

**ROBERT
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THE ROVER OF THE
ANDES: A TALE OF
ADVENTURE ON SOUTH
AMERICA

Robert Michael Ballantyne

**The Rover of the Andes: A Tale
of Adventure on South America**

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R. M. Ballantyne

The Rover of the Andes: A Tale of Adventure on South America

Chapter One. A Tale of Adventure in South America. At the Foot of the Mountain Range

Towards the close of a bright and warm day, between fifty and sixty years ago, a solitary man might have been seen, mounted on a mule, wending his way slowly up the western slopes of the Andes.

Although decidedly inelegant and unhandsome, this specimen of the human family was by no means uninteresting. He was so large, and his legs were so long, that the contrast between him and the little mule which he bestrode was ridiculous. He was what is sometimes styled “loosely put together;” nevertheless, the various parts of him were so massive and muscular that, however loosely he might have been built up, most men would have found it rather difficult to take him down. Although wanting in grace, he was by no means repulsive, for his face, which was ornamented with a soft flaxen beard and moustache of juvenile texture, expressed wonderful depths of the milk of human kindness.

He wore boots with the trousers tucked into them, a grey tunic, or hunting coat, belted at the waist, and a broad-brimmed straw hat, or sombrero.

Evidently the times in which he travelled were troublous, for, besides having a brace of large pistols in his belt, he wore a cavalry sabre at his side. As if to increase the eccentricity of his appearance, he carried a heavy cudgel, by way of riding-whip; but it might have been observed that, however much he flourished this whip about, he never actually applied it to his steed.

On reaching a turn of the road at the brow of an eminence the mule stopped, and, letting its head droop till almost as pendent as its tail, silently expressed a desire for repose. The cavalier stepped off. It would convey a false impression to say that he dismounted. The mule heaved a sigh.

“Poor little thing!” murmured the traveller in a soft, low voice, and in a language which even a mule might have recognised as English; “you may well sigh. I really feel ashamed of myself for asking you to carry such a mass of flesh and bone. But it’s your own fault—you know it is—for you *won’t* be led. I’m quite willing to walk if you will only follow. Come—let us try!”

Gently, insinuatingly, persuasively, the traveller touched the reins, and sought to lead the way. He might as well have tried to lead one of the snow-clad peaks of the mighty Cordillera which towered into the sky before him. With ears inclining to the neck, a resolute expression in the eyes, his fore-legs thrown forward and a lean slightly backward, the mule refused to move.

“Come now, *do* be amiable; there’s a good little thing! Come on,” said the strong youth, applying more force.

Peruvian mules are not open to flattery. The advance of the fore-legs became more decided, the lean backward more pronounced, the ears went flat down, and incipient passion gleamed in the eyes.

“Well, well, have it your own way,” exclaimed the youth, with a laugh, “but don’t blame me for riding you so much.”

He once more re-m—; no, we forgot—he once more lifted his right leg over the saddle and sat down. Fired, no doubt, with the glow of conscious victory the mule moved on and up at a more lively pace than before.

Thus the pair advanced until they gained a rocky eminence, whence the rich Peruvian plains could be seen stretching far-away toward the glowing horizon, where the sun was about to dip into the Pacific.

Here again the mule stopped, and the rider getting off sat down on a rock to take a look at the level horizon of the west—for he had reached a spot where the next turn in the road would partially shut out the plains and enclose him among the giant mountains.

As he sat there meditating, while the mule cropped the herbage at his side, he observed two riders a considerable way down the circuitous road by which he had ascended—a man and a boy, apparently.

Whether it was the fine stalwart figure of the man that influenced him, or the mere presence of wayfarers in such a solitary place, our traveller could not tell, but he certainly felt unusual interest, and not only watched the pair as they approached, but sat still until they came up. As they drew near he perceived that the smaller of the two, whom at a distance he had taken for a boy, was an Indian girl, who, according to custom, bestrode her mule like a man. Her companion was a handsome Spanish-looking man—a Peruvian or it might be a Chilian—with fine masculine features and magnificent black eyes. He was well-armed, and, to judge from his looks, seemed a little suspicious of the tall Englishman.

The hearty salutation of the latter, however, in bad Spanish, at once dissipated his suspicions. Replying in the same tongue, he then added, in good English:—

“You are a stranger in this land, I perceive.”

“In truth I am,” replied the other, while the Peruvian dismounted, “nevertheless, I ought scarcely to admit the fact, for I was born in Peru. This perhaps may seem contradictory, but it is not more so than your being apparently a native of the soil yet speaking English like an Englishman.”

“From which it follows,” returned the Peruvian, “that men ought not to judge altogether by appearances. But you are wrong in supposing me a native of the soil, and yet—I am not an Englishman. I have got a gift of language, however—at least I feel myself equally at home in English, Indian, Spanish, and Portuguese, which is not to be wondered at, seeing that I have been forced to talk in all four languages for nigh a quarter of a century.”

“Then you must have been but a boy when you came here,” returned the Englishman, “for you seem to be not yet middle-aged.”

“Right, I was indeed a mere boy when I came to this land.”

“And I was a boy of seven when I left it to be educated in Europe,” returned the Englishman. “It is sixteen years since then, and I had feared that my memory might have failed to recognise the old landmarks, but I am rejoiced to find that I remember every turn of the road as if I had left home but yesterday.”

We have said that the tall youth’s face was not handsome, but the glow of animation which rested on it when he spoke of home, seemed for a moment to transform it.

“Your home, then, cannot be far distant?” remarked the Peruvian, with a peculiar look that might have attracted the attention of the younger man if his gaze had not at the moment been directed to the Indian girl, who, during the foregoing conversation, had remained motionless on her mule with her eyes looking pensively at the ground, like a beautiful statue in bronze.

“My home is close at hand,” said the Englishman, when the question had been repeated; “unless memory plays me false, two more turns in the road will reveal it.”

The earnest look of the Peruvian deepened as he asked if the Estate of Passamanka was his home.

“Yes, you know it, then?” exclaimed the youth eagerly; “and perhaps you knew my father too?”

“Yes, indeed; there are few people within a hundred miles of the place who did not know the famous sugar-mill and its hospitable owner, Senhor Armstrong. But excuse me,” added the Peruvian, with some hesitation, “you are aware, I suppose, that your father is dead?”

“Ay, well do I know that,” returned the other in a deeper tone. “It is to take my father’s place at the mills that I have been hastily summoned from England. Alas! I know nothing of the work, and it will be sorely against the grain to attempt the carrying on of the old business in the desolate old home.”

“Of course you also know,” continued the Peruvian, “that the country is disturbed just now—that the old smouldering enmity between Chili and Peru has broken forth again in open war.”

“I could not have passed through the low country without finding that out. Indeed,” said the youth, glancing at his belt with a half-apologetic smile, “these weapons, which are so unfamiliar to my hand, and so distasteful to my spirit, are proof that I, at least, do not look for a time of peace. I accoutred myself thus on landing, at the urgent advice of a friend, though my good cudgel—which has sufficed for all my needs hitherto—is more to my mind, besides being useful as a mountain staff. But why do you ask? Is there much probability of the belligerents coming so far among the hills?”

“Wherever carrion is to be found, there you may be sure the vultures will congregate. There is booty to be got here among the hills; and whether the soldiers belong to the well-trained battalions of Chili, or the wretched levies of Peru, they are always prepared, for plunder—ready to make hay while the sun shines. I only hope, Senhor Armstrong, that—but come, let us advance and see before the sun sets.”

Turning abruptly as he spoke, the man mounted his mule and rode briskly up the winding road, followed by the Indian girl and our Englishman.

At the second turning of the road they reached a spot where an opening in the hills revealed the level country below, stretching away into illimitable distance.

As had been anticipated, they here came upon the mills they were in quest of. The Peruvian reined up abruptly and looked back.

“I feared as much,” he said in a low tone as the Englishman rode forward.

Rendered anxious by the man’s manner, Lawrence Armstrong sprang from his mule and pushed forward, but suddenly stopped and stood with clasped hands and a gaze of agony.

For there stood the ruins of his early home—where his mother had died while he was yet a child, where his father had made a fortune, which, in his desolation, he had failed to enjoy, and where he finally died, leaving his possessions to his only child.

The troops had visited the spot, fired no doubt with patriotic fervour and knowing its owner to be wealthy. They had sacked the place, feasted on the provisions, drunk the wines, smashed up, by way of pleasantry, all the valuables that were too heavy to carry away, and, finally, setting fire to the place, had marched off to other fields of “glory.”

It was a tremendous blow to poor Lawrence, coming as he did fresh from college in a peaceful land, and full of the reminiscences of childhood.

Sitting down on a broken wall, he bowed his head and wept bitterly—though silently—while the Peruvian, quietly retiring with the Indian girl, left him alone.

The first paroxysm of grief over, young Armstrong rose, and began sadly to wander about the ruins. It had been an extensive structure, fitted with all the most approved appliances of mechanism which wealth could purchase. These now helped to enhance the wild aspect of the wreck, for iron girders had been twisted by the action of fire into snake-like convolutions in some places, while, in others, their ends stuck out fantastically from the blackened walls. Beautiful furniture had been smashed up to furnish firewood for the cooking of the meal with which the heroic troops had refreshed themselves before leaving, while a number of broken wine-bottles at the side of a rosewood writing-desk with an empty bottle on the top of it and heaps of stones and pebbles around, suggested the idea that the warriors had mingled light amusement with sterner business. The roofs of most of the buildings had fallen in; the window-frames, where spared by the fire, had been torn out; and a pianoforte, which lay on its back on the grass, showed evidence of having undergone an examination of its internal arrangements, with the aid of the butt-ends of muskets.

“And this is the result of war!” muttered the young man, at last breaking silence.

