

Aimard Gustave

The White Scalper: A Story of the Texan War



Gustave Aimard

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CHAPTER I

A RECONNOISSANCE

Colonel Melendez, after leaving the Jaguar, galloped with his head afire, and panting chest, along the Galveston road, exciting with his spurs the ardour of his horse, which yet seemed to devour space, so rapid was its speed. But it is a long journey from the Salto del Frayle to the town. While galloping, the Colonel reflected; and the more he did so, the more impossible did it appear to him that the Jaguar had told him the truth. In fact, how could it be supposed that this partisan, brave and rash though he was, would have dared to attack, at the head of a handful of adventurers, a well-equipped corvette, manned by a numerous crew, and commanded by one of the best officers in the Mexican navy? The capture of the fort seemed even more improbable to the Colonel.

While reflecting thus, the Colonel had gradually slackened his horse's speed; the animal, feeling that it was no longer watched, had insensibly passed from a gallop into a canter, then a trot, and by a perfectly natural transition, fell into a walk, with drooping head, and snapping at the blades of grass within its reach.

Night had set in for some time past; a complete silence brooded over the country, only broken by the hollow moan of the sea as it rolled over the shingle. The Colonel was following a small track formed along the coast, which greatly shortened the distance separating him from Galveston. This path, much used by day, was at this early hour of night completely deserted; the ranchos that stood here and there were shut up, and no light gleamed through their narrow windows, for the fishermen, fatigued by the rude toil of the day, had retired to bed at an early hour.

The young officer's horse, which had more and more slackened its pace, emboldened by impunity, at length stopped near a scrubby bush, whose leaves it began nibbling. This immobility aroused the Colonel from his reverie, and he looked about him to see where he was. Although the obscurity was very dense, it was easy for him to perceive that he was still a long distance from his destination. About a musket-shot ahead was a rancho, whose hermetically-closed windows allowed a thin pencil of light to filter through the interstices of the shutters. The Colonel struck his repeater and found it was midnight. To go on would be madness; the more so, as it would be impossible for him to find a boat in which to cross to the island. Greatly annoyed at this obstacle, which, supposing the Jaguar's revelations to be true, might entail serious consequences, the young officer, while cursing this involuntary delay, resolved on pushing on to the rancho before him, and once there, try to obtain means to cross the bay.

After drawing his cloak tightly round him, to protect him as far as possible from the damp sea air, the Colonel caught up his reins again, and giving his horse the spur, trotted sharply towards the rancho. The traveller speedily reached it, but, when only a few paces from it, instead of riding straight up to the door, he dismounted, fastened his horse to a larch-tree, and, after placing his pistols in his belt, made a rather long circuit, and stealthily crept up to the window of the rancho.

In the present state of fermentation from which people were suffering in Texas, the olden confidence had entirely disappeared to make way for the greatest distrust. The times were past when the doors of houses remained open day and night, in order to enable strangers to reach the fireside with greater facility. Hospitality, which was traditional in these parts, had, temporarily at any rate, changed into a suspicious reserve, and it would have been an act of unjustifiable imprudence to ride

up to a strange house, without first discovering whether it was that of a friend. The Colonel especially, being dressed in a Mexican uniform, was bound to act with extreme reserve.

This rancho was rather large; it had not that appearance of poverty and neglect which are found only too often in the houses of Spanish American Campesinos. It was a square house, with a roof in the Italian fashion, having in front an azotea-covered portillo. The white-washed walls were an agreeable contrast to the virgin vines, and other plants which ran over it. This rancho was not enclosed with walls: a thick hedge, broken through at several places, alone defended the approaches. The dependencies of the house were vast, and well kept up. All proved that the owner of this mansion carried on a large trade on his account.

The Colonel, as we have said, had softly approached one of the windows. The shutters were carefully closed, but not so carefully as not to let it be seen that someone was up inside. In vain did the Colonel, though, place his eye at the slit, for he could see nothing. If he could not see, however, he could hear, and the first words that reached his ear probably appeared to him very serious, for he redoubled his attention, in order to lose no portion of the conversation. Employing once again our privilege as romancers, we will enter the rancho, and allow the reader to witness the singular scene going on there, the most interesting part of which escaped the Colonel, greatly to his annoyance.

In a rather small room, dimly lighted by a smoky candle, four men, with gloomy faces and ferocious glances, dressed in the garb of Campesinos, were assembled. Three of them, seated on butacas and equipals, were listening, with their guns between their legs, to the fourth, who, with his arms behind his back, was walking rapidly up and down, while talking.

The broad brims of the vicuña hats which the three first wore, and the obscurity prevailing in the room, only allowed their faces to be dimly seen, and their expression judged. The fourth, on the contrary, was bare-headed; he was a man of about forty, tall, and well built; his muscular limbs denoted a far from common strength, and a forest of black and curly hair fell on his wide shoulders. He had a lofty forehead, aquiline nose, and black and piercing eyes; while the lower part of his face disappeared in a long and thick beard. There was in the appearance of this man something bold and haughty, which inspired respect, and almost fear.

At this moment, he seemed to be in a tremendous passion; his eyebrows were contracted, his cheeks livid, and, at times, when he yielded to the emotion he tried in vain to restrain, his eye flashed to fiercely, that it forced his three hearers to bow their heads humbly, and they seemed to be his inferiors. At the moment when we entered the room, the stranger appeared to be continuing a discussion that had been going on for some time.

"No," he said in a powerful voice, "things cannot go on thus any longer. You dishonour the holy cause we are defending by revolting acts of cruelty, which injure us in the opinion of the population, and authorise all the calumnies our enemies spread with reference to us. It is not by imitating our oppressors that we shall succeed in proving to the masses that we really wish their welfare. However sweet it may be to avenge an insult received, where men put themselves forward as defenders of a principle so sacred as that for which we have been shedding our blood the last ten years, every man must practise self-denial, and forget all his private animosities to absorb them in the great national vengeance. I tell you this frankly, plainly, and with no reserve. I, who was the first that dared to utter the cry of revolt, and inaugurate resistance: I, who, since I have reached man's estate, have sacrificed everything, fortune, friends, and relations, in the sole hope of seeing my country one day free, would retire from a struggle which is daily dishonoured by excesses such as the Redskins themselves would disavow."

The three men, who had been tolerably quiet up to this moment, then rose, protesting simultaneously that they were innocent of the crimes imputed to them.

"I do not believe you," he continued passionately; "I do not believe you, because I can prove the utter truth of the accusation I am now making. You deny it as I expected. Your part was ready traced, and you might be expected to act so: all other paths were closed to you. Only one of you,

the youngest, the one who perhaps had the greatest right to employ reprisals, has always remained equal to his mission; and, though our enemies have tried several times to brand him, he has ever remained firm, as the Mexicans themselves allow. This Chief you know as well as I do: it is the Jaguar. Only yesterday, at the head of some of our men, he accomplished one of the most glorious and extraordinary exploits."

All pressed round the stranger, and eagerly questioned him.

"What need for me to tell you what has occurred? You will know it within a few hours. Suffice it for you to know for the present, that the consequence of the Jaguar's daring achievement is the immediate surrender of Galveston, which cannot hold out against us any longer."

"Then we triumph!" one of the Campesinos exclaimed.

"Yes; but all is not over yet: if we have succeeded in taking the town of Galveston from the Mexicans, they have fifty others left, in which they can shut themselves up. Hence, believe me, instead of giving way to immoderate joy, and imprudent confidence, redouble, on the contrary, your efforts and self-denial, if you wish to remain victors to the end."

"But what is to be done to obtain the result we desire as much as you do?" the one who had already spoken asked.

"Follow blindly the counsels I give you, and obey without hesitation or comment the orders I send you. Will you promise me this?"

"Yes," they exclaimed, enthusiastically; "you alone, Don Benito, can guide us safely and ensure our victory."

There was a moment's silence. The man who had just been addressed as Don Benito went to a corner of the room hidden behind a curtain of green serge. This curtain he drew back, and behind it was an alabaster statue of the Virgin Soledad, with a lamp burning in front of it, and then turned to the others.

"On your knees, and take off your hats," he said.

They obeyed.

"Now," he continued, "swear to keep faithfully the promise you have just made me of your own accord; swear to be merciful to the conquered in battle, and gentle to the prisoners after the victory. At this price I pledge myself to support you; if not, I retire immediately from a cause which is at least dishonoured, if not lost."

The three men, after piously crossing themselves, stretched out their right arms toward the statue, saying in a firm voice —

"We swear it, by the share we hope in Paradise."

"It is well," Don Benito replied, as he drew the curtain across again and made them a sign to rise; "I know you are too thoroughly Caballeros to break so solemn an oath."

The Colonel, confounded by this singular scene, which he did not at all comprehend, did not know what to do, when he fancied he heard an indistinct sound not far from him. Drawing himself up at once, he concealed himself behind the hedge, rather alarmed as to the cause of this noise, which was rapidly approaching. Almost immediately he noticed several men coming gently up; they were four in number, as he soon made out, and carrying a fifth in their arms. They walked straight to the door, at which they tapped in a peculiar way.

"Who's there?" was asked from inside.

One of the newcomers replied, but in so low a tone, that it was impossible for the Colonel to hear the word pronounced. The door was opened, and the strangers entered; it was then closed again, but not until the opener had cast a scrutinizing glance round him.

"What does this mean?" the Colonel muttered.

"It means," a rough voice said in his ear, "that you are listening to what does not concern you, Colonel Melendez, and that it may prove dangerous to you."

The Colonel, astounded at this unexpected answer, and especially at being so well known, quickly drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it, and turned to his strange speaker.

"On my word," he answered, "there is no worse danger to incur than that of an immediate death, which I should not at all object to, I swear to you."

The stranger began laughing, and emerged from the thicket in which he was hidden. He was a powerful-looking man, and, like the Colonel, held a pistol in his hand.

"You are aware that duelling is forbidden in the Mexican army," he said, "so take my advice, sir, and put up that pistol, which, if it exploded, might entail very disagreeable consequences for you."

"Lower your weapon first," the Colonel said, coldly, "and then I will see what I have to do."

"Very good," the other remarked, still smiling, as he thrust his pistol into his belt. The Colonel imitated him.

"And now," the stranger continued, "I have to converse with you; but, as you can see, this spot is badly chosen for a secret interview."

"That is true," the Colonel interrupted, frankly assuming the tone of the singular man with whom chance had so unexpectedly brought him together.

"I am delighted that you are of my opinion. Well, Colonel, as it is so, be kind enough to accompany me merely a few paces, and I will lead you to a spot I know, which is perfectly adapted for the conversation we must have together."

"I am at your orders, Caballero," the Colonel answered, with a bow.

"Come, then," the stranger added, as he made a start.

The Colonel followed him. The stranger led him to the spot where he had tied up his horse, by the side of which another was now standing. The stranger stopped.

"Let us mount," he said.

"What for?" the young officer asked.

"To be off, of course. Are you not returning to Galveston?"

"Certainly; still – "

"Still," the stranger interrupted, "you would have had no objection to prowl a little longer round the rancho, I presume?"

"I confess it."

"Well, on my honour, you are wrong, for two excellent reasons: the first is, that you will learn nothing more than you have surmised, – that is to say, that the rancho is the headquarters of the insurrection. You see that I am frank with you."

"I perceive it. And now, what is your second reason?"

"It is very simple: you run the risk, at any moment, of being saluted with a bullet, and you know that the Texans are decent marksmen."

"Certainly; but you know also that this reason possesses but slight value for me."

"I beg your pardon; courage does not consist, in my opinion, at least, in sacrificing one's life without reason; it consists, on the contrary, in being only killed for a good price, – that is to say, for a motive worth the trouble."

"Thanks for the lecture, Caballero."

"Shall we be off?"

"At once, if you will be good enough to tell me who you are and where we are going?"

"I am surprised that you did not recognise me long ago, for we have been for some time past on excellent, if not intimate terms."

"That may be; the sound of your voice is rather familiar to me, and I fancy I have heard it before, but it is impossible for me to recall either when or under what circumstances."

"By Heaven, Colonel! You will allow me to remark that you have a preciously short memory. But since our last meeting, so many events have occurred, that it is not surprising you should have

forgotten me. With one word I will recall everything to your mind – I am John Davis, the ex-slave dealer."

"You!" the Colonel exclaimed, with a start of surprise.

"Yes, I am that person."

"Ah! Ah!" the Colonel continued, as he crossed his arms haughtily and looked him in the face, "In that case we have an account to settle."

"I am not aware of the fact, Colonel."

"You forget, Master Davis, in what manner you abused my confidence in order to betray me."

"I? You are in error, Colonel. To do that I must have been a Mexican, which is not the case, thank Heaven! I served my country as you serve yours, that is all; each for himself in a revolution, you know."

"That proverb may suit you, Master Davis, I grant, but I only know one way of acting honourably, with uplifted head."

"Hum! There would be a good deal to say on that head, but it is not the question at this moment. The proof that you are mistaken and unjust toward me is, that a few minutes ago I held your life in my hands, and was unwilling to take it."

