or operating to any great extent. Shall we go down and see?”

The young women's eyes were soft with romantic apprehension, and Agnes Lorimer, the loving mother of one of the young men, was herself mute. She neither whispered “Go” nor “Stay.”

“Bah!” impetuously cried Frank Lorimer as the hush became almost solemn. “Englishmen go from the Thames to the Himalayas for a single pop at a tiger. Amateurs dally now with the North Pole. The ‘new woman’ is carted across Africa, clad in a sweet smile and her Jenness Miller's. We can easily make the trip in two months. I say, go! All we want is courage and quinine.”

“Well, if you wish to furnish the courage, I'll throw in the quinine,” laughed the doctor. Then he stretched out his hand. “It's a go, Frank!”

And the only touch of sentiment was when the conclave broke up, for Agnes Lorimer threw her shapely arms around Frank, murmuring: “My boy!”

The two beauties who gazed from under shaded lashes at the self-devoted knight errants did not throw any arms around them, however, for obvious reasons. The sweet, strange, delicious monopoly of the knowledge that love had already stolen into their hearts, like a thief in the night, made these two dissembling maids fearful of each other. They hovered on the ragged edge of self-betrayal, however, when Lorimer said: "To-morrow we change our headquarters to New York City. As soon as we hear by cable that *La Touraine* has arrived, we miners will depart singly from the city, and to Frank will be left all the communication with you. They must be of a family nature only. Our letters would not be safe. The secret we carry is so weighty that only after our success or failure can we, or any of us, telegraph an agreed-on word to Drexel, Harjes & Co. at Paris."

"There is one thing I would speak of," hesitatingly said Inez. "I wish to spare no pains or expense to recover the estate of Los Olmos. If it is ever mine, then Don José and Felipe shall rest in the chapel where my mother lies. As to this wild quest, if you succeed, you must know what your reward will be. You go to danger to face fever and the jungle and all these terrors."

"Will you permit me to name my reward—if I return?" said Frank Lorimer, in a voice that made Miss Inez glow like the rose and pale like the lily in two breaths.

"I only go for your sake, Frank," laughed Nixon. Which was a very well-developed whopper, for the sister standing mutely there had given him a look which was "partial payment" in advance.

The party soon left Edgecliff. Inez was happier for every mile the steel wheels checked off between her and all the sorrowful memories of the deserted Villa Romero. Agnes Lorimer's gentle eyes rested in pride and hope on her brave son, and all the circle felt that they had come as it were "out of the shadows of the night," when they were harbored in that dear old hostelry the Fifth Avenue!

There was a store of important business awaiting the young men already; a summons from the State

Department at Washington for Lorimer's immediate presence, the cards of Banker Munoz to see Miss Romero; Lieutenant Walsingham, U. S. N., for Doctor Nixon; Captain Hogan, too, was in friendly unofficial waiting and several letters from the consul at Matanzas were sent up—the preliminary orchestral strains of a new act of the drama.

"I'll not bother you, Lorimer," said the police officer. He then gave the lawyer a cipher address. "Use that and the force will always swing to your help. Better name a cool friend here to look after your confidential affairs and also give him a card to me."

"Thanks, captain," gratefully answered Lorimer. "You are a brick. I'll send Tom Ellison, my law partner, down to see you."

"Fine young fellow," remarked Hogan, "know him well."

"Well, he's all the same as myself then, Hogan. That fixes the whole thing."

"Glad of it! Go well armed, too. A good Winchester, pistol and knife, and take an old 'cop's' advice—just when you think you're all right, the coast clear and no danger near, then skin your eyes. I don't know what your business is, but there's an ugly taint of dirty, cowardly work against you in this whole affair." The gay captain disappeared whistling "Annie Rooney."

The pleasant half-hour with Lieutenant Walsingham in the parlor with the ladies was supplemented by ten minutes of private confab. "See here, doctor," he said, as he scribbled a card to the navy agent at Key West, "find Old Frenchy, the slaver. He's nearly seventy, but even to-day the best skipper in the Spanish Main. True as gold, he knows every rock and turtle spit down there and has always a lot of schooners and yachts in traffic. He's your very man. Tell him I sent you. The navy agent will have a private letter from me."

A few days later four stalwart young men were the very last to cease waving their hats and kerchiefs as the great sea-bound *Touraine* backed out slowly into the Hudson. Two of these fancied that there was something meant, for one heart alone, in the last

fluttering signal of dark-eyed Inez and dazzling Miss Ethel Lorimer. On the finger of one of the watching lovers gleamed a slender golden band which spoke of future hope, now glowing only hidden in that lover's breast—a sweet secret, half of which future pledge was throbbing on Inez Romero's fair white bosom.

Nixon had shyly filched a bit of golden hair with a sunny wave in its bright filaments, and this was to be his own secret talisman in the future days skimming over the glassy waves of the blue Caribbean and destined to light the dark hours under the glowing tangles of the literally howling wilderness of the unexplored forests of Honduras.

All was now ready for the quest. The day had come when the three friends separated to meet at Key West.

Tom Ellison, the home guard, wrung Frank Lorimer's hand stoutly in parting. For the young lawyer was now billeted by rail to St. Augustine, Florida, to there meet Abercromby, who had already sailed by steamer to Havana, with a mysterious mission to Admiral Toplights ; and Doctor Nixon, now bowling down past Hatteras on the Florida steamer.

"Frank !" muttered the anxious Ellison, "remember, old boy, if anything happened to you, it would simply break three hearts. Don't forget Hogan's advice. Trust nothing to no one down there. And may God bless you !"

Frank Lorimer, light at heart as the train passed out of Jersey City, felt that mysterious thrill of young blood which comes always with "going into action."

"If there are any emeralds to be had on the Mangalile," he joyously pledged himself, "we will try and imitate friend H. Kinsley Syntax, and make a clean scoop!"

For he was a lover, brave and bold and strong in the golden chain he lightly wore—the love of the dark-eyed Cuban girl—now wandering along the Champs Elysées.

BOOK III.
A MODERN FILIBUSTER.

CHAPTER XII.

HELPLESS IN THE FOREST.

"I DON'T see anything the matter with this part of the trip, do you?" idly remarked William Abercromby, M.D., as he gazed at Frank Lorimer, counsellor-at-law, who had just dexterously flopped a good-sized red mullet on the deck of the schooner *Beauregard*.

The shimmering rays of the sun were slowly dying in a pearly mist and yearning toward the purple haze of the night. The still water, a blue crystalline flood, brimmed up to the very level of the coral reefs known as the Dry Tortugas.

The stout schooner daintily swam on the shallow waters, where by day opal, aqua-marine and emerald flashes gleamed up from the branching gardens below, nature's fairy aquarium. The deck of the boat was deserted save by one lazy sailor, coiled up on a pile of loosened sail and watching the "Portuguese man-o'-war" float by.

The silent octagon of huge Fort Jefferson lay before them only a few cable lengths away, and on clear nights Key West light blinked out its friendly "Good-by" over the silent waters of the Florida channel, the dreamy seas of the tropics.

"So far, it's only a picnic—an aquatic night dream," said Frank Lorimer, ringing out a cheery "Aye, aye, sir" as Nixon popped his head out of his cabin hatch.

"Lobscouse and mystery for three. Tumble down here, lads," sung out the doctor. "Tony has 'thrown himself' for our last meal in American waters."

"My native land, good night," mournfully murmured Lorimer, as he coiled up his fishing lines.

"Yes, Frenchy says we'll be well under way before we wash decks again," answered Abercromby, as they sought the cabin.

There was no sound but the jingling of table equipage for some time, as the three had already developed their regulation sea appetite. The cabin was spacious and comfortable, and Abercromby remarked, at the black coffee and cigar stage of the meal: "Where in the world did this old beach-comber pick up a vessel like this? She's a beauty."

"So she is," slowly said Nixon, "and I fell in love with her when I first saw that glistening gold streak on her black sides, and the carved eagle at her stern. Do you know that she has a very strange history?"

"Tell us," cried the others, who now yearned for an after-dinner yarn.

"I got it from Lefferts, the Key West navy agent," began the doctor. "Fifteen years ago the beauty cost a mint of money—with two huge sticks in her twice the proper size, and sails big enough for a corvette. She capsized, being over-sparred, in a squall off Staten Island, and made the name *Mohawk* a sad memory to those who knew that princely family of New Yorkers who nearly all perished in her. Sold for a song under a probate order, she then passed through several hands, and distinguished herself later by drowning a colonel of engineers and a party of his official subordinates off Fernandina harbor, Florida, turning turtle again in a tornado. Tony found the dismasted hulk floating out at sea tight as a drum. It was drifting around in the channel, the wonder of the albicore and the admiration of the white shark. The ex-pirate dragged her into a cove, then sawed off a few extra yards of bowsprit and put some moderate-sized sticks in her. In Frenchy's hands, with conservative canvas, she can even now walk past a flying square rigger. For he knows all her wicked capers to a dot, and his graceful loyalty is testified by the name *Beauregard*, so saucily slapped on over Uncle Sam's own carved eagle."

"To what base uses we may return, Horatio," mur-

mured Lorimer. "The millionaire's costly toy to pass into the doubtful hands of our sea Figaro, Antoine Lemaire. Frenchy, the slaver, man-o'-war'sman, wrecker, blockade runner, smuggler, pirate, and all-round general utility man for the United States army, navy and treasury."

"Yes," laughed Abercromby, "Pilot for all the world, chief satellite of the Cuban renegade, friend of the filibuster, and 'dead agin' every government that lives."

"He's a singular old wild duck," remarked Nixon.

Just then a bullet head popped into the companion-way with a pair of twinkling gray eyes shining keenly over a bristling gray mustache. The face was as brown as old mahogany, and "Frenchy" then gayly cried: "All right! *Vamos nosotros; à demain!*"

"Let her go, Gallagher!" laughed Lorimer.

With this Tony wobbled away, crying: "Three days more and you see Omoa Castle. Big old fort. Spanish! *Sacré!*"

Frank walked the deck for half an hour, for two dark Creole eyes were shining down into his heart as the stars hung white and trembling over the anchored vessel, floating as if suspended in air under the sapphire skies of the Caribbean.

Once more he was leaving his native land to take chances among the Spanish Americanos. True, the island he looked on was only Dry Tortugas and the fort almost deserted, with crumbling bastions and dismounted columbiads—still, over it floated the flag of the United States!

Then he was joined by his friend.

"Who would think that old chap in his razeed sea-boot slippers, canvas trousers and a hickory shirt was the proprietor of a nautical boneyard valued at a quarter of a million dollars?" mused Nixon, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"I would like that Bayard of the lead pencil, Mr. H. Kinsley Syntax, of the *Calliope*, to write up his picturesque old haunt on Orange river," remarked Abercromby. "Lefferts tells me that Frenchy has an entire island there, all to himself. He rules with a rod

of iron some still faithful slaves who know not even now the name of 'Father Abraham.' There is also an old negro Voodoo princess who acts as his Fatima. His collection of old junk and marine curios stolen from wrecks is very amusing, and yet they tell me that the bankers and capitalists of the Key West admiralty court will back Tony Lemaire on his simple word at any time with a hundred thousand dollars."

"According to his lights he is a pretty square man," replied Nixon.

"Yes, *wreckers'* lights," chuckled Doctor William. "He's a nimble old chap, too. They tell me that his seventy years count sixty of realistic romance since he skipped out of Bordeaux a cabin boy at ten, and burst his mother's apron string with a resounding snap. Lefferts says that he used to pilot the *Wanderer* when Lamar ran the last Congo 'niggers' into the Savannah River, and has often seen the bobbing heads rise and fall in their wake, as the poor Africans were walked overboard, chained together to leave a 'clean bill of health' when hove to by a Government cruiser."

Here Lorimer interjected: "Quit romance and come to business. What is our itinerary on the raging main?"

"I believe, answered Nixon, that after lingering along the Central American coast here and there for a few days, as if leisurely trading or looking for a banana plantation site, we can happen in at Truxillo. There we get a handy little mule train and cross the interior ranges until we strike the great unknown Aguan River. There are so many straggling parties of American prospectors who are wandering around, lured down there by humbug colonization schemes, that we will only be regarded as three more unfortunates. Yet I am sorry that we do not land and break into the mountains by Puerta Cortez or San Juan. We would so be spared the needless curiosity of all the mingled scoundrels, bravos and refugees of Truxillo."

"True," calmly said the lawyer, "and we might also wander up and down, two or three hundred miles astray, in the terrific gorges of the Mangalile and upper

branches of the winding Aguan and never know whether we were above or below our point. No! we must strike over the iron coast range from Truxillo, cross the great Arinal range to Jocon, and then follow up the Mangalile from its junction. In that way we must recognize the sharp nose on the South with the great nostril bored through it by the wild dashing river."

"I fear, too, that we may be followed or paralleled, tracked or spied on if we go to Truxillo. Can we not cross the mountains, build some canoes and work up the river?" anxiously questioned Nixon.

"We could work down like a flash," quickly said Lorimer, "but even a Thorneycroft launch could not force its way up the Mangalile."

"It looks like a rocky road to Dublin," remarked Abercromby, "for Cortez lost three hundred men in four days there on the quartz-fanged hillsides."

"He won't lose us," determinedly said Lorimer. "We are not clad in two hundred pound suits of pot metal armor. I am going in for these emeralds if I wade up the river like a flamingo."

"Selah!" remarked both his auditors as they took an observation and turned in.

When they turned out for their tub at the time of deck washing, the *Beauregard* was already spinning along over crisp seas and Tony Lemaire was most energetically damning his crew in choice imprecative excerpts from the various languages acquired in his interesting career.

"Jimmy," said Abercromby, "How I envy your staccato friend, 'Frenchy the Slaver.' If I could only swear as satisfactorily as this retired pirate I would like to paralyze a New York hackman or two."

The time passed rapidly. "Frenchy the Slaver," lightly tempted, opened his "knowledge box" and dilated upon the legends of Porto Bello, Tortuga, Coro Island and Cayman Grand. He revealed a vast treasury of stories caught up from sea rover, slaver, smuggler and the proud, defiant children of the freebooters. Tales of the Carib's unerring vengeance, legends of the slave uprising of Santo Domingo and weird stories of

Voodoo vengeance and of the wild planter life of the West Indies fell from his lips as he narrowly watched the helmsman yelling out a warning when the *Beauregard* fell off a half-point.

In all this chaff there were stray pearls of great value, and the three young men drank in these stories à la Sinbad *cum grano salis*, and yet to their practical edification.

They exchanged knowing winks as Tony lit a flat "Cabana," saying: "Don't trus' no Truxillo manna. Voleurs, thief a man! Truxillo—bloody hole. I know him. I bin calaboose there three weeks. I there when General Walker, great filibustero, shot. Both his eyes blaze like a gray eagle."

And Lemaire walked away muttering curses loud and deep on all Hispano-American officials. He summed up their many perfections in one sweeping remark, capable of universal application: "Port Admiral, you be damned!"

In fact, Frenchy the Slaver saw no necessity for government of any kind. He only revered the "shipping articles" and the memory of the great Napoleon.

Two days later the *Beauregard* glided along swiftly on an enchanted sea. To the north, a few miles away, green fringed Bonaca slept upon the waters; to the west blue hills all palm-shaded rose where Ruatan stretched its fifty miles of witching beauty, fleeting by them like a floating island of the Hesperides.

"It's not this one, but the middle one that we wish to see," murmured the three friends, as they watched the boiling white crystal flash out of the sparkling blue, under the swift schooner's dancing heel.

The next morning Nixon, as he walked the deck at sunrise with Lorimer, for they were all excited now, gave an exclamation of joy and whispered: "Here is the very place that the Don described. The middle island. It confirms his story in every word."

Abercromby joined them as he resumed: "Now we will take the fresh water here and in six hours bear away for the heel of Belize Bay.

Under a golden sun the next day faint curving shore

lines crept out low to the north, purple mountains backing the horizon to the south and west, and a few silver sails flecked the dreaming waters of Belize Bay, as the three gathered Americans listened to Frenchy's harangue.

"Belize," pointed Lemaire to the north. "One English regiment every year. *El vomito!*—Yella Jack. He kill all. *Todos!* Governor, man, lady—all! There, him Guatemala!" pointing to the west, and then wheeling to the south in rapid succession he snapped his Gallic fingers, cigarito-stained, in scorn. "Puerta Cortez—Livingston, Omoa, Ceiba, Truxillo. Ah! Ladrones—*Sacré Honduras!*"

They looked upon this scene with eager eyes. For in those blue mountains, stretching faint and far, lay the silent, haunted river chasm whose secret deposit of three centuries was their quest. On the threshold of the unknown, they were face to face at last with the dangers of the voyage.

"It is prudent," murmured Lorimer, "to generally give out our prospecting character here." It was the next day, and the three friends were gazing at Puerta Cortez, a dwarfed semblance of townhood, as an official boat dragged out over the oily tide to board them; but Consul Bertrand had squared all their papers, so they had a clean bill of official health.

For two hours the pompous lieutenant poked around in every corner of the *Beauregard*, while Frenchy, with a vast wave of florid politeness, forced meat and drink offerings upon the military customs party.

"*Ah, voleurs canailles!*" he cried, as the boat glided away to Omoa Bay. But keen and sensible were Frenchy's actions, all guarded by an infinite prudence.

"To-morrow we will go ashore and look at Omoa Castle," said Lorimer. "Then skim along down to Truxillo. There we will strike for the interior at once, while Frenchy fills the boat up with hides and skins at all the little landings, so as to give an excuse to hover around in harbor for our return."