“Only one phase of it,” replied a voice at his side, in tones of exceeding bitterness; “you must imagine a few corpses of slaughtered men and women and children, if you would have a perfect picture of war.”

The speaker was the Peruvian, who had quietly approached to say that if they wished to reach the next resting-place before dark it was necessary to proceed without delay.

“But perhaps,” he added, “you do not intend to go further. No doubt this was to have been the end of your journey had all been well. It can scarcely, I fear, be the end of it now. I do not wish to intrude upon your sorrows, Mr Armstrong, but my business will not admit of delay. I must push on, yet I would not do so without expressing my profound sympathy, and offering to aid you if it lies in my power.”

There was a tone and look about the man which awoke a feeling of gratitude and confidence in the forlorn youth’s heart.

“You are very kind,” he said, “but it is not in the power of man to help me. As your business is urgent you had better go and leave me. I thank you for the sympathy you express—yet stay. You cannot advance much further to-night, why not encamp here? There used to be a small hut or out-house not far-off, in which my father spent much of his leisure. Perhaps the—the—”

“Patriots!” suggested the Peruvian.

“The scoundrels,” said Lawrence, “may have spared or overlooked it. The hut would furnish shelter enough, and we have provisions with us.”

After a moment’s reflection the Peruvian assented to this proposal, and, leaving the ruins together, they returned to the road, where they found the Indian girl holding the youth’s mule as well as that of her companion.

Hastening forward, Lawrence apologised for having in the agitation of the moment allowed his mule to run loose.

“But I forgot,” he added, “of course you do not understand English.”

“Try Spanish,” suggested the Peruvian, “she knows a little of that.”

“Unfortunately I have forgotten the little that I had picked up here when a boy,” returned Lawrence, as he mounted, “if I can manage to ask for food and lodging in that tongue, it is all that I can do.”

They soon reached an opening in the bushes at the roadside, and, at the further end of a natural glade or track, observed a small wooden hut thatched with rushes. Towards this young Armstrong led the way.

He was evidently much affected, for his lips were compressed, and he gave no heed to a remark made by his companion. Entering the hut, he stood for some time looking silently round.

It was but a poor place with bare walls; a carpenter’s bench in one corner, near to it a smith’s forge, one or two chairs, and a few tools;—not much to interest a stranger but to Lawrence full of tender associations.

“It was here,” he said in tones of deepest pathos, “that my father showed me how to handle tools, and my mother taught me to read from the Word of God.”

Looking at his companions he observed that the large dark eyes of the Indian girl were fixed on him with an expression of unmistakable sympathy. He felt grateful at the moment, for to most men sympathy is sweet when unobtrusively offered whether it come from rich or poor—civilised or savage.

“Come, this will do,” said the Peruvian, looking round, “if you will kindle a fire on the forge, Senhor Armstrong, Manuela will arrange a sleeping chamber for herself in the closet I see there, while I look after the beasts.”

He spoke in cheering tones, which had the effect of rousing the poor youth somewhat from his despondency.

“Well, then,” he replied, “let us to work, and it is but just, as we are to sup together, and you know my name, that I should be put on an equal footing with yourself—”

“Impossible!” interrupted the other, with a slight curl of his moustache, “for as I am only six feet one, and you are at least six feet four, we can never be on an equal footing.”

“Nay, but I referred to names, not to inches. Pray, by what name shall I call you?”

“Pedro,” returned the Spaniard. “I am known by several names in these parts—some of them complimentary, others the reverse, according as I am referred to by friends or foes. Men often speak of me as a confirmed rover because of my wandering tendencies, but I’m not particular and will answer to any name you choose, so long as it is politely uttered. The one I prefer is Pedro.”

He went out as he spoke to look after the mules, while Lawrence set about kindling a small fire and otherwise making preparations for supper.

The Indian girl, Manuela, with that prompt and humble obedience characteristic of the race to which she belonged, had gone at once into the little closet which her companion had pointed out, and was by that time busily arranging it as a sleeping chamber for the night.

Chapter Two.

Compact with the New Friend and Discovery of an Old One

Keeping the fire low in order to prevent its being seen by any of the wandering bands of patriots—*alias* soldiers, *alias* banditti—who might chance to be in the neighbourhood, the three travellers thus thrown unexpectedly together ate their supper in comparative silence, Lawrence and Pedro exchanging a comment on the viands now and then, and the handsome Indian girl sitting opposite to them with her eyes for the most part fixed on the ground, though now and then she raised them to take a quick stealthy glance at the huge youth whose appetite did not seem to be greatly affected by his misfortunes. Perhaps she was wondering whether all Englishmen, possessed such innocent kindly faces and such ungainly though powerful frames. It may be that she was contrasting him with the handsome well-knit Pedro at his side.

Whatever her thoughts might have been, the short glances of her lustrous eyes gave no clue to them, and her tongue was silent, save when she replied by some brief monosyllable to a remark or query put in the Indian language occasionally by Pedro. Sometimes a gleam of the firelight threw her fine brown features into bold relief, but on these occasions, when Lawrence Armstrong chanced to observe them, they conveyed no expression whatever save that of profound gravity, with a touch, perhaps, of sadness.

The bench being awkwardly situated for a table, they had arranged a small box, bottom up, instead. Lawrence and his new acquaintance seated themselves on the ground, and Manuela used her saddle as a chair.

Towards the end of their meal the two men became more communicative, and when Pedro had lighted a cigarette, they began to talk of their immediate future.

“You don’t smoke?” remarked Pedro in passing.

“No,” replied Lawrence.

“Not like the most of your countrymen,” said the other.

“So much the worse,” rejoined the youth.

“The worse for them or for you—which?” asked Pedro, with a significant glance.

“No matter,” returned Lawrence with a laugh.

“Well, now,” resumed Pedro, after a few puffs, during the emission of which his countenance assumed the expression of seriousness, which seemed most natural to it, “what do you intend to do? It is well to have that point fairly settled to-night, so that there may be no uncertainty or delay in the morning. I would not urge the question were it not that in the morning we must either go on together as travelling companions, or say our final adieux and part. I am not in the habit of prying into men’s private affairs, but, to speak the bare truth, I am naturally interested in one whose father has on more than one occasion done me good service. You need not answer me unless you please, *senhor*,” added the man with the air of one who is prepared to retire upon his dignity at a moment’s notice.

“Thanks, thanks, Pedro,” said the Englishman, heartily, “I appreciate your kindness, and accept your sympathy with gratitude. Moreover, I am glad to find that I have been thrown at such a crisis in my fortunes into the company of one who had regard for my dear father. But I scarce know what to do. I will give you my confidence unreservedly. Perhaps you may be able to advise—”

“Stay,” interrupted the other, on whose countenance a slightly stern expression hovered. “Before you give me unreserved confidence, it is but fair that I should tell you candidly that I cannot pay you back in kind. As to private matters, I have none that would be likely to interest any one under the sun. In regard to other things—my business is not my own. Why I am here and what I mean to do I have no right to reveal. Whither I am bound, however, is not necessarily a secret, and if you choose to travel with me you undoubtedly have a right to know.”

Young Armstrong expressed himself satisfied. He might have wished to know more, but, like Pedro, he had no desire to pry into other men's affairs, and, being of an open confiding nature, was quite ready to take his companion on trust, even though he had been less candid and engaging in manner than he was. After explaining that he had been educated in Edinburgh, and trained to the medical profession, he went on to say that he had been hastily summoned to take charge of the sugar-mill at his father's death, and that he had expected to find an old overseer, who would have instructed him in all that he had to do in a business with which he was totally unacquainted.

"You see," he continued, "my father always said that he meant to retire on his fortune, and did not wish me to carry on the business, but, being naturally an uncommunicative man on business matters, he never gave me any information as to details. Of course, I had expected that his manager here, and his books, would reveal all that I required to know, but the soldiers have settled that question. Mill and books have gone together, and as to manager, clerks, and servants, I know not where they are."

"Scattered, no doubt," said Pedro, "here, there, and everywhere—only too glad to escape from a neighbourhood which has been given up to fire and sword by way of improving its political condition!"

"I know not," returned Lawrence, sadly. "But it would be useless, I fear, to try to ferret them out."

"Quite useless," said Pedro. "Besides, what would it avail to talk with any of them about the affairs of a place that is now in ashes? But if your father spoke of his fortune, he must have had at least some of it in a bank somewhere."

"True, but I don't know where. All I know is that he once mentioned casually in one of his letters that he was going to Buenos Ayres, where he had some property."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Pedro. "Come, that may help you to decide, for I am myself going to Buenos Ayres, and can guide you there if disposed to go. Only, you will have to make up your mind to a pretty long and hard journey, for duty requires me to go by a devious route. You must know," he continued, lighting another cigarette, "that I am pledged to take that girl to her father, who lives not far from Buenos Ayres."

He pointed as he spoke to Manuela, who, having laid her head on her saddle, appeared to have fallen asleep.

"Her father must be a chief, I should think, to judge from her dignified, graceful carriage, as well as her fine features," said Lawrence in a low tone.

"Yes, he is a chief—a great chief," returned Pedro, gazing at his cigarette in a meditative mood—"a very great chief. You see, she happened to be living with friends on the western side of the mountains when this war between Chili and Peru broke out, and her father naturally wants to get her out of danger. The old chief once saved my life, so, you see, I am bound both by duty and gratitude to rescue his daughter."

"Indeed you are, and a pleasant duty it must be," returned Lawrence with an approving nod; "but don't you think it might have been wise to have rescued some other female, a domestic for instance, to keep her company? The poor girl will feel very lonely on such a long journey as you speak of."

Pedro again looked musingly at his cigarette, and flipped off the ash with his little finger.