"You were wrong, for I swear to you that unless you defend yourself I shall take yours in a second," he said, as he cocked a pistol.

"You are in earnest, then?"

"Most earnest, he assured."

"You are mad," said Davis, with a shrug of his shoulders; "what strange idea is this of yours to insist on killing me?"

"Will you defend yourself; yes or no?"

"Wait a moment. What a man you are! There is no way of having an explanation with you."

"One word, then, but be brief."

"Well, as you are aware, I am not accustomed to make long speeches."

"I am listening to you."

"Why play with the butt of your pistol so? Vengeance is only real when complete. A shot fired would be the signal for your death, for you would be surrounded and attacked on all sides at once before you had even time to place a foot in the stirrup. You allow this, I suppose?"

"To the point, Master Davis, for I am in a hurry."

"You admit," the other said, with his old stoicism, "that I am seeking no unworthy subterfuge to avoid a meeting with you?"

"I know that you are a brave man."

"Thanks! I do not discuss the validity of the reason which makes you wish to exchange bullets with me: a pretext is nothing with men like ourselves. I pledge my word to be at your disposal on any day, and at any hour you please, with or without witnesses. Does that suit you?"

"Would it not be better to mount, gallop into the plain that stretches out before us, and settle the affair at once?"

"I should like to do so, but, unfortunately, I must, for the present, deprive myself of the pleasure. I repeat to you that we cannot fight, at least not at this moment."

"But the reason, the reason?" the young man exclaimed, with feverish impatience.

"The reason is this, as you absolutely insist on my telling it you: I am at this moment entrusted with very great interests; in a word, I am charged by the Chief of the Texan army with a mission of the utmost importance to General Rubio, Military Governor of Galveston. You are too much of a gentleman not to understand that this prohibits me risking a life which does not belong to me."

The Colonel bowed with exquisite politeness and uncocked the pistol, which he restored to his belt.

"I am confounded at what has taken place," he said. "You will excuse me, Señor, for having allowed my passion to carry me away thus; I recognise how worthy and delicate your conduct has been under the circumstances. May I venture to hope you will pardon me?"

"Not another word about the past, Colonel. So soon as I have terminated my mission, I shall have the honour of placing myself at your orders. Now, if nothing further keeps you here, we will proceed together to Galveston."

"I accept gladly the offer you make me. There is a truce between us: be good enough till further orders to consider and treat me as one of your friends."

"That is settled; I was certain we should end by understanding each other. To horse, then, and let us start."

"I ask nothing better; still, I would observe that the night is as yet only half spent."

"Which means?"

"That till sunrise, and perhaps later, it will be impossible for us to find a boat in which to cross over to the island."

"That need not trouble you, Colonel; I have a boat waiting for me, in which I shall be delighted to offer you a place."

"Hum! All the measures of you revolutionary gentlemen seem to be well taken; you want for nothing."

"The reason is very simple; would you like to know it?"

"I confess that I am curious in the matter."

"It is because, up to the present, we have appealed to the hearts, rather than the purses of our confidants. The hatred of the Mexican Government renders every intelligent man a devoted partisan; the hope of liberty gives us all we want; that is our whole secret. You are aware, Colonel, that the spirit of opposition is innate in the heart of every man; insurrection or opposition, whichever you like to call it, is only that spirit organised."

"That is true," said the Colonel, with a laugh.

The two enemies, temporarily friends, mounted and set out side by side.

"You have very singular ideas and opinions," the Colonel, whom the American's remarks amused, continued.

"Oh dear no!" the latter replied, carelessly; "Those ideas and opinions are nothing but the fruit of lengthened experience. I do not ask of a man more than his organisation allows him to give, and enacting these I am certain of never making a mistake. Hence, suppose that the Mexicans are expelled the country, and the government of Texas established and working regularly – "

"Good," the Colonel said, with a smile; "what will happen then."

"This will inevitably happen," the American answered, imperturbably. "A hot-headed or ambitious man will emerge from the crowd and rebel against the Government. He will immediately have partisans, who will make a flag of truce, and the same men who today are ready to shed their blood for us with the most utter abnegation, will act in the same way for him; not because they have to complain of the Government they desire to overthrow, but merely on account of that spirit of opposition to which I have alluded."

"Come, that is a little too strong," the Colonel exclaimed, as he burst into a laugh.

"You do not believe me? Well, listen to this: I who am speaking to you once knew, no matter where, a man whose whole life was spent in conspiring. One day luck smiled on him, and chance enabled him, hardly knowing how or why, to occupy the highest post in the Republic – something like President. Do you know what he did, so soon as he obtained power?"

"Canarios! He tried to hold his ground, of course."

"You are quite out. On the contrary, he went on conspiring, and so famously that he overthrew himself and was condemned to perpetual imprisonment."

"So that – ?"

"So that, if the man who succeeded to power had not amnestied him, he would, in all probability, have died in prison."

The two men were still laughing at John Davis's last repartee, when the latter stopped, and made the Colonel a sign to follow his example.

"Have we arrived?" he asked.

"All but. Do you see that boat tossing about at the foot of the cliff?"

"Of course I see it."

"Well, it is the one which will convey us to Galveston."

"But our horses?"

"Don't be uneasy; the owner of that wretched rancho will take all proper care of them."

John Davis raised a whistle to his lip and blew it twice sharply. Almost immediately the door of the rancho opened and a man appeared; but, after taking one step forward, he took two backward, doubtless astonished at seeing two persons when he only expected one.

"Halloh! halloh, John!" Davis shouted, "don't go in again."

"Is it you, then?" he asked.

"Yes! Unless it be the demon who has assumed my face."

The fisherman shook his head with a dissatisfied air.

"Do not jest so, John Davis," he said; "the night is black and the sea rough; so the demon is about."

"Come, come, old porpoise," the American continued, "get your boat ready, for we have no time to lose. This Señor is a friend of mine. Have you any alfalfa for our horses in your cabin?"

"I should think so. Eh, Pedriello, come hither, muchacho. Take the horses from the Caballero, and lead them to the corral."

At this summons a tall young fellow came yawning from the rancho, and walked up to the two travellers. The latter had already dismounted; the peon took the horses by the bridle and went off with them, not saying a word.

"Shall we go?" John Davis asked.

"Whenever you please," the fisherman growled.

"I hope you have men enough?"

"My two sons and I are, I should think, enough to cross the bay."

"You must know better than I."

"Then, why ask?" the fisherman said with a shrug of his shoulders, as he proceeded toward the boat.

The two men followed him, and found that he had not deceived them. The sea was bad, being rough and lumpy, and it required all the old sailor's skill to successfully cross the bay. Still, after two hours of incessant toil, the boat came alongside Galveston jetty, and disembarked its passengers safe and sound; then, without waiting for a word of thanks, the sailor at once disappeared in the obscurity.

"We part here," said John Davis to the Colonel; "for we each follow a different road. Tomorrow morning, at nine o'clock, I shall have the honour of presenting, myself at the General's house. May I hope that you have spoken to him of me in sufficient favourable terms for him to grant me a kind reception?"

"I will do all that depends on myself."

"Thank you, and good night."

"One word, if you please, before parting."

"Speak, Colonel."

"I confess to you, that at this moment I am suffering from extreme curiosity."

"What about?"

"A moment before your arrival, I saw four men, carrying a fifth, enter the rancho to which accident had brought me."

"Well?"

"Who is that man?"

"I know no more about him than you do. All I can tell you is, that he was picked up dying on the beach, at eleven o'clock at night, by some of our men stationed as videttes to watch the bay. Now, who he is, or where he comes from, I do not know at all. He is covered with wounds; when picked up, he held an axe still clutched in his hand, which makes me suppose that he belonged to the crew of the *Libertad* corvette, which our friends so successfully boarded. That is all the information I am able to give you. Is it all you wish to know?"

"One word more. Who is the man I saw at the rancho, and to whom the persons with him gave the name of Don Benito?"

"As for that man, you will soon learn to know him. He is the supreme Chief of the Texan revolution; but I am not permitted to tell you more. Good bye, till we meet again at the General's."

"All right."

The two men, after bowing courteously, separated, and entered the town from opposite sides; the Colonel proceeding to his house, and John Davis, in all probability, to crave hospitality from one of the numerous conspirators Galveston contained.

CHAPTER II

A BARGAIN

There is in the rapidity with which all news spread, a mystery which has remained, up to the present, incomprehensible. It seems that an electric current bears them along at headlong speed, and takes a cruel pleasure in spreading them everywhere.

The most minute precautions had been taken by the Jaguar and El Alferéz to keep their double expedition a secret, and hide their success until they had found time to make certain arrangements necessary to secure the results of their daring attempts. The means of communication were at that period, and still are, extremely rare and difficult. Only one man, Colonel Melendez, was at all cognizant of what had happened, and we have seen that it was impossible for him to have said anything. And yet, scarce two hours after the events we have described were accomplished, a vague rumour, which had come no one knew whence, already ran about the town.

This rumour, like a rising tide, swelled from instant to instant, and assumed gigantic proportions; for, as always happens under similar circumstances, the truth, buried in a mass of absurd and impossible details, disappeared almost entirely to make way for a monstrous collection of reports, each more absurd than the other, but which terrified the population, and plunged it into extreme anxiety.

Among other things, it was stated that the insurgents were advancing on the town with a formidable fleet of twenty-five ships, having on board ten thousand troops, amply provided with cannon and ammunition of every description. Nothing less was spoken of than the immediate bombardment of Galveston by the insurgents, large parties of whom, it was stated, were scouring the country to intercept all communication between the town and the mainland.

Terror never calculates or reasons. In spite of the material impossibility of the insurgents being able to collect so considerable a fleet and army, no one doubted the truth of the rumour, and the townspeople, with their eyes anxiously fixed on the sea, fancied in each gull whose wing flashed on the horizon, they saw the vanguard of the Texan fleet.

General Rubio was himself very much alarmed. If he did not place entire faith on these stupid rumours, still one of those secret forebodings, that never deceive, warned him that grave events were preparing, and would soon burst like a thundercloud over the town. The Colonel's prolonged absence, whose motive the General was ignorant of, added still further to his anxiety. Still the situation was too critical for the General not to try to escape from it by any means, or dispel the storm that was constantly menacing.

Unfortunately, through its position and commerce, Galveston is a thoroughly American town, and the Mexican element is found there in but very limited proportions. The General was perfectly aware that the North. Americans who represented the mercantile houses, sympathized with the revolution, and only waited for a favourable opportunity to raise the mask and declare themselves overtly. The Mexican population itself was not at all desirous of running the risk of a siege: it preferred to a contest, which is ever injurious to commercial interests, an arrangement, no matter its nature, which would protect them. Money has no country, and hence, politically regarded, the population of Galveston cared very little whether it was Texan or Mexican, provided that it was not ruined, which was the essential point.

In the midst of all this egotism and vexation, the General felt the more embarrassed, because he possessed but a very weak armed force, incapable of keeping the population in check, if they felt any desire to revolt. After vainly awaiting the Colonel's return till eleven o'clock, the General resolved to summon to his house the most influential merchants of the town, in order to consult with them on the means to protect individuals, and place the town in a posture of defence, were that possible. The

merchants responded to the General's summons with an eagerness which, to any man less thoroughly acquainted with the American character, would have seemed a good omen, but which produced a diametrically opposite effect on the General. At about half-an hour after midnight, the General's saloon was crowded: some thirty merchants, the elite of Galveston, were collected there.

His Excellency, Don José Maria Rubio, was essentially a man of action, frank, loyal, and convinced that in all cases the best way of dealing is to go straight to the point. After the first compliments, he began speaking, and without any tergiversation or weakness, explained clearly and distinctly the state of their situation, and claimed the assistance of the notable inhabitants of the town to ward off the dangers that threatened it, promising, if that help were assured him, to hold out against the whole revolutionary army, and compel it to retire. The merchants were far from expecting such a requests which literally stunned them. For some minutes they knew not what answer to give; but at last, after consulting in whispers, the oldest and most influential of them undertook to reply in the names of all, and began speaking with that feigned frankness which forms the basis of the Anglo-American character – a frankness which conceals so much duplicity, and by which only those who are unacquainted with the inhabitants of the United States are at times entrapped.

This merchant, a native of Tennessee, had in his youth carried on nearly all those trades more or less acknowledgeable, by means of which men in the new world contrive in so short a time to raise the scaffoldings of a large fortune. Coming to Texas as a slave-dealer, he had gradually extended his trade; then he became a speculator, corn-dealer, and all sorts of things. In a word, he worked so well, that in less than ten years he was in possession of several millions. Morally, he was an old fox, without faith or law; a Greek by instinct, and a Jew by temperament. His name was Lionel Fisher; he was short and stout, and appeared scarce sixty years of age, although he was in reality close on seventy.