"I am glad we have ended the first chapter," remarked Nixon, as the anchor rattled down within gunshot of the great, silent masonry fortress which cost

Philip of Spain ten millions of pesos. The three friends could see the flash of a single bayonet on the ramparts.

Dreamy, low, shallow lagoons lay sweltering about it, and a pestilential swamp surrounded the great keep. It was under the main sally port, where the sculptured arms of Spain still braved the passing years, that Lorimer whispered: "We are at last on the enemy's soil."

Even in an hour's rambling over the little settlement, doubt, suspicion and malevolent distrust hung around the three strangers.

Natives clad in a single garment, dangling the murderous machete from a rawhide girdle, followed them, and a loafing squad of soldiers sullenly ordered them out of the ruined Omoa Castle, whose exquisite old bronze guns lay around as they fell when tumbled into the dry ditch by the wrathful blue-jackets of indignant John Bull. For with all John's money plethora and time-serving commercial spirit, there is a considerable tide of life in the old lion yet.

I doubt me not it would to-day take at least two first-class powers to twist the tail of the British lion to a finish! Albion's steel floating fighting-boxes are still manned by English tars, and Tommy Atkins, as heard of at Rorke's Drift and El Teb, can do far grimmer work than mystifying pretty nurse girls in London parks with those natty canes and those "skin-tight sojer clothes."

"This is a good place to get out of," suggested Lorimer. "I am now familiar enough with the sugar-rum booths, unhung scoundrels, banana groves and brush huts each tenanted by a score of 'missing links.'"

Tony Lemaire was soon dragged away from a crowd of *compadres* and *comadores* and instructed to "up-sail" and make for Congrehoy Peak, towering ten thousand feet above the rocky plateau where old Truxillo gleams out white among the clustered palms around the stately old fortress where once the haughty Spanish garrison discharged their culverins vainly at saucy Henry Morgan.

The moldering council halls, broken convent arches

and squalid barracks still speak of the romance of the old times and the frowzy death-in-life of the days of a ghastly imitative republic effort. Honduras, the slave of the military jackanapes dictator, is the refuge of the vile, thrust out from all other lands. And its sad supremacy of filth, villainy and degeneracy remains unchallenged by any other autonomy on the Western continent.

"There's a good deal of country here," remarked Doctor Abercromby, as he gazed two days later on the shining beach with its fruit groves stretching forty miles along the rocky plateau, the purple sierras towering far above.

"Wait till you get over a few of the ranges and you will see more of this delectable land," rejoined Nixon. "A paradise on earth, as the writer of that exquisite little funny tale, 'Millions in Bananas,' paints it."

"I shall be pleased to get in and get out," laughed Lorimer, but his blue eyes were keenly fixed beyond the serrated line which parted them from the lost treasure of Maracaibo.

And in a half hour they stood on the silver strand where Cortez had marshaled his men, and wandered up the rocky road where that ill-placed Napoleon of destiny, Filibuster Walker, went "with bloody hands to a hospitable grave." Strange, restless war-hawk of peace times! Had the Tennessee journalist-lawyer lived ten years longer, Forrest and John Morgan would have been pushed hard for the divided laurels of the "dare-devil of the Southern Confederacy."

William Walker's memory is now fading away. Silent, reserved, slight, gray-eyed and thin-lipped, he was a grim duellist with Fate—to the death! He only needed one last smile of fickle fortune to have climbed that single step which separates the adventurer from the hero of history. For, alas, principles are nothing. Success alone is the modern touchstone.

The white stars gleamed down on the three friends that night as they left the great mongrel drinking saloon of the one hotel of the town to find coolness, safety and tranquillity in the open square, sullenly eyed by the prowling Hondurean night guards.

"If money will buy mules," energetically said Abercromby, "let us all sleep *al fresco* on the trail tomorrow night, for we will be followed out of here as 'sure as shootin,' as the Yankees say."

And so the morning lark found them convulsing the mule market with Frenchy's energetic bargaining; for he sighed also to be three marine leagues away off shore.

"Bad a town! *Sacré voleurs!*" he wrathfully repeated, as he rolled off his denunciations of the rascally animal peddlers.

At sunset the three young men strolled across the square of Truxillo with Captain Tony Lemaire. They were the proud possessors of ten little mules resembling enlarged jack-rabbits.

A couple of peasant muleteers were engaged *por el viaje*; then the friends walked down to the beach as the day was declining.

They were ready for their journey to the interior. Frenchy had sent them a faithful amphibious cook; also a familiar of his who was an Admirable Crichton of general utility, besides having an excellent record as an "all around" fighting man.

They turned at the edge of the rocky plateau and then gazed at the eight-thousand-foot sierras towering gray and wildly heaped up to the far west.

"To-morrow night you climb canon there, an old Cortez stairway. Ah! Dam quel rude voyage. I came out on sea, run down to Cape Gracian a Dios, buy a load hides and buckskins. I come back, wait here till you come!" remarked Frenchy, who was glad to get out of Truxillo. Old smuggling tricks rose up against him. "Well," he said, as a burly sailor toiled up the steep road, "when you come, Morales?"

Then the stranger and Frenchy exchanged much strange gibberish.

The young men walked home an hour later and killed time gazing on the bay, where a fruit steamer and a gaunt three-masted schooner, just arrived, gave an air of nautical life, the *Beauregard* being the only other craft dancing on the blue waters beside them.

"You say, Tony," remarked Lorimer, "that that craft hails from Havana?"

"No, from Matanzas, señor."

"Matanzas! I'm glad we leave in the morning," said Nixon suddenly, almost anxiously.

Late into the night the three chums labored in the Hotel Paseo in adjusting the loads and packs of the beasts of burden and in making all "ship-shape" for the personal outfit carried by each. The two muleteers drove the animals afield and vowed by *Todos los Santos!* to show up with the morning star.

"I am glad that our cook and fighting man will sleep with all the plunder," remarked Lorimer, as the three men were about to retire to fight mosquitoes and wait for the hour of reveille.

A most tempting bait in the line of saddles, mining gear and provisions lay around the little storeroom assigned them.

"Better hide away all your watches and valuables, señores, or leave them in my safe," said burly Juan Crespo, the boniface. "I've known men to be cut in pieces with a machete for a single silver dollar up there where you are going." The host jerked his thumb most contemptuously toward the *canino real* stretching out toward far Tegucigalpa, twenty days' march away.

These remarks tended to make their sleep restless, the mosquitoes presiding at their unquiet dreams.

"I wonder if we will be followed?" mused Nixon next morning, as he gazed at their road-agent outfit; rifle, revolver, knife and cartridge-belts being the adornment of each, with a pair of cart-wheel spurs and the inglorious helmet which defies even Garnet Wolseley, Lord Roberts or Stanley Africanus to look stately.

Then in the pearl-gray mist of morning the young men rode four hours along the shell-strewn beaches, watching the diminutive mules trot away nimbly under their packs. At Bella Vista, when they turned and gazed back toward the noble bay and Truxillo Point, the *Beauregard* looked like a wind-blown cloud of silver out on the blue sea; but the Cuban three-master was still there riding at anchor off the fortress.

Looking on the schooner Nixon growled: "Captain Morales from Matanzas, for a load of cattle, and

Frenchy says the town is filled now with desperate Cuban criminals and refugees. We must be very wary. Who knows?" Then he lost himself in vain musing as he toiled up the steep pass.

He scented danger once more. A vague feeling he could not explain possessed him of terrors hovering far beyond the blue Sierras there above them. Cuba brought back sad memories.

Step by step the sure-footed mules picked their way up the narrow stairway, where rocky steps had been cut by Indians bleeding under the lash of the Spanish conquerors three hundred years before. Dizzy and nerve-numbed, they ceased to gaze into the awful gorges whose edge was but a yard away, and a gloomy silence fell on them under the wild tropic jungle trees.

By nightfall they had entered a gorge leading down toward the hillocks, sloping toward the valley of the great Aguan. On a smooth stretch of a few hundred yards, the feet of a galloping animal had plowed great sliding marks in the dark wet earth.

Nixon's theory as to the chances of being followed was correct, but none of the brave-hearted Americans even dreamed that a lad with gleaming coal black eyes and wind-blown hair had dashed along at daybreak, racing toward the plains of Sonaguera and El Jicaro; muttering, "I will keep ahead of them—out of their way, and, *Madre de Dios*, I will have my revenge!"

For neither the glittering knife nor keen machete he carried was whetted as sharp as the mad thirst for vengeance borne by the dark-faced young rider whose left shoulder yet twitched in the night air with reminiscences of a pistol bullet.

Strange dreams of foreboding haunted Nixon's pillow that night.

Three days later, toil-worn and uneasy, the friends gazed upon the mighty Aguan, its banks breaking away in vast forest groves to the northwest, where the Jocon and Mangalile mountains showed their sharp blue peaks in air, a hundred miles away.

A squalid hamlet with a couple of circular bush corrals on a mount fifty feet high, crowning a point jutting into the Aguan, was the night station.

A dozen men and women lounged around the filthy interior of the main hut. Hammocks strung thickly side by side sheltered an old crone and a half-delirious fever patient. Around an earth oven two dark-browed scoundrels, armed to the teeth, were insolently familiarizing themselves with several slatternly Honduranean women.

Sullen aversion had marked the arrival of the seven strangers with their band of laden mules.

Through dry wastes, baking logwood groves, gloomy, tangled morasses and squalid huts had marked their path; no noise save the yell of the mountain tiger or the chattering of monkeys and screaming of macaws had disturbed them.

The great tropical primeval forest of the Aguan lay spread out, steaming below them and stretching hundreds of miles up and down its tortuous banks. Fairy orchids bloomed on the giant mahogany trees, swinging on graceful vines; fronded ferns were parted by the gorgeous plumage of the chattering tropic birds; every witchery of nature had made these silent forests worthy of a Doré's pencil. But in all this beauty, the waters below lay black and poisonous in the rotting lagoons, where the cayman eyed the fetid coils of the enormous boas, and every thorn thicket had its poisonous snake or steel-fanged creeping things.

The fever breath was wafted around them, and now at nightfall a thousand wild discordant screams told of the sleepless hell of the tropic forest.

"I don't like the looks of this dirty hole," said Nixon, as the three friends saw the black night fold them in among the squalid scoundrels.

Lorimer and Abercromby, too, were gloomy. "One of us had better sleep and the other two watch; our two *Beauregard* men must also relieve each other with the cattle," suggested Frank.

The steaming night wore on as the friends slung their hammocks from the rough beams of the shed and sighed for the "flesh-pots" of New York; for their fire furnished forth a camp supper from the reserve canned provisions.

Dogs and pigs strayed in to the hut through the open

doors. The wild forest tumult screamed indistinctly around them, while the rushing Aguan murmured hoarsely below. The rum bottle and mescal calabash were busied in the dirty little station, where the brutish murmurs and coarse chuckles of the wild vaqueros and their hard-faced slatterns dominated the more distant noises of the jungle.

In the valley below, Lorimer had noted a single telegraph wire strung along the lonely trail. It was the last link binding them to the seashore. All else was primeval, savagery not a whit reduced by man's brutishness.

"How far may we have to drive ourselves into this tropic horror yet before we reach the tunneled point of the Mangalile?" mused Nixon, leaning on his rifle at the angle of the hut. He raised his repeater as a dark form suddenly glided to his side. But with finger on trigger he paused.

It was the *Beauregard's* fighting man. He grasped Nixon's arm, and the brooding depression of the night was now realized in the hidden foe's first snaky movement.

"Wake all our friends silently," whispered the outlying man. "A dozen thieves have stampeded all our mules. We are helpless in the forest now."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AMBUSH ON THE AGUAN.

"WAIT a moment, Baxter," answered the excited Nixon, as he joined the startled watcher in the dark shade of the palm sheds around the hut. "Before we make a break let us hear all your story." He slipped his big revolver around to the front and quietly tested the action of his Winchester.

"Easy enough to see," growled Baxter. "It's a case of put-up job. This is one of the worst murder holes on the Aguan, and many a murdered man has been pitched into the river from these bluffs. Cayman teeth wipe out all knife and bullet marks very easily. These chaps have posted some fellows to run off with our stock. Very likely some one who is dead down on your mining projects."

Nixon started!

This idea had not yet materialized in his mind. He had only thought of the gracefully loose custom of horse-stealing which hangs as a modest wreath around the sunburned neck of the average Honduran.

"They want to dump you down here discouraged and have your party turn back," concluded the irate Baxter, known over the Mississippi valley and the Gulf by the curt designation "Tough." "There's only two things to do. One is throw up the game. The other is to jump these fellows at once, and if they don't find our mules, then to—take theirs. There's a band now in the corral. If we force them to find our stray animals they will soon offer to mount us, and then try to lie their way out of this affair. Choose quick, boss!" Then he ran on: "If these fellows are allowed to scatter they might ambush us. Now we've got 'em. Ten minutes later we will lose our only chance. For the first man who leaves this here *jacal* will turn out their own mules in the corral, and then these liars will pretend theirs have been run off too. Do you catch on?"

Nixon caught on. He jerked out his army revolver and grasped his rifle in the left hand. "How shall we do it?" he whispered eagerly. "Two of them are heavily armed."

"Oh, easy enough," confidently replied Baxter. "I'll sneak our men out and then we'll all sing out our alarm. As they come out we'll bag them one by one. I've a *riata* handy here and I'll tie their arms till we have a palaver."

"Go!" said the doctor, determinedly. In his heart of hearts he had sworn to see that tunneled nose of the Mangalile mountain, for the sake of the dear blue-eyed Nixie of Fishkill.

The young American's heart thumped loudly as he breathlessly waited the safe return of Baxter.

In a moment the others were with him.

"Quick, now," he whispered, as the "sea cook" turned up on the run with his rifle at a trail and Tough Baxter glided back, as serpent-like as Uncas. "We'll get them first; then make our plans afterward!"

With their weapons ready the whole party softly glided up to the great adobe where the slatternly daughters of Venus still snored over the emptied mescal bottles. Then the staccato voice of Baxter was raised in an unearthly yell as he discharged one barrel of his revolver.

The plan worked to a charm.

A startled throng came pouring out of the one low entrance, as a frightened old crone waved a burning brand! The next moment cursing and imprecations arose from the men, who were neatly lariatied, one by one, by Baxter, while the four other Americans bound them and kicked the weapons of the disarmed scoundrels into a heap.

In five minutes the American army of occupation had arranged its sullen captives on one side of the hut, all securely roped. Baxter and the cook guarded the dozen or more women of the Spanish party and the door was also securely barred.

Lights had been tremblingly lit by the venerable crone who was head witch of this devil's hostelry.

As his party stood, back to back, watching all

quarters of their stronghold with ready revolvers, through James Nixon's mind came one startling, secret conviction. "It is that cursed priest's work. In some fatal imprudence we have unveiled ourselves and the whole scoundrel scum of Honduras will hold up the hands of this avenging Moses."

Frank Lorimer looked at his watch. "Half past two," he muttered in English. "We cannot move before five. Suppose that we should be attacked here, what shall we do?"

There was a grim silence until Tough Baxter very practically remarked: "Shoot all these fellows on the inside first, and then a good bunch of the ones on the outside. We have dead loads of cartridges."

This wholesale proposed application of the *Lex Talionis*, though horrible, seemed about the only thing to do.

"If we shoot a hundred greasers, that won't make mule meat out of them," lazily remarked the "sea cook."

"By Jove!" sharply cried Frank Lorimer, "we must go out at once and secure mules enough to get out of this murder trap."

Baxter's calm voice was heard. "Let us all leave here. Fetch the whole gang down to the mule corral. Light a fire there and tie these men up to the nearest bush fence. If there's any ambush they'll get shot first. We'll keep in the shadow."

"And our baggage?" remarked Abercromby.

"Oh, easy enough. We'll make this gang tote all our belongings down there."

"But what shall we do at daybreak?" demanded Nixon.

"There's only one thing to do," remarked the guide. "We've got a nasty lot of forest and ravines and defiles to go through, and the Aguan to cross besides, to get on to Sonaguera. Push out at daybreak. Make these fellows lead their own extra mules on, and pack all our things besides. We will ride the best of theirs. If there's any ambush I will see they get the first dose. Besides, their friends will hardly kill them just to get the show of a fight out of us. When we get

to Sonaguera, then we will turn in the whole gang to the Alcalde there. He will be afraid of a row with the American consul. You can just bluff the life out of him. He will, anyway, let you take these fellows' mules till they find yours. I will bet my bottom dollar these chaps will find those mules yet. I'll jabber away at them. Don't you gentlemen let on you know any Spanish."

There was sense in his rough words. "Baxter, you are a born strategist," remarked Nixon, admiringly. "Where did you pick up your generalship?"

"Oh, I was one of General John Morgan's men! We rode half over the State of Ohio and drank up all the old women's buttermilk, as well as walked off with the fattest horses and the farmers' gold watches. We were gay old 'rebs,' you bet," returned the ex-guerrilla, as he calmly lighted a cigar.

In half an hour the transfer was duly made. Then Tough amused himself by making one Honduran brave, with his arms loosely pinioned, point out the very best riding mules of the score of animals, as the old woman drove them past one by one

The long hours till dawn dragged slowly along and the three friends watched, lying ready on their arms, while Baxter forced the sullen prisoners to place the packs on all the mules and then caparison the riding animals.

"It's about light enough now to travel," said the ex-guerrilla. "When these old women have filled our canteens and boiled us some coffee we'll make a break for Sonaguera. But on this road it's mind your eye and shoot quick!"