"You have not had much experience of war, young man," he said, "if you think that in cases of rescue men can always arrange things comfortably, and according to the rules of propriety. When towns and villages are in flames, when plunder and rapine run riot everywhere, and little children are spitted on the bayonets of patriots, as is often the case even in what men have agreed to term civilised warfare, one is glad to escape with the skin of one's teeth. Yet I was not as regardless of Manuela's comfort as you seem to think. A poor woman who had nursed her when a child volunteered to accompany us, and continued with us on the first part of our journey; but the exertion, as I had feared, was too much for her. She caught a fever and died, so that we were forced to come on alone."

If you join us, however, I shall be greatly pleased, for two can always make a better fight than one, and in these unsettled times there is no saying what we may fall in with in crossing the mountains.”

“But why expose the poor girl to such risks?” asked Lawrence. “Surely there must be some place of safety nearer than Buenos Ayres, to which you might conduct her?”

“Senhor Armstrong,” replied the man, with a return of his stern expression, “I have told you that my business is urgent. Not even the rescue of my old friend’s daughter can turn me aside from it. When Manuela begged me to take her with me, I pointed out the difficulties and dangers of the route, and the necessity for my pursuing a long and devious course, but she said she feared to remain where she was; that, being young, strong, and accustomed to an active life, she felt sure she was equal to the journey; that she could trust me, and that she knew her father would approve of her taking the step. I agreed, with some hesitation. It turned out that the girl was right in her fears, for before we left the town it was attacked by the troops of Chili. The Peruvians made but a poor resistance, and it was carried by assault. When I saw that all hope of saving the place was gone, I managed to bring Manuela and her nurse away in safety. As I have told you, the nurse died, and now—here we are alone. Manuela chooses to run the risk. I will not turn aside from my duty. If you choose to join us, the girl will be safer—at least until we cross the mountains. On the other side I shall be joined by friends, if need be.”

Pedro ceased, and rekindled his cigarette, which had gone out during the explanation.

“I will go with you,” said Lawrence, with decision, as he extended his hand.

“Good,” replied Pedro, grasping it with a hearty squeeze; “now I shall have no fears for our little Indian, for robbers are cowards as a rule.”

“Have we, then, much chance of meeting with robbers?”

“Well, I should say we have little chance of altogether escaping them, for in times of war there are always plenty of deserters and other white-livered scoundrels who seize the opportunity to work their will. Besides, there are some noted outlaws in the neighbourhood of the pass we are going to cross. There’s Conrad of the Mountains, for instance. You’ve heard of him?”

“No, never.”

“Ah, senhor, that proves you to be a stranger here, for his name is known from the Atlantic to the Pacific—chiefly, however, on the east side of the Cordillera, and on the Pampas. He is an outlaw—at least he is said to be so; but one cannot believe all one hears. Some say that he is cruel, others that he is ferocious among men, but never hurts women or children.”

“Well, it is to be hoped we may not fall in with him, or any of his band,” said Lawrence; “for it is better to hear of his qualities than to put them to the test.”

“Yet, methinks,” resumed Pedro, “if you fell in with him alone you should have no cause to fear him, for you must be more than his match.”

“I don’t think I should fear him,” returned Lawrence, with a simple look. “As to being more than his match, I know not, for my spirit does not prompt me to light, and I cannot boast of much capacity in the use of arms—unless you count my good oak-cudgel a weapon. I have acquired some facility in the use of that, having practised singlestick as an amusement at school.”

As he spoke, the youth was surprised and somewhat startled by his companion suddenly drawing a pistol from his belt, and pointing it steadily at the open doorway of the hut. Turning his eyes quickly in that direction, he beheld, with increased astonishment, a pair of glaring eyes, two rows of glittering teeth, and a pair of thick red lips! The flesh which united these striking objects was all but invisible, by reason of its being nearly as black as its background.

Most eyes, if human, would have got away from a pistol’s line of fire with precipitancy, but the eyes referred to did not disappear. On the contrary, they paid no regard whatever to the owner of the pistol, but continued to glare steadily at Lawrence Armstrong. Seeing this, Pedro hesitated to pull the trigger. He was quick to defend himself, but not prompt to kill. When he saw that the eyes slowly advanced out of the gloom, that they with the lips and teeth belonged to a negro who advanced

into the room unarmed and with outspread hands, he quietly lowered his weapon, and glanced at Lawrence. No doubt Pedro felt, as he certainly looked, perplexed, when he observed that Lawrence returned the intruder's gaze with almost equal intensity.

Suddenly the negro sprang towards the Englishman. He was a short, thick-set, and exceedingly powerful man; yet Lawrence made no move to defend himself.

"Quashy!" he exclaimed, as the black fell on his knees, seized one of his hands, and covered it with kisses, at the same time bursting into tears.

"Oh! massa Lawrie—oh! massa Lawrie, why you no come sooner? Why you so long? De sodger brutes nebber dar to touch de ole house if you was dere. Oh! Massa Lawrie, you's too late—too late!—My! how you's growed!"

In the midst of his sobs the young negro, for he was little more than a youth, drew back his head to obtain a better view of his old companion and playmate.

Need we say that Lawrence reciprocated the affection of the man?

"He was a boy like myself when I was here," said Lawrence in explanation to the amused Peruvian. "His father was one of my father's most attached servants, whom he brought from Kentucky on his way to this land, and to whom he gave his freedom. Quashy himself used to be my playmate.—But tell me about the attack on the mill, Quash. Were you present?"

"Prisint! You bery sure I was, an' I poke some holes in de varmints 'fore dey hoed away."

"And how did you escape, Quash? Come, sit down and tell me all about it."

The negro willingly complied. Meanwhile the Indian girl, who had been roused by his sudden entrance, resumed her seat on the saddle, and, looking intently into his black face, seemed to try to gather from the expression of his features something of what he said.

We need not repeat the story. It was a detailed account of murder and destruction; the burning of the place and the scattering of the old servants. Fortunately Lawrence had no relatives to deplore.

"But don't you know where any of the household have gone?" he asked, when the excited negro paused to recover breath.

"Don't know nuffin'. Arter I poke de holes in de scoundrils, I was 'bleeged to bolt. When I come back, de ole house was in flames, an' eberybody gone—what wasn't dead. I hollered—ay, till I was a'most busted—but nobody reply. Den I bury de dead ones, an' I've hoed about eber since slobberin' an' wringin' my hands."

"Was our old clerk among the slain?" asked Lawrence.

"No, massa, but I tinks he's a dead one now, for he too ole to run far."

"And I suppose you can't even guess where any of those who escaped went to?"

"Couldn't guess more nor a Red Injin's noo-born babby."

"Quashy," said Lawrence in a low voice, "be careful how you speak of Indians."

He glanced, as he spoke, at Manuela, who now sat with grave face and downcast eyes, having apparently found that the human countenance, however expressive, failed to make up for the want of language.

And, truly, Quashy's countenance was unwontedly mobile and expressive. Every feature seemed to possess the power of independently betraying the thoughts and feelings of the man, so that when they all united for that end the effect was marvellous. Emotional, and full of quick sympathy, Quashy's visage changed from grave to gay, pitiful to fierce, humorous to savage, at a moment's notice. When, therefore, he received the gentle rebuke above referred to, his animated countenance assumed a sudden aspect of utter woe and self-condemnation that may be conceived but cannot be described, and when Lawrence gave vent to a short laugh at the unexpected change, Quashy's eyes glistened with an arch look, and his mouth expanded from ear to ear.

And what an expansion that was, to be sure! when you take into account the display of white teeth and red gums by which it was accompanied.

"Well, now, Quash," resumed Lawrence, "what did you do after that?"

“Arter what, massa?”

“After finding that slobbering and wringing your hands did no good.”

“Oh! arter dat, I not know what to do, an’ den I tried to die—I *was* so mis’rable. But I couldn’t. You’ve no notion how hard it is to die when you wants to. Anyhow I couldn’t manage it, so I gib up tryin’.”

At this point Manuela rose, and, bidding Pedro good-night in the Indian tongue, passed into her little chamber and shut the door.

“And what do you intend to do now, Quash?” asked Lawrence.

“Stick to you, massa, troo t’ick an’ t’in,” returned the negro with emphatic promptitude, which caused even Pedro to laugh.

“My poor fellow, that is impossible,” said Lawrence, who then explained his position and circumstances, showing how it was that he had little money and no immediate prospect of obtaining any,—that, in short, he was about to start out in the wide world friendless and almost penniless to seek his fortune. To all of which the negro listened with a face so utterly devoid of expression of any kind that his old master and playmate could not tell how he took it.

“And now,” he asked in conclusion, “what say you to all that?”

“Stick to you troo t’ick and t’in,” repeated Quashy, in a tone of what might be styled sulky firmness.

“But,” said Lawrence, “I can’t pay you any wages.”

“Don’ want no wages,” said Quashy.

“Besides,” resumed Lawrence, “even if I were willing to take you, Senhor Pedro might object.”

“I no care for Senhor Pedro one brass buttin,” retorted the negro.

The Peruvian smiled rather approvingly at this candid expression of opinion.

“Where you gwine?” asked Quashy, abruptly.

“To Buenos Ayres.”

“I’s gwine to Bens Airies too. I’s a free nigger, an’ no mortal man kin stop me.”

As Quashy remained obdurate, and, upon consultation, Lawrence and Pedro came to the conclusion that such a sturdy, resolute fellow might be rather useful in the circumstances, it was finally arranged, to the poor fellow’s inexpressible delight, that he should accompany them in their long journey to the far east.

Chapter Three.

Lingual Difficulties Accompanied by Physical Dangers and followed by the Advent of Banditti

After several days had passed away, our travellers found themselves among the higher passes of the great mountain range of the Andes.