"Señor General," he said in an obsequious voice, after bowing with that haughty humility which distinguishes parvenus, "we are extremely pained by the sad news your excellency has thought it right to communicate to us, for none are more affected than ourselves by the calamities of our hapless country. We deplore in our hearts the situation into which Texas is suddenly cast, for we shall be the first assailed in our fortunes and affections. We should be glad to make the greatest sacrifices in order to prevent disasters and ward off the fearful catastrophe that menaces us. But, alas! What can we do? – nothing. In spite of our good will and warm desire to prove to your excellency that you possess all our sympathies, our hands are tied. Our assistance, far from helping the Mexican Government, would, on the contrary, injure it, because the populace and vagabonds who flock to all seaports, and who are in a majority at Galveston, delighted at having found a pretext for disorder, would immediately revolt, apparently to defend the insurrection, but in reality to plunder us. This consideration, therefore, compels us most reluctantly to remain neutral."

"Reflect, Señores," the General answered, "that the sacrifice I ask of you is but a trifle. Each of you will give me a thousand piastres; it is not too much, I suppose, to guarantee the security of your money and goods? For with the sum you collect, I pledge myself to preserve you from all harm by collecting a sufficient number of men to foil any expedition made against the town by the insurgents."

At this point-blank appeal the merchants made a frightful grimace, which the General did not appear to notice.

"The offering I claim from you at such a moment," he continued, "is not exorbitant; is it not just that in the hour of need you should come to the aid of a government under whose protection you have grown rich, and which, although it would have been perfectly justified in doing so, has, up to this day, demanded nothing from you?"

Caught in this dilemma, the merchants did not know what to answer. They were not all desirous to give their money in the defence of a cause which their secret efforts tended on the contrary to destroy, but when thus pressed by the General, their embarrassment was extreme; they did not dare openly to refuse, and wished still less to say yes. It is a singular fact, though perfectly true, that those men who have grown rich with the greatest facility, cling the most to their fortunes. Of all the natives

of the New World, the North American is the one who most craves money. He professes a profound love for the precious metals; with him money is everything, and to gain it he would sacrifice relatives and friends without remorse and without pity. It is the North American who invented that egotistic and heartless proverb, which so thoroughly displays the character of the people, *time is money*. Ask what you will of a North American, and he will give it you, but do not try to burrow a dollar of him, for he will bluntly refuse, however great the obligations he owes you may be.

The great American bankruptcies which a few years back terrified the Old World by their cynical effrontery, edified us as to the commercial honesty of this country, which in its dealings never says, yes, and is so afraid of letting; its thoughts be penetrated, that even in the most frivolous conversations the people, through fear of compromising themselves by an affirmative, say at each sentence, "I suppose," "I believe," "I think."

General Rubio, who had been a long time in Texas, and accustomed to daily dealings with the Americans, was perfectly well aware in what way he should treat them, hence he was not at all disturbed by their embarrassed denials, their protestations of devotion, or their downcast faces. After leaving them a few moments for reflection, seeing that they could not make up their minds to answer him, he continued in his calmest voice and with his most pleasant air —

"I see, Señores, that the reasons I have had the honour of laying before you have not had the good fortune to convince you, and I am really vexed at it. Unfortunately, we are in one of those fatal crises where long deliberations are impossible. Ever since the President of the Republic appointed me Military Chief of this State, I have ever been anxious to satisfy you, and not make you feel too heavily the weight of the power entrusted to me, taking on myself on several occasions, to modify any harshness in the orders I received from high quarters with reference to you. I venture to believe that you will do me the justice of saying that you have always found me kind and complaisant toward you."

The merchants naturally burst into affirmations as the General continued.

"Unfortunately it can no longer be so. In the face of this obstinate and unpatriotic refusal you so peremptorily give me, I am, to my great regret, constrained to carry out literally the orders I have received, — orders that concern you, Señores, and whose tenor, I repeat, I find myself utterly unable to modify."

At this declaration, made in a sarcastic voice, the merchants began shivering; they understood that the General was about to take a brilliant revenge, although they did not know yet what was about to happen. For all that, they began to repent having accepted the invitation, and placed themselves so simply in the wolf's mouth. The General kept smiling, but the smile had something bitter and mocking in its expression, which was far from reassuring them. At this moment a clock, standing on a bracket, struck two.

"Caramba," said the General, "is it so late as that already? How quickly time passes in your agreeable company. Señores, we must wind up the business. I should be in despair if I kept you longer from your homes — the more so, as you must be desirous of rest."

"In truth," stammered the merchant who had hitherto spoken in the name of all, "whatever pleasure we feel at being here —"

"You would feel greater still at being elsewhere," the General interrupted, with a laugh; "I perfectly understand that, Don Lionel, hence I will not abuse your patience much longer. I only ask you for a few minutes more, and then I will set you at liberty, so be kind enough to sit down again."

The merchants obeyed, while exchanging a glance of despair on the sly. The General seemed on this night to be deaf and blind, for he saw and heard nothing. He struck a bell; at the summons a door opened, and an officer walked in.

"Captain Saldana," the General asked, "is all ready?"

"Yes, General," the Captain answered, with a respectful bow.

"Señores," the Governor continued, "I have received from the Mexican Government orders to lay on the rich merchants of this town a war tax of sixty thousand piastres in cash. As you are aware,

Señores a soldier can only obey. Still, I had taken on myself to reduce this contribution by one-half, desiring, as far as in me lay, to prove to you up to the last moment, the interest I take in you. You would not understand me; I am vexed at it, but nothing is now left me save obedience. Here is the order," he added, as he took a paper from the table and unfolded it, "it is peremptory; still, I am ready to grant you five minutes to make up your minds; but when that period has elapsed, I shall be compelled to do my duty, and you are sufficiently well acquainted with me, Señores, to know that I shall do it at all hazards."

"But, General," the old merchant hazarded, "your Excellency will permit me to observe, that the sum is enormous."

"Nonsense, Señores; there are thirty of you – it only amounts to two thousand piastres per head, which is only a trifle to you. I made you an offer to knock off half, but you were not willing."

"Business has been very flat for some years, and money is becoming excessively scarce."

"To whom do you say that, Don Lionel? I fancy I am better aware of that fact than anybody else."

"Perhaps if you were to grant us a delay of a month or a fortnight, by collecting all our resources and making enormous sacrifices, we might manage to scrape together one-half the amount."

"Unfortunately, I cannot even grant you an hour."

"In that case, General, it is impossible."

"Nonsense! I feel certain that you have not reflected. Besides, that is no affair of mine: in asking you for this money, I carry out the orders I have received, it is for your to judge whether you will consent or not. I, personally, am completely out of the affair."

"Really, General," the old merchant continued, deceived, in spite of all his craft, by the Governor's tone, "really, it is impossible for us to pay the smallest amount."

All bowed in affirmation, supporting the remarks of their spokesman.

"Very good," the General continued, still in a coolly mocking tone, "that is clearly understood, then. Still, you will not, I trust, render me responsible for the consequences which this refusal may entail on you."

"Oh, General, you cannot suppose that!"

"Thanks. You heard, Captain?" he added, turning to the officer, who was standing motionless by the door; "order in the detachment."

"Yes, General."

And the officer quitted the room. The merchants gave a start of terror, for this mysterious order caused them to reflect seriously, and their anxiety became the greater, when they heard the clang of arms in the patios, and the heavy footfalls of approaching troops.

"What is the meaning of this, General?" they cried in terror, "Can we have fallen into a trap?"

"What do you mean?" the General said. "Oh, I beg your pardon, but I forgot to communicate to you the end of this order, which concerns you particularly, however, that will be soon done. I am instructed to have all persons shot, who refuse to subscribe to the loan demanded by the government, in order to get over the serious embarrassments the malcontents occasion it."

At the same instant, the doors were thrown wide open, and a detachment of fifty men silently surrounded the American merchants. The latter were more dead than alive – they fancied they were having a frightful dream, or suffering from a horrible nightmare. Certain that the General would not hesitate to execute the threat he had made them, the merchants did not know how to get out of the scrape. The Governor himself had made no change in his demeanour – his face was still gracious, and his voice gentle.

"Come, Señors," he said, "pray accept my heartfelt sympathy. Captain, lead away these gentlemen, and treat them with all the kindness their sad position claims."

He then bowed, and prepared to leave the room.

"One moment," the old merchant said, quite appalled by the approach of death; "are there no means of settling this business, General?"

"I only know one – paying."

"I am well aware of that," he said with a sigh; "but, alas! we are ruined."

"What can I do? You know, and yourselves allowed, that I am quite unconnected with this unhappy affair."

"Alas," the poor merchants exclaimed in chorus, "you will not kill us, surely, General; we are fathers of families, what will become of our wives and children?"

"I pity you, but, unfortunately, can do no more than that."

"General," they cried, falling at his knees, "in the name of what you hold dearest, have pity on us, we implore you."

"I am really in despair at what has occurred, and should like to come to your aid; unhappily I do not see my way, and then, again, you do nothing to help me."

"Alas!" they repeated, sobbing and clasping their hands desperately.

"I am well aware that you have not the money, and there is the insurmountable difficulty, believe me. However, let us see," he added, apparently reflecting.

The poor devils, who felt themselves so near death, looked at him with eyes sparkling with hope. There was a rather lengthened silence, during which you might have heard the heart throbs of these men, who knew that life and death depended on the man who held them panting under his eye.

"Listen," he continued, "this is all I can do for you, and believe me, that, in acting thus, I assume an enormous responsibility; there are thirty of you, I think?"

"Yes, Excellency," they exclaimed unanimously.

"Well, only ten of you shall be shot. You shall select them yourselves, and those you designate will be immediately led into the patio and executed. But now ask me for nothing further, as I shall be constrained to refuse you; and that you may have time to make your selection carefully, I grant you ten minutes."

This was a proof of incontestable cleverness on the part of the General. By breaking, through this decision, the agreement that had hitherto prevailed among the merchants, by opposing them to one another, he was certain of obtaining the result which, without, he would probably not have secured. For we prefer to suppose, for the honour of the General, whose career up to this day had been so free from excesses, and acts of this nature, that the threat of death was only a mode employed to cause these men, whom he knew to be opposed to the government he represented, into undoing their purse strings, and that he would not have been so cruel as to carry matters to extremities, and shoot in cold blood thirty of the most respectable townsmen.

Whatever General Rubio's intentions might have been, however, the Americans believed him, and acted accordingly. After two or three minutes' hesitation, the merchants came one after the other, to give their consent to the loan. But their tergiversation had cost them a thousand dollars a-piece. It was dear, hence we must allow that they consented with very ill grace. But the soldiers were there ready to obey the slightest sign from their chief; the muskets were loaded, and the patio two paces off. There was no chance of getting out of it.

Still, the General did not let them off so cheaply. The Americans were led home one after the other by four soldiers and an officer, whose instructions were to shoot the prisoner at the slightest attempted escape, and it was not till the General had the two thousand piastres in his hands that a second prisoner was sent home in the same fashion. This went on until the whole sum was collected, and the only persons remaining in the saloon were the General and old Lionel.

"Oh, Excellency!" he said, reproachfully, "How is it possible that you, who have hitherto been so kind to us, could have had the thought of committing such an act of cruelty?"

The General burst out laughing.

"Do you imagine I would have done it?" he said, with a shrug of his shoulder.

The merchant struck his forehead with a gesture of despair.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "We were idiots."

"Hang it, did you have such a bad opinion of me? Caramba, Señor, I do not commit such acts as that."

"Ah," the merchant said, with a laugh, "I have not paid yet."

"Which means?"

"That now I know what I have to expect. I shall not pay."

"Really, I believed you cleverer than that."

"Why so?"

"What? You do not understand that a man may hesitate to execute thirty persons, but when it comes to only one man, who, like yourself, has a great number of misdeeds on his conscience, his execution is considered an act of justice, and carried out without hesitation?"

"Then, you would shoot me?"

"Without the slightest remorse."

"Come, come, General, you are decidedly stronger than I am."

"You flatter me, Señor Lionel."

"No, I tell you what I think; it was cleverly played."

"You are a judge."

"Thanks," he answered, with a modest smile. "To spare you the trouble of having me executed, I will execute myself," he added, good temperedly, as he felt his coat pocket.

He drew out a pocketbook crammed with Bank of England notes, and made up the sum of two thousand piastres, which he laid on the table.

"I have now only to thank you," the General said, as he picked up the notes.

"And I you, Excellency," he answered.

"Why so?"

"Because you have given me a lesson by which I shall profit when the occasion offers."

"Take care, Señor Lionel," the General said, meaningly; "you will not, perhaps, come across a man so good-natured as myself."

The merchant restored the portfolio to his pocket, bowed to the General, and went out. It was three o'clock; all had been finished in less than an hour; it was quick work.

"Poor scamps, after all, those gringos," the General said, when he was alone; "oh, if we had not to deal with mountaineers and campesinos we should soon settle this population."

"General," said an aide-de-camp, as he opened the door, "Colonel Melendez asks whether you will deign to receive him, in spite of the late hour?"

"Is Colonel Melendez here?" the General asked in surprise.