Coffee being over, Baxter slipped away to the deserted adobe on the hill. He returned with a beaming face. Then he chuckled, "No, I was not a-sayin' my prayers. I have just chucked all them shooting-irons and machetes down into the whirlpool of the Aguan, under the hill. So all these ruck and truck can get back to their hole."

With this he dismissed the women with a paternal smile.

Howls and wails arose as the men were forced away

by their captors, and the two unkempt daughters of Venus loudly lifted up the voice of lamentation.

An hour later Tough led the way down the trail to the ford of the Aguan, some eight miles distant. Two men, lashed arm to arm, sullenly plodded on in front, covered by the poised Winchester of the tranquil-souled frontiersman. The three friends rode together as a main fighting body in the middle of the caravan, and the alert sea-cook brought up the rear.

It was a gloomy and a sullen morning journey. Steaming heat arose from the awaking forest, where strange animals scuttled across the paths. Myriads of monkeys, swarms of shrill-voiced tropic birds and distant beasts of prey made the echoes of the dark depths ring again. Every eye was strained as the somber shades grew denser, and the cavalcade slowly toiled over the great flat to the ford of the Aguan.

At ten o'clock a sorry-looking band was paraded on the shining pebbly bank of the great river, at this point some hundred yards broad.

Baxter alertly reconnoitered the ford, and then returned with the most intelligent prisoner quailing under his keen eye.

"It's all O. K., gentlemen," he said. "We've got a clear beach on the other side to come out on, and there's no ambush there. I'll just put these fellows now in to lead the mules over, and the cook, ready to fire on the instant, will follow me up. You could cover our whole party with your heavy rifle. If there's any firing, then cross over as quick as you can."

In ten minutes the great silent stream was safely forded.

"I have made up my mind to one thing," laughed Frank Lorimer to Abercromby as he came dripping out of the knee-high stream. "I'll never travel without that ex-rebel if money can buy him. He's a Jim-Dandy, that's just his regular size."

For the fighting man's ready wit and nerve placed him in the front rank.

Noon—high noon—fiercely burned above them, the blazing sun-rays poured down through trees two hundred feet high, when the toiling cavalcade at last

halted. Immediately in their front was a long sunken glen. Beyond, through rifts in the forest, bare savannah patches showed out where the plains rolled away toward distant Sonaguera.

Nixon's Truxillo-made map showed this village also to be a military and telegraph headquarters.

As they halted to reconnoiter, the two leading prisoners astounded the party by suddenly falling on their knees and begging Baxter piteously to allow them to go first down into the ravine.

"Here's some plant!" quickly remarked the scout as he peered down into the tropic wilderness below them.

Then Nixon whispered to him, and the Americans formed the sullen prisoners in a body and drove them before them, still bound, down the slippery path.

"Now, gentlemen," said Baxter, determinedly, his old rebel spirit rising. "Remember, if there's trouble jump off and fight behind your mules. We must stick closely together. I'll watch over these prisoners. Here, give me one of your extra revolvers. I am a little quicker than some of you," he grimly added, stern memories coming to him of the days when Morgan and Gillem fought to the death in the blue Tennessee passes.

Every nerve was strained as they picked their way down the flinty hillside, along the narrow trail where the bushes hung so closely that a man's face was invisible five yards away. The "sea cook" was at Baxter's side, his eyes burning with the light of battle. In silence they strode out of the sun's rays into the depth of the ravine, where fern and palm, tangled vine and dense thicket rose around a gurgling spring.

Then Baxter's right arm suddenly leveled the Colt six-shooter.

There was a deafening roar, a chorus of yells, then bellowing echoes and shrieks of pain as a cloud of blue smoke drifted over the trail. The rapid ring of four Winchesters, spitting fire to right and left, followed the crack of the ex-guerrilla's ready frontier revolver; he had got in the first killing shot. A moment after the concealed thieves in ambush poured a volley into their

remarks : '*Muy mala gente!*' 'Served them right !' I *did* pile it on a bit. I spoke of our American fleet and also made some reference to General Phil Sheridan—of gory renown. We will, moreover, have two soldiers to pilot us on past Arinal and by Jocon to the forks of the Aguan and the Mangalile. When we have found the place we want, I will fool with these fellows while you do your private prospecting."

The tired Baxter then treated himself to a half go of sugar rum "on general principles."

"But as to our return ? They will waylay us surely," gloomily remarked Nixon.

"They won't waylay us any more—not a little bit—nary a time," crowed Generalissimo Baxter, as he gracefully accepted a light from an admiring *señorita* lingering at the door and gazing on his manly perfections. "I know of a neat little cut-off road that will take us back to Omoa Bay and so skip Truxillo. We can telegraph to the American Consul from here on our way back, so to have Captain Tony Lemaire hang up the *Beauregard* in Omoa Bay, and wait for us there."

"Baxter, you are a jewel," cried Frank Lorimer.

"That's what my girl used to say," sighed the rebel. "But she's been dead and gone this many a year. She died, poor child, of a broken heart, for every man in her family fell in battle for Dixie's land."

He walked suddenly away as if to gaze over the darkening mountains, but the look in his eyes told the young men that the ex-Confederate saw once again the banner of the "Lost Cause."

"That's a brave fellow," whispered Abercromby.

"Yes, they were dead game the men who rode with Jackson and with Lee," sadly mused Nixon, as the days when brothers butchered each other anonymously came back in sad review.

It was two o'clock before "Tough" Baxter returned from his queer symposium. The sound of revelry by night floated out from the open doors of the *alcalde's* mansion. The tuning of guitars resounded and the strident voice of the Southerner was once raised in song, "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

But the chronicler as well as the sorrowing Recording Angel must add that Tough Baxter came back "running very free before the wind." Yet he was the bearer of a precious secret, of which he guarded the sanctity even under the sway of the wand of that great god, Bacchus, who has caught so many mortals tripping.

An admiring conclave of the entire population escorted the five Americans and their two muleteers out of Sonaguera in the early afternoon of the next day. As they started the alcalde proudly led the way to the calaboose. There, behind a grated iron door, the last evidence of the plot at the thieves' haunt lingered in the shape of a heavily leg-ironed prisoner.

Baxter thoughtfully gave the crest-fallen scoundrel a couple of packs of *cigaritos*, a pull of rum and some very pithy, good advice.

"Hereafter, *amigo mio*, let all traveling Americans alone. For you may again entertain angels unawares."

The beautiful oaks of Sonaguera plain nodded in friendly shade over them as the five watchful white men rode on behind the escort, the muleteers pushing along the captured animals. "Sweet wonder" filled the eyes of the three friends as with a proud modesty Generalissimo Baxter let fall the various pearls of local wisdom he had gathered in the brief glories of that dazzling night.

"I am a pretty solid Honduranéan now," said the Southerner. "The great thing that I am a bit proud of is that I have very fairly located the place we are in search of. There is really such a big mountain nose as you describe between Jocon and the little town of Mangalile, and these soldiers know a little ranch station right on the top of the ridge near what they call 'Los Disparamades,' where a little trail leads down to the river bank. There was some queer business of the olden time once going on there, for one of the 'traveled beauties' of Sonaguera filled my ears with a long-ago yarn about the 'Witch of Mangalile,' who is supposed to haunt that old cave tunnel."

"Indeed! Tell us!" exclaimed Nixon, as the three friends trotted along to the little half-way station which was to end this day's short march.

"Wait till we get into camp," pleaded the repentant Baxter. "I have the whole scenery in my mind, and I'll take you there straight as an arrow. But my head is awful. This climate is a little warm for drinking sugar rum of ninety degrees proof. I did learn from a very buxom and matronly charmer that this same cave was once a favorite smugglers' resort. It is not far from the Guatemala line, and tobacco, cigars, salt and guns have been often stowed there, waiting a chance to run them over the mountains. So I suppose these bugaboo stories were only got up for a purpose. They are a sly lot down here."

"How long will our march be?" queried the impatient Lorimer.

"Only five days;" but we have two terrific mountain ranges to cross, and four or five deep Aguan fordings."

"We will get there!" cried the three New Yorkers.

So a wonderful unanimity reigned among them as they plodded on. For the wine of life was bounding in their young veins, and dreams of treasure trove haunted their tired brains long after Baxter had told them the story of the Witch of Mangalile, and they were enwrapped each in his dearest dreams.

As he lay by the camp fire Doctor Nixon's mind wandered away to past scenes of trouble and danger. "Who is now on our trail?" he muttered. "I might fancy Padre Guerra would certainly dearly love to pay us off. Impossible! And the boy Valdes. Far away in Cuba."

While his companion slept Frank Lorimer, rifle in hand, gazed out on the chaparral fringing the night's bivouac. The young New Yorker marked the listless stride of their admiring sentinel, who muttered: "*Muy bravos los Americanos*," as he passed by the lair where the four white men lay curtained only with the stars.

The face of Inez Romero, witching in its noble and plaintive beauty, then rose up before the guardian of the night. The wailing breeze seemed to bear a strange call to her side. "I'll see this first war-path through," resolutely murmured the gallant Frank. "Win or lose, I will then go over to Paris for—thank God I have

money enough to make Inez my wife—to give her a home. She shall forget the lost emeralds. Even now I've a mind to vote that whole story an infernal humbug."

He paused to light a cigar as a solace to his despondency. "I don't believe there's a single emerald——" Then he started wildly as the crack of a heavy revolver roused the camp. Half blinded by the glare and suddenly startled, he was unable to speak, as his comrades rushed to his aid, for the alert soldier sentinel had thrice replied to the fire of the unseen foe.

"It is useless to saddle up," cried Baxter, with ear to the ground. He had caught the retreating sound of horses' hoofs on the gallop.

"A pretty close call, squire," remarked the ex-Confederate, as bullet holes in Lorimer's coat and hat were discovered. "You wouldn't do for the Comanche country. That blaze of your cigar lighting would have cost your life down there. I fancy that you can see now why we old 'rebs' only chewed tobacco on sentinel's post. Then he added, gravely, "Gentlemen, this is no ordinary marauder. We are followed, dogged, and by some one with a bit of nerve. But for his haste this would-be assassin would have potted Lorimer here!"

Anxious faces greeted the dawn, as with the morning coffee came Baxter's report that the tracks showed that a horseman had ridden around the camp stealthily for hours until the murderous attack on Lorimer.

"It clean beats me!" said the veteran raider, slowly shaking his head. "This prowling scoundrel has ridden on ahead. Are we waited for again? And then he could have picked off the soldier sentinel quite easily, but he waited for one of you."

Mr. Baxter walked away chewing a twig in deep thought, and most carefully examined his personal battery.

The three New Yorkers saddled their mules in silence. "Can it be Guerra's work?" growled Nixon, as he spurred out in the lead. But he dared not voice his thoughts to his moody companions as they rode on over the sweltering plains toward Olanchito.

By common consent, Baxter was made the leader of

the march. Each river ford was scouted, every tangled path and wild logwood grove was duly scanned as they toiled along.

"It may have been only one of these reckless Olanchito thieves," thoughtfully said Baxter, at their noonday rest. "These higher valleys furnish the black flag 'no-quarter' rebels to every cut-throat revolutionary general here. For the cruel men of Olanchito never spare life. They are tigers for human blood."

That night the jaded adventurers threw themselves down in a sullen silence as they sheltered in the vermin-infected adobe offered to the wayfarer by the authorities of Olanchito, while Baxter made a call upon the *alcalde*.

From this visit he returned with an angry brow. "This is a good place—to get out of!" he sardonically growled "I was sharply questioned by the *alcalde*, and he seems anxious as to where we were going to prospect and other impudence of the kind."

"What did you say?" asked Lorimer.

"I met his lies in kind," said Baxter, as he proceeded to swing his hammock. "I told him that we were going on over the range to the Pacific. That may throw him off our trail. There's a bad lot around here, too. But we won't have trouble here in town."

The next afternoon the serrated line of the huge Mangalile mountains rose up before them.

Over burning reaches and flinty mesas, past huts, where frowsy, half-naked natives huddled to glare at the gringos, the cavalcade toiled slowly along, armed at all points and alert for the sudden attack.

Then the ex-Confederate halted the train before they swam the mighty Aguan for the last time.

"Here, gentlemen," he said, "is our most ticklish point on our return, whether successful or unsuccessful. The road to Yoro and Omoa is the same as far as the summit yonder, forty miles away. We will camp up there and I can lead you through the forest by a short line to Omoa, where the *Beauregard* awaits us. So we can outwit the spies on our track, for they will 'lay for' us on the return road

through these jungles to Truxillo. But we must hold this secret locked in our breasts."

"So you have adventured down here before?" queried Nixon in amazement.

"I helped to bring an American financial fugitive secretly over from New Orleans," coolly replied Baxter. Up there I delivered him over to the escort of the personal representatives of the then all-powerful tyrant President of Honduras."

"And the President here protected him?" cried Lorimer in surprise.

"Certainly," smiled Tough Baxter. "The Don got a good share of the spoil. They are hard and fast friends even yet."

"Queer country," mused Abercromby. "Very queer."

"The only typical hell on earth," cheerfully said Baxter as they rode into Arinal. "Here is the very worst cut-throat nest in the Land of the Banana; so let us keep together and be very close-mouthed."

Forty-eight hours later the band of adventurers straggled into Jacon, walled in from the outer world with its gigantic mountain ranges. They had painfully toiled over an enormous sierra where even the patient mules had to be beaten, along over the narrow trails threading the fearful declivities. High up in the thin blue air over them condors wheeled their airy flight, mere specks against the blazing sun.

Gloomy pine reaches shrouded them in the mountain amphitheater where the rude crosses and growing piles of memorial stones often marked the graves of murdered wayfarers. They now had taken their last glimpse of the great Aguan valley, and the three friends on the summit of the ten-thousand-foot divide clasped hands in a last silent compact as Baxter pointed to a blue notch to the west.

"There's where we break down to the Mangalile River," he said. "Our journey's end. And if we find your old cave it won't take us long to discover if the beautiful Indian princess, once murdered there, has remained to keep house for us."

Then they thankfully sought the shelter of the

wretched village of a hundred squalid huts and a ruined church.

"It is a grim old haunt of misery and ruin, this last village in the lonely mountains," sighed the once bright-hearted Lorimer, as he laid his weapon in readiness near his saddle pillow. And the wearied toilers slept. Far above them rose the huge ridge, towering in air where a narrow, dizzy trail led along to the horrors of the beetling Disparamades, where even stout-hearted Cortez quailed as his men, enfeebled, fell, plunging into the depths of the Mangalile, dashing themselves to pieces thousands of feet below.

As they slept under a double guard, waiting for the morn; standing by a little watch fire on a cliff twenty miles away, a single desperado was posted, stealthily awaiting their toilsome ascent.

"If they escape now they bear charmed lives, these cursed gringos," he muttered, as he enrolled his saddle swung hammock and serape. "I must work the natives if they find the plunder. It is hidden here somewhere, and *par Dios!* I will have it. The Indians must help me—and—*hide* me until I can get away!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISSING SIGNAL FIRE.

THE stars were still shining on the roofless church of Jocon when Baxter awakened the party. "We will need all the time we have, if we mean to scale the crest to-night," he said, as he tendered the morning coffee. "Our natives are driving up the mules. I calculate to strike the foot of the mountain by daybreak."

Nixon was girding up his loins with cartridge belt, as a tremulous old Indian sacristan thanked him for the *douceur* paid for the use of the cloistered shelter.

"*Gracias, muy Señor mio,*" muttered the last guardian of Mother Church. "Beware of the Disparamades—tigers in the mountain—too. Many go by—ah, so

few return. The dreadful witch of Mangalile rules over wild savages. The cañons are filled with the bones of men and animals carried down into the chasms by accident; only our sure-footed Indian barefoot runners can tread the sides of the great slopes where the treacherous greasy pine needles cover the six-inch trail, where the Conquistadores went to their doom!"

"What is this old tale of the Witch Mangalile?" interrupted Nixon, hastily.

"Ah, señor, long before our day she died," mumbled the sacristan. "There is an old cave in a great point on the Mangalile—the 'Devil's Nose,' our muleteers call it. There sounds and unearthly yells echo up the ghastly gorge; no one dares approach it. Padre Santos, the last Vicar of Jocon, told me that the accursed Buccaneers hid once in that cave. They lured a beautiful captive Indian princess to guide them to the sea. Hiding here from the Spaniards, they made rafts to descend the Mangalile, and buried their treasures in the cave. To guard it they killed the faithful one, who, led by love for their captain, had guided them to where they could reach the Aguan on their rafts. She was soon terribly avenged, for the native savages of the Mangalile slew them all. Only one poor wretch ever reached an Indian village at the forks of the Aguan to tell the story. The murdered one's spirit yet haunts the fearful gorge. No one returns alive from there."

"Would you guide me there? I have gold!" eagerly asked Nixon.

But the old man shuddered as he crossed himself. "Not for worlds! *Sea por Dios y la Santissima!* The awful Valley of Death is haunted." And the sacristan fled timidly away, as his auditor was called to business by the impatient hallo of the anxious Baxter.

Down the shadowy river path they spurred, as the dim woods became vocal with the discord of a tropic forest. Riding by Lorimer's side Nixon told the quaint story of the verger. "This is only another form of the leakage of the strange tradition of the lost 'Emeralds of Maracaibo,'" answered Frank, enthusiastically. "Dead or alive, I will tempt the Witch of

Mangalile!" Then in grim silence they toiled on till the afternoon sun showed them a rude hut, lifted far up in the blue ether on a spiral ridge sweeping away to the west.