Before reaching that region, however, they had, in one of the villages through which they passed, supplied themselves each with a fresh stout mule, besides two serviceable animals to carry their provisions and camp equipage.

Pedro, who of course rode ahead in the capacity of guide, seemed to possess an unlimited supply of cash, and Lawrence Armstrong had at least sufficient to enable him to bear his fair share of the expenses of the journey. As for Quashy, being a servant he had no expenses to bear.

Of course the finest, as well as the best-looking, mule had been given to the pretty Manuela, and, despite the masculine attitude of her position, she sat and managed her steed with a grace of motion that might have rendered many a white dame envious. Although filled with admiration, Lawrence was by no means surprised, for he knew well that in the Pampas, or plains, to which region her father belonged, the Indians are celebrated for their splendid horsemanship. Indeed, their little children almost live on horseback, commencing their training long before they can mount, and overcoming the difficulty of smallness in early youth, by climbing to the backs of their steeds by means of a fore-leg, and not unfrequently by the tail.

The costume of the girl was well suited to her present mode of life, being a sort of light tunic reaching a little below the knees, with loose leggings, which were richly ornamented with needlework. A straw hat with a simple feather, covered her head, beneath which her curling black hair flowed in unconfined luxuriance. She wore no ornament of any kind, and the slight shoes that covered her small feet were perfectly plain. In short, there was a modest simplicity about the girl's whole aspect and demeanour which greatly interested the Englishman, inducing him to murmur to himself, "What an uncommonly pretty girl she would be if she were only white!"

The colour of her skin was, indeed, unusually dark, but that fact did not interfere with the classic delicacy of her features, or the natural sweetness of her expression.

The order of progress in narrow places was such that Manuela rode behind Pedro and in front of Lawrence, Quashy bringing up the rear. In more open places the young Englishman used occasionally to ride up abreast of Manuela and endeavour to engage her in conversation. He was, to say truth, very much the reverse of what is styled a lady's man, and had all his life felt rather shy and awkward in female society, but being a sociable, kindly fellow, he felt it incumbent on him to do what in him lay to lighten the tedium of the long journey to one who, he thought, must naturally feel very lonely with no companions but men. "Besides," he whispered to himself, "she is only an Indian, and of course cannot construe my attentions to mean anything so ridiculous as love-making—so, I will speak to her in a fatherly sort of way."

Filled with this idea, as the party came out upon a wide and beautiful table-land, which seemed like a giant emerald set in a circlet of grand blue mountains, Lawrence pushed up alongside, and said—

"Poor girl, I fear that such prolonged riding over these rugged passes must fatigue you." Manuela raised her dark eyes to the youth's face, and, with a smile that was very slight—though not so slight but that it revealed a double row of bright little teeth—she replied softly—

"W'at you say?"

"Oh! I forgot, you don't speak English. How stupid I am!" said Lawrence with a blush, for he was too young to act the "fatherly" part well.

He felt exceedingly awkward, but, observing that the girl's eyes were again fixed pensively on the ground, he hoped that she had not noticed the blush, and attempted to repeat the phrase in Spanish. What he said it is not possible to set down in that tongue, nor can we gratify the reader with a translation. Whatever it was, Manuela replied by again raising her dark eyes for a moment—this time without a smile—and shaking her head.

Poor Lawrence felt more awkward than ever. In despair he half thought of making trial of Latin or Greek, when Pedro came opportunely to the rescue. Looking back he began—

“Senhor Armstrong—”

“I think,” interrupted the youth, “that you may dispense with ‘Senhor.’”

“Nay, I like to use it,” returned the guide. “It reminds me so forcibly of the time when I addressed your good old father thus.”

“Well, Senhor Pedro, call me what you please. What were you about to say?”

“Only that we are now approaching one of the dangerous passes of the mountains, where baggage-mules sometimes touch the cliffs with their packs, and so get tilted over the precipices. But our mules are quiet, and with ordinary care we have nothing to fear.”

The gorge in the mountains, which the travellers soon afterwards entered, fully justified the guide's expression “dangerous.” It was a wild, rugged glen, high up on one side of which the narrow pathway wound—in some places rounding a cliff or projecting boulder, which rendered the passage of the baggage-mules extremely difficult. Indeed, one of the mules did slightly graze a rock with its burden; and, although naturally sure-footed, was so far thrown off its balance as to be within a hair's-breadth of tumbling over the edge and being dashed to pieces on the rocks below, where a turbulent river rushed tumultuously at the bottom of the glen.

One of the snow-clad peaks of the higher Andes lay right before them. One or two guanacos—animals of the lama species—gazed at them from the other side of the gorge, and several ill-omened vultures wheeled in the sky above, as if anticipating a catastrophe which would furnish them with a glorious meal.

“A most suitable place for the depredations of banditti, or fellows like Conrad of the Mountains, I should think,” said Lawrence.

“Bandits are sometimes met with here,” returned Pedro, quietly.

“And what if we should meet with such in a place where there is scarcely room to fight?”

“Why then,” returned the guide, with a slight curl of his moustache, “we should have to try who could fight best in the smallest space.”

“Not a pleasant prospect in the circumstances,” said Lawrence, thinking of Manuela.

For some time they rode together in silence; but Quashy, who had overheard, the conversation, and was of a remarkably combative disposition, though the reverse of bad-tempered or quarrelsome, could not refrain from asking—

“W'y de Guv'mint not hab lots ob sojers an' pleece in de mountains to squash de raskils?”

“Because Government has enough to do to squash the rascals nearer home, Quashy,” answered Pedro. “Have a care, the track gets rather steep here.”

He glanced over his shoulder at the Indian girl as he spoke. She was riding behind with an air of perfect ease and self-possession.

“Fall to the rear, Quashy,” said Pedro.

The black obeyed at once, and a minute later they turned the corner of a jutting rock, which had hitherto shut out from view the lower part of the gorge and the track they were following.

The sight that met their view was calculated to try the strongest nerves, for there, not a hundred paces in advance, and coming towards them, were ten of the most villainous-looking cut-throats that could be imagined, all mounted, and heavily armed with carbine, sword, and pistol.

Taken completely by surprise, the bandits—for such Pedro knew them to be—pulled up. Not so our guide. It was one of the peculiarities and strong points of Pedro's character that he was never taken by surprise, or uncertain what to do.

Instantly he drew his sword with one hand, a pistol with the other, and, driving his spurs deep into his mule, dashed down the steep road at the banditti. In the very act he looked back, and, in a voice that caused the echoes of the gorge to ring, shouted in Spanish—

“Come on, comrades! here they are at last! close up!”

A yell of the most fiendish excitement and surprise from Quashy—who was only just coming into view—assisted the deception. If anything was wanting to complete the effect, it was the galvanic upheaval of Lawrence's long arms and the tremendous flourish of his longer legs, as he vaulted over his mule's head, left it scornfully behind, uttered a roar worthy of an African lion, and rushed forward on foot. He grasped his great cudgel, for sword and pistol had been utterly forgotten!

Like a human avalanche they descended on the foe. That foe did not await the onset. Panic-stricken they turned and went helter-skelter down the pass—all except two, who seemed made of sterner stuff than their fellows, and hesitated.

One of these Pedro rode fairly down, and sent, horse and all, over the precipice. Lawrence's cudgel beat down the guard of the other, flattened his sombrero, and stopping only at his skull, stretched him on the ground. As for those who had fled, the appalling yells of Quashy, as he pursued them, scattered to the winds any fag-ends of courage they might have possessed, and effectually prevented their return. So tremendous and sudden was the result, that Manuela felt more inclined to laugh than cry, though naturally a good deal frightened.

Lawrence and Pedro were standing in consultation over the fallen bandit when the negro came back panting from the chase.

“Da's wan good job dooed, anyhow,” he said. “What's you be do wid *him*?”

“What would you recommend?” asked Pedro.

The negro pointed significantly to the precipice, but the guide shook his head.

“No, I cannot kill in cold blood, though I have no doubt he richly deserves it. We'll bind his hands and leave him. It may be weakness on my part, but we can't take him on, you know.”

While Pedro was in the act of binding the robber, a wild shriek, as of some one in terrible agony, startled them. Looking cautiously over the precipice, where the sound seemed to come from, they saw that the man whom Pedro had ridden down was hanging over the abyss by the boughs of a small shrub. His steed lay mangled on the rocks of the river bank at the bottom. There was an agonised expression in the man's countenance which would have touched a heart much less soft than that of Lawrence Armstrong. Evidently the man's power of holding on was nearly exhausted, and he could not repress a shriek at the prospect of the terrible death which seemed so imminent.

Being a practised mountaineer, Lawrence at once, without thought of personal danger, and moved only by pity, slipped over the crags, and, descending on one or two slight projections, the stability of which even a Swiss goat might have questioned, reached the bush. A look of fierce and deadly hate was on the robber's face, for, judging of others by himself, he thought, no doubt, that his enemy meant to hasten his destruction.

“Here, catch hold—I'll save you!” cried Lawrence, extending his strong right hand.

A glance of surprise told that he was understood. The bandit let go the hold of one of his hands and made a convulsive grasp at his rescuer. Their fingers touched, but at the same moment the branch gave way, and, with a cry of wild despair, the wretched man went headlong down.

Not, however, to destruction. The effort he had made threw him slightly to one side of the line which his horse had taken in its fall. The difference was very slight indeed, yet it sufficed to send him towards another bush lower down the cliff. Still, the height he had to fall would have ensured the breaking of all his bones if the bush had not hurled him off with a violent rebound.

Lawrence almost felt giddy with horror. Next moment a heavy plunge was heard. The man had fallen into a deep dark pool in the river, which was scarce distinguishable from the cliffs above. Being fringed with bushes, it was impossible to note whether he rose again. Lawrence was still gazing anxiously at the pool, when something touched his cheek. It was a lasso which Pedro had quietly dropped over his shoulders.