"He has this instant arrived, General; can he come in?"

"Of course; show him in at once."

In a few minutes the Colonel appeared.

"Here you are at last," the General cried, as he went to meet him; "I fancied you were either dead or a prisoner."

"It was a tossup that one of the two events did not happen."

"Oh, oh! Then you have something serious to tell me."

"Most serious, General."

"Hang it, my friend, take a chair and let us talk."

"Before all, General," the Colonel remarked, "do you know our position?"

"What do you mean?"

"Only, General, that you may possibly be ignorant of certain events that have happened."

"I think I have heard grave events rumoured, though I do not exactly know what has happened."

"Listen, then! The *Libertad* corvette is in the hands of the insurgents."

"Impossible!" the General exclaimed, bounding in his chair.

"General," the young officer said, in a mournful voice, "I have to inform you of something more serious still."

"Pardon me, my friend, perhaps I am mistaken, but it seems to me highly improbable that you could have obtained such positive news during the pleasure trip you have been making."

"Not only, General, have the insurgents seized the *Libertad*, but they have also made themselves masters of the Fort of the Point."

"Oh!" the General shouted, as he rose passionately, "this time, Colonel, you are badly informed; the Fort of the Point is impregnable."

"It was taken in an hour by thirty Freebooters, commanded by the Jaguar."

The General hid his face in his hands, with an expression of despair impossible to render.

"Oh! It is too much at once," he exclaimed.

"That is not all," the Colonel continued, sharply.

"What have you to tell me more terrible than what you have just said?"

"A thing that will make you leap with rage and blush with shame, General."

The old soldier laid his hand on his heart, as if wishful to arrest its hurried beating, and then said to the Colonel, in a tone of supreme resignation —

"Speak, my friend; I am ready to hear all."

The Colonel remained silent for some minutes; the despair of the brave old soldier made him shiver.

"General," he said, "perhaps it would be better to defer till tomorrow what I have to say to you; you appear fatigued, and a few hours, more or less, are not of much consequence."

"Colonel Melendez," the General said, giving the young officer a searching glance, "under present circumstances a minute is worth an age. I order you to speak."

"The insurgents request a parley," the Colonel said, distinctly.

"To parley with me?" the General answered, with an almost imperceptible tinge of irony in his voice. "These Caballeros do me a great honour. And what about, pray?"

"As they think themselves capable of seizing Galveston, they wish to avoid bloodshed by treating with you."

The General rose, and walked sharply up and down the room for some minutes. At length he stopped before the Colonel.

"And what would you do in my place?"

"I should treat," the young officer replied, unhesitatingly.

CHAPTER III

THE RETREAT

After this frankly expressed opinion there was a rather lengthened silence, and the Colonel was the first to resume the conversation.

"General," he went on, "you evidently know nothing of the events that have occurred during the last four and twenty hours."

"How could I know anything? These demons of insurgents have organised Guerillas, who hold the country and so thoroughly intercept the communications, that out of twenty spies I have sent out, not one has returned."

"And not one will return, be assured."

"What is to be done, then?"

"Do you really wish for my advice, General?"

"On my honour, I desire to know your real opinion; for you are the only one among us, I fancy, who really knows what is going on."

"I am aware of it. Listen to me, then, and do not feel astonished at anything you may hear, for all is positively true. The information I am about to have the honour of communicating to you was given me, by the Jaguar himself, scarce three hours back, at the Salto del Frayle, whither he invited me to come to converse about some matters in no way connected with politics."

"Very good," the General remarked, with a slight smile. "Go on, I am listening to you with the deepest attention."

The Colonel felt himself blush under his chief's slightly ironical smile; still he recovered himself, and continued —

"In two words, this is our position: while a few bold men, aided by a privateer brig under the American flag, carried by surprise the *Libertad*—"

"One of the finest ships in our navy!" the General interrupted, with a sigh.

"Yes, General, but unhappily it is now an accomplished fact. While this was taking place, other insurgents, commanded by the Jaguar in person, got into the Fort of the Point, and carried it almost without a blow."

"But what you tell me is impossible!" the old soldier interrupted with a burst of passion.

"I tell you nothing that is not rigorously true, General."

"The vague rumours that have reached me, led me to suppose that the insurgents had dealt us a fresh blow but I was far from suspecting such a frightful catastrophe."

"I swear to you, on my honour, as, a soldier, General, that I only tell you the most rigid truth:"

"I believe you, my friend, for I know how brave and worthy of confidence you are. Still, the news you give me is so frightful, that, in spite of myself, I should like to be able to doubt it."

"Unhappily, that is impossible."

The General, suffering from a fury which was the more terrible as it was concentrated, walked up and down the room, clenching his fists, and muttering broken sentences. The Colonel looked after him sadly, not dreaming of offering him any of those conventional consolations which, far from offering any relief to pain, only render it sharper and more poignant. At the end of some minutes, the General succeeded so far in mastering his emotion as to draw back to his heart the annoyance he felt. He sat down again by the Colonel's side, and took his hand kindly.

"You have not yet given me your advice," he said with a ghost of a smile.

"If you really insist on my speaking, I will do so, General," the young man answered, "though I am convinced beforehand that our ideas are absolutely similar on this question."

"That is probable. Still, my dear Colonel, the opinion of a man of your merits is always precious, and I should be curious to know if I really agree with you."

"Be it so, General. This is what I think: we have but insufficient forces to sustain an assault effectively. The town is very badly disposed toward us: I am convinced that it only wants an opportunity to rise and make common cause with the insurgents. On the other hand, it would be a signal act of folly to shut ourselves up in a town with an issue, where we should be forced to surrender – an indelible stain for the Mexican army. For the present, we have no succour to expect from the government of Mexico, which is too much engaged in defending itself against the ambitious men of every description who hold it continually in check, to dream of coming effectively to our assistance, either by sending us reinforcements, or carrying out a diversion in our favour."

"What you say is unfortunately only too true; we are reduced to reckon on ourselves alone."

"Now, if we obstinately shut ourselves up in the town, it is evident to me that we shall be compelled eventually to surrender. As the insurgents are masters of the sea, it is a mere question of time. On the other hand, if we quit it of our free will, the position will be singularly simplified."

"But, in that case, we shall be compelled to treat with these scoundrels?"

"I thought so for an instant; but I believe we can easily avoid that misfortune."

"In what way? speak, speak, my friend."

"The flag of truce the insurgents send you, will not arrive at the cabildo till nine in the morning; what prevents you, General, evacuating the town, ere he makes his appearance?"

"Hum!" said the General, growing more and more attentive to the young man's remarks. "Then you propose flight to me?"

"Not at all," the Colonel retorted; "remember, General, that the position is admitted, that in war, recoiling is not flying. If we render ourselves masters of the country by leaving the town to the insurgents, by this skilful retreat we place them in the difficult position in which we are today. In the open plains, and through our discipline, we shall be enabled to hold our own against a force four times our strength, which would not be possible here; then, when we have obtained those reinforcements Santa Anna will probably himself bring us ere long, we will re-enter Galveston, which the insurgents will not attempt to defend against us. Such is my opinion, General, and the plan I should adopt, had I the honour to be Governor of this State."

"Yes," the General answered, "the advice you offer would have some chance of success, were it possible to follow it. Unluckily, it would be madness to reckon on Santa Anna's support: he would allow us to be crushed, not perhaps of his own will, but compelled by circumstances, and impeded by the constant obstacles the Senate creates for him."

"I cannot share your opinion on that point, General; be well assured that the Senate, ill-disposed though it may be to the President of the Republic, is no more desirous to lose Texas than he is. Besides, under the present circumstances, we must make a virtue of necessity; it would be great madness for us to await here the enemy's attack."

The General seemed to hesitate for some minutes, then, suddenly forming a determination, he rang a bell. An aide-de-camp appeared.

"Let all the general officers assemble here within half an hour," he said. "Begone."

The aide-de-camp bowed, and left the room.

"You wish it," the General continued, turning to the Colonel; "well, be it so. I consent to follow your advice. Besides, it is, perhaps, the only chance of safety left us at this moment."

In Europe, where we are accustomed to see great masses of men come in contact on the field of battle, it would cause a smile to hear the name of army given to what, among us, would not even be a regiment. But we must bear in mind that the new world, excepting North America, is very sparsely populated; the inhabitants are scattered over immense districts, and the most imposing regular forces rarely attain the number of five or six thousand men. An army is usually composed of fifteen to eighteen hundred troops, all told, infantry, cavalry, and artillery. And what soldiers! ignorant, badly

paid, badly armed, only half obeying their Chiefs, whom they know to be as ignorant as themselves, and in whom they naturally have not the slightest confidence.

In Mexico, the military profession, far from being honoured as it is in Europe, is, on the contrary, despised, so that the officers and soldiers are generally blemished men to whom every other career would be closed. The officers, with a few honourable exceptions, are men ruined by debt and in reputation, whose ignorance of their profession is so great, that one of our sergeants could give them lessons. As for the soldiers, they are only recruited among the leperos, thieves, and assassins. Hence the army is a real scourge for the country. It is the army that makes and unmakes the Governments, which succeed each other with perfectly headlong rapidity in Mexico; for, since its pretended emancipation, this unhappy country has witnessed nearly three hundred pronunciamientos, all organised in the army, and carried through for the benefit of the officers, whose only object is to be promoted.

Still, what we say is not absolute. We have known several Mexican officers, highly educated and honourable men; unluckily their number is so limited, that they are impotent to remedy the evil, and are constrained to put up with what they cannot prevent. General Rubio was undeniably one of the most honourable officers in the Mexican army. Still, we have seen that he did not hesitate to plunder the very persons whom his duty obliged him to protect against all annoyance. My readers can judge by this example, selected from a thousand, what tricks the other Generals play.

The corps d'armée placed under the command of General Rubio, and shut up with him in Galveston, only amounted to nine hundred and fifty officers and men, to whom might be found at a given signal some three hundred lanceros scattered in little posts of observation along the coast. Though incapable of effectually defending the town, this force, well directed, might hold in check for a long time the worse armed, and certainly worse disciplined insurgents.

The General had rapidly seen the value of the Colonel's advice. The plan the latter proposed was, in truth, the only practicable one, and hence he accepted it at once. Still, it was necessary to act with vigour; the sun was rising, and the coming day was Sunday; hence it was important that the army should have evacuated the town before the end of mass, that is to say, eleven in the morning, for the following reason:

In all the slave states, and especially in Texas, a strange custom exists, reminding us distantly of the Lupercalia of ancient Rome. On a Sunday masters grant their slaves entire liberty; one day in seven is certainly not much; but it is a great deal for the Southern States, where slavery is so sternly and strictly established. These poor slaves, who seek compensation for six days of hard servitude, enjoy with childish delight their few holiday hours: not caring a whit for the torrid heat that transforms the streets into perfect ovens, they spread over the town singing, dancing, or galloping at full speed in carts belonging to their masters which they have appropriated. On this day the town belongs to them, they behave almost as they please, no one interfering or trying to check their frolic.

General Rubio rightly feared lest the merchants of Galveston, whom he had so cleverly compelled to disgorge, might try to take their revenge by exciting the slaves to mutiny against the Mexicans, and they would probably be ready enough to do so, delighted at finding a pretext for disorder, without troubling themselves further as to the more or less grave results of their mutiny. Hence, while his aide-de-camp performed the commission he had entrusted to him, General Rubio ordered Colonel Melendez to take with him all the soldiers on duty at the Cabildo, place himself at their head, and seize the requisite number of boats for the transport of the troops to the main land.

This order was not difficult to execute. The Colonel, without losing a moment, went to the port, and not experiencing the slightest opposition from the captains and masters of the vessels, who were well aware, besides, that a refusal would not be listened to, assembled a flotilla of fifteen light vessels, amply sufficient for the transport of the garrison. In the meanwhile, the aide-de-camp had performed his duties with intelligence and celerity, so that within twenty minutes all the Mexican officers were collected at the General's house.

The latter, without losing a moment, explained to them in a voice that admitted of no reply, the position in which the capture of the fort placed the garrison, the necessity of not letting the communication with the mainland be cut off, and his intention of evacuating the town with the least possible delay. The officers, as the General expected, were unanimous in applauding his resolution, for in their hearts they were not at all anxious to sustain a siege in which only hard blows could be received. Taking the field pleased them, on the contrary, for many reasons: in the first place, the pillage of the estancias and the haciendas offered them great profits, and then they had a hope of taking a brilliant revenge on the insurgents for the numerous defeats the latter had inflicted on them since they had been immured in the town.

Orders were therefore immediately given by the General to march the troops down to the quay with arms and baggage; still, in order to avoid any cause for disorder, the movement was executed very slowly, and the Colonel, who presided over the embarkation, was careful to establish numerous posts at the entrance of each street leading to the port, so that the populace were kept away from the soldiers, and no disputes were possible between them. So soon as one boat had its complement of troops on board it pushed off, though it did not start, as the General wished the entire flotilla to leave the town together.