The chill mountain breeze swept wailing through the stunted pines around them as they stood seven thousand feet above where the faint blue smoke wreaths curled up from Jocon, twenty miles away. "Gentlemen, my work is nearly done," said Baxter shortly, "for the Jocon muleteers tell me that the 'Devil's Nose' can be plainly seen from the end of this ridge. There is a spring in a clump of cedars, where the Indian runner's trail breaks off for Tegucigalpa, at that point we must leave the mules with a guide till we find the way down the cliff to the river bed."

"Can we not descend into the gorge with the animals?" anxiously asked Lorimer.

"Not for Joseph!" replied the guide, "We will have to leave one Indian and a volunteer to guard the mules, while we go down. If any accident happens, or we are delayed in your prospecting, we can then get pinole, dried beef, and cassava bread from Jocon, by sending back one of the mounted Indians. To risk losing the animals might mean our death by starvation; no white man could carry supplies up this ridge—it is the very worst I ever climbed."

For an hour more with pallid brows and panting breaths the group struggled on. Then Baxter, in advance, turned and swung his hat in triumph as he reached a rocky knoll, beyond which the dark cedar tops marked the descent toward the mysterious Valley of the Margalile.

"By Heavens, it corresponds with the map of the dead Spaniard!" gasped Nixon, as he sprang off his exhausted animal.

There was a thrilling silence! Their eyes followed Baxter's pointing finger. Then their senses reeled at the sheer descent below them to the south, where the Mangalile, a shining silver thread, glittered in the last rays of the sinking sun.

"While you look around a bit, I will examine this cedar clump for water. We'll have to camp here

sure," doggedly said "Tough" Baxter, as he dispatched his "sea-cook" to reconnoitre all the approaches to the ridge.

It was an anxious group that stood around Nixon, whose fingers trembled as he drew out the copy of the old tracing made by the doomed Francisco Aguilar de Romero. With a pocket compass he oriented the sheet, and then solemnly said: "There is a great point like unto the nose of a man."

Their eyes explored the blue chasm below, where the great rock ledge ran due northeast.

"I see the point!" cried Abercromby.

Lorimer was already exploring its face with his signal glass. It was a thrilling moment.

Crawling on his hands and knees out to the edge of the cliff, Abercromby gazed down into the gorge of the Mangalile. A shout of triumph from Lorimer at last made the blood bound in the hearts of his two companions. "There *is* a cave or arched hole down there near the point where the river turns."

Standing together, where the dark shadows began to veil the distant winding of the enormous cañon, the three friends were forced to cling to the wind-swept ridge summit.

"It is the very place," they murmured, as Baxter returned.

"Let us get down into the little pocket here," cried the frontiersman. "Our animals are now nearly done for; we must make camp for the night."

Seated around the gleaming fire, when the bivouac repast was finished, over their pipes, the Americans discussed the descent.

"There's but one way," said the sturdy Baxter. "We'll leave the cook and one Indian on guard here, the other can go with us as messenger. Taking our lariats, and putting our outfit in the raw-hide ore bags, we can take four or five days' supplies. Our men here can guard the rest. We can make fire signals. I'll arrange that. The two soldiers must also remain until we send word back. If we find there's no way to get the animals down, then the soldiers can escort all back to Jocon and wait for us there, for I think we can

get around the headlands and follow the little river to Jocon. It looks practicable from here."

"But, can we get down ourselves?" said Abercromby, whose view of the awful gorge below had almost shaken his nerve.

"Oh yes," calmly said Baxter, "I took a look of the hillside a bit; with the lariats, and letting the packs slide before us now and then, I reckon we can make the trip. But its a devil's own jumping-off place. It beats the Arcata trail out in California, where the government mules commit suicide in disgust."

"Our guns," anxiously said Nixon, still fearful of their haunting enemies.

"Take 'em," replied the guide, "and if we have to abandon them we can hide them in the cliffs. The Indian can get them to us later; these fellows climb like goats. Our revolvers and knives are enough to protect us."

"Then let us all turn in!" suggested Nixon, "for we will make a break for the river bed the very moment it is daylight."

The mountain eagles were soaring in the glittering sunbeams when Baxter reported all ready for the descent next morning. He had thoroughly swept the hillsides with the glass, and found the well-marked path of the larger wild animals, driven in summer to seek the shade of the thickets in the river bottom below.

The rude packs were soon adjusted, and the five men were ready to begin the toilsome descent. The last orders were hastily given to the detachment remaining in camp, under command of Baxter's chum.

"You can bet on me to the last gasp, gentlemen," the "sea-cook" said stoutly. "I will make the signals agreed on, and I will also keep a smoke rising from the top of the highest knoll here to let you know that all is well."

Baxter called back, good humoredly, "keep an eye on those mules, too; I should not care to walk back to Truxillo."

"You'll find me with 'em" were the last words heard, as the eager explorers plunged down the slippery hillside, bending under their packs.

It was a journey beyond all parallel. To go back was impossible.

In half an hour after commencing the perilous descent, the desperate nature of the quest made itself but too apparent. They gazed in despair at one another when, with hands bruised and bleeding, they lay resting on a narrow rocky ledge. Even the indomitable Baxter groaned—"This is the very roughest deal I ever struck."

To avoid gazing into the fearful gorge below, they kept their eyes fixed on the walls to which they clung like flies, gazing along the shelving ledges, where even the panthers had turned back. With slung rifles, and aided by pointed stakes, trimmed by Baxter's trusty Bowie knife, they faltered along, clinging with hands and feet where a single loose rock or crumbling stone meant instant and horrible destruction. Lowering their packs in advance, they threaded the narrow ledges of slippery rock, forcing their eyes to gaze always before them, but never *down*, until seven hours from their setting forth, they bathed their heated faces in the crystal waters of the mystic Mangalile.

They lay exhausted by the river for half an hour in a gloomy silence.

The bed of the stream was obstructed with giant boulders. Taking up at last their march toward the great bend, they painfully scrambled over the rock and waded through the water toward the Devil's Nose.

Suddenly, Baxter in the lead, halted, and threw up his hands in a signal of amity. The others started in wonder, as a frightened troop of a dozen naked Indians stood in the way, excitedly barring their advance. The unexpected appearance of white men in this mountain-walled river valley, filled the children of the forest with wonder, and Baxter's cry of "*Amigos, Amigos!*" but faintly reassured them.

Long slender fish spears, tipped with barbed flint, with bows and arrows of a rude make, were their only weapons.

The magical effect of a judicious sampling of Baxter's canteen finally induced the reassured natives to become the porters of the now irksome packs.

The afternoon shadows were stealing down and throwing strange figures of giant, grotesque outline on the still sunlit walls of the farther chasm when the five exhausted cliff scalers threw themselves down on the river drift at the foot of the Devil's Nose.

A moment after Baxter dragged his weary bones around the point and, returning, cried, "Sure enough, this old pot hole here runs out under the point on the other side, but I can't see daylight through the tunnel."

Five minutes later, the Indians crawling out, torch in hand, reported that the middle of the old subteranean causeway was choked with a tangle of logs and river débris, caught on a great black stone ledge.

Then, as the three frieuds lay resting their aching bones, their eyes wandered back to the beetling crags of Los Disparamades above them, saw the blue smoke curling up from the knoll, telling them that all was still well on the ridge.

"While you gentlemen are now taking a bit of a rest, I'll prospect the cañon below, a bit," said the ex-rebel, "for I want to find out from these natives, while we have our hands on 'em, the easiest way back to Jocon. I know that we could never get up those cliffs again, and I beg you to guard our canteens carefully, for rum is the only thing to keep these Indians near us. When it gives out they will be off like a shot. Rum and tobacco are the only hire that they will work for."

The Indian attendant had already built a fire and was busied with his coffee boiling as the three friends peered into the darkened opening of the cave, wherein the Witch of Mangalile held her phantom court. The two entrances, the black ledge of rock, all confirmed the old tale. But, the emeralds! Ah, the emeralds!

Nixon broke the silence, as he rose from his knees. "The moment has come," he said, "to take Baxter into at least our partial confidence. Time is golden. To clear this tunnel we must avail ourselves of the help of these natives. This must be done before our own slender stores of rations are exhausted, for, buried in this frightful gorge here, our very existence is at stake."

There was no dissenting word, and the immediate

exploration of the cavern was decided. The guide was loudly called.

"So you wish to explore the old ghost hole," laughed the ex-guerrilla when he listened to the strange tale. "All right!" With ready wit, he explained his wishes to the natives, with much indicated promise of the magic fire-water, and a sparing preliminary distribution of tobacco.

"We are safe now," he cheerfully added, as the excited natives divided at once into two parties, and entered like foxes the archways of the cavern. Lightly scorning Baxter's offer of candles, the forest children, returning with withes of twisted fiber plucked from the forest groves, deftly lit them from fire produced by knocking together pieces of vitrious quartz.

"While you select a good sheltered place for our camp, I will have a look inside," remarked the indefatigable scout.

The friends were all busy with their bivouac labors, when Baxter joined them, laughing, "It's easy enough to read the riddle of the haunted cave," he said, as he took a pull at the flask. "The sides of the tunnel are smoked with many camp fires at both ends. There is also débris of the packages in which salt, tobacco, and rum, are usually handled in Honduras. The place has certainly been used as a smuggler's haunt for years. We are not far from the Guatemala line here.

"But how can any practicable use be made of it; how do they get down here?" asked Nixon incredulously.

"Ah!" replied Baxter, smiling, "easy enough. There is a practicable ravine about five miles up stream, so the Indians tell me, and a good trail leading over to Jocon, a dozen miles below here. That is the way we must go back. Now, if we only stand guard over our rum, the natives will clear the tunnel by daylight; then, you can examine it as you wish. One of them speaks a little Spanish, and he has agreed to pilot us back to Jocon, by the ravine, and have all the men of his strange brood carry to a point on the trail near the town our heavy goods. We are to repay them with as much rum as they can pack."

“Good enough,” cried Lorimer, his spirits rising; “we will fill them up, inside and outside. All well at our camp,” he gayly concluded, as he dropped his field-glass. “The smoke column is still curling up on the knoll by the cedars.”

Baxter and the Indian soon produced a hearty meal from the contents of the pack, while the three friends filled a sheltering cleft of the rocks with drifted wood. This was soon covered with moss and elastic leaves, heaped up by the willing savage women. “Behold our beds,” laughed Abercromby.

“We will have deer at daylight for breakfast,” said Baxter. “Our Indian friends are mighty hunters, and they haunt the runs where the bucks come down to drink.”

All through the long night one of the four white men, rifle in hand, patrolled the river bank between the two openings of the tunnel, while the brown-skinned natives hopefully toiled away, with the rum of Jocon in their mind's eye.

Divided into watches of three hours, the resting time of nature slipped away, until the river glen was vocal again with the bird and beast chorus of daylight.

Strange dreams had haunted the rude pillows of the wanderers to the Mangalile, and yet right cheerfully did the young men bound up to begin the examination of the tunnel.

“So far all is going well,” remarked Baxter, as he marshaled the steaming viands and the fragrant coffee. “The tunnel is perfectly clear now from end to end. There's a big fat buck hanging by his heels down by the stream and I see our signal smoke above!”

In half an hour breakfast was finished, and with brawny arms bared the excited party was at work.

The first examination brought disappointment.

There had been a deposit of gravel left by the successive floods of ages in the tunnel. It would take at least a day's strong digging to get down to the old level of the floor as indicated by the mouths of the passage.

It was hastily decided to dig a trench about thirty

feet long, following the axis of the tunnel midway between the two entrances. This would surely strike anything that would answer the description of the Spanish buccaneer's rocky cache.

Four short cornish picks and picket shovels were soon at work, where the Americans knelt under the down-sloping roof of the center of the tunnel. The Indian children held the flaming fiber torches near, the men in the rear rolled out the loose cobbles, while the women carried out all the loosened earth in rude baskets, hastily plaited.

It was a singular scene; the swarthy, naked natives and the nervous, energetic whites toiling away; the resounding thud of the picks, the hollow scraping of the shovels, was the only sound heard. On guard with ready rifle and revolver, the native muleteer scanned the approaches of the stream, above and below the Devil's Nose.

The day passed quietly in fevered digging, and the great flaming sun darts filled the cañon, as the half-disheartened men gathered around the camp fire to eat of Honduras venison and reinforce their energies with the magic rum.

"It seems to get harder than flint as we go down," doggedly said Abercromby, filling his pipe, and stretching his stiffened frame.

"I fear that the concrete we are drifting in has never before been disturbed by man," cried the impulsive Nixon.

"Now, young men, quit talking and go to work," cut in Baxter, sententiously.

The natives had kept up their digging without an instant's cessation.

"There is one thing I don't like about this whole situation," said Lorimer, in a brief resting spell from pick and shovel. "How did the party of the wandering Aguilar Romero ever get here, when the trails all lead over the mountains? It seems incredible."

"Easy enough!" answered the sharp-witted Baxter. "The old buccaneers always traveled the ravines and valleys, as being the easiest and safest about here; and the water-run ways guided them to the sea on either

side. The Indians, light-footed as deer, always laid out their trails to cross the highest points, so as to descry the coming of their heavily armed Spanish enemies. It is so on the plains, and in Arizona, as well as Mexico, where the natives always use these highest points for their rallying places, and to light their signal fires."

"It does not seem as if any one ever had floated down this little stream," doubtfully remarked Abercromby.

"Don't it? Look at the brushwood piled twenty feet high on the banks," replied the ex-rebel scout. "In the rainy season a good-sized vessel could easily pass from here to Truxillo, and remember, too, that the buccaneers only lashed logs together and went down these streams."

"Let us tackle the concrete again," urged Lorimer, whose face bore marks of the flame of his internal excitement.

So they worked on until, late at night, Baxter forced the young men unwillingly to their rest.

"See here, gentlemen," he said, "Your hands are beginning to swell, and you will all be stiff to-morrow. Rest easy, and turn in. I'll guard the camp with our man, and these Aztecs in double shifts will keep up a steady lick all this night; I'll give them a good round of spiritual refreshment at midnight.

The supper was dispatched in the silence of intense fatigue.

As they turned in Nixon put his head out of his blankets to ask the watchful Baxter if the summit signal was all right.

"There was a faint smoke line at sunset, it was just visible, but, it was there!" answered the volunteer guard.

The second night of the bivouac passed in peace; only the uncouth wallowing of a tapir had disturbed the sleepers when Baxter roused them.

"Let us all go into the tunnel," he said. "The Indians have found a line of flat stones, near one of the walls, and directly in the middle arch of the cavern."

There was a rush for the entrance.

Dashing into the gloomy hole, the three friends were soon on their hands and knees, besides the tired Indians, who muttered in strange fear, as they sought to dislodge the closely cemented drift. There was a line of stones in rough order plainly visible, although the work of hours would be needed to clear even one them; the central trench being too far distant from the side wall.

"If we had only blasting powder or dynamite," cried Lorimer, his pale face now beaded with the sweat of excitement.

"That would bring down the roof on us," promptly answered Baxter. "Now, let us have our breakfast, while we put the whole force of Indians at cutting the overhanging bank off this line of stones."

Then the scout reassured the timid and shrinking natives.

"What is the matter with them?" demanded Lorimer.

"They fear this is the Devil's grave, and the spirits, loosed from rest, will carry them off," chuckled the guide. "After our coffee we will come back and urge them to their work. They want us to stand by and protect them."

It was just after the coffee had gladdened their nostrils that Baxter suddenly dropped his pannikin. "Give me the field glass," he said in an agitated voice.

"What is the matter?" cried the three men, springing up.

"By the eternal! There's no fire signal on the mountain!" slowly answered Baxter, as he handed the telescope back to Nixon.

One after another they swept the lines of the knoll towering far above them. Not a single blue wreath curled around the cedar clumps. The gloomy silence was broken by Baxter.

"There is something wrong up there," he coldly said, "I don't like it a bit. You remember the cook's words, 'You can bet on me to the last gasp.' Some one has cleaned up our camp; most likely the cussed horse thieves."

"What shall we do?" was the inquiring chorus.

"Do," scornfully echoed the scout. "First, I'll send the remaining Truxillo Indian by the river ravine to sneak up there and find out what's the matter; next, we must get the stuff out of that Devil's Lock Box of yours as quick as we can. Then, we can barricade this tunnel and fix ourselves for a bit of a fight."

"Ah," growled Lorimer, "I see it now, we have been followed by some one, every step from New York."

"Yes, and by heavens, they shan't take the last trick here without a fight!" said Nixon, in a rage, as he sprang up.

"Let me first dispatch the Indian," said the man of war. This was done in two minutes.

"The man will surely get back here before midnight," remarked Baxter. "I've given him his cue, and told him he would not need to work for a year if he is faithful. You three men get all your arms and ammunition within the cave and keep up the work. Send all the spare Indians out to me. I'll soon fortify the entrances."

In a half hour, acting under his directions, the up stream mouth of the tunnel was filled with loosely piled boulders, over which were thrown the logs removed from the tunnel. A tangle of bushes and vines concealed the artful mask.

"There," said Baxter, as he crawled up to where the friends were nervously working away like madmen, "I have my people all busy throwing up a breastwork at the down stream end, with only a flank opening and a loop-holed barrier behind. We can stop the opening easily."

"How?" cried the excited Nixon.

"With dead men!" chuckled the scout. Then he continued seriously: "We have plenty of water near, and all our traps and grub inside. I've had the camp fires all covered with fresh gravel. The squaws and kids after bringing all the gourds filled with water for us, will sleep around in the trees to-night and give us warning if any one comes."

"Do you think the attack will hold off till then?" asked the Americans.