“Hold fast to it, *senhor*, you’ll never get up without it,” he said, in tones so earnest that the youth became suddenly alive to the great danger of his position. In the haste and anxiety of his descent he had failed to note that one or two of the slight projections on which he had placed his feet had broken away, and that therefore a return to the top of the almost perpendicular precipice by the same route was impracticable. Even the slight ledge on which he stood, and from which the little shrub grew, seemed to be crumbling away beneath his great weight. With that feeling of alarm which the sudden and unexpected prospect of instant death brings, we presume, even to the stoutest hearts, Lawrence clutched the line convulsively. He was ignorant at that time of the great strength of the South American lasso, and hesitated to trust his life entirely to it. Pedro guessed his feelings.

“Don’t fear to trust it,” he said, “many a wild bull it has held, four times your size; but wait till Quashy and I get our feet well fixed—we’ll haul you up easily.”

“Have you made the end fast?” cried Lawrence, looking up and encountering the anxious gaze of the Indian maiden.

“Yes, *massa*, all fast,” answered Quashy, whose look of horror can be more easily imagined than described.

“Hold on, then, and *don’t* haul.”

The two men obeyed, and the active youth pulled himself up hand over hand, making good use in passing of any hollow or projection that afforded the slightest hold for his toes. At the top he was roughly grasped by his rescuers and dragged into safety.

“Poor fellow!” he exclaimed, on reaching the top.

“Well, *massa*,” said Quashy, with a broad grin, “*das jist w’at I’s agwine to say, but you’s too quick for me.*”

“I meant the bandit, not myself,” said Lawrence, looking over the cliff at the pool with an expression of great pity.

“Ha! don’t be uneasy about him,” said Pedro, with a short laugh, as he resumed the binding of the stunned robber. “If he’s killed or drowned he’s well out o’ the way. If he has escaped he’ll be sure to recover and make himself a pest to the neighbourhood for many a day to come.—No, no, my good man, it’s of no use, you needn’t try it.”

The latter part of this speech was in Spanish, and addressed to the robber, who, having recovered consciousness, had made a sudden struggle to shake off his captor. As suddenly he ceased the effort on finding that the strength of the guide was greatly superior to his own.

In another minute Pedro stood up, having bound the bandit’s hands in front of him in a manner that rendered any effort at self-liberation impossible—at least in a short space of time.

“There,” said Pedro to Lawrence, “I’ll warrant him to lead a harmless life until to-morrow at any rate.”

As he spoke he drew the man’s pistols, knife, and carbine, and handed them to Quashy.

“There,” he said, “you may find these useful.”

Meanwhile the robber lay quietly on his back, glancing from one to another of the party with looks of hatred that told clearly enough how he would have acted had he been free.

Turning to him as he was about to remount and quit the scene, Pedro said very sternly in Spanish—

“You and I have met before, friend, and you know my powers with the rifle at long-range. If you offer to rise from the spot where you now lie until we have disappeared round that rocky point half a mile along the road, you are a dead man. After we have turned the point, you may go where

you will and do what you please. I might point out that in refraining from cutting your throat I am showing mercy which you don't deserve—but it is useless to throw pearls to swine.”

The man spoke no word of reply, though he did look a little surprised as the party left him and rode away.

“Would it not have been safer to have bound his hands behind his back?” asked Lawrence.

“No doubt it would, but he is secure enough for our purpose as he is. If I had bound him as you suggest, he would have been almost certain to perish, being quite unable to help himself. As it is, he can use his tied hands to some extent, and, by perseverance in sawing the lines against sharp rocks, he will set himself free at last. By that time, however, we shall be beyond his reach.”

From time to time they all glanced over their shoulders as they rode along, but the bound man did not stir. After they had passed beyond the point of rock before referred to, Lawrence's curiosity prompted him to turn back and peep round.

The bandit had already risen from the ground, and could be seen walking, as quickly as circumstances permitted, up the track by which they had just descended.

In a few minutes his tall figure was seen to pause for a brief space at the summit of the pass. Then it disappeared on the other side into the gloomy recesses of the mountains.

Chapter Four.

In which Quashy is Communicative and an Enemy is Turned into a Friend

The pass which our travellers had just crossed merely led them over a mountain chain which may be described as the Peruvian Cordillera. Beyond it lay a fruitful valley of considerable extent, which terminated at the base of the great range, or backbone, of the Andes. Beyond this again lay another valley of greater extent than the first, which was bounded by a third range or cordillera of inferior height, the eastern slopes of which descended on one hand in varying undulations to the dense forests of equatorial Brazil, on the other, by easy gradations to the level Pampas or plains which extend for hundreds of miles through the lands of the Argentine Confederation to the Atlantic.

Two mountain passes, therefore, were still to be crossed, and Lawrence Armstrong began to think that if things went on as they had begun a pretty lively experience probably lay before them.

But in this he was mistaken, at least as regarded banditti, though in some other respects the journey was not quite devoid of stirring incidents—as we shall see.

We have said that the good-nature of the young Englishman induced him to attempt conversation with the Indian girl, and at first Manuela appeared to be amused, if not interested, by his unsuccessful efforts; but after one of these futile attempts Pedro made some remarks to the girl in the Indian tongue, and in a tone of remonstrance, which had the effect of rendering her more silent and grave than before. Lawrence, therefore, finally ceased to address her, though his natural gallantry prompted him to offer assistance when it seemed necessary, and to accost her with a hearty good-night and good-morning each day.

As Pedro, in his capacity of guide, usually rode a few paces in advance, and was frequently in a silent, abstracted mood, Lawrence was thus thrown almost entirely on the negro for companionship. Although the young Englishman may not have estimated his company very highly, nothing could have been more satisfactory to Quashy, who, with delight expressed in every wrinkle and lineament of his black visage, fully availed himself of his opportunities.

“O Massa Lawrie!” he exclaimed, at the close of one of their conversations, “how I does lub to talk ob de ole times when me an’ you was play togidder!”

“Yes, it’s very nice to recall old times,” answered Lawrence, with a half-suppressed yawn, for they had by that time gone over the old times so often that the novelty had rather worn off.

“Yes, bery nice,” repeated Quashy, with gleaming eyes, “when I tink ob de ole fadder an’ de ole mill an’ de ole fun what me an’ you carried on—oh! my heart goes like to bu’st.”

“Don’t let it bu’st here, whatever you do, Quashy, for you’ll need all the heart you possess to carry you safely over these mountain passes.”

Quashy opened his huge mouth, shut his eyes, and went off in a high falsetto—his usual mode of laughing. He always laughed at Lawrence’s little jokes, whether good or bad, insomuch that the youth finally abstained from jesting as much as possible.

“I did not know,” continued Lawrence, “that there were so many robbers about. Pedro tells me that the mountains are swarming with them just now.”

“Ho yis, massa, plenty ob rubbers eberywhar,” said Quashy, with a nod, “more nor ’nuff ob dem. You see, massa, Chili an’ Proo’s a-fightin’ wid each oder jus’ now. What dey’s fightin’ about no mortal knows; an’, what’s more, nobody cares. I s’pose one say de oder’s wrong an’ de oder say de one’s say not right. Bof say das a big lie so at it dey goes hammer an’ tongs to prove—ha! ha! to prove dey’s bof right. Oh my!”

Here the negro opened his cavernous jaws and gave vent to another explosion of shrill laughter.

“What fools dey is!”

“Then you think it is only fools who fight, Quashy?”

“Ob coorse, massa. Don’ you see, if dey wasn’t fools dey wouldn’t fight; ’cause fightin’ can’t prove nuffin’, an’ it can’t do nuffin’, ’cep’ waste life an’ money. No doubt,” added the negro, with a meditative gaze at the ground, “when rubbers come at a feller he’s boun’ to fight, for why? he can’t help it; or when Red Injin savages—”

“Have a care, Quashy, what you say about Indians. I’ve warned you once already.”

“O massa!” said the poor black, with a look of almost superhuman penitence, “I beg your pard’n. I’s quite forgit to remimber. I was just agwine to say that there *is* times when you *mus*’ fight. But isn’t Chili Christ’n, an’ isn’t P’roo Christ’n? I don’ bleeve in Christ’ns what cut each oder’s t’roats to prove dey’s right. Howsever, das noting. What I’s agwine to say is—dars a lot o’ white livers on bof sides, an’ dese dey runs away, takes to de mountains and becomes rubbers. But dey’s not all bad alike, dough none of em’s good. You’s heer’d ob Conrad ob de Mountains, massa?”

“Yes, Pedro mentioned his name. He seems to be a celebrated bandit.”

“Well, I’s not sure. Some peepil say he’s not a rubber at all, but a good sort o’ feller as goes mad sometimes. He’s bery kind to women an’ child’n, but he’s bery awful.”

“That’s a strange character. How do you know he’s so very awful, Quashy?”

“Because I seed ’im, massa.”

“Indeed, where?”

“On de plains ob Proo, massa,” replied the negro, with that self-satisfied clearing of the throat which was usually the prelude to a long story.

“Come now, Quashy,” said Lawrence, with a laugh, “don’t be too long-winded, and don’t exaggerate.”

“Don’t ex-what-gerate, massa?”

“Exaggerate.”

“What’s dat, massa?”

“Never mind, Quashy—go on.”