It was a magnificent day, the sun dazzled, and the bay sparkled like a burning-glass. The people, kept at a distance by the bayonets of the soldiers, watched in gloomy silence the embarkation of the troops. Alarmed by this movement, which they did not at all understand, and were so far from suspecting the departure of the Mexican garrison, that they supposed, on the contrary, that the General was proceeding with a portion of his troops to make an expedition against the insurgents.

When all the soldiers, with the exception of those intended to protect the retreat of their comrades, had embarked, the General sent for the alcade mayor, the Juez de letras, and the corregidor. These magistrates came to the General, concealing, but poorly, under a feigned eagerness, the secret alarm caused them by the order they had just received. In spite of the rapidity with which the troops effected their embarkation, it was by this time nearly nine o'clock. At the moment when the General was preparing to address the magistrates whom he had so unexpectedly convened, Colonel Melendez entered the cabildo, and after bowing respectfully to the Governor, said —

"General, the person to whom I had the honour of referring last night is awaiting your good pleasure."

"Ah! Ah!" the General replied, biting his moustache with an ironical air, "Is he there, then?"

"Yes, General; I have promised to act as his introducer to your Excellency."

"Very good. Request the person to enter."

"What!" the Colonel exclaimed, in surprise, "Does your Excellency intend to confer with him in the presence of witnesses?"

"Certainly, and I regret there are not more here. Bring in the person, my dear Colonel."

"Has your Excellency carefully reflected on the order you have done me the honour to give me?"

"Hang it! I should think so. I am sure you will be satisfied with what I am about to do."

"As you insist, General," the Colonel said with marked hesitation, "I can only obey."

"Yes, yes, my friend, obey; do not be uneasy, I tell you."

The Colonel withdrew without any further remark, and in a few moments returned, bringing John Davis with him. The American had changed his dress for one more appropriate to the circumstances. His demeanour was grave, and step haughty, though not arrogant. On entering the room he bowed to the General courteously, and prepared to address him. General Rubio returned his bow with equal courtesy, but stopped him by a sign.

"Pardon me, sir," he said to him, "be kind enough to excuse me for a few moments. Perhaps, after listening to what I shall have the honour of saying to these Caballeros, you will consider your mission to me as finished."

The American made no further reply than a bow, and waited.

"Señores," the General then said, addressing the magistrates, "orders I have this moment received compel me to leave the town at once with the troops I have the honour to command. During my absence I entrust the direction of affairs to you, feeling convinced that you will act in all things prudently and for the common welfare. Still, you must be cautious not to let yourselves be influenced by evil counsels, or led by certain passions to which I will not allude now, particularly here. On my return, which will not be long delayed, I shall ask of you a strict account of your acts during my absence. Weigh my words carefully, and be assured that nothing you may do will be concealed from me."

"Then, General," the Alcade said, "that is the motive of the movement of the troops we have witnessed this morning. Do you really intend to depart?"

"You have heard me, Señor."

"Yes, I have heard you, General; but in my turn, in my capacity as magistrate, I will ask you by what right you, the military governor of the state, leave one of its principal ports to its own resources in the present critical state of affairs, when the revolution is before our gates, and make not the slightest attempt to defend us? Is it really acting as defenders of this hapless town thus to withdraw, leaving it, after your departure, a prey to that anarchy which, as you are aware, only the presence of your forces has hitherto prevented breaking out? The burden you wish to lay upon us, General, we decline to accept; we will not assume the responsibility of so heavy a task; we cannot bear the penalty of another person's faults. The last Mexican soldier will scarcely have left the town, ere we shall have handed in our resignations, not being at all desirous to sacrifice ourselves for a government whose conduct toward us is stamped with egotism and cold-blooded cruelty. That is what I have to say to you in my name and in that of my colleagues. Now, in your turn, you will act as you think proper, but you are warned that you can in no way reckon upon us."

"Ah, ah, Señores!" the General exclaimed, with an angry frown, "Is that the way you venture to act? Take care, I have not gone yet; I am still master of Galveston, and can institute a severe example before my departure."

"Do so, General, we will undergo without a murmur any punishment you may please to inflict on us, even were it death."

"Very good," the General replied, in a voice quivering with passion; "as it is so, I leave you free to act, according to circumstances. But you will have a severe account to render to me, and that perhaps shortly."

"Not we, Excellency, for your departure will be the signal of our resignation."

"Then you have made up your mind to plunge the country into anarchy?"

"What can we do? What means have we to prevent it? No, no, General, we are not the persons who deserve reproach."

General Rubio in his heart felt the logic of this reasoning; he saw perfectly well how egotistic and cruel his conduct was toward the townsmen, whom he thus surrendered, without any means of defence, to the fury of the popular passion. Unfortunately, the position was no longer tenable – the town could not be defended, hence he must depart, without answering the decade; for what reply could he have made him? The General gave his aides-de-camp a sign to follow him, and prepared to leave the cabildo.

"Pardon me for detaining you for a moment, General," John Davis said: "but I should have liked to have a short conversation with your Excellency, prior to your departure."

"For what good object, sir?" the General answered, sharply; "did you not hear what was said in this room? Return to those who sent you, and report to them what you have seen, that will be sufficient."

"Still, General," he urged, "I should have desired –"

"What?" the General interrupted, and then added, ironically, "To make me proposals, I presume, on the part of the insurgents. Know, sir, that whatever may happen, I will never consent to

treat with rebels. Thank Colonel Melendez, who was kind enough to introduce you to my presence. Had it not been for his intervention I should have had you hung as a traitor to your country. Begone! – or stay!" he added, on reflection; "I will not leave you here after I am gone. Seize this man!"

"General, take care," the American replied. "I am intrusted with a mission; arresting me is a violation of the law of nations."

"Nonsense, sir," the General continued, with a shrug of his shoulders, "why, you must be mad? Do I recognize the right of the persons from whom you come to send me a flag of truce? Do I know who you are? Viva Dios! In what age are we living, then, that rebels dare to treat on equal terms with the government against which they have revolted? You are my prisoner, sir! But be at your ease I have no intention of ill-treating you, or retaining you any length of time. You will accompany us to the mainland, that is all. When we have arrived there you will be free to go wherever you please; so you see, sir, that those Mexicans, whom you like to represent in such dark colours, are not quite so ferocious as you would have them supposed."

"We have always rendered justice to your heart and loyalty, General."

"I care very little for the opinion you and yours have of me. Come on, sir."

"I protest, General, against this illegal arrest."

"Protest as much as you please, sir, but follow me!"

As resistance would have been madness, Davis obeyed.

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "I follow you, General. After all, I have not much cause to complain, for everything is fair in war."

They went out. In spite of the dazzling brilliancy of the sun, whose beams spread a tropical heat through the town, the entire population encumbered the streets and squares. The multitude was silent, however; it witnessed with calm stoicism the departure of the Mexican army; not an effort was attempted by the people to break the cordon of sentries drawn up on the fort. When the General appeared, the crowd made way respectfully to let him pass, and many persons saluted him.

The inhabitants of Galveston detested the Mexican Government; but they did justice to the Governor, whose honest and moderate administration had effectually protected them during the whole time he remained among them, instead of taking advantage of his authority to plunder and tyrannize over them. They saw with pleasure the departure of the troops, with sorrow that of the General. The old soldier advanced with a calm step, talking loudly with his officers, and courteously returning the bows he received, with smiling face and assured demeanour. He reached the port in a few minutes, and at his order the last soldiers embarked. The General, with no other weapon but his sword, remained for some minutes almost alone in the midst of the crowd that followed him to the quay. Two aides-de-camp alone accompanied him. John Davis had already entered a boat, which took him on board the schooner, in which the General himself intended to cross.

"General," one of the aides-de-camp said, "all the troops have embarked, and we are now only waiting your Excellency's pleasure."

"Very good, Captain," he answered. He then turned to the magistrates, who had walked by his side from the cabildo. "Farewell, señores," he said, taking off his hat, whose white plumes swept the ground, "farewell, till we meet again. I pray Heaven, from my heart, that, during my short absence, you will be enabled to avoid the scenes of disorder and anarchy which the effervescence of parties too often occasions. We shall meet again sooner than you may possibly suppose. Long live Mexico!"

"Long live Mexico!" the two officers shouted.

The crowd remained dumb; not a man took up the General's shout. He shook his head sadly, bowed for the last time, and went down into the boat waiting for him. Two minutes later the Mexican flotilla had left Galveston.

"When shall we return?" the General muttered, sadly, with eyes fixed on the town, whose buildings were slowly disappearing from sight.

"Never!" John Davis whispered in his ear; and this prophetic voice affected the old soldier to the depth of his heart, and filled it with bitterness.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN DAVIS

The Mexican flotilla, impelled by a favourable breeze, accomplished the passage from the island to the mainland in a comparatively very brief period. The brig and corvette, anchored under the battery of the fort, made no move to disturb the General; and it was evident that the Texans did not suspect the events taking place at this moment, but awaited the return of their Envoy ere making any demonstration.

Colonel Melendez had seized the few boats capable of standing out to sea in Galveston harbour, so that the magistrates could not, had they wished it, have sent a boat to the Texans to inform them of the precipitate departure of the Mexican garrison. The General's resolution had been formed so suddenly, and executed with such rapidity, that the partisans of the revolution in the town, and who were ignorant of the cause of that retreat, felt singularly embarrassed by the liberty so singularly granted them, and did not know what arrangements to make, or how to enter into communication with their friends, whose position they were ignorant of. Only one man could have enlightened them, and he was John Davis. But General Rubio, foreseeing what would have inevitably happened had he left the ex-slave dealer behind him, had been very careful to carry him off with him.

The landing of the troops was effected under the most favourable conditions. The point they steered for was in the hands of the Mexicans, who had a strong detachment there, so that the army got ashore without arousing the slightest suspicion, or any attempt to prevent the landing. The General's first care, so soon as he reached the mainland, was to send off spies in every direction, in order to discover, were it possible, the enemy's plans, and whether they were preparing to make a forward movement.

The boats which had been used to convey the troops were, till further orders, drawn up on the beach, through fear lest the insurgents might make use of them. Two schooners, however, on each of which two guns were put, received orders to cruise in the bay, and pick up all boats the inhabitants of Galveston might attempt to send off to the Chief of the Texan army.

The banks of the Rio Trinidad are charming and deliciously diversified, bordered by rushes and reeds, and covered with mangroves, amid which sport thousands of flamingoes, cranes, herons, and wild ducks, which cackle noisily as they swim about in tranquil and transparent waters. About four miles from the sea, the banks rise gradually with insensible undulations, and form meadows covered with a tall and tufted grass, on which grow gigantic mahogany trees with their oblong leaves, and Peru trees with their red fruit, and magnolias, whose large white flowers shed an intoxicating perfume. All these trees, fastened together by lianas which envelop them in their inextricable network, serve as a retreat for a population of red and grey squirrels, that may be seen perpetually leaping from branch to branch, and of cardinal and mocking birds. The centzontle, the exquisite Mexican nightingale, so soon as night arrives, causes this picturesque solitude to re-echo with its gentle strains.

On the side of a hill that descends in a gentle slope to the river, glisten the white walls of some twenty cottages, with their flat roofs and green shutters, hanging in clusters from the scarped side of the hill, and hidden like timorous birds amid the foliage. These few cottages, built so far from the noise of the world, constitute the rancho of San Isidro.

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of this obscure nook, General Rubio, who felt the necessity of choosing for the site of his camp a strong strategic position, came suddenly to trouble their peace, and recall them rather roughly to the affairs of this world. In fact, from this species of eagles' nests, nothing was easier than for the General to send his columns in all directions. The Mexican army, therefore, marched straight on the rancho of San Isidro, where it arrived about midday. At the unexpected

appearance of the troops, the inhabitants were so terrified that, hastily loading themselves with their most valuable articles, they left their houses and fled to hide themselves in the woods.

Whatever efforts the General might make to prevent them, or bring them back to their houses, the poor Indians offered a deaf ear to all, and were resolved not to remain in the vicinity of the troops. The Mexicans therefore remained sole possessors of the rancho, and at once installed themselves in their peaceful conquest, whose appearance was completely changed within a few hours. Tall trees, flowers, and lianas, nothing was respected. Enormous masses of wood lay that same evening on the ground, which they had so long protected with their beneficent shadow. The very birds were constrained to quit their pleasant retreat, to seek a shelter in the neighbouring forest.

When all the approaches to the forest had been cleared for a radius of about twelve hundred yards, the General had the place surrounded by powerful barricades, which transformed the peaceful village into a fortress almost impregnable, with the weak resources the insurgents possessed. The trees on the interior of the rancho were alone left standing, not for the purpose of affording, but to conceal from the enemy the strength of the corps encamped at this spot.

The house of the Indian Alcade, somewhat larger and more comfortably built than the rest, was selected by the General as headquarters. This house stood in the centre of the pueblo; from its azotea the country could be surveyed for a great distance, and no movement in Galveston roads escaped notice. The Texans could not stir without being immediately discovered and signaled by the sentry, whom the General was careful to place in this improvised observatory.