"They are not darn fools enough to tackle us in daylight, when we can see to shoot," scornfully ejaculated Baxter. "Now go ahead with the work, gentlemen, I've got all the rifles handy here. A couple of the Indians up and down the stream will let us know if the enemy approach."

"Our messenger—how will he return in safety?" demanded Nixon, while his friends pried away at a flat covering stone, which seemed to loosen at last.

"I've told him to crawl down the bank opposite and give the jaguar cry three times in succession, which I will then answer," answered Baxter, inspecting his rifle carefully.

There was not a useless word spoken for an hour, as the laborers in the grimy recesses of the tunnel effected the dislodging of one of the row of gray flat stones, fastened together by a cemented matrix harder than the rocks themselves. Disappointment was upon them, as Nixon thrust his hand into a soft gray mud oozing with infiltrated water. "Here," he cried hoarsely, "Give me a knife." He thrust his heavy blade down, then plunged his hand again into the orifice. It came back covered with loosened hairs, the decayed fragments of what had been the upper layer of a rawhide bag.

"Pass me a calabash," he commanded, sharply, and half filled it with the mixed material of the rough coffer. "There are some good-sized, rounded lumps, looking like dirty green marbles in there!" Doctor Jim said, still on his knees—the others gathered anxiously round. "Are these pebbles or are they—?"

"Give me the gourd!" cried Lorimer, and before his friends could stop him, he had run down the bank to the silver stream of the Mangalile. Here, careless of lurking foes, the excited lawyer quickly panned out the gray silt, until only a dozen heavy, rounded, crusty pebbles, with dull green edges, remained in the red interior of the calabash. Holding them up to the light, one after another, the elated adventurer uttered a shout, which brought his friends in angry remonstrance to his side. "They look like the rough emeralds I saw in New York. They have a dull

green color. I swear, I believe we have found the lost treasure," he cried in triumph.

The watchful Baxter warned them back, as Nixon and Abercromby also verified the discovery of Inez Romero's lover.

Crouched in a sunny angle near the primitive fortification, Doctor Nixon applied the file, and found the stones all proof against the gnawing edge. "Back now," he said, "and clear out the coffer. If we find the remains of the four bags Aguilar spoke of, it is an added proof."

"Back to cover!" growled Baxter. "Clear the whole thing out and be ready to make a break, if need be. Our legs must take us back to Jocon if these horse thieves have really raided the camp."

"To work!" cried Nixon. Then the triumphant band returned to scoop out, with knife and tin cup, the whole interior of the irregular opening.

But it was hours before the last of the precious pebbly mass was deposited in the rawhide ore bags, which formed a part of the Indians' pack.

"Now," said Nixon, as he held up a candle so as to illuminate the irregular box-like cavity, "there is nothing left here. Whatever there is, we have it!"

"It is the old treasure, I verily believe," said Lorimer, as he pointed to the rude wicker basket where lay the fragments of the decayed sacks, which came out in shattered strips under the digging work of the machete. "The buccaneer's story has been verified in every detail. The loose mud must have been infiltrated from the oozy floods!"

All was silent without, save the rippling river, gurgling over its shingly bed, and the wail of the night birds.

"Dare we light a fire now for our coffee?" asked Abercromby, as their work was achieved.

"One of you come out and stand guard with me," answered the scout, "and I'll warm the pot over. I have a cold supper here that the squaws cooked for us back in the woods."

"What are your plans for the night, Baxter?" earnestly demanded the exhausted Nixon.

"Oh, my strategy is all ready; I will post all the

women and children on the banks, and also let some of the men lie out, with orders to watch. We can sleep here behind our breastwork in readiness. No one's going to get past those Indians unnoticed. I will lie nearest the open passage and be responsible for bringing in our messenger, if he ever returns."

These suggestions were listened to with a courage born of a new danger.

There was no sleep in the gloomy hole where the excited adventurers lay huddled together for warmth, and the hours glided by in low murmured converse, as to the anxious morrow.

"There's but one thing left to do," sententiously said Baxter, "and that is to get back to Jocon, though we are not safe till we reach Arinal. From there one forced march will bring us up to the summit. Ha! listen!" and all their hearts beat wildly, as the jaguar's shrill cry sounded out three times across the river. The scout answered.

A moment later a man was hastily drawn within the barricade.

"Speak!" muttered Baxter.

"Ah," groaned the returned muleteer. "All gone, *Todos muertos!*" and he fell forward at the feet of his questioner.

"Then we are left helpless, betrayed—cut off in this lonely forest," groaned Lorimer. "And—our recovered deposit?"

"Must be saved!"

"Look out!" muttered Nixon, shoving his Winchester out of its ready loophole. For an Aztec now glided in, whispering, "Ladrones—robbers—many coming round the point."

"Rifles first," commanded Baxter. "Have your pistols ready, too. Wait till they crowd around in a huddle to get in. They have surely tracked our messenger. Fire low when I give the word; then pour it in as long as you can see a moving man. Curse 'em!"

The scout dropped a couple of leaning logs into the manhole at the angle of the curtain; then, with finger on trigger, the four whites stood "at a ready."

In the glimmer of the starlight nothing could be seen

as yet, but the shuffling of many feet was heard on the loose gravel of the river bank.

The ex-guerrilla was on his knees and peering out of his loophole.

He straightened up and shoved his rifle forward, as the loose wall without was rudely shaken by the rush of men. "Now!" he whispered. Then the flashes leaped forth from the awakened Winchesters, and yells and screams sounded widely on the night air.

"Hold," he shouted at last. A few heavy groans outside answered him. "I reckon they'll let us rest in peace for the rest of the night," he quietly added. A moment after the opening of the tunnel was lit up with flambeaux waved by the friendly savages of the Mangalile. The friends followed Baxter's lead, to where he stood gazing at three ugly looking Mestizos, lying prone in the spread eagle agonies of a sudden death. Armed with their sharp fish lances, their watchful allies viciously prodded the dead assailants to verify their helplessness.

"Who are they?" demanded Baxter.

"Guatemalans, bad men!" simply answered the leader of the river Indians, spurning the body of a dead robber.

"Is no one of us hurt?" called out the scout.

It was then that their returned messenger dragged himself out of the tunnel.

"Tell us of the camp," eagerly said Baxter.

The Indian shuddered as he spoke: "Your own man lies there with my poor compadre, shot to death, and already half eaten by the mountain wolves. The hobbled mules, all with their throats cut are scattered near by as they were killed, one by one."

"The two soldiers?" hastily questioned Nixon.

"Gone! not a sign. The cowards ran away, perhaps, was the answer.

"And all our camp property?" was Baxter's last query.

"They had dragged the things down, and pitched all off the cliff; I saw a saddle caught on a tree half way down the first bluff. They carried nothing away."

"Now, this beats hell," philosophically remarked

the rebel veteran. "You men seem to have a deadly foe treading on your path day and night. Their little game was the same right here, to sneak in and butcher us all while asleep. These fellows luckily only fired one shot; they were confused about the other blocked tunnel entrance in the dark, and were groping around for us. They did not fancy that we were ready for 'em, on the inside."

"And now——" said Nixon.

"There's but one course," replied Baxter, as he emerged from the tunnel, after rewarding his faithful outlying spies and giving the exhausted messenger a good dram.

"Get rid of every pound extra weight. Give all our useless property to our strange friends; then let us strike for Jocon by daylight. These nimble woodsmen will scout all the banks as we go along. We must, at every risk, get into the village to-morrow night. In a band, we will then demand the alcalde to send a swift runner down to Arinal for mules. We will stay in his house till they come, kinder keeping him a hostage. With mules we can get safely over to Arinal in a couple of days. Then, a dash for the sea coast, and you and your treasures are safe."

"Then back to Paris," exultingly cried Lorimer. "With the hard won legacy of Fernando Aguilar de Romero," gravely said Nixon, "and, may God rest his soul."

"This has been a lively old night," energetically remarked Generalissimo Baxter, as he lit his pipe, and sat down with his rifle across his knees. "But we are safe now. These wild natives are as good as any outlying picket."

It was so. All that night the Indian braves watched and scouted, while their frightened women and children huddled round the camp fires, save when they gave a contemptuous kick to one or the other of the three dead robbers, who lay cold and stark by the river bank.

CHAPTER XV.

"IT IS THE PADRE!"

THERE was little sleep in the cavern, where the half-dozen sacks lay, still open, filled with the mass of mud and green pebbles, scraped out of the hole where it had lain for two hundred years. The sudden attack had interrupted all mineralogical tests of the hidden treasure so strangely recovered.

The indefatigable Baxter had now completed his dispositions for the night. "Shall we revisit our old camp on the mountains?" anxiously inquired Nixon.

"This is now a case of life or death," sharply answered the frontiersman. "There is nothing on the hill but the bones of our two poor followers. Now you three men have surely got the thing you came down here for—slush or uncut jewels! Your half-dozen sacks and our arms are the only things we dare not abandon. Take what sleep and rest you can; I'll rouse you all at three o'clock. Let us make all ready; what we don't take we will give to the tribe. The men, only, go with us. It's a race, perhaps for life itself, to Jocon; there we will take what there is in town and push hard on to Arinal; the villagers will be only too glad to get us out of Jocon and off their hands. We must make a forced march and thus avoid a peck of trouble later, perhaps, about killing these dirty Guatemalans. Perhaps we may have to fight our way. Who the h—ll is on your track, man or devil? I give it up." He glared around for an answer.

"Both," gloomily answered Nixon; for the unseen hand which has struck down poor Felipe Romero seemed to be still clutching at the recovered emeralds.

"You are right, Baxter; we will be ready," said Lorimer.

"It's a case of save our bacon now," growled Abercromby.

So, side by side, the pilgrims of love lay and waited for Baxter's call.

It seemed as if the adventurers had only closed their eyes when the iron sinewed Southerner aroused them.

"Here you are, all ready for the road," he cheerily said. The Indians have our breakfast cooked, and the packs are all made up. I've left the ammunition belts and guns for ourselves. The sacks are sewed up, and slings made. If we are officially questioned, we can simply say that we have some ore samples. In half an hour more we can start."

"Baxter, you are a jewel," cried Nixon.

With strangely moved hearts, the three men turned away from the dark cavern forever, as the guide started his Indian bearers on in advance.

They lingered a moment by the fire to give a few gold pieces to the faithful squaws who had served them so well.

"Now, gentlemen, you have recovered your hidden deposit—it is to the sea—for our own lives, and—no fooling on the way," urged the ex-Confederate. He shouldered his rifle, and plunged down the bank.

With a last look of the awful gorge rising to where their murdered servant's bones lay under the mountain cedars, they moved away, anxious to get out of the dark and threatening cañon.

They straggled down the sandy reaches of the widening river, and the daylight came faintly in upon them. In Indian file, they moved along freely.

"No danger yet," pithily said Baxter. "Our trail cannot be followed until it is broad daylight, and the prowlers have had a severe lesson. No one down here likes the Gringos at bay. Our real trouble will be between Jocon and Arinal."

Three hours after leaving the "Witch's Haunt" the party halted at the opening of a practical cañon, where the Jocon creek purled down from the mountains. Baxter eyed the "tender-foot" Americans anxiously.

"A half hour's rest, coffee, a bite, and the Indian boys will rub your legs limber for you in a jiffy," he remarked.

Then he posted four of the Indians as outlying pickets, and smiled as the party gradually recovered the use of their muscles and got under way. Along the shortening trail to Jocon, the chances of safety increased every hour. A couple of lithe Indian boys ran in advance, scanning with lynx eyes, the beautiful forest, now lit up with the high morning sun.

"We shall make it well before sunset!" were Baxter's cheering words.

The prospect of safety, and the shelter even of the poor hamlet of Jocon nerved every limb. At last the rising smoke of Jocon was seen in the waning afternoon.

The Indians then stopped and began to chatter in their strange jargon to the guide.

"What is the matter?" anxiously asked the Americans.

"They are afraid of being kept as peons, and will not go nearer the town."

"We can never get the heavy burdens into the village alone," muttered Nixon, moodily.

"I'll pick out a good place for you to make a stand; then I'll take our own man and go on into the village. Give me some of your doubloons. I'll get a few mules back here, loaded with some of that rum, which has been our blessing here," suggested the wise one they called Baxter.

"That's true," Lorimer assented. "We could not have kept guard and cleared that tunnel in a week without these docile forest wanderers."

"And we would have been starved out, or perhaps butchered at our work," said Nixon, as he handed over a dozen doubloons. "Don't spare the rum," he laughed, good-humoredly.

"Oh, I'll give them enough for a month's love feast." Baxter then disappeared with a cautionary "keep a sharp look out."

The friends waited till hope deferred made the heart sick. They dared not light a fire for fear of an ambush. But the last of the rum and the faithful pipes aglow steeled them to waiting the event.

The clatter of hoofs brought them all to their feet as the guide dashed up. "I made a ten

strike," he cried gayly, springing off a fine mule. "I found by good luck a Truxillo muleteer returning from Tegucigüepa with a sarsaparilla pack train. I have ten of these mules already engaged. They will be all here for you in ten minutes. I brought along four five-gallon skins of rum and a box of tobacco for these faithful dark friends. Decent quarters with good rawhide beds await you now at Jocon. I have frightened the poor alcalde already half out of his wits. He will be glad to see us move out."

A ringing hurrah answered the scout's welcome address. Ten minutes later the dusky waifs of the Mangalile glen were ready to plunge back again into the friendly gloom of night.

Their welcome burdens of rum and baccy were quickly slung on poles, and presents of pocket knives and small portable articles of the four whites made these friends of adversity happy at heart.

"Get a move on before the alcalde catches you," cried Baxter.

They took his hint, at a run, to gain again the invincible protection of the tractless glades of the lonely river, their only safeguard against the oppression of the civilized.

"Not one word must be let fall carelessly; be on your guard every minute," commanded the Mentor as they rode into Jocon. "I will do the talking for the whole party."

It was in the alcalde's own house, surrounded by his family, a *sans gêne* band of squalid women and frowzy children, that the four adventurers slept, with the ore bags piled under their beds and their revolvers all loosely strapped on.

The muleteer, who had so luckily missed the sad fate of the surprised mountain camp party, droned the night out with the mules in the *patio*, alternately rolling papillitos, basking at the fire, or taking a *siesta* in his *serape* among the fleas and pebbles in the courtyard.

Happy peon. His brown skin was unpunctured by knife or pistol ball, and it had in it about all the rum that he could force down his throat. The compensations of fortune are strange.

The next morning the party were halfway up the great bold divide leading to the long ridge above Arinal, on their homeward way before Baxter dared to unfold his plans, while the new muleteers, out of ear shot, "adjusted packs" on a friendly shelf.

"We will safely be on the summit at noon," he said to the three New Yorkers. "From there we can see the pass that we must cross to descend to Omoa Bay. Now, to prevent any possible gossip of these strangers, we will camp on this side of Arinal, in a glen about five miles from the town. Then at dawn we will push right on, avoiding the place by a detour. By tomorrow night we will camp on the ridge, where we can see the blue Bay of Belize and the *Beauregard* at anchor, sixty miles beyond."

"Will the men turn off as you wish?" said Lorimer.

"They won't know until we are twelve miles beyond Arinal, and then—this talks." He tapped his revolver and laughed. "Ready money will do the needful later, in the way of apologies."

It was with a feeling akin to triumph that the returning prospectors found themselves at sunset winding the tri-fold ridge leading to the outskirts of Arinal. The huge Aguan river crawled along like a blue snake, two thousand feet below, past sandy wastes and burning, yellow logwood groves; another dimly seen valley, sweeping from Yoro onwards to far Olanchito, was blocked out in green tangles of impassible jungle.

The last rays of the setting sun burned fiercely on the coppery cliffs of the huge range shutting off the sea, in which a dim indentation indicated Cortez's pass, where the mail-clad men of Spain had toiled along in their search for gold, three hundred years before.

"This is our point of greatest danger," said Baxter, as he posted the train in a washout valley a few rods away from the Arinal trail.

All of that night, two of the returning Argonauts watched the camp, rifle in hand. There was nothing to break the dreamless sleep of the exhausted wayfarers, and long before the dark-haired Senoras of Arinal had sought the nearest spring for their morning toilets, the little cavalcade had forded the Aguan, and

were miles beyond the reach of all the village babblers.

When at ten o'clock Tough Baxter quietly rode up to the head of the column where the road branched toward the Omoa Pass, there was a trial of title to the mules which led to a display of Castilian eloquence by the scout, and the sudden withdrawal of his ready revolver from its scabbard. For the chief muleteer was strangely rebellious and evidently deeply chagrined at the sudden change of route.

"You will be well paid for your loss of time. The mules go to Omoa with us, and if you choose to walk back to Truxillo by the Aguan road, you will find them there, six days before you." Such was the guide's energetic harangue.

The four men backing him up overawed the grumbling head muleteer. Despite his muttered *carajos* the stout and well rested mules were pushed along toward the Omoa pass. They jingled away over the rising uplands to the winding trail leading along the foothills into the mountain notch.

Busied with guarding the rear, and watching against all possible pursuit and any further surprise, it was only when they camped in the four mile pass leading through the great Sierra overhanging Livingston, Puerta Cortez and Omoa, that Baxter noticed the absence of one of the muleteers.

"Were there not five of these chaps in the party?" he asked, his voice trembling with excitement.

"Yes, yes," answered the three Americans.

"Then, one of them has surely slipped away from us; there are but four now. He sprang forward and roused the dull looking strangers, who were cowering around the fire.

"It's no use," grumbled the Southerner on his return, "Liars by nature—I could not even shoot the truth out of them, if I tried. This fellow may bring trouble on us. You see, we don't know if he has gone ahead or not."