With a genial and highly exaggerated smile, the negro proceeded:—

“Well, as I was agwine to say, I see dis man, Conrad ob de Mountains, on de plains ob Proo. I’s in de Proo camp at de time, attendin’ on you’s fadder, an’ de army ob Chili was in front ob us on de slopes ob de hills, agwine to go in for a fight wid us. De sojers ob Proo wasn’t bery keen for fightin’. I could see dat, but their gin’ral screwed ’em up to de pint, an’ dey was all ready, when all of a sudden, we sees a pris’ner brought in by four sojers. Dey seem so ’fraid ob him dey darn’t touch him, tho’ he was unarmed. Two walked behind him, an’ two walked in front ob ’im, all wid dere baynets pintin’ at ’im, ready to skewer ’im all round if he was try to run. But, poor chap, he walk wid his head down, bery sad-like—nebber t’inkin’ ob runnin’. So dey druv’ ’im up to our gin’ral. I was in a crowd o’ tall fellers, an’ de pris’ner had his back to me, so I not seed his face well. ‘Das Conrad ob de Mountains dey’ve cotched,’ says a feller near me. ‘Listen!’ We all listen’d so quiet you could hear a ’skito sneeze. ‘What’s you’ name?’ asks de gin’ral, ridin’ close up to Conrad on his splendid war-hoss—a child ob one ob de war-hosses as come ober wid Pizarro from Spain. ‘My name’s Pumpkin,’ answers de pris’ner. ‘Das a lie!’ says de gin’ral. ‘No’s not,’ says Conrad, lookin’ up, as I could see by de back ob his head. ‘What side you b’longs to, raskil?’ ‘To no side, gin’ral.’ ‘Whar you come fro?’ ‘Fro’ de mountains, gin’r’l.’ ‘Whar you go to?’ ‘Ober de mountains, gin’ral.’ I could see by de way de fedders in de gin’ral’s hat shake dat he’s gittin’ in a wax at de cool imprence ob de pris’ner, but he ’strain hisself, an’ spoke sarkmistic. ‘Senhor Pumpkin,’ says he, ‘you are Conrad ob de Mountains,’—(’cause he guess who he was by dat time); ‘how you prepose to go ober de mountains?’ ‘Dis way!’ says Conrad, an’, nixt momint, up goes de gin’ral’s leg, down goes his head an’ fedders on de ground, and Conrad sits in de saddle afore you can wink. All round de baynets was charge, but dey haul up jist in time not to skewer one anoder, for de horse shotted out fro’ between dem all, an’ away straight to de Chili lines, whar dere was a great cheerin’, for dey t’ought it was a deserter. When Conrad came up,

he trotted quietly troo de ranks, till he got near to whar de Chili commander stood wid his hofficers, wonderin' who he was. As he couldn't 'spec' to git no furder, he rides quietly up to a hofficer, takes de sword out ob his hand afore he understand what he wants, den, diggin' de spurs into de big war-hoss, off he goes wid a yell like a Red Inj—oh! I's mean like a—a buff'lo bull. Out comes de swords. Dey close all round 'im. I no see him by dat time. He too fur off; but a friend ob mine was near, an' he say dat Conrad swing de long sword so quick, an' de sun was shinin' so clar, dat it look like a circle ob fire all round him. Down dey hoed on ebery side. Off goed a head here, an arm dere. One trooper cut troo at de waist, an' fall'd off, but de legs stick on. Anoder splitted right down fro' de helmet, so as one half fall on one side, an' de odour half fall—”

“Come now, Quashy,” interrupted Lawrence, with a laugh, “you exaggerate.”

“What! you call *dat* exaggerate, massa? Den Conrad exaggerate about ten more afore he cut his way troo an' 'scaped to de hills. Oh, he's an awrful man!”

“Truly he must be very awful, if all you relate of him be true,” said Lawrence; “and I sincerely trust that if we fall in with him we may find him friendly. Now, I shall ride forward, and ask Pedro if we are far from our halting-place.”

This abrupt change of subject was usually understood by the amiable negro to mean that our hero—whom he persisted in regarding as his master—had had enough of his conversation at that time, so he reined back his mule, while Lawrence pushed forward.

To his question Pedro replied that he expected to reach the next sleeping-place very soon.

“It will not be as luxurious as the last,” he said; “but, doubtless, one who has traversed the mountains of Scotland is prepared to rough it in South America.”

“You speak as if you were yourself somewhat acquainted with the Scottish mountains.”

“So I am, senhor,” replied the guide. “I had clambered up Ben Nevis while I was yet a little boy.”

“Surely you are not a Scot?” said Lawrence, with a quick glance.

“No, I am not a Scot, senhor. To have travelled in a country does not render one a native, else might I claim England, Ireland, and Switzerland as my native lands. See, yonder lies the little farm where I hope to put up for the night.”

He pointed as he spoke to the head of the glen or valley, which was somewhat narrower and more gloomy than the vales through which they had ridden in the earlier part of the day. Since crossing the first cordillera on the Pacific side of the Andes they had, indeed, traversed a great variety of country. In some places the land was rocky and comparatively barren. In others, where the peculiar form of the mountains sheltered the table-lands, the country was fertile, and numerous farms dotted the landscape, but as they ascended higher on the main chain the farms became fewer, until they finally disappeared, and an occasional hut, with a mere patch of cultivated ground, was all that remained in the vast solitudes to tell of the presence of man.

It was to one of these huts that Pedro now directed his companion's attention.

“A most suitable place for the abode of banditti,” remarked Lawrence, as they advanced up the winding path.

“And many a time do the bandits lodge there,” returned Pedro. “Of course, robbers of the Andes do not go about with placards on their backs announcing their profession to all the world, and, as long as they behave themselves, farmers are bound to regard them as honest men.”

“You said, if I heard rightly,” observed Lawrence, “that you had formerly met with the rascal whom we let off the other day.”

“Yes, I know him well. One of the worst men in the land. I'm almost sorry we did not shoot him, but I never could take human life in cold blood, even when that life had been forfeited over and over again. However, he's sure to get his deserts sooner or later.”

“Then he is not Conrad of the Mountains whom you mentioned to me lately?”

“No, Conrad is a very different stamp of man—though he has not too much to boast of in the way of character if all that's said of him be true. The man we let go is a gaucho of the Pampas named

Cruz. He delights in war, and has fought in the armies of Chili, Peru, and the Argentine Confederation without much regard to the cause of quarrel. In fact, wherever fighting is going on Cruz is sure to be there. Lately he has taken to the mountains, and now fights for his own hand.”

“And the other poor fellow who went over the precipice,” asked Lawrence, “did you know him?”

“I knew him slightly. Antonio is his name, I think, but he is a villain of no note—an inferior bandit, though quite equal to his captain, no doubt, in selfishness and cruelty.”

On arriving at the hut or small farm at the head of the valley, they found its owner, a burly, good-humoured Creole, alone with his mother, an old woman whose shrivelled-up appearance suggested the idea of a mummy partially thawed into life. She was busy cooking over a small fire, the smoke of which seemed congenial to her—judging from the frequency with which she thrust her old head into it while inspecting the contents of an iron pot.

There was plenty of room for them, the host said, with an air of profound respect for Pedro, whom he saluted as an old acquaintance. The house had been full two days before, but the travellers had gone on, and the only one who remained was a poor man who lay in an out-house very sick.

“Who is he?” asked Pedro, as he assisted Manuela to alight.

“I know not, senhor,” replied the host. “He is a stranger, who tells me he has been robbed. I can well believe it, for he has been roughly handled, and there are some well-known bandits in the neighbourhood. His injuries would not have been so serious, however, if he had not caught a fever from exposure.”

“Indeed,” returned the guide, who, however, seemed more interested in unsaddling his mules than in listening to the account of the unfortunate man, “was it near this that he fell in with the bandits?”

“No, senhor, it was far to the west. The travellers who brought him on said they found him almost insensible on the banks of a stream into which he appeared to have fallen or been thrown.”

Pedro glanced at Lawrence.

“Hear you that, senhor?”

“My Spanish only suffices to inform me that some one has been robbed and injured.”

Explaining fully what their host had said, Pedro advised Lawrence to visit the stranger in his medical character.

“My friend is a doctor,” he said, turning to the host, “take him to the sick man; for myself, I will put up the mules and then assist the old mother, for mountain air sharpens appetite.”

In a rude, tumble-down hut close to the main building Lawrence found his patient. He lay stretched in a corner on a heap of straw in a state of great exhaustion—apparently dying—and with several bandages about his cut and bruised head and face.

The first glance told Lawrence that it was Antonio, the robber whom he had tried to rescue, but he carefully concealed his knowledge, and, bending over the man, addressed him as if he were a stranger. The start and look of surprise mingled with alarm on the robber’s face told that he had recognised Lawrence, but he also laid restraint on himself, and drew one of the bandages lower down on his eyes.

Feeling his pulse, Lawrence asked him about his food.

He got little, he said, and that little was not good; the people of the farm seemed to grudge it.

“My poor man,” said Lawrence in his bad Spanish, “they are starving you to death. But I’ll see to that.”

He rose and went out quickly. Returning with a basin of soup, he presented it to the invalid, who ate it with relish. Then the man began to relate how he had been attacked a few days before by a party of robbers in one of the mountain passes, who had cut the throats of all his party in cold blood, and had almost killed himself, when he was rescued by the opportune arrival of some travellers.

Lawrence was much disgusted at first by the man's falsehood. Observing the poor fellow's extreme weakness, however, and his evident anxiety lest he should be recognised, the feeling changed to pity. Laying his hand gently on the man's shoulder, he said, with a look of solemnity which perchance made, up to some extent for the baldness of the phraseology—

“Antonio, tell not lies; you are dying!”

The startled man looked at his visitor earnestly. “Am I dying?” he asked, in a low tone.

“You are, perhaps; I know not. I will save you if possible.”