At sunset all the preliminary preparations were finished, and the rancho rendered safe against a coup de main. About seven in the evening the General, after listening to the report of the spies, was sitting in front of the house in the shadow of a magnificent magnolia, whose graceful branches crossed above his head. He was smoking a papillo, while conversing with several of his officers, when an aide-de-camp came up and told him that the person who had come to him that morning from the rebels, earnestly requested the favour of a few minutes' conversation. The General gave an angry start, and was about to refuse, when Colonel Melendez interposed, representing to the General that he could not do so without breaking his word, which he had himself pledged in the morning.

"As it is so," the General said, "let him come."

"Why," the Colonel continued, "refuse to listen to the propositions this man is authorized to offer you?"

"What good is it at this moment? There is always a time to do so if circumstances compel it. Now our situation is excellent; we have not to accept proposals, but, on the contrary, are in a position to impose those that may suit us."

These words were uttered in a tone that compelled the Colonel to silence; he bowed respectfully, and withdrew softly from the circle of officers. At the same moment John Davis arrived, led by the aide-de-camp. The American's face was gloomy and frowning; he saluted the General by raising his hand to his hat, but did not remove it; then he drew himself up haughtily and crossed his hands on his chest. The General regarded him for a moment with repressed curiosity.

"What do you want?" he asked him.

"The fulfilment of your promise," Davis replied drily.

"I do not understand you."

"What do you say? When you made me a prisoner this morning, in contempt of the military code and the laws of nations, did you not tell me that so soon as we reached the mainland, the liberty you had deprived me of by an unworthy abuse of strength, would be immediately restored to me?"

"I did say so," the General answered meekly.

"Well, I demand the fulfilment of that promise; I ought to have left your camp long ago."

"Did you not tell me that you were deputed to me by the rebel army, in order to submit certain propositions?"

"Yes, but you refused to hear me."

"Because the moment was not favourable for such a communication. Imperious duties prevented me then giving your words all the attention that they doubtless deserve."

"Well, and now?"

"Now I am ready to listen to you."

The American looked at the officers that surrounded him.

"Before all these persons?" he asked.

"Why not? These Caballeros belong to the staff of my army, they are as interested as I am in this interview."

"Perhaps so: still, I would observe, General, that it would be better for our discussion to be private."

"I am the sole judge, Señor, of the propriety of my actions. If it please you to be silent, be so; if not, speak, I am listening."

"There is one thing I wish to settle first."

"What is it?"

"Do you regard me as an envoy, or merely as your prisoner?"

"Why this question, whose purport I do not understand?"

"Pardon me, General," he said with an ironical smile, "but you understand me perfectly well, and so do these Caballeros – if a prisoner, you have the right to force silence upon me; as a deputy, on the other hand, I enjoy certain immunities, under, the protection of which I can speak frankly and clearly, and no one can bid me be silent, so long as I do not go beyond the limits of my mission. That is the reason why I wish first to settle my position with you."

"Your position has not changed to my knowledge. You are an envoy of rebels."

"Oh, you recognise it now?"

"I always did so."

"Why did you make me a prisoner, then?"

"You are shifting the question. I explained to you a moment ago, for what reason I was, to my great regret, compelled to defer our interview till a more favourable moment, that is all."

"Very good, I am willing to admit it. Be kind enough, General, to read this letter," he added, as he drew from his pocket a large envelope, which, at a sign from the General, he handed to him.

Night had fallen some time before, and two soldiers brought up torches of acote-wood, which one of the aides-de-camp lit. The General opened the letter and read it attentively, by the ruddy light of the torches. When he had finished reading, he folded up the letter again pensively, and thrust it into the breast of his uniform. There was a moment's silence, which the General at last broke.

"Who is the man who gave you this letter?"

"Did you not read his signature?"

"He may have employed a go-between."

"With me, that is not necessary."

"Then, he is here?"

"I have not to tell you who sent me, but merely discuss with you the proposals contained in the letter."

The General gave a passionate start.

"Reply, Señor, to the questions I do you the honour of asking you," he said, "if you do not wish to have reasons for repenting."

"What is the use of threatening me, General? You will learn nothing from me," he answered firmly.

"As it is so, listen to me attentively, and carefully weigh your answer, before opening your mouth to give it."

"Speak, General."

"This moment, – you understand, this moment, Señor, you will confess to me, where the man is who gave you this letter, if not – "

"Well?" the American nominally interrupted.

"Within ten minutes you will be hanging from a branch of that tree, close to you."

Davis gave him a disdainful glance.

"On my soul," he said ironically, "you Mexicans have a strange way of treating envoys."

"I do not recognise the right of a scoundrel, who is outlawed for his crimes, and whose head is justly forfeited, to send me envoys, and treat with me on an equal footing."

"The man whom you seek in vain to brand, General, is a man of heart, as you know better than anybody else. But gratitude is as offensive to you as it is to all haughty minds, and you cannot forgive the person to whom we allude, for having saved, not only your life, but also your honour."

John Davis might have gone on speaking much longer, for the General, who was as pale as a corpse, and whose features were contracted by a terrible emotion he sought in vain to master, seemed incapable of uttering a syllable. Colonel Melendez had quietly approached the circle. For some minutes he had listened to the words the speakers interchanged, with gradually augmenting passion; judging it necessary, therefore, to interpose ere matters had reached such a point as rendered any hope of conciliation impossible, he said to John Davis, as he laid his hand on his shoulder:

"Silence! You are under the lion's claw, take care that it does not rend you."

"Under the tiger's claw you mean, Colonel Melendez," he exclaimed, with much animation.

"What! Shall I listen calmly to an insult offered the noblest heart, the greatest man, the most devoted and sincere patriot, and not attempt to defend him and confound his calumniator? Come, Colonel, that would be cowardice, and you know me well enough to feel assured that no consideration of personal safety would force me to do so."

"Enough," the General interrupted him, in a loud voice, "that man is right; under the influence of painful reminiscences I uttered words that I sincerely regret. I should wish them forgotten."

John Davis bowed courteously.

"General," he said, respectfully, "I thank you for this retraction; I expected nothing less from your sense of honour."

The General made no answer; he walked rapidly up and down, suffering from a violent agitation.

The officers, astonished at this strange scene, which they did not at all understand, looked restlessly at each other, though not venturing to express their surprise otherwise. The General walked up to John Davis and stopped in front of him.

"Master Davis," he said to him, in a harsh and snapping voice, "you are a stout-hearted and rough-spoken man. Enough of this; return to the man who sent you, and tell him this: 'General Don José Maria Rubio will not consent to enter into any relations with you; he hates you personally, and only wishes to meet you sword in hand. No political question will be discussed between you and him until you have consented to give him the satisfaction he demands.' Engrave these words well in your memory, Señor, in order to repeat them exactly to the said person."

"I will repeat them exactly."

"Very good. Now, begone, we have nothing more to say to each other. Colonel Melendez, be good enough to give this Caballero a horse, and accompany him to the outposts."

"One word more, General."

"Speak."

"In what way shall I bring you the person's answer?"

"Bring it yourself, if you are not afraid to enter my camp a second time."

"You are well aware that I fear nothing, General. I will bring you the answer."

"I wish it; good-bye."

"Farewell," the American answered.

And bowing to the company, he withdrew, accompanied by the Colonel.

"You played a dangerous game," the latter said, when they had gone a few steps; "the General might very easily have had you hung."

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"He would not have dared," he said, disdainfully.

"Oh, oh! and why not, if you please?"

"How does that concern you, Colonel; am I not free?"

"You are."

"That must be sufficient for you, and prove to you that I am not mistaken."

The Colonel led the American to his quarters, and asked him to walk in for a moment, while a horse was being got ready.

"Master Davis," he said to him, "be good enough to select from those weapons, whose excellence I guarantee, such as best suit you."

"Why so?" he remarked.

"Confound it! you are going to travel by night; you do not know whom you may meet. I fancy that under such circumstances it is prudent to take certain precautions."

The two men exchanged a glance; they understood each other.

"That is true," the American said, carelessly; "now that I come to think of it, the roads are not safe. As you permit me, I will take these pistols, this rifle, machete, and knife."

"As you please, but pray take some ammunition as well; without that your firearms would be of no service."

"By Jove! Colonel, you think of everything, you are really an excellent fellow," he added, while carelessly loading his rifle and pistols, and fastening to his belt a powder flask and bullet pouch.

"You overwhelm me, Master Davis; I am only doing now what you would do in my place."

"Agreed. But you display a graciousness which confuses me."

"A truce, if you please, to further compliments. Here is your horse, which my assistant is bringing up."

"But he is leading a second; do you intend to accompany me beyond the advanced posts?"

"Oh, only for a few yards, if my company does not seem to you too wearisome."

"Oh, Colonel, I shall always be delighted to have you for a companion."

All these remarks were made with an accent of excessive courtesy, in which, however, could be traced an almost imperceptible tinge of fun and biting raillery. The two men left the house and mounted their horses. The night was limpid and clear; millions of stars sparkled in the sky, which seemed studded with diamonds; the moon spread afar its white and fantastic light; the mysterious night breeze bowed the tufted crests of the trees, and softly rippled the silvery waters of the Rio Trinidad, as they died away amorously on the bank.

The two men walked side by side, passing without being challenged by the sentinels, who, at a signal from the Colonel, respectfully stepped back. They soon descended the hill, passed the main guard, and found themselves in the open country. Each of them yielded to the voluptuous calmness of nature, and seemed no longer to be thinking of his comrade. They proceeded thus for more than an hour, and reached a spot where two paths, in crossing, formed a species of fork, in the centre of which stood a cross of evil omen, probably erected in memory of a murder formerly committed at this solitary spot.

As if by common accord, the two horses stopped and thrust out their heads, while laying back their ears and snorting loudly. Suddenly aroused from their reveries and recalled to actual life, the two riders drew themselves up in the saddle, and bent a scrutinising glance around. No human sound disturbed the silence; all around was calm and deserted as in the first days of creation.

"Do you intend, my dear Colonel," the American asked, "to honour me with your charming society any longer?"

"No," the young man answered, bluntly; "I shall stop here."

"Ah!" John Davis continued, with feigned disappointment, "shall we part already?"

"Oh no," the Colonel answered, "not yet."

"In spite of the extreme pleasure I should feel in remaining longer in your company, I am obliged to continue my journey."

"Oh, you will surely grant me a few moments, Master Davis?" the other said, with an emphasis on each syllable.

"Well, a few moments, but no more; for I have a long distance to go, and whatever pleasure I feel in conversing with you – "

"You alone," the Colonel interrupted him, "shall decide the time we shall remain together."

"It is impossible to display greater courtesy."

"Master Davis," the Colonel said, raising his voice, "have you forgotten the last conversation we had together?"

"My dear Colonel, you must know me well enough to be sure that I only forget those things which I ought not to remember."

"Which means?"

"That I perfectly well remember the conversation to which you allude."

"All the better. In that case your excellent memory spares me half the trouble, and we shall soon come to an understanding."

"I believe so."

"Do you not find the spot where we are admirably adapted for what we have to do?"

"I consider it delicious, my dear Colonel."

"Then, with your consent, we will dismount?"

"At your orders; there is nothing I detest so much as a lengthened conversation on horseback."

They leaped to the ground and tied up their horses.

"Do you take your rifle?" the American inquired.

"Yes, if you have no objection."

"Not at all. Then we are going to see some sport?"

"Oh yes, but on this occasion the game will be human."

"Which will add greatly to the interest of the sport."

"Come, you are a delightful comrade, Master Davis."

"What would you, Colonel? I never was able to refuse my friends anything."

"Where shall we place ourselves?"

"I trust to you entirely for that."

"Look! On each side the road are bushes, which seem to have grown for the express purpose."

"That is really singular. Well, we will each hide behind one of the bushes, count ten, and then fire."

"First-rate; but suppose we miss? I am perfectly well aware that we are both first-rate marksmen, and that is almost impossible; but it might happen."

"In that case nothing is more simple: we will draw our machetes and charge each other."

"Agreed. Stay, one word more; one of us must remain on the ground, I suppose?"

"I should think so. If not, what would be the use of fighting?"

"That is true; so promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"The survivor will throw the body into the river."

"Hum! Then you are very desirous that I should not come to life again?"

"Well, you can understand – "

"All right, that is agreed."

"Thank you."

The two men bowed, and then went off in opposite directions, to take up their stations. The distance between them was about seventy yards; in a few seconds a double detonation burst forth like a clap of thunder, and woke up the echoes. The two adversaries then rushed on each other, machete in hand. They met nearly half way, and not uttering a word, attacked each other furiously.

The combat lasted a long time, and threatened to continue longer, without any marked advantage for either of the champions, for they were nearly of equal strength, when all at once several men appeared, and, aiming at the two adversaries, ordered them to lay down their arms immediately. Each fell back a step, and waited.

"Stop!" the man shouted, who seemed to be the Chief of the newcomers; "do you, John Davis, mount your horse and be off!"