"You fear treachery," asked Nixon anxiously.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no! He has hurt his foot, they say," grumbled Baxter. "It may be true; these

fellows often fall out, and sometimes catch up a day later; the forests here are also full of mahogany cutting parties, and log-wood gatherers. The Belize Bay slopes are hunted over for rare orchids and the treasured sarsaparilla, as well as the rare plumage bird. Perhaps some little Indian hut here may hide this missing fellow's humble sweetheart. But on a ticklish trail, I want no one to leave the party."

With redoubled vigilance they alternated in guarding their camp until the dawn, when Baxter led them on at a stiff trot, four miles past fearful chasms and over beetling cliffs.

The clear salt air of the Caribbean drew through the gap, and all then pressed eagerly forward, as their wary leader, halting at a knoll in advance, waved his hat and yelled, "The sea! the sea!"

By his side they soon stood in a delighted group, and all shook hands in a vigorous congratulation, for, spread out before them, like a sapphire lake, lay the beautiful Bay of Belize.

Far in the distance, a dim low green line marked British Honduras, stretched out across the silent gulf. To the west, the splendidly broken mountain line of Guatemala towered over the groves where Livingston's white houses showed out, and a broad level savannah filled the re-entrant of the southern curve, covered with fragrant groves, rich with the cocoa, pine-apple, banana, orange and lime. It was an enchanted scene—a dream picture of delight.

"We are all safe now!" joyously shouted Abercromby.

"Purty near out of the woods, but not quite," muttered the watchful scout. "Omoa and Puerta Cortez lie just below us to the right. By noon I can tell you if the *Beauregard* is in the Bay."

The elated Americans cried, "On, on," and chattered gaily as they rode down the glen.

No happier group surrounded Balboa on the peak of Darien than that which clustered round Baxter in the waning, sweltering tropic day, as he, with field-glass to his eye, remarked, "I know the *Beauregard's* rig. There she is."

Two vessels were to be seen riding far below them at anchor in the beautiful inlet of Omoa Bay.

The discontented muleteers were made joyful with a ration of rum, and Nixon gaily cried, "Ten pieces extra a man, if we sleep on board to-morrow night," and so all went well as they jogged merrily along.

Their last camp was a lively scene at sunset, when they built their fire by a lagoon opening out into the sluggish river flowing down to Omoa.

"There," said Baxter, "if we did not have to make a circuit to get firm ground around this marsh, we could reach Omoa in sixty minutes; but, five hours more to-morrow morning will put us on the sea beach."

The hammocks bought at Jocon had just been strung to the nearest trees, when a squad of mounted men, led by an officer, rode up at a smart trot and surrounded them.

The four Americans were ready to fire, but the guide, recognizing the soldiers' uniforms, cried out: *Amigos! Amigos! Americanos!*

There was no time lost in parley, for the scowling officer insisted upon an examination of their packs. "Smugglers with tobacco were swarming around," he vigorously insisted, and was very dubious as to any belief in the story of the innocence of the alleged ore samples.

With calm courtesy, Baxter soothed the haughty lieutenant's national pride. The peace offering of rum and cigaritos only partly mollified the soldier.

"Have you a permit to mine in Honduras?" he abruptly demanded at last. "If not, I must take you all in to Puerta Cortez, to the customs office! You can remove nothing without certificate and examination."

Here the blood ran cold in the veins of the three American adventurers anxiously listening.

The squad of soldiers, a dozen or more, armed with repeating Spencers, stood "at a ready." Their sullen faces indicated a readiness to pull the trigger. The Americans' own muleteers were calmly indifferent.

"Let me navigate this," whispered Baxter. "Get out a few gold pieces."

Then, with infinite tact, the rebel veteran contemptuously kicked the nearest sack. "Only a few specimens," he said, as he slashed the fastenings of one of the ore bags with his bowie knife.

The lazy officer never stooped to examine further, but quietly grasped the gold pieces slipped confidentially into his hand by El Señor Baxter. A handful of their last cigars and a bottle of rum completed the officer's good-humored surrender to the "sweetening" process.

"Fools," mused Honduras' lieutenant, as he rode away. "To come down here for a few worthless stones."

But he left four happy men over their coffee boiling, blithely talking of this last "narrow shave."

"I don't think that anything else can now happen," growled Baxter, as they made all safe for the night. "I will have our men get the animals ready at three o'clock, and have coffee boiled. Then we will push on to Omoa as fast as the mules can trot."

"Are you sure that our own vessel is there?" demanded Nixon, whose nerves were thrilling yet with the possibility of arrest, detention, and perhaps the confiscation of the supposed precious stones.

"Why, certainly, I would know her rig in a thousand," replied Baxter. "The big three-master near her looks something like that Cuban cattle schooner that we left lying at Truxillo; she may have come up here for her load."

"The Matanzas schooner," echoed the New Yorkers, in a breath.

"Oh, they are a lazy lot here," laughed Baxter. "Besides they may have only got half a load down at Truxillo, and then come up for the rest. Sometimes they lie a month here trading for hides and animals. There's no rent to pay on blue waters."

Then the rebel raider carefully gave out the order of the guard, "Wake me at midnight," Nixon, he said, "I'll get the men out of hammock at two o'clock."

The dusky shadows of night framed themselves into strange figures, as Nixon paced his weary rounds, after his comrades had turned in and all was quiet.

The muleteers lay together, huddled around their fires, and a gloomy silence soon possessed the malarial swamp which fringed the lonely lagoon.

Once the American thought he saw a creeping something moving around near his sleeping comrades. He strode towards it. It seemed to fade into the shadows of the tropic forest. He listened. No sound came to alert ears. "Pshaw," he mused. "The flicker of the camp fire deceived me," as he returned from where his three comrades lay. "I must be sure, however, and wake Baxter in time."

Even as he thought, a strange and drowsy feeling began to suddenly benumb his muscles. "Yes," he repeated, "I must wake—wake Baxter." With these words on his lips, he paused at a tree and leaned against it, passing his hand over his eyes, as the heavy rifle fell from his grasp. Then he sank down, benumbed and dead to all dangers.

The dreams of Frank Lorimer were haunted by a fair face with Castilian eyes, until the sharp sting of some one of the thousand creeping things of Honduras caused him to convulsively roll out of the hammock, falling on the soft grass. He struggled slowly to his feet, then gazed around. The camp was all silent, and the stars glimmered through a wet mantle of warm coast fog.

"I'll have just one pipe," he muttered, rubbing his leg, "and take a turn around the fire." He looked about for the sentinel. All was silent and deserted. "Why, where's Nixon?" he sleepily mused, as he slowly paced the little circle of their bivouac.

A sudden stumble over a prostrate form wakened him to a sense of danger at once.

Crying loudly for help, he knelt beside the man lying prone with his gun under him. "Dead!" he screamed, and no one replied.

Catching up the Winchester he ran back to the hammocks. There were Baxter and Abercromby, lying also helpless, and his rough shakings did not rouse them. "Treachery!" he shouted, as he sprang over to where the muleteers still lay in circle. But no answer came to his alarms.

He flew back to his friends. A hasty examination showed him no mark of knife or bullet. They still breathed, they were alive, thank God! they were alive!

Dashing cool water over them from the lagoon, prodding them, shaking them, crying to them—at last sentiency began to return to them. They moved of their own volition, sluggishly, sleepily. Then Baxter opened his eyes and growled sleepily: "What the deuce is the matter?"

"Matter? You've been drugged!"

"Drugged!" The word seemed to act as a spur upon the frontiersman. "Drugged! How? You're not insensible, Lorimer? That's curious."

"I drank no coffee!"

"But I did and all the rest," muttered the scout, still only half awake. A hurried questioning of Nixon and Abercromby, who were now able to speak, told the same tale. Lorimer had drunk no coffee and had retained his senses. The rest had partaken and had been drugged.

"The muleteers as well," cried Frank. "Look at them! There they all lie."

"Two of the three," said Baxter, striding over to them. "Where the dickens is the other?"

"A hasty search revealed that the chief muleteer was gone.

"Ah! to steal the mules," cried Nixon.

"You're out there, my friend," replied Baxter, who strode about waving his arms to make his blood circulate and his brain work. "The mules are all here, and so are our arms."

"Then we have been robbed of nothing," said Abercromby.

"Hold your horses a minute," remarked the ex-confederate. Seizing a brand from the fire he ran to where the six ore bags had been piled between the hammocks of Lorimer and Nixon.

A wild cry came from all of them!

The sacks of emeralds were gone!

Whirling the brand into a blaze, they saw that the bags had been dragged away, over the now dew-soaked

grass down to the edge of the lagoon, and there the deep prints of men's boots, showed where the heavy burdens had been lifted into a canoe.

There, in the silence of the night, a sudden light flashed over Lorimer's excited brain: "The Matanzas schooner!—By Heaven, they have followed us, and the chief muleteer has drugged the party!

The toughened Baxter was now almost himself again.

"Saddle up, saddle up!" shouted Lorimer in a stern voice, and the frightened Mestizos urged by the heavy foot of the guide, hastened to prepare the animals.

"Leave all but our weapons," ordered Baxter.

"And now altogether. On to Omoa!" cried Lorimer. "For if we catch that schooner we may yet get the thieves; if they don't throw the stuff overboard? By Heaven, they have tricked us at the last!"

The patter of the mule's feet on the road quickened in rapidity as Nixon and Abercromby, the two greatest sufferers, regained their vigor.

Baxter was now all awake, and it was at a smart rattling trot the cavalcade pushed on to Omoa.

The day came at last, slowly breaking and lifting the pearly fog from the sleeping bay. Already they were in sight of Omoa when Baxter pulled up his mule and whispered: "That fog may prove to be our salvation."

"Why?" hopelessly replied Nixon, the faithless guard, whose head was bowed in shame.

"They won't be able to see us from the Cuban schooner for an hour. If we can get on board the *Beauregard* first, then our boats can take possession of the Cuban schooner before any canoe can work out of the lagoon. We will find the head devil of this scheme, whoever he is, on board that boat. You have been tracked down here from New York. By Heaven! You should have told me all at first! I might then have saved you." Then Baxter broke away and galloped up to the flag-staff that indicates the hotel of Omoa village, muttering: "Curse all half confidences! They're worse than none at all!"

The friends had hardly drawn reins when the guide quickly reappeared, followed by old "Frenchy Le-

maire," half dressed, who excitedly pulled one of the muleteers from his animal and then, springing on cried: "*Vamonos, pronto! Les Voleurs!*"

A moment later they were at the beach.

The gray eyes twinkled ferociously as Lemaire yelled to a Carib who stood up, gesticulating in a fine canoe, "Four men; your very best; quick!" he called out, as the eager natives ran down to the strand to meet the liberal French captain.

Tony's gray mustache curled with anger as he listened to Baxter's brief recital.

"Ah, *Les Voleurs!*" he snorted, as the four Caribs brandished their paddles, the canoe whizzing along over the crystal flood. Frenchy's head was now bent to Baxter as the two men quickly laid their plans.

"I have it," growled the irate Lemaire. "I go on board ze Matanzas schooner; make a friendship visit. I send zis boat back to bring ze comandante right off for ze breakfast, ze cigarre and ze good cognac. He my *buen amigo*. I make him catch that *diable* muleteer! He hide near to watch for ze mule. I give you my besta boat's crew—my cutter—and you all watch ze lagoon. If one boat, he sneak out, then you run out and stop him. If they row to ze Cuban schooner—my man all armed—by Jupiterre! we hold ze boat!

The sunlight was dancing on the blue waters of the dreaming bay, as the bronzed Caribs, standing upright, propelled the great cedar canoe along with lusty sweeps of their double-handled paddles.

Pearly banks of gray fog rolled away, showing the beautiful reaches of Omoa bay, fringed with its fruit-laden trees. There was no sign of life on the dainty *Beauregard* save a man on forecastle; but there were already some active fellows at work on the deck of the great three-master.

"I don't like the looks of that," grumbled Baxter, as he eyed the Cuban vessel. "They are loosening her sails."

As he spoke the gray fog swept away and showed the calm waters of the lagoon, into which the river streamed with all the drainage of the great encircling mountain basin.

The morning gun at Omoa fortress boomed out, as Nixon quickly cried, "See, something in the river! Beyond the further point!"

A black speck was drifting down from afar. Was it the thieves' canoe?

"*Ha! pronto! pronto!*" yelled Lemaire.

To his shout glistening balls of muscle rose on the Carib boatmen's arms, as with strained whip-cord sinews they swept their bark along.

"Get your arms ready," quietly ordered Baxter. "We have no time to lose."

A minute later they were alongside the *Beaaregard*. As Frenchy bounded lightly over the rail, his excited gibberish brought every man of his crew on deck.

Two minutes after he was pulling away to the Cuban schooner with four of his tars, who carried not only revolvers, but the usual machete of the polite land of Honduras.

As Frenchy's gig swept away from the *Beauregard*, her long boat was quietly lowered upon the side furthest from the Matanzas vessel. Into this boat, from the Carib canoe, the four Americans sprang with gleaming eyes, as their oarsman sat ready to give way.

Tired of waiting, Nixon leaned over the gunwale and bathed his heated face in the sparkling waters on which they floated.

"Don't do that," sharply commanded Baxter. "The water swarms with huge sharks here; half a dozen are near us in the shade of the schooner."

"Bah!" replied the excited American. "I escaped the thieves; why not the sharks?"

"They are over the bar, and heading for the Cuban, let's cut them off." Give away, men!" interrupted the ex-Confederate as he seized the tiller. Now don't shoot till I give the word."

They swept along now in plain sight of Captain Tony Lemaire, who was just boarding the Matanzas craft.

The morning sun gleamed fiercely now on the glassy waves, as the god of day darted his golden lances of fire over the broad blue waters of Belize Bay. Nixon had his glass fixed on the canoe which had passed over the bar, and was now only a half mile distant from the

"Parde Guerra!" faltered Lorimer.

The secret of the Cuban cattle schooner was at last unveiled.

A half dozen men were leaning over the rail of the Cuban, as the two boats drifted alongside. At the companionway, Captain Tony Lamaire was now grimly standing, revolver in hand. He pointed as Frank Lorimer sprang on the deck. "There he are" he cried. "Ze ladrone muletero," and in truth, lashed to the mainmast, the missing chief muleteer was trying to hide his villainous face.

"I have ze crew all down below," joyously proclaimed Lemaire, as he indicated one of his men standing armed on guard at the cabin hatchway.

"Let us get this wounded wretch on board," faltered Nixon, who had now satisfied himself that Padre Vicente Guerra still had life in him. "I want him to talk."

The boat's crew hastened to this task, while Abercromby breathlessly said: "I recognized Juan Valdes, as he sprang overboard, and he got only his deserts."

"Secure the emeralds" said Baxter in a low voice.

In five minutes a whip was rigged, and the six sacks lay, safe at last, on the deck of the vessel, which had evidently only waited the return of the two conspirators to weigh anchor, and then set sail for Matanzas.

Doctor Abercromby then raised a grave question of immediate moment. Kneeling at the side of the fainting priest, he said: "This man has but a short time to live. The ball has gone through the right lung. Send at once to the *Beauregard* for my medicine chest."

Then as the cutter's crew sped away to the *Beauregard*, he and Nixon diligently plied the wounded man with cordials, and essayed all the resources of their art.

"What you wish me to do now?" demanded the eager Frenchman.

Get us all out of this harbor and put us ashore on American soil at St. Augustine, just as quick as the *Beauregard* can sail there," spoke Lorimer, as he

slowly gazed at the dying man, whose villainy had effected the ruin of the Romero line.

In five minutes the villainous half-breed opened his eyes.

Nixon, holding his hand, and testing the flickering pulse, spoke gravely, almost beseechingly, to the Padre. "Tell me, why did you hound down your benefactors? For what did young Felipe Romero die?"

The wounded man glared up defiantly at the circle of hostile faces. The words came hissing forth from his blood-foaming lips:

"His father was my mother's foe. Indian blood never forgets! General José Romero's father sent me into the world as his despised bastard. For the man whom I plotted to ruin in every step of his life, was my brother! My mother was his father's victim, and I was suckled at her breast, to a bloody vengeance!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE IS NO STAIN UPON THE ROBE.

A FILM gathered over the eyes of the baffled arch assassin, and it was an anxious hour before the two watchful doctors dared to hazard a last questioning.

The decks of both schooners were now busy with the most precipitate efforts at departure.

While Abercrombie fanned the flame of life to obtain further disclosures, Nixon and Lorimer were at work with Tony Lemaire.

The Cuban captain was again in charge of his own vessel. His ready story was backed with every evidence of truth.

Padre VICIENTE GUERRA had engaged him for a smuggling cruise along the Honduran coast, and inquiries for cattle being only to blind the authorities. It was young JUAN VALDES who had acted as the director of all operations on shore. The Cuban really expected to be called on to run in a full cargo of

smuggled rum and tobacco from British Belize, landing it as usual on the Honduras shores and then receiving hides and cattle in return.

There were now some warning signs of commotion on shore which portended a hasty visit from the officials.

"By Gare!" cried Captain Lemaire, "we foola ze Comandante. I send my frien' now to take my own schooner out to sea. I weigha de ancre here an' we stand right outside. They got no good boat ashore. You all stay here with me. Makea de offing twenty miles, zen I steer for St. Augustine an' this boata for de Cuba!"

"*Bueno!*" cried the Cuban captain. "My owners at Matanzas told me all right. The Capitan General will back up El Padre."