These words were accompanied by a kind look and a comforting pat on the shoulder, which, it may be, did more for the sick man than the best of physic. At all events the result was a sudden grasp of the hand and a look of gratitude which spoke volumes. The robber was about to give vent to his feelings in speech when the door opened, and the burly host, putting his head in, announced that supper was ready.

Giving his patient another reassuring pat, the young doctor left him and returned to the banqueting-hall of the mountain farm, where he found that Manuela, Pedro, and Quashy were more or less earnestly engaged with the contents of the iron pot.

Chapter Five.

Lawrence and Quashy become “Flosuffical,” and they camp out beside the “Giant’s Castle.”

While the party were at supper the first gusts of a storm, which had for some time been brewing, shook the little hut, and before they had all fallen into the profound slumber which usually followed their day’s journey, a heavy gale was howling among the mountain gorges with a noise like the roaring of a thousand lions. For two days the gale raged so furiously that travelling—especially in the higher regions of the Andes—became impossible. The Indian girl, Pedro, and the negro, bore their detention with that stoicism which is not an infrequent characteristic of mountaineers, guides, and savages. As for our hero, he devoted himself and all his skill to his patient—to which duty he was the more reconciled that it afforded him a good opportunity at once for improving his Spanish and pointing out to the bandit the error of his ways.

To do the man justice, he seemed to be fully sensible of the young doctor’s kindness, and thanked him, with tears in his eyes, not only for his previous intention to save him from the tremendous fall over the cliff, but for his subsequent efforts to alleviate the evil consequences thereof.

It mattered nothing to the great warm-hearted, loose-jointed Englishman that when he mentioned these hopeful signs in his patient to Pedro, that worthy shook his head and smiled sarcastically, or that Quashy received the same information with a closing of the eyes and an expansion of the jaws which revealed the red recesses of his throat to their darkest deeps! Lawrence, being a man of strong opinions, was not to be shaken out of them either by sarcasm or good-humoured contempt.

Turning to the Indian girl for sympathy, he related the matter to her at a time when the other inhabitants of the hut had gone out and left them alone.

“You see,—Manuela,” he said, with the frown of meditation on his brow, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, “I have no belief in the very common idea that there is a soft spot in the heart of every man, however bad; but I do believe that the heart of the very worst of men may be made soft by the Spirit of God, and that He employs us, who call ourselves Christians, as His agents in bringing about the result. It is quite possible that I may have been thrown in the way of this robber for the very purpose of touching his heart through kindness—God’s own motive-power—and that the Spirit will soften his heart to receive the touch.”

He paused, and, withdrawing his gaze from the ceiling, observed that the girl’s eyes were fixed on his face with an expression of perplexity and earnestness.

It then suddenly occurred to him that, having spoken in English, she could not have understood him.

“But you *do* look as if you had some idea of what I have been saying, Manuela. Have you?”

“Si, senhor, some,” was the reply, as she dropped her eyes with an embarrassed look and blushed so as to make her pretty brown face look alarmingly red.

Endeavouring to convey the same ideas through the medium of Spanish, Lawrence made such a bungle of it that Manuela, instead of expressing sympathy, began to struggle so obviously with her feelings that the poor Englishman gave up the attempt, and good-naturedly joined his companion in a little burst of laughter. They were in the midst of this when the door opened and Quashy entered.

“You ’pears to be jolly,” observed the genial negro, with every wrinkle of his black visage ready to join in sympathetically, “was de jok a desprit good un?”

“Not very desperate, Quashy,” said Lawrence, “it was only my bad Spanish which made Manuela laugh. If you had been here to interpret we might have got on better with our philosophical discourse.”

“O massa!” returned the black—solemn remonstrance, both in manner and tone, putting to sudden flight the beaming look of sympathy—“don’t speak of me ’terpretin’ Spinich. Nebber could take kindly to dat stuff. Ob course I kin talk wid de peons an’ de gauchos, whose conv’sation am mostly ’bout grub, an’ hosses, an’ cattle, an’ dollars, an’ murder, but when I tries to go in for flosuffy, an’ sitch like, I breaks down altogidder.”

At this point the Indian girl’s tendency to laugh increased, but whether because of fresh views of the absurdity of what had passed, or because of some faint perception of the negro’s meaning, Lawrence had no power to decide.

“I should have thought, Quashy,” he said, with a return of his wonted gravity, “that a man of a thoughtful and contemplative turn of mind like you would have acquired the power of expressing almost any idea in Spanish by this time.”

“T’ank you for de compl’ment, massa,” replied Quashy, “but I not so clebber as you t’ink. Der am some tings in flosuffy dat beats me. When I tries to putt ’em afore oder peepil in Spinich, I somehow gits de brain-pan into sitch a conglomeration ob fumbustication dat I not able to see quite clar what I mean myself—dough, ob course, I knows dat I’m right.”

“Indeed!”

“Yis; but de great consolation I has is dat de peepil I’m talkin’ to don’t onderstand me a mossel better nor myself; an’, ob course, as noting in de wurl could show dem dey was wrong, it don’t much matter.”

“That is good philosophy, at all events. Isn’t it, Manuela?” asked Lawrence in Spanish.

“Si, senhor,” replied the girl, with sparkling eyes and a dazzling display of little teeth which seemed to indicate that she fully appreciated what was said.

“Strange,” thought Lawrence—“so grave and pensive, yet at times so sprightly; so intelligent, yet, of course, so ignorant; so very brown, and yet so pretty. What a pity she is not white!”

He only said, however, with a sigh, “Is the gale abating, Quashy?”

To which the negro replied, with a responsive sigh, “Yis, massa,—it am.”

After two days’ delay our travellers were enabled to proceed. While their host was busy saddling the mules Lawrence took Pedro aside.

“I am anxious about that bandit,” he said. “It is not his power of recovering I am afraid of, but our host’s willingness to take care of him.”

“Have you not spoken to him about it, senhor, and paid him in advance, like the good Samaritan?”

“Truly I have, but that does not secure fidelity in our host, and the man’s life may depend on his treatment during the next few days. I almost wish that we might delay our journey a little.”

“That cannot be,” returned Pedro, with decision. “Besides, it is unnecessary, for I have spoken to our host, and told him to take good care of the fellow.”

Lawrence could scarcely forbear smiling at the quiet assurance with which Pedro spoke.

“Surely,” he said, “you cannot count on his being influenced by your commands after you are gone?”

“Yes, senhor, I can count on that, for he knows me, and I occasionally pass this way.”

Pedro turned away as he spoke and went towards the mules, the fastenings of whose loads he carefully inspected. Lawrence went to look after his own animal with his mind much relieved, for the manner of Pedro was such as to inspire irresistible, almost blind, confidence.

During the first mile or two, as they rode along, our hero puzzled himself in a vain attempt to analyse the cause of this confidence. Was it the result of that imperturbable self-possession and invariable readiness of resource which marked the guide; or was it the stern truthfulness of his dark eyes, coupled with the retiring modesty and gravity of his demeanour? Perhaps it was the union of these characteristics. He could not tell.

While thus engaged in profound thought he was roused by Manuela riding alongside of him, and pointing upwards with animated looks while she exclaimed—

“See—look—senhor!”

Much surprised, for this was the first time during the journey that the girl had ventured to attract his attention, the youth looked in the direction indicated, and certainly the view that met his eyes was calculated to banish not only the surprise, but all other feelings save those of admiration of Nature and reverence for Nature’s God.

They had just rounded one of those rocky bluffs which so frequently interrupted their view during their upward journey, and had come upon a scene which they could not find words adequately to describe. As interjectional phrases alone could indicate something of their emotions to each other, so fragmentary sentences alone will convey a faint semblance of the truth to the intelligence of the reader.

Mountains, glens, and mighty cliffs; hideous precipices and yawning gulfs; snow-clad summits high above them, and rock-riven gorges far below. Distance upon distance ranging backward and upward to infinity, where all was mingled with cloudland; sunlit here, darkest shadowed there—wildness, weirdness, grandeur, and magnificence everywhere!

In the immediate foreground the serpentine path wound upward among rugged rocks, and the riders, picking their steps, as it were, midway up the face of a stupendous precipice, looked upward on the left at an apparently summitless wall, and downward on the right into an almost bottomless valley, through which a river roared as if mad with joy at having escaped its glacier-prison; though its roaring was softened well-nigh to silence by distance, while in appearance it seemed little larger than a silver thread.

“I could almost believe that to be a giant’s castle,” remarked Lawrence, pointing to the opposite side of the ravine, where a huge perpendicular mountain of porphyry was so broken into turrets, towers, and battlements, that it was difficult, except for its size, to believe it other than the work of man. There were even holes and formations about it that had the appearance of antique windows, gates, and drawbridges!

“Yes, it is a strange place,” said the guide, checking his mule; “moreover, we must spend the night under its shadow, for it is impossible to reach a better place of shelter to-night; and, by good fortune, yonder is something fresh for supper.”

Pedro pointed to a spot about seven or eight hundred yards distant, where a group of guanacos stood gazing at the intruders with profound attention.

“How will you get near enough for a shot?” asked Lawrence; “they will be gone before you can get across the ravine, and there is little or no cover.”

“You shall see,” said Pedro, cocking his rifle.

“But—but no weapon short of a cannon will carry so far—at least with accuracy,” exclaimed Lawrence in surprise, for at the time of which we write breech-loaders and the long-range weapons of precision had not been introduced in those regions. Indeed, the armies of South America, and of Europe also, still slew each other with the familiar Brown Bess and the clumsy flint-lock at that time.