"By what right do you give me that order?" the American asked, savagely.

"By the right of the stronger," the leader replied. "Be off, if you do not wish a misfortune to happen to you!"

John Davis looked around him. Any resistance was impossible – for what could he have done alone, merely armed with a sabre, against twenty individuals? The American stifled an oath, and mounted again, but suddenly reflecting, he asked, "And who may you be, who thus pretend to dictate to me?"

"You wish to know?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am a man to whom you and Colonel Melendez offered an atrocious insult. I am the Monk Antonio!"

At this name the two adversaries felt a thrill of terror run through their veins; without doubt the monk was about to avenge himself, now that in his turn he had them in his power.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE THE BATTLE

John Davis recovered almost immediately.

"Ah, ah!" he said, "Then it is you, my master?"

"It astonishes you to meet me here."

"On my honour, no. Your place, in my opinion, is wherever a snare is laid; hence nothing is more natural than your presence."

"It is wrong, John Davis, for a man to take advantage of his weakness to insult people, especially when he is ignorant of their intentions."

"Ah, they appear to me tolerably clear at this moment."

"You might be mistaken."

"I do not believe it. However, I shall soon be certain."

"What are you doing?"

"As you see, I am dismounting."

In fact, the American leapt from his horse, drew his pistols from the holsters, and walked toward the monk with a most quiet step and thoroughly natural air.

"Why do you not go, as I advised you to do?" Fray Antonio continued.

"For two reasons, my dear Señor. The first is, that I have no orders or advice to receive from you; the second, because I shall not be sorry to be present at the pretty little act of scoundrelism you are of course meditating."

"Then your intention is –"

"To defend my friend, by Heaven!" the American exclaimed, warmly.

"What! your friend?" the monk said, in amazement: "why, only a minute ago you were trying to take his life."

"My dear Señor," Davis remarked, ironically, "there are certain remarks whose sense you unhappily never catch. Understand me clearly: I am ready to kill this gentleman, but I will not consent to see him assassinated. That is clear enough, hang it all!"

Fray Antonio burst into a laugh.

"Singular man!" he said.

"Am I not?" Then turning to his adversary, who still stood perfectly quiet, he continued: "My dear Colonel, we will resume, at a later date, the interesting interview which this worthy Padre so untowardly interrupted. For the present, permit me to restore you one of the pistols you so generously lent me; it is undoubted that these scamps will kill us; but, at any rate, we shall have the pleasure of settling three or four of them first."

"Thank you, Davis," the Colonel answered, "I expected nothing less from you. I accept your proposition as frankly as you make it."

And he took the pistol, and cocked it. The American took his place by his side, and bowed to the stranger with mocking courtesy.

"Señores," he said, "you can charge us whenever you think proper, for we are prepared to sustain your charge bravely."

"Ah, ah!" said Fray Antonio, "Then you really mean it?"

"What! – mean it? The question seems to me somewhat simple; I suppose you think the hour and place well chosen for a joke?"

The monk shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the men who accompanied him.

"Be off!" he said. "In an hour I will join you again, you know where."

The strangers gave a nod of assent, and disappeared almost instantaneously among the trees and shrubs. The monk then threw his weapons on the ground, and drew so near to the men as almost to touch them.

"Are you still afraid?" he said; "It is I now who am in your power."

"Halloh!" Davis said, as he uncocked his pistol, "why, what is the meaning of this?"

"If, instead of taking me as a bandit, as you did, you had taken the trouble to reflect, you would have understood that I had but one object, and that was, to prevent the resumption of the obstinate fight which my presence so fortunately interrupted."

"But how did you arrive here so opportunely?"

"Accident did it all. Ordered by our Commander-in-chief to watch the enemy's movements, I posted myself on the two roads, in order to take prisoner all the scouts who came in this direction."

"Then you do not owe either the Colonel or myself any grudge?"

"Perhaps," he said, with hesitation, "I have not quite forgotten the unworthy treatment you inflicted on me; but, at any rate, I have given up all thoughts of vengeance."

John Davis reflected for a moment, and then said, as he offered him his hand, "You are a worthy monk. I see that you are faithful to the pledge of amendment you made. I am sorry for what I did."

"I will say the same, Señor," the Colonel remarked; "I was far from expecting such generosity on your part."

"One word, now, Señores."

"Speak," they said, "we are listening."

"Promise me not to renew that impious duel, and follow my example by forgetting your hatred."

The two men stretched out their hand with a simultaneous movement.

"That is well," he continued, "I am happy to see you act thus. Now let us separate. You, Colonel, will mount and return to camp – the road is free, and no one will try to oppose your passing. As for you, John Davis, please to follow me. Your long absence has caused a degree of alarm which your presence will doubtless dissipate. I had orders to try and obtain news of you."

"Good-bye for the present," the Colonel said; "forget, Señor Davis, what passed between us at the outset of our meeting, and merely remember the manner in which we separate."

"May we, Colonel, meet again under happier auspices, when I may be permitted to express to you all the sympathy with which your frank and loyal character inspires me."

After exchanging a few words more, and cordially shaking hands, the three men separated. Colonel Melendez set off at a gallop in the direction of the rancho, while the monk and Davis started at an equal pace in exactly the opposite direction. It was about midnight when the Colonel reached the main guard, where an aide-de-camp of the General was waiting for him. A certain degree of animation appeared to prevail in the rancho. Instead of sleeping, as they might be expected to be doing at so late an hour, the soldiers were traversing the streets in large numbers; in short, an extreme agitation was visible everywhere.

"What is the matter?" the Colonel asked the aide-de-camp.

"The General will tell you himself," the officer answered, "for he is impatiently expecting you, and has already asked several times for you."

"Oh, then, there is something new."

"I believe so."

The Colonel pushed on ahead, and in a few minutes found himself before the house occupied by the General. The house was full of noise and light; but so soon as the General perceived the young man, he left the officers with whom he was talking, and walked quickly toward him.

"Here you are at last," he said; "I was impatiently expecting you."

"What is the matter then?" the Colonel asked, astounded at this reception, which he was far from expecting, for he had left the camp so quiet, and found it on his return so noisy.

"You shall know, Señores," the General added addressing the officers in the room: "be kind enough not to go away. I shall be with you in an instant. Follow me, Colonel."

Don Juan bowed, and passed into an adjoining room, the door of which the General shut after him. Hardly were they alone, ere the General took the young man affectionately by one of his coat buttons, and fixed on him a glance that seemed trying to read the depths of his heart.

"Since your departure," he said, "we have had a visit from a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?" the young man repeated.

"Or, at any rate, of a man who gives himself out as such."

"I only know one man in this country," the Colonel replied distinctly, "who, despite the opinions that divide us, can justly assume that title."

"And that man is?"

"The Jaguar."

"Do you feel a friendship for him?"

"Yes."

"But he is a bandit."

"Possibly he is so to you, General; from your point of sight, it is possible that you are right. I neither descry his character, nor condemn him; I am attached to him, for he saved my life."

"But you fight against him, for all that."

"Certainly; for being hurled into two opponent camps, each of us serves the cause that appears to him the better. But, for all that, we are not the less attached to each other in our hearts."

"I am not at all disposed to blame you, my friend, for our inclinations should be independent of our political opinions. But let us return to the subject which at this moment is the most interesting to us. A man, I say, presented himself during your absence at the outposts as being a friend of yours."

"That is strange," the Colonel muttered, searching his memory; "and did he mention his name?"

"Of course; do you think I would have received him else? However, he is in this very house, for I begged him to await your return."

"But his name, my dear General?"

"He calls himself Don Felix Paz."

"Oh," the Colonel exclaimed eagerly, "he spoke the truth, General, for he is really one of my dearest friends."

"Then we can place in him –"

"Full and entire confidence; I answer for him on my head," the young officer interrupted warmly.

"I am the more pleased at what you tell me, because this man assured me that he held in his hands means that would enable us to give the rebels a tremendous thrashing."

"If he has promised it, General, he will do so without doubt. I presume you have had a serious conversation with him?"

"Not at all. You understand, my friend, that I was not willing, till I had previously conversed with you, to listen to this man, who after all might have been a spy of the enemy."

"Capital reasoning; and what do you propose doing now?"

"Hearing him; he told me enough for me, in the prevision of what is happening at this moment, to have everything prepared for action at a moment's notice; hence no time will have been lost."

"Very good! We will listen to him then."

The General clapped his hands, and an aide-de-camp came in.

"Request Don Felix to come hither, Captain."

Five minutes later, the ex-Major-domo of the Larch-tree hacienda entered the room where the two officers were.

"Forgive me, Caballero," the General said courteously as he advanced to meet him, "for the rather cold manner in which I received you; but unfortunately we live in a period when it is so difficult

to distinguish friends from enemies, that a man involuntarily runs the risk of confounding one with the other, and making a mistake."

"You have no occasion to apologise to me, General," Don Felix answered; "when I presented myself at your outposts in the way I did, I anticipated what would happen to me."

The Colonel pressed his friend's hand warmly. A lengthened explanation was unnecessary for men of this stamp; at the first word they understood each other. They had a lengthened conversation, which did not terminate till a late hour of the night, or rather an early hour of the morning, for it struck four at the moment when the General opened the door of the room in which they were shut up, and accompanied them, conversing in whispers, to the *saguan* of the house.

What had occurred during this lengthened interview? No one knew; not a syllable transpired as to the arrangements made by the General with the two men who had remained so long with him. The officers and soldiers were suffering from the most lively curiosity, which was only increased by the General's orders to raise the camp.

Don Felix was conducted by the Colonel to the outermost post, where they separated after shaking hands and exchanging only one sentence —

"We shall meet again soon."

The Colonel then returned at a gallop to his quarters, while Don Felix buried himself in the forest as rapidly as his horse could carry him. On returning to camp, the Colonel at once ordered the boot and saddle to be sounded, and without waiting for further orders, put himself at the head of about five hundred cavalry, and left the rancho.

It was nearly five in the morning, the sun was rising in floods of purple and gold, and all seemed to promise a magnificent day. The General, who had mounted to his observatory, attentively followed with a telescope the movements of the Colonel, who, through the speed at which he went, not only got down the hill within a quarter of an hour, but had also crossed, without obstacle, a stream as wide as the Rio Trinidad itself. The General anxiously watched this operation, which is so awkward for an armed body of men; he saw the soldiers close up, and then, at a sign from the leader, this column stretched out like a serpent undoing its rings, went into the water, and cutting the rather strong current diagonally, reached the other bank in a few minutes, when, after a moment of inevitable tumult, the men formed their ranks again and entered a forest, where they were speedily lost from sight.

When the last lancero had disappeared, and the landscape had become quite desolate, the General shut up his glass, and went down again, apparently plunged in serious thought. We have said that the garrison of Galveston consisted of nine hundred men; but this strength had been raised to nearly fourteen hundred by calling in the numerous small posts scattered along the coast. Colonel Melendez had taken with him five hundred sabres the General left at the rancho, which he determined on retaining at all hazards as an important strategical point, two hundred and fifty men under the orders of a brave and experienced officer; and he had at his disposal about six hundred and fifty men, supported by a battery of four mountain howitzers.

This force, small as it may appear, in spite of the smile of contempt it will doubtless produce on the lips of Europeans accustomed to the shock of great masses, was more than sufficient for the country. It is true that the Texan army counted nearly four thousand combatants, but the majority of these men were badly-armed peasants, unskilled in the management of the warlike weapons which a movement of revolutionary fanaticism had caused them to take up, and incapable of sustaining in the open field the attack of skilled troops. Hence, in spite of his numerical inferiority, he reckoned greatly on the discipline and military education of his soldiers, to defeat this assemblage of men, who were more dangerous through their numbers than for any other reason.

The start from the rancho was effected with admirable regularity; the General had ordered that the baggage should be left behind, so that nothing might impede the march of the army. Each horseman, in accordance with the American fashion, which is too greatly despised in Europe, took up a foot soldier behind him, so that the speed of the army was doubled. Numerous spies and scouts

sent out to reconnoitre in every direction, had announced that the Insurrectionary army, marching in two columns, was advancing to seize the mouth of the Trinidad and cover the approaches to Galveston, a movement which it was of the utmost importance to prevent; for, were it successful, the Insurgents would combine the movements of the vessels they had so advantageously seized with those of their army, and would be masters of a considerable extent of the seaboard, from which possibly the Mexican forces would not be strong enough to dislodge them. On the other hand, General Rubio had been advised that Santa Anna, President of the Republic, had left Mexico, and was coming with forced marches, at the head of twelve hundred men, to forcibly crush the Insurrection.

General Santa Anna has been very variously judged; some make him a profound politician and a thunderbolt of war; and he seems to have that opinion about himself, as he does not hesitate to say that he is the Napoleon of the New World; his enemies reproach him for his turbulence and his unbounded ambition; accuse him of too often keeping aloof from danger, and consider him an agitator without valour or morality. For our part, without attempting to form any judgment of this statesman, we will merely say in two words, that we are convinced he is the scourge of Mexico, whose ruin he accelerates, and one of the causes of the misfortunes which have for twenty years overwhelmed that ill-fated country.