In ten minutes both schooners were clouds of canvas as they sped along over the shallow waters of Belize Bay. A signal gun booming from old Omoa fortress indicated the impotent rage of El Comandante, at this most unceremonious departure of the two vessels without their papers.

The Carib boatmen and the captive muleteers were now loud in their wails as the great three-master swept along seaward.

"Be quiet, you fools!" commanded Nixon. "Don't you see your canoe is in tow? We will send you all safely ashore and well paid."

"By the way," said Abercromby, "before the Padre comes to, please sling that fellow who drugged us, up by his thumbs and make him unfold all his yarn."

Baxter attended to this most cheerfully and spread eagled his man "forrard" in great shape.

"You watch the Padre. I'll take notes of this Dago's copious remarks," was the ex-guerrilla's suggestion.

But the main interest centered in the dark schemer soon to be death's prey.

The three New Yorkers leaned over Padre Guerra, who was seemingly revived by the fresh breeze now singing through the rigging.

"We must coax the truth out of him," gravely said

Lorimer, thinking of the great estates of Jibacoa still in jeopardy.

"Try kindness," said Abercromby. "It's no use to bluff a dying man. What has he now to fear? Hopes and fears are all the same to one whose foot is on the threshold."

It was indeed even so. It was Abercromby who knelt by the reviving half-breed. "Can I do anything for you?" he said softly, as the dying priest opened his eyes. "I am a doctor, as you know. Your time is short. I was never your enemy—only a friend of my friends."

Viciente Guerra's eyes rested beseechingly on the young man's frank, manly visage. There was a world of questioning—of all the bitter agony of defeat—of a proud man's sullen helplessness; suddenly his glances softened to a last mute appeal.

"A lonely woman," he whispered, "at Matanzas will wait for the lad you saw die. She is my sister. The Queen of the Voudoos. Will you swear to give to her unopened what I confide to your honor. Tell me, Americano!"

"I swear," solemnly said the young man after he had exchanged glances with his friends.

"Around my neck," gasped Guerra.

Then Doctor Bill gently removed a small pouch hanging by a silken cord on the bosom where brown ridges were now flecked with stiffened clots of blood.

"Manuela, the housekeeper at Jibacoa will bring her to you. Tell her, the charm failed us at the last!"

"Is that all?" gravely questioned the doctor.

"Yes," groaned Guerra, "for the rest she will know. Failure—defeat—the death of her loved son!"

"Do you wish to be taken back to Cuba?" solemnly said Nixon.

Guerra faintly moved his lips. "In the old church—the ruined church there," he said; then muttered, "You have wealth now—a million."

There was a hovering silence as Abercromby plied every restorative known to his art. While the vessel swept along over the fairy submerged gardens of the

seas, the three friends watched eagerly the last rally of the dying man.

"Anything more?" softly whispered Abercromby.

"Nothing," whispered Guerra, whose fingers were moving and twitching in the manipulation of an absent rosary. "It is the hand of God. The Voodoo Gods are all Ears. What would you of me? Tell me."

"Tell us of your plans," was Nixon's pleading inquiry. "Remember the innocent girl."

The priest faltered. "If Juan Valdez had married her, then my mother's line would have inherited the stolen birthright. I wished to drive Inez to this through poverty. So I had to have the legacy of the old buccaneer too. I watched the Romeros from boyhood, for my mother swore me to revenge. She was a great Voodoo priestess and bequeathed to my sister her awful heritage."

"And Felipe—why did he die?" Lorimer gravely said.

"I—I had to make room for Juan," the dying man moaned. "Besides, I had to stop your search at Jibacoa."

"Ah! For the buccaneer's secret?"

"No—for the pardon and restoration of the estates to General Romero," sighed the padre, and his dying eyes smiled at their astounded faces.

"What! Romero pardoned? Impossible!" gasped Nixon.

"Ten years ago the Spanish Government by document sent to me," said the priest slowly, "proffered free pardon and restoration of the estates in case Romero would agree to quit the rebel cause and return once more to Cuba. His family was so great—the name so old—it would have been a grand branch lopped off the patriot tree."

"And you never told him?" began Lorimer excitedly. But Nixon placed his finger on his lips and muttered: "Hush!" the padre's voice was so very low.

"No. Because I—feared, for his daughter's sake—to give her a home, to place her above any chance of want, Don José might have accepted. I wanted the

girl in my own hands. Poor, it was easy—rich, it was impossible!”

“And you came to New York for that?” cried Lorimer.

“That and other things. The Captain General secretly gave me charge of the Spanish government spies in New York. By them afterwards I discovered that you had found in some way the clew to the emeralds. So we both, Juan and I, followed you to this place. And Juan is destroyed and I am dying!”

“But this pardon—as a dying man I charge you to make reparation,” whispered Nixon excitedly. “Inez, your pupil, your own blood, you say; give back her estates to her. Where can we find the pardon?”

“Give my sister this ring on my hand,” slowly answered the man, who was fast weakening. My sister will give you the offer of pardon! Go to the Spanish Ambassador in Paris and he will then render up to Inez Romero the documents given him ten years ago when he was the Minister to America. Then Inez Romero is sure of her estates. My sister, the Voodoo Queen, will give the pardon to you when you faithfully restore to her the last of the great sacred Voodoo jewels, the triple charm that never failed before. The Voodoo Queen’s amulet.”

“God forgive you,” solemnly said Nixon as he saw a sudden change now stealing over the dying man’s bronze face.

“God never will!” cried the padre, writhing in the pains of dissolution. “God never will,” he moaned, the anguish of a lost spirit coming upon him, “for I have, unannointed, administered the sacrament with profane hands. For this I am damned forever!”

“What, no priest?” they shuddered astounded.

“My cousin was a priest. *El vomito* killed him, likewise the bishop of the diocese during the great rebellion. There was none to minister to the dying. I took the vocation upon me. During the awful commotion of those years people passed away—those that remained forgot I had not been ordained. There was no bishop to supervise, no vicar general to examine. And then—then I had learned the power of the con-

fessional. I could not give it up, it aided me so in my spying—in my work of vengeance. I was never a *true* priest—only a government spy. There is no stain upon the sacred robe of Rome—which anathematizes me and gives me to hell fire—and damns me as I—die!”

Here his voice failed him! They raised him gently up and his eyes had not the peace of the passing spirit but only the anguish of a soul forever lost.

Then with one shuddering thrill the darkened spirit passed out far beyond the earthly metes and bounds which fence in the loves and hates of this little world of ours.

Twenty miles away the Comandante of Omoa vainly raged as he saw the two schooners lying to at easy anchorage, while the transfer of the six hide bags was carefully effected. There was no danger now to the jewels which had been the object of Guerra's artful treacheries.

The Honduran magnate howled in wrath when the Carib boatmen paddled in at nightfall, bringing back the cresfallen head muleteer, for already the saucy *Beauregard* was standing away toward the coral reefed shores of Florida, bearing three happy hearted men homeward to Gotham's maddening whirl, and the great three-master was steadily breasting the waves toward distant Cuba with her bootless voyage unrewarded.

The three friends were now already deep in plans for certain little personal excursions, which seemed to present peculiar advantages both to themselves and the absentees in Paris, when Lorimer, gazing around their cain, suddenly said: "Where's Baxter?"

The uplifted wine glass dropped from Doctor Bill Abercromby's hand, as he darted upon deck. He found the ex-Confederate standing alone at the bow of the vessel gazing at the fast receding shores of Honduras. For the first time in many days no "personal battery" adorned the veteran's manly person.

He gazed blankly at Doctor Bill, when that rising young physician remarked: "I have orders to move you aft, Baxter. We have obeyed you long enough, and you are now my prisoner."

The world wanderer's cheek paled slightly as he

quietly said: "See here, Doctor Abercromby, you have all good homes waiting for you. I seem to be only a sort of 'extra man' in this world. I'd rather stay here forward."

The answer of Doctor Bill was then a most effective one, for he towed his human prize bodily down to the cabin where Frank Lorimer now stood with a fourth glass brimming with Tony Lemaire's best.

Then, by an impulse which needed not the vain display of threadbare words to interpret its origin, the three friends drank the health of the fourth friend whose wit and nerve had been the safeguard of them all.

"You must give us a toast, Baxter," was the emphatic order of Nixon, when the raider had been duly honored.

"I only know two," said the simple borderer. "Sweethearts and wives, and the Stars and Bars!" Poor homeless rebel Baxter.

Then he went on. "Don't get me used to high living, I'm a poor man."

"Not if the emeralds are genuine," cried Nixon heartily.

"To this Lorimer said excited: "Jim and I make a straight run from Saint Augustine to Paris."

"And what of us?" remarked Abercromby ruefully.

"You and Baxter must get over to Matanzas at once incognito; instantly see this Queen of the Voudoos and obtain the papers left with her by the dead padre. For we're going in now to get those estates back for Inez Romero. Emeralds ain't enough for such a beauty, eh, Lorimer?" laughed Nixon.

For in truth they were merry now, fear of death had passed from them, and champagne had taken its place.

"Ah, I see!" said Abercromby. "Baxter and I will get the papers and join you in Paris."

"And what the devil am I to do in Paris?" asked the game Southerner. "I'm only a fighting man without a job."

"Have a devil of a good time there and then when

we get the estates trot back to Cuba and take possession of them for Senorita Romero," remarked Lorimer.

"Will that be her name when Baxter goes back?" said Abercromby with a slight snicker, which produced a guffaw from Nixon. Even Baxter could not restrain his merriment, and Captain Tony Lemaire looking down the companion way cried:

"Gentlemens! I vill join you in a toast, you seem so ver' happy!"

So coming in the little Frenchman tipped up his glass and said: "I drink to ze ladies! I know by your laughs you are thinking of zem! *Allons, mes enfants!*

With this he departed to pile more canvas on the flying *Beauregard*, till she swept along like a lithe white wraith of the summer seas, once the freebooters' home.

"I think even you, Baxter, may turn in for an all night's snooze," said Nixon, meditatively. "No chance of being drugged to-night."

Then all turned in to dream.

Four days passed over them uneventfully in a delicious Nirvana of restful abandonment to the charms of sea and sky. They had seen Ruatan, Ulitta and Bonacca fade behind them, and speeding northward marked the gleaming red lights on the crags where the blood-thirty Spaniard still keeps watch over the "Siempre Isla de Cuba." Spit and Turtle Key shoal and reef were safely threaded and the sharp-fangèd coral reefs below reached up in vain for the gleaming copper of the *Beauregard*.

As they approached Saint Augustine, Captain Tony Lemaire became quite morose.

"You see," he said, confidentially to Nixon, "I musta some day go back to Honduras coast. My boat—my face—well known down zere. I get a one devil overhauling if I go back. You takea me and makea me one d—d pirate!"

So a fear of Spanish spies and Cuban vengeance weighing upon the old buccaneer, it was arranged that the whole party should be secretly landed in the

night at St. Augustine, while the schooner stood off and on.

"You see we have no papers, and to be detained by the authorities on a telegraphed complaint for our fitting from Omoa would possibly be fatal to all our plans for quick action," remarked the impatient Nixon, as the friends gathered on the quarter deck the next evening, elated yet anxious. For the lights which shown out over the dancing waves were those of Saint Augustine, and they had already passed Anastasia Island and were opposite the landing on Bay Street.

"Yes, our flight from Omoa disposed of all our camp outfit in very good shape," laughed Lorimer, as he gazed down upon the long boat drifting at the schooner's side, waiting for them and the rescued plunder in the six rawhide bags. "We have only what we stand in and are flying light."

"Except as to hair," jeered Abercromby. "Mine hasn't been cut for two months."

"All the better," said Nixon. "Our landing from a yachting cruise will be an easily believed story. Devil fishing and tarpon catching will explain our wild and unkempt appearance. Jump into the boat quick!"

They were light-hearted as they swooped in shorewards and sprang upon the soil of the United States.

On Bay Street there was a short but hearty leave-taking of old Tony Lemaire, who nursed the conscience-bred horror of customs visits. The bill drawn on the navy agent at Key West for his plump fee as per charter, warmed all the cockles of the old pirate's heart. He heartily screamed after them his good wishes as his long boat drew away returning to the *Beauregard*, which looked in the moonlight almost like a phantom yacht.

Then the two lovers made straight for a telegraph office, as Baxter and Abercromby with due philosophy, followed by one astounded, stay-up-all-night nigger, drove to the old Saint Augustine House on Bay Street, very carefully guarding the inheritance of the absent heiress of Jibacoa. For none of the great hotels like the Ponce de Leon and Cordova, which are filled with

myriad visitors in the winter, were open at this time of the year.

As they reached their hostelry the crowd of one astonished darkey became a crowd of two astonished darkies; for an arrival in St. Augustine at any time of the day in October is a remarkable fact and the arrival of four people at midnight from a phantom yacht seemed miraculous. For yachts in the hot months at Saint Augustine are very rare birds, though there is a squadron of them during the winter.

Unheeding comment, Baxter's gray eye never for a moment left the innocent looking bags which concealed the yet unproved treasure-trove.

Before they had gone a hundred yards away from the landing the swift swoop of the *Beauregard* had picked up the returning boat and the beautiful sea rover had vanished in the night.

"There is one astonished telegraph operator in this sleepy old town," laughed Lorimer, as he recalled the wonderment with which the clerk had received their sheaf of messages.

"It seems providential. You can get your passage to-morrow to Havana, and our train leaves in the early morning for New York."

So, after a few hours' rest, Nixon and Lorimer as especial travelers in the express car for the North, and Baxter and Abercromby with railroad tickets for Tampa, *en route* for Havana, bade each other good-bye till they should meet in Paris.

But they did not know that a local H. Kinsley Syntax had "got on to them" and their adventures; and that very morning a great New York journal had published with big head lines a sensational telegram from St. Augustine, full of the story of the return of an American wrecking party which had recovered several heavy chests of doubloons from a sunken Spanish frigate, and had been landed from a phantom yacht which most mysteriously returned to the hidden location for further plunder.

Some of this news drifting over to Paris, in conjunction with the cable dispatches, clicked off from Saint Augustine, produced a rage of excitement in certain

fair white bosoms, which had been panting for news of the departed—for the love in a man's heart is ofttimes forgotten in the mad rush of adventure—but in a waiting, watching woman anxiety causes it to grow and suspense makes it more tender.

CHAPTER XVII.

“THE LAW OF THE BUCCANEERS!”

IN vain Paris had wooed the three waiting women with its myriad fascinations. Gay Boulevard and the delightful Bois were not the haunts of the distinguished widow whose diversely beautiful charges attracted a world of comment. The evident social luxury of the family, the thrilling loveliness of Inez, the Greuze-like face of Ethel Lorimer, all attracted that nervous advance guard of the fortune-hunters who always keep watch upon the American colony.

All in vain were the gentle tentacles of the “hospitable” foreigner thrown out. Sorrow has its dignified mantle, which may not be rent even by the curious. There was time enough in these lonely weeks for all three to realize the madness of the quest, the improbability of success, and the dangers and delays were now but too apparent.

Days had dragged along into weeks, and beyond two cablegrams, followed by some cautious letters, the loving watchers were yet without tidings. The sweet faces of Inez and Ethel began to be at last a bright haunting charm of the cable offices, where, alas! no magic words of hope awaited them.

One evening in their salon at the Hotel Athenie Inez Romero's clinging arms had pressed “the mother” to her breast once more in a wordless “Good night,” and brave Ethel, too, had for the hundredth time asserted her own theories as to the necessary delays of communication in the savage interior of Honduras,

when the sharp sound of a double knock called Mrs. Lorimer to the door of her salon.

Impassive bearer of tidings good or bad, the grave-faced professional servant calmly thrust an envelope into the startled woman's hand.

She was nervously trembling over the unopened telegraph envelope when with the swoop of the falcon, two sets of clinging arms were strained around her, and laughing, crying, loving eyes, filled with happiest tears, beamed upon her.

"Safe! Safe, mother!" was Ethel's joyous cry.

"Your son—" began Inez, but there was no reply, for the mother's quick eye had caught the words of the telegram:

"All well—coming direct—successful."

The signature, "Frank and Nixon," was buzzing in her brain as she gazed about to find her two excited guardian angels busied in comparing two other cablegrams that had been received a little later. For the news of the dreamy-eyed Cuban orphan was strangely contained in a dispatch signed "Frank," and Doctor Nixon himself had been thoughtful enough to cable directly to Miss Ethel.

No one noted how the dragging days filled up their measure until the arrival of the *Bourgoine* at Havre. The confirmatory dispatches announcing the sailing from New York City were followed a few days later by a cipher cablegram from Matanzas, Cuba, addressed to Frank Lorimer, Hotel Athenié, Paris.

"Let us open it, it must contain news about your estates, Inez," remarked Ethel, in whom excitement had not yet killed curiosity.

"My estates, bah! When Frank is com—" cried Miss Inez, but stopped here and got very red in the face.

But at last the happy day came when Mrs. Lorimer and her dazzling charges departed together for the Gare St. Lazare to receive the pilgrims of the Aguan. There the widow had the advantage of the young ladies; she embraced *both* the bronzed young men. Ethel had only the kisses of one, her brother; and poor Inez, forced by *les convenances* could only blush

and shake hands and say "God bless you—you have done all this for my sake"—though her starry eyes and enchanting lips perchance meant kisses also.

As for Ethel, she gave him a look that made Nixon wonder how he ever could have left her.

Half an hour afterward, in their salon at the Athenié, Frank, inspecting the cipher telegram, remarked: "By Jove! Abercromby has found the Romero amnesty, and he and Baxter have caught the steamer from Havana. That Consul is a regular gilt-edged brick."