General Rubio understood how important it was for him to deal a heavy blow before his junction with the President, who, while following his advice, would not fail, in the event of defeat, to attribute the reverses to him, while, if the Mexicans remained masters of the field, he would keep all the honour of victory to himself.

The Texan insurgents had not up to this moment dared to measure themselves with the Mexican troops in the open field, but the events that had succeeded each other during the last few days with lightning speed, had, by accelerating the catastrophe, completely changed the aspect of affairs. The Chiefs of the revolutionary army, rendered confident by their constant advantages, and masters without a blow of one of the principal Texan seaports, felt the necessity of giving up their hedge warfare, and consolidating their success by some brilliant exploit.

To attain this end, a battle must be gained; but the Texan Chiefs did not let themselves be deceived by the successes they had hitherto met with, successes obtained by rash strokes, surprises, and unexampled audacity; they feared with reason the moment when they would have to face the veteran Mexican troops with their inexperienced guerillas. Hence they sought by every means to retard the hour for this supreme and decisive contest, in which a few hours might eternally overthrow their dearest hopes, and the work of regeneration they had been pursuing for the last ten years with unparalleled courage and resignation. They desired, before definitively fighting the regulars, that their volunteers should have acquired that discipline and practice without which the largest and bravest army is only an heterogeneous compound of opposing elements, an agglomeration of men, possessing no consistency or real vitality.

After the capture of the fort a grand council had been held by the principal Texan Chiefs, in order to consult on the measures to be taken, so as not to lose, by any imprudence, results so miraculously obtained. It was then resolved that the army should occupy Galveston, which its position rendered perfectly secure against a surprise; that the freebooters should alone remain out to skirmish with the Mexicans and harass them; while the troops shut up in the town were being drilled, and receiving a regular and permanent organization.

The first care of the Chiefs, therefore, was to avoid any encounter with the enemy, and try to enter Galveston without fighting the Mexicans. The following was the respective position of the two armies; the Texans were trying to avoid a battle, which General Rubio was lodging, on the contrary, to fight. The terrain on which the adversaries would have to manoeuvre was extremely limited, for scarce four leagues separated the videttes of the two armies. From his observatory the General could clearly distinguish the camp fires of the rebels.

In the meanwhile Colonel Melendez had continued to advance; on reaching the cross where he and John Davis had fought so furiously on the previous evening, the Colonel himself examined the ground with the utmost care, then, feeling convinced that none of the enemy's flankers had remained ambushed at this spot, which was so favourable for a surprise, he gave his men orders to dismount. The horses were thrown down, secured, and their heads wrapped in thick blankets to prevent their neighing, and after all these precautions had been taken, the soldiers lay down on their stomachs among the shrubs, with instructions not to stir.

General Rubio had himself effected a flank march, which enabled him to avoid the crossways; immediately after descending the hill, he marched rapidly upon the river bank. We have said that the Rio Trinidad, which is rather confined at certain spots, is bordered by magnificent forests, whose branches form on the bank grand arcades of foliage overhanging the mangroves; it was among the latter, and on the branches of the forest trees, about two gunshots from the spot where he had landed, that the General ambuscaded about one-third of his infantry. The remainder, divided into two corps, were echeloned along either side of the road the Insurgents must follow, but it was done in the American fashion, that is to say, the men were so hidden in the tall grass that they were invisible.

The four mountain howitzers crowned a small hill which, through its position, completely commanded the road, while the cavalry was massed in the rear of the infantry. The silence momentarily disturbed was re-established, and the desert resumed its calm and solitary aspect. General Rubio had taken his measures so well that his army had suddenly become invisible.

When it was resolved in the council of the Texan Chiefs that the Insurrectionary army should proceed to Galveston, a rather sharp discussion took place as to the means to be adopted in reaching it. The Jaguar proposed to embark the troops aboard the corvette, the brig, and a few smaller vessels collected for the purpose. Unfortunately this advice, excellent though it was, could not be followed, owing to General Rubio's precaution of carrying off all the boats; collecting others would have occasioned an extreme loss of time; but as the boats the Mexicans had employed were now lying high and dry on the beach, and the guard at first put over them withdrawn a few hours later, the Texans thought it far more simple to set them afloat, and use them in their turn to effect the passage.

By a species of fatality the council would not put faith in the assertions of John Davis, who in vain assured them that General Rubio, entrenched in a strong position, would not allow this movement to be carried out without an attempt to prevent it; so that the abandonment of the boats by the Mexicans was only fictitious, and a trap adroitly laid to draw the Revolutionists to a spot where it would be easy to conquer them.

Unfortunately, the mysterious man to whom we have alluded had alone the right to give orders, and the reasons urged by Davis could not convince him. Deceived by his spies, he persuaded himself that General Rubio, far from having any intention of recapturing Galveston, wished to effect his junction with Santa Anna before attempting any fresh offensive movement, and that the halt at the rancho had been merely a feint to embarrass the rebels.

This incomprehensible error was the cause of incalculable disasters. The chiefs received orders to march forward, and were constrained to carry them out. Still, when this erroneous resolution had been once formed, the means of execution were selected with extreme prudence. The corvette and brig were ordered to get as near land as they could, in order to protect, by their cross fire, the embarkation of the troops, and sweep the Mexicans, if they offered any opposition. Flying columns were sent off in advance and on the flanks of the army, to clear the way, by making prisoners of any small outposts the enemy might have established.

Four principal chiefs commanded strong detachments of mounted freebooters. The four were the Jaguar, Fray Antonio, El Alferez, and Don Felix Paz, whom the reader assuredly did not expect to find under the flag of the rebels, and whom he saw only a few hours back enter the Mexican camp, and hold a secret conference with General Rubio and Colonel Melendez. These four chiefs were ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to prevent any surprise, by searching the forests and examining

the tall grass. El Alférez was on the right of the army, Fray Antonio on the left, the Jaguar had the rear guard, while Don Felix, with six hundred sabres, formed the van. One word as to the guerillas of the ex-Mayor-domo of the Larch-tree hacienda. The men who composed his band, raised on lands dependent on the hacienda, had been enlisted by Don Felix. They were Indios *mansos*, vaqueros, and peons, mostly half savages, and rogues to a certain extent, who fought like lions at the order of their leader, to whom they were thoroughly devoted, but only recognising and obeying him, while caring nothing for the other leaders of the army. Don Felix Paz had joined the insurgents about two months previously, and rendered them eminent service with his guerillas. Hence, he had in a short time gained general confidence. We shall soon see whether he was worthy of it.

By a singular coincidence, the two armies left their camp at the same time, and marched one against the other, little suspecting that two hours later they would be face to face.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF CERRO PARDO

The battle of Cerro Pardo was one of those sanguinary days, whose memory a nation retains for ages as an ill-omened date. In order to explain to the reader thoroughly how the events happened which we are about to narrate, we must give a detailed account of the ground on which they took place.

The spot selected by the Mexicans to effect their landing after leaving Galveston, had been very cleverly chosen by General Rubio. The stream, which, for some distance, is enclosed by high banks, runs at that spot through an extensive plain, covered with tall grass and clumps of trees, the last relics of a virgin forest, which the claims of trade have almost destroyed. This plain is closed by a species of *cañón*, or very narrow gorge, enclosed between two lofty hills, whose scarped flanks are carpeted at all seasons with plants and flowers. These two hills are the Cerro Pardo and the Cerro Prieto, – that is to say, the Red Mountain and the Black Mountain.

At the canyon begins a road, or, to speak more correctly, a rather wide track, bordered by bogs and morasses, and running to the cross we have before visited. This road is the only one that can be followed in going from the interior to the seashore. A little in advance of the two hills, whose summit is covered with dense wood and scrub, extend marshes, which are the more dangerous, because their surface is perfidiously covered with close green grass, which completely conceals from the traveller the terrible danger to which he is exposed if he venture on to this moving abyss. The Cerro Pardo, which is much higher than the other hill, not only commands the latter, but also the surrounding country, as well as the sea.

After what we have said, the reader will easily perceive that the enterprise attempted by the Texans was only possible in the event of the coast being entirely undefended; but under the present circumstances, the inconceivable obstinacy of the Commander-in-Chief was the more incomprehensible, because he was not only thoroughly acquainted with the country, but at the moment when the army was about to begin its forward movements, several spies came in in succession, bringing news which entirely coincided with the positive reports already made by John Davis.

Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first blind. This wise and thoughtful man, who had ever acted with extreme prudence, and whose conceptions up to this day had been remarkable for their lucidity, was deaf to all remonstrances, and the order was given to march. The army at once set out; Don Felix Paz went on ahead with his guerillas, while the Jaguar's cuadrilla, on the contrary, remained in the rear. Tranquil, in spite of the wounds he had received, would not remain in the fort; he came along lying in a cart, having at his side Carmela and Quoniam, who paid him the utmost attention; while Lanzi, at the head of a dozen picked Freebooters given him by the Jaguar, escorted the cart, in the event of the army being disturbed during the march.

The Jaguar was sorrowful, a gloomy presentiment seemed to warn him of a misfortune. This daring man, who carried out as if in sport the maddest and most venturesome deeds, now advanced reluctantly, hesitating and constantly looking about him suspiciously, and almost timidly. Assuredly, he feared no personal danger; what did he care for an attack? What alarm did he feel about dying? Peril was his element; the heated atmosphere of battle, the odour of powder intoxicated him, and made him feel strange delight; but at this moment Carmela was near him; Carmela, whom he had so miraculously found again, and whom he feared to lose again. This strong man felt his heart soften at the thought, hence he insisted on taking the rear guard, in order to watch more closely over the maiden, and be in a position to help her if necessary.

The superior Commander had not dared to refuse the bold partisan this post, which he asked for as a favour. This condescension on the part of the Chief had terrible consequences, and was partly the cause of the events that happened a few hours later.

The Texan troops, in spite of the various element of which they were composed, advanced, however, with an order and discipline that would have done honour to regulars. Don Felix Paz had thrown out to the right and left of the road flankers ordered to investigate the chaparral, and guarantee the safety of the route; but in spite of these precautions, whether the Mexicans were really ambushed in inaccessible places, or for some other reason, the flankers did not discover them, and the vanguard advanced at a pace which heightened the security of the main body, and gradually induced the Chiefs to relax their previous watchfulness.

The vanguard reached the cross, and nothing had as yet happened in any way to trouble the march of the army. Don Felix, after allowing his cuadrilla to halt for twenty minutes, resolutely entered the road that led to the spot where the Mexicans had landed. From the cross to the Rio Trinidad was no great distance, and could be covered in less than two hours by troops marching at the ordinary pace. The road, however, after passing the cross, insensibly becomes narrower, and soon changes into a very confined track, in which three persons can scarce walk abreast.

We have said that trembling prairies extend on either side of this road. We will explain, in a few sentences, what these trembling prairies are, which are met with in several parts of America, but principally in Texas and Louisiana. These prairies, if we may trust to the frequently false theories of science, have a similar organ to that of Artesian springs, for the earth does in one case what water does in the other. Through the action of geological dynamics, the earthy matter which constitutes the trembling prairies ascends to the surface of lakes and ponds, while in Artesian wells the water rushes up from the depths through the pressure of the strata by which it was held down.

Nothing is more dangerous than those trembling prairies, covered with a perfidious vegetation that deceives the eye. The Rio Trinidad flows at a few hundred yards from the prairie we have just described, conveying into the Gulf of Mexico the sedimentary deposits which would consolidate this shifting soil. Nature has already traced canals intersecting the prairie, and which run between banks formed by mysterious forces. The wild beasts, whose admirable instinct never deceives them, have for ages past formed tracks across these dangerous zones, and the path followed by the Texan army was no other than one of those trails trodden by the wild beasts when they go down at night to water.

I know not whether, since Texas has gained its liberty and been incorporated with the United States, any attempt has been made to drain these prairies. And yet, I believe that it would require but a very slight effort to complete the work so intelligently sketched out by nature. It would be sufficient to dig a series of *colmates*, or aqueducts, which would introduce into the trembling prairie the turbid waters of the river, and convey to it the sedimentary matter; and, before all, the vegetation growing on the prairie should not be burnt, as is the unfortunate custom. With these two conditions, a firm, rich, and fertile soil would soon be attained in the line of these slimy and pestilential marshes that poison the air, produce contagious diseases, and cause the death of so many unfortunate travellers, deceived by the luxuriant appearance of these prairies, and who perish miserably, by being swallowed up in their fetid mud.

But in America it is not so much land that is wanting as men. Probably, the trembling prairies will remain for a long time what they are at the present day, for no one has a really personal interest in draining and getting rid of them.

We will now take up our story at the point where we broke it off, begging the reader to forgive us the long digression in which we indulged, but which has its value, we think, in a work intended to make known a country which is destined ere long to assume an important part in the trade of the world.

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