"The Romero amnesty? What do you mean!" cried Inez, excitedly.

"It is a little first trick in a game that will soon ring down the curtain on the whole drama of the past. Its lurid lights are faded forever," answered Lorimer.

"You can thank Doctor Nixon for your precious stones—if they're worth anything. But if you regain your estates—bless the law for that," added the young attorney, with eyes that indicated a longing for his fee. Then he said, confidently but solemnly, "You must give me a couple of days after Abercromby's arrival to fight my own last battle for you."

The hours sped along on golden wings until the arrival of the Havana steamer, as in wide-eyed wonder the ladies followed the unrolled panorama of the relation of the strange Honduranean voyage.

While awaiting the arrivals from Cuba, Nixon and Lorimer busied themselves with certain important conferences with the leading dealers in precious stones in Paris. These were controlled by advice given by the great firm of bankers who had kindly watched over the ladies in their waiting weeks.

"It all comes to this, gentlemen," said the gray-bearded chief of the firm. "I have arranged with the leading European expert on emeralds to see Tiffany, Reed & Co.'s buyer. You had better face him at once with a fair selection of these uncut stones. He will be under the impression that the rough stones are only in your charge as representatives of the estate of some deceased South American grandee. Don't lose sight of your gems a moment."

It was an anxious half hour which Nixon and Lori-

mer passed together the next day in a room where the representative of the great importing jewelers faced a pallid young man who sat, scales and tweezers in hand, at a plain deal table.

"Remember, Horrivtz," continued the head clerk, "we are to pay your expert fee."

The silent foreigner bowed in answer as he then counted and noted the weight of twelve rough stones which had been selected as a fair average by the joint efforts of the two returned adventurers.

Then he bent to his task, while Lorimer and Nixon watched him with their hearts in their mouths.

The thin claw-like fingers of the expert strayed among the implements and chemicals of the test laboriously. Plunging his hands in his bushy hair the nerve shaken expert pondered long and finally broke out: "I never doubted the evidence of my senses before, and so I wish the privilege of calling in my principal. He is the money—I am only the science of this thing. You know the Venetian Sangreal cup—the single vase hollowed from an emerald. Our people—the Hebrews—loaned the great Napoleon a half million crowns on it when he held it as a temporary gage of fortune. It was proved to be false at last. And but a year ago the great Vienna emerald swindle! An unparalleled gem—an emerald of unheard of richness and water. It had passed through a dozen expert hands. The sly Levantine who engineered that swindle pocketed a snug forty thousand florins in clear gold."

"These imitations were—?"

"Lumps of glass, which are, after all, the best imitation of the colored stones. Strass—crystal—whatever you may call it. There are hundreds of proud beauties now wearing worthless glass, 'in the swim,' where the lie has been handed down by generations of innocent dupes. It would spread dismay among princes and princesses if ever the crown jewels of Europe were to be properly examined. But these things before me stagger me. Will you wait a few moments? They only lack the traditional flaws for me to pronounce at once. If they could be matched there is an open Imperial order for a nonpareil emerald necklace."

The friends lingered in suspense. Their eyes sought each other in silence. The expert fled away and returned with the other Hebrew, who always hovers near on a field-day of such financial ventures.

With flashing eyes the waiting onlookers suppressed their breathing as the globular perspiration beaded the brows of the sons of Judah.

A jargon which defies all modern vocabulary enabled the "chosen ones" to confer, as the impatient watchers sat with their hopes combating pessimistic fears. Lorimer felt the warm blood surge to his temples when the young expert at last threw down his metallic antennæ.

"Real!" he said, decisively, with the air of an oracle. And the "partner" whose signs of prosperity in efflorescent jewelry and well-rounded waistcoat added to his self-sufficiency, hoarsely growled: "I back him up—with all my money!"

"What do you value them at!" incautiously hazarded Nixon.

"Ah! mine fren'!" and the two Israelities sprang up eagerly, as with waving hands, their trembling palms upturned; they raced along in a conversational steeplechase to be the first at limiting the possible bargain within the decent confines of profit.

The clerk laughed most heartily as he joined the two Americans in the reception room after a half hour's further conference. "It will probably be better to arrange with the head of our house to have the gems cut, and then valued later. We will take them, however, if you wish, on our own risk as soon as we agree on a price, *for they are real!*"

And so they were, beyond the possibility of any mistake, was the final fiat of the great house, delivered on their return through the chief, whose congratulations were now in order. In addition, he made an offer for the twelve uncut emeralds that made the young men open their eyes.

"There are at least seven hundred emeralds in the bag," cried Nixon, excitedly to Lorimer as they held private conference together. "At this rate—" he made hasty figures—"Senorita Inez will be worth millions."

"Yes—worth millions!" returned Frank, rather

gloomily. Then he added: "Miss Romero must be spoken to at once. She had better take the money offered for these twelve, as the expenses have been very heavy, and I'm pretty near the end of my financial tether."

On this proposition being laid before Miss Romero, she immediately assented to the same, the jewels were sold, and the expenses of the expedition liquidated in full.

"She is a great heiress," said Ethel excitedly, "isn't she? And owes it all to you, Frank."

"And Doctor Jim," said her brother with such gloom in his voice that Nixon, looking after him, uttered a prolonged whistle, and remarked to himself:

"By Jove! That fellow has made that girl so rich that he's afraid to propose to her."

But notwithstanding this, Frank abated no effort on behalf of the young lady who was under his legal charge.

"We can now clear away decks for action for the last trick," he said two days later, when Doctor William Abercromby and "Tough" Baxter arrived and delivered the proffered amnesty, ten years old, from the Spanish government to Don José Romero and his descendants under certain conditions.

"Now," remarked Lorimer, "you, Nixon and I move on the Spanish Ambassador. While we prepare our plans you, Doctor Bill, make yourself agreeable to the ladies."

"And what am I to do?" said Baxter.

"Why, see Paris, my man. This is the chance of your life."

Acting upon this advice, for two or three days Bax did see Paris in a way that astonished the Cafés Chantants and the Quartier Latin. In fact, before he had left the town he had become celebrated among the young ladies of the boulevards under the soubriquet of "*Le Trappeur Taciturne*."

As for Abercromby he did his duty to the fair ones and led the ladies afar on small excursions, of great pleasure to them and large profit to the Parisian shopkeepers. For a general coquettish, feminine devilish-

ness seemed to assert itself now in the two maidens. They looked more beautiful than ever; they arrayed themselves in the most exquisite Parisian gowns, but as Nixon remarked, seemed "inferribly offish."

"I can understand," he cogitated, "the emeralds getting to that minx Inez's head, but what's the matter with that blue-eyed, level-headed nixie of Poughkeepsie?"

But the young men had plenty to do. They had already made friends with the American Legation, and one evening under convoy of an attaché, Frank Lorimer of the New York bar, supported by Dr. James Nixon, with due gravity and splendor of attendant details, were at last ushered into the conference rooms of the Spanish Ambassador at Paris.

The introduction finished, in which the kindly attaché took care to magnify the sudden yearning of the American government as to the Romero affair; the most noble the Marquis de Villa Flores listened with calm, diplomatic courtesy, and displayed the most haughty, high-bred patience as he harkened to the American lawyer's demand for certain papers deposited with him when he was the Spanish Minister at Washington ten years before, and still held by him, relating to Don José Romero, at that time a resident of the United States.

"But not a citizen," remarked the Marquis blandly.

"Certainly not, your Excellency," replied Lorimer.

"Then the affair is very simple. Had Don José become a citizen of the republic I fear his daughter could never have received the estates. As he has remained a Spanish subject, though an exile, I think I can aid you. In fact, I shall be delighted to do so, as I believe I have the honor of being a second or third cousin of the fair young lady herself. The documents placed in my hands were a full pardon to Romero under condition that he agreed to return to Cuba and made oath to support no further insurrectionary movements in the island. I was both astounded and grieved that he never applied for them, as notice of the amnesty had been sent to him by a trusted agent of ours, one Padre Vicente Guerra. I

am very candid in this matter, as you have been candid with me," returned the Marquis.

"I will be still more so, your Excellency," replied Lorimer. "The notice of amnesty given into the hands of Guerra never reached Don José Romero, but was retained to further his own personal ends by Padre Vicente. As long as Romero could not take possession of the family estates at Jibacoa he, Guerra, lived in enjoyment of them. Besides, he had other plans."

With this the lawyer lucidly laid before the Spanish Ambassador the extraordinary action, plots and revenge of the man who had masqueraded as priest and spy at the same time.

"Then, there only remains for me to inform myself," answered the Ambassador, "if this proffer from the Spanish government of free pardon and the lifting of the confiscation of the estates are still open. That I can easily ascertain by telegraphing my government at Madrid. In case their answer is favorable, I shall do myself the honor of calling in person with the documents upon my fair relative. You will hear from me in the course of a few days," added the Marquis, with that air of politeness, yet brevity, which great people assume toward small ones to show them that the interview is finished.

"I believe your case is all right," said the attache cordially, as he bade the young men good-bye at the American Embassy. "Only don't let his Spanish Excellency get the girl for his nephew, who is a very handsome young fellow, exceedingly extravagant and somewhat impecunious."

This kind of advice made Lorimer very moody as they strode back to the Athenié.

But at his hotel a surprise awaited both him and Nixon. On entering his mother's parlor and asking to see Miss Romero, in order to give her the pleasant information from the Spanish Ambassador, Mrs. Lorimer informed her son that at present his fair client was not visible.

"Not to such important news?" asked Frank somewhat hotly and very disappointedly, for he and Nixon had been at the American Embassy most of the day,

and his eyes hungered for the sight of the exquisite face and graceful form of Senorita Inez.

"Not *just* at present," replied Mrs. Lorimer. "Inez and Ethel are preparing a little tableau for you two, Doctor Abercromby and Mr. Baxter, whom I expect here in a few moments."

"A tableaux?" queried Nixon astounded.

"Yes, some South American affair," laughed Agnes. "The girls have been reading up about the buccaneers for the last day or two."

"Well, what has all this do with those four gentlemen loitering about the hall, as we entered," remarked Frank, anxious to grumble about something.

"Oh, they're four agents *de surête*."

"Detectives!" cried Nixon.

"Yes, they have been here all day guarding the emeralds that have been sent up from the bank in the raw-hide sacks by the order of Miss Inez."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Doctor Jim. "And they took this risk to give us a tableau!"

"I suppose they have strung the uncut jewels all over them," remarked Lorimer. "What a sight they will be." And his eyes lighted up at the thought of Miss Romero covered with uncut jewels. Then he delivered a little lecture on feminine vanity to his mother, which that widow received with laughter.

This was interrupted by the entrance of Abercromby and Mr. "Tough" Baxter, who was still in trapper's garb.

Feminine voices now came to them from behind the heavy draperies that cut off the salon from a little ante-chamber.

A minute after, at a tinkle of a little bell, Mrs. Lorimer's maid entered and drew the draperies aside, disclosing a sight that made even imperturbable Baxter remark, *soto voce*: "By golly!"

It was a scene that might well produce admiration, for it was a picture of the past. By deft feminine hands the room had been turned into some kind of mediæval affair with old-fashioned draperies, antique vases and ancient arms that had been borrowed from an antiquary on the Rue Rivoli. Within it stood Inez Romero and

Ethel Lorimer dressed in the costumes of two hundred years ago; one blondely fair, with gleaming, sparkling blue eyes, the other dark, enchanting, fascinating, with the grand beauty of Castile. Heaped about them were leather bags corded up.

"What's the—the meaning of this masquerade?" muttered Lorimer, astounded.

"It is a vision of the plunder of the buccaneers!" cried Ethel, laughingly.

"It means," said Inez, proudly, "that the plunder of the buccaneers is to be divided among those who gained it!" Then she burst forth almost indignantly: "Did you think for one moment that I could have been so heartless, so ungrateful, as to have proffered no reward to the brave men who have risked their lives to give me wealth? This plunder is buccaneers' plunder, the division shall be according to buccaneers' law."

"Buccaneers' law!" cried Nixon. "Why, it's—it's like a dream of the past!"

And in truth it was, for the scene carried with it an antiquity that made it real. The room looked mediæval with its old-fashioned draperies and arms; the bags of leather seemed like the plunder of some Spanish fortress at Maracaibo or Porto Bello, and Inez Romero and Ethel Lorimer in their antique costumes looked like two maidens, the fairest in all the ravaged town, who had been gathered in with the treasure to be the spoil of the chiefs of the buccaneers: Ethel, draped wholly in white with floating tresses and excited eyes; Inez in black and gold, her hair done up with high jeweled comb, flaunting a fan that Spanish girls alone know how to use, her bouffant skirts trimmed with the lace of Spain, that displayed her high-arched but petite feet and exquisite ankles in web-like hose and fairy slippers.

But it was not a tableau they were looking on; it was action, vivid, intense, graceful action, as Inez spoke again and said: "This division I make according to Buccaneers' Law! First, are there any wounded? If a man has lost an arm, a hundred and twenty-five *golden crowns*, or four shares; an eye, twenty-five,

or one share; even a finger must be paid for according to the laws of the Companions of the Gulf."

"I ain't lost nothing but a mule," replied the downright Baxter, who seemed to regard this as a very business-like affair.

"That shall be paid for," remarked Miss Romero. "The expenses have all been settled, and I as the queen take half, or three hundred shares."

With that she gathered in six of the bags of emeralds and placed them on one side. "Now comes the captain, who has one hundred shares, or one-sixth of the plunder."

With this the two girls seized two sacks and presented them to the astonished Lorimer.

"Next comes the doctor and chief intriguer." And she and Ethel laughingly deposited by the astounded Nixon two bags of uncut emeralds.

"The other shares, one hundred; fifty each, one to the under officer, Abercromby, and the other to the brave guide, who saved the lives of all of you—the great scout, Baxter!"

And she handed to the astonished ex-rebel a leather sack and to the delighted Abercromby another, of equal weight.

"I never refuse plunder, Miss," replied the ex-guerrilla, as he coolly took possession of his own.

But here Nixon excitedly said: "You give too much. I did this—not for love of you, I confess it freely, but for love of him," and he placed his hand upon Lorimer's shoulder.

But Inez cried: "No! No! I beg of you, I command you to take these. I could not sleep to-night if I thought each one of you had not received his share. It is according to the laws of the Brotherhood of Buccaneers that you share the plunder. But know that you have my gratitude as well. Would not my heart have been broken if destruction had come to you? Take it, share the plunder according to the laws of the buccaneers!"

This was said with streaming eyes; then quick as thought the generous girl, overcome by some emotion that was too potent to be concealed, fled from the

room and perchance would have escaped had not a sudden idea flashed like wildfire into Lorimer's excited brain.

In an instant he was after her and stayed the beauty in a little writing-room belonging to Mrs. Lorimer.

"You have followed me here?" said the girl, turning upon him, and looking more beautiful than she had ever looked.

"Yes, to demand my *whole* share of the plunder!" whispered the excited Frank.

"You have it. Is it not enough—have I not given you your due?"

"No! The Captain's share is not only his portion of the treasure but also the right to the most beautiful captive maiden in the town. When you stood amid the buccaneer's booty I said: 'Thank God, I am the captain of the band, and the prettiest maid comes into my hand by law of the buccaneers.'"

"*O Madre! O Dios!*" gasped the girl between his kisses. For she had no more chance of escaping from him than she would have had of escaping from Harry Morgan himself.

"Booty and beauty is my motto," whispered Frank to her in rapture. "Only we'll have wax candles over this affair and the priest's blessing."

"*Dios!* What a buccaneer you would have made," replied the young lady, in an admiration that showed that his attentions, though ardent, had by no means been displeasing.

"I am ahead of the Spanish Ambassador and his nephew," whispered Lorimer, a few minutes after to his chum, when he had returned to the salon.

"Are you?" replied Nixon. "That means the priest—for two; but I say it means priests for *four*. For, between us, I have secured the other captive maiden myself—congratulate me."

"What! You fell in love with Ethel, as she stood there, surrounded by the treasure? How romantic," whispered the young lawyer.

"Bosh! I fell in love with Ethel the first moment I saw her, I think. Oh, blind-eyed! didn't you see that all I did for you was for love of her? Is Senorita Romero the only pretty girl in this world?"

And they had a very happy party that night, Mr. Baxter telling them to have no fear of thieves for the jewels. He was going to take care of his own and he would take care of theirs also. "If they can get away with a bag before I shoot they are welcome to it."

Then the shoppings of the young ladies increased and doubled and trebled, for they were buying their trousseaux. And they transformed emeralds into dresses with great rapidity.

Some two days after this the Spanish Ambassador drove from his Embassy bringing his nephew with him and presented in form the revocation of the confiscation of the Romero estates, and begged to introduce his nephew, Don Cæsar de Flores.

But his Spanish Excellency's jaw dropped, likewise his nephew's, a few weeks after, when they received the cards announcing the approaching nuptials of Senorita Inez Romero and Frank Lorimer, Esq., of New York; likewise the paste-boards stating that Miss Ethel Lorimer would on that same day become Mrs. James Nixon.

The double wedding would have been a quiet one, only that the American colony in Paris, getting excited over the matter, made it a fashionable event, and H. Kinsley Syntax, who was over, doing the continent, sent columns of cable to the New York papers, headed "His Cuban Sweetheart." But he would have liked to have heard one sentence that one bridegroom remarked to the other as they shook hands before departing upon separate wedding tours:

"By Jove, Jimmy, old chum! this is a buccaneer affair—booty and beauty, eh, my boy?"

"Egad," replied Nixon, "old Harry Morgan couldn't have made a cleaner scoop himself!"

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