Pedro paid no attention to the remark, but, dismounting, slowly raised the rifle to his shoulder. The guide was one of those men who seem to live in advance of their age. He had thought out, and carried out in a rough-and-ready manner, ideas which have since been scientifically reduced to practice. Being well aware that any projectile is drawn downward in its flight by the law of gravitation, and that if you want to hit a distant point you must aim considerably above it, he had, by careful experiment, found out how high above an object at a given distance one must aim in order to hit, and, by constant practice in judging distance, as well as in taking aim above his mark, he had attained to such skill as a long-range marksman that his friends almost believed it impossible for game to get beyond the range of his deadly weapon, and foes never felt easy till they were entirely out of his sight. The comparative slowness, too, of the flint-lock in discharging a rifle, had necessitated in him

a degree of steadiness, not only while taking aim, but even after pulling the trigger, which rendered him what we might term statuesque in his action as he levelled his piece.

For a few seconds the rock beside him was not more steady. Then the cliffs burst into a fusillade of echoes, and the guanacos leaped wildly up the mountain-side, leaving one of their number on the rocks behind them.

It was some time before the young Englishman could get over his astonishment at this feat, for Pedro had pointed his weapon so high that he did not appear to be aiming at the animal at all, and he maintained an animated discussion with the mountaineer until they reached a part of the pass which proved to be somewhat dangerous.

And here they met with a party of muleteers crossing the mountains in the opposite direction. They were still far above them when first observed descending the same steep and narrow road.

“We will wait here till they pass,” said the guide, pulling up at a point where the width of the track was considerable. “I see by the escort that they carry something of value—probably bars of silver from one of the mines. They have reached the worst part of the pass. I shouldn’t wonder to see one of the mules go over—they often do.”

“And always get killed, I suppose,” said Lawrence.

“Not always. Now and then they have wonderful escapes, but many hundreds have been lost here. See!”

As he spoke one of the baggage-mules of the party touched the cliff with its load. This caused the animal to stagger; his hind-legs actually went over the precipice, and the loose stones began to roll away from under his hoofs. With his fore-feet, however, still on the narrow track, he held on bravely, even sticking his nose on the ground, so that he had the appearance of holding on by his teeth! Two of the peons rushed to render assistance, but before they reached him he had slipped, and rolled down the awful slope which ended in a sheer perpendicular precipice. Here he bounded off into space, and next moment fell, baggage and all, with a tremendous splash into the river.

It seemed impossible that the poor animal could have escaped with life, but in another moment his head reappeared above water, and he made a brave struggle to gain the bank. The current, however, was too strong for him. Down he went below the foaming water, his scraggy tail making a farewell flourish as he disappeared. But again his head appeared, and once again he struggled for the bank. This time with success, for he had been swept into a shallow in which he was able to maintain his foothold and slowly drag himself out of the river. When in safety, he stood with drooping head and tail, as if in a state of the most thorough dejection at having made such an exhibition of himself.

“Clebber beast!” shouted Quashy, who had stood with his ten fingers expanded, his great mouth open, and his whole emotional soul glaring out of his monstrous eyes.

“Well done!” echoed Lawrence, who was scarcely less pleased than his servant.

The party now drew near, and very striking was their appearance—the variously coloured mules, following the bell-mare which went in advance as a leader, winding slowly down the crooked path, and the peons in their picturesque costumes shouting, laughing, or singing wild snatches of song as they were moved by fury, fun, or fancy.

The men, who numbered a dozen or so, and were well-armed, were apparently relieved to find that our travellers were not bandits, in regard to whom their questions showed that they felt some anxiety. They had witnessed Pedro’s shot from the heights above, and looked upon him with no little surprise and much respect as they commented on his power with the rifle.

A few questions were asked, a few compliments paid, and then the two parties, passing each other, proceeded on their respective ways.

Crossing the mountain torrent at a rather dangerous ford, towards evening Pedro led his companions to a spot not far from the ramparts of what Lawrence styled the giant’s castle.

It was not an inviting spot at first. There was little pasture for the wearied mules on the almost naked rocks, and the stunted trees and gnarled roots told eloquently of the severity of winter in those

high regions. There was, however, a good spring of water and an over-arching rock, which promised some degree of refreshment and shelter, and when firewood was collected, a ruddy blaze sent up, the kettle put on to boil, and several fine cuts of the guanaco set up to roast, the feelings of sadness which had at first influenced Lawrence were put to flight, and he felt more satisfaction in his lodging than he could have experienced if it had been a palatial hotel with its confined air and feather beds and cloying luxuries.

There was a species of natural recess in the cliff which Pedro screened off as a chamber for Manuela, while she assisted Quashy to prepare the supper.

“There’s nothing like fresh mountain air,” exclaimed Lawrence, with a glow of enthusiasm, after the first attack on the guanaco steaks had subsided.

“Specially when the said air happens to be quiet and warm, and the night fine and the stars bright and the company pleasant,” added the guide.

Quashy had a habit, when his risible faculties were only gently tickled, of shutting his eyes, throwing back his head, opening his great mouth wide, and indulging in a silent laugh. Having done so on the present occasion, he shut his mouth with a snap and opened his eyes.

“Ho yis,” he said in a low tone, “bery nice when it all plisent like now, but it am anoder t’ing when de fresh mountain air goes howlerin’ an’ bowlerin’ about like a wild beast, an’ when it snowses an frozes fit to cut off your noses an’ shribel up de bery marrow in your bones! Oh! you got no notion what—”

“Hold your tongue, Quashy,” interrupted Lawrence, “why, your description of such things makes one shiver. Let us hope we may have no experience of them and enjoy our comforts while we may.”

“Dat’s true flosuffy, massa,” returned the negro, helping himself to more guanaco, and offering some on the end of his fork to Manuela, who accepted the same with her usual ready smile, which, however, on this occasion, expanded into an uncontrollable little laugh.

Lawrence was perplexed, and so was Quashy, for the quiet little Indian was not given to giggling at trifles, much less to laughing at nothing. Lawrence observed, however, that the girl did not reach out her hand with her usual graceful action, but on the contrary gave her arm an awkward twist which obliged the negro to stretch needlessly far over towards her in handing the meat.

The result was that a pannikin of coffee which Quashy had placed on his plate—the plate being in his lap—began to tilt over. Before any one could warn him it overturned, causing the poor man to spring up with a yell as the hot liquid drenched his legs. Of course every one laughed. People always do at such mild mishaps. As the coffee was not too hot, and there was more in the kettle, Quashy joined in the laugh while he wiped his garments, and afterwards replenished his pannikin.

But a new light began to force itself upon Lawrence. “Can it be,” he thought, “that she did that on purpose?—that she saw the pannikin was tilting, and—no, that’s impossible!”

He looked earnestly at the girl. She had recovered her gravity by that time, and was quietly eating her supper with downcast eyes. “Impossible,” he repeated in thought, “so unlike her, and so very unlike the Indian character.” Nevertheless his perplexity remained, and when he went to sleep that night, after gazing long and earnestly up at the bright stars and at the white summits of the Andes which rose in awful grandeur above him, he dreamed that while Quashy was sitting sound asleep with his head on his knees in front of the fire, Manuela availed herself of the opportunity to pour an ocean of hot coffee down his back!

Starting up wide awake at this, he found that Quashy lay beside him, sleeping quietly on his back, that Pedro was similarly engaged, that the Indian girl had disappeared into her dormitory, that the giant’s castle looked more splendidly real than ever in the rising moonlight, and that no sound was to be heard save the brawling of the escaped river, as it fled from its glacier-prison to its home in the mighty sea.

Chapter Six.

A Storm in the Mountains—Refuge found—Converse round the Fire

The summit of the pass was at last gained, and not a moment too soon, for the storm which they had experienced a few days before was but the prelude to a gale such as is rarely experienced save in the winter months of the year, when most of the mountain passes are closed.

It began by mutterings of distant thunder, which caused the guide to look round the horizon and up at the sky somewhat anxiously.

“Do you think we shall reach our next shelter before it breaks?” asked Lawrence.

“I hope so,” said Pedro, pausing on a ridge from which an almost illimitable view was had of mountain range and valley in all directions.

“Far over in that direction,” he continued, pointing with his hand, “lies the land of the Incas. You have heard of the Incas, senhor?”

“Yes, I have heard of them, but cannot say that I am intimately acquainted with their history.”

“It is a strange history—a very sad one,” returned Pedro. “I will tell you something about it at another time; at present it behoves us to push on.”

There was no question as to that point, for just as he spoke a sudden and powerful gust of wind swept Quashy’s straw hat off and sent it spinning gaily along the path. Vaulting from his mule with a wild shout, the negro gave chase on foot, with an amount of anxiety that seemed not justified by the occasion. But as the poet truly puts it, “things are not what they seem,” and Quashy’s head-piece, which presented much the appearance of a battered old straw hat, was in truth an article of very considerable value.

It was one of those hats made by the people of South America, with a delicate fibre so finely plaited that in texture it resembles fine canvas, though in appearance it is like straw. It is exceedingly tough, takes a very long time to manufacture, and costs many dollars—so many, indeed, that a hat of the kind is thought worthy of being preserved and left as an heirloom from father to son as long as it lasts.

No wonder then that the negro made frantic efforts to regain his property—all the more frantic that he was well aware if it should pass over one of the neighbouring precipices it would be lost to him for ever. At last a friendly gust sent it into a snowdrift, through which Quashy plunged and captured it.

Snow in considerable quantities lay here and there around them in the form of old patches or drifts, and this began to be swept up by the fierce wind in spite of its solidity. Soon new snow began to fall, and, mingling with the old drifts, rendered the air so thick that it was sometimes difficult to see more than a few yards in advance. Lawrence, being unused to such scenes, began to fear they should get lost in these awful solitudes, and felt specially anxious for Manuela, who, despite the vigour of a frame trained, as it no doubt had been, in all the hardihood incidental to Indian camp life, seemed to shrink from the fierce blast and to droop before the bitter cold.

“Here, put on my poncho,” said the youth, riding suddenly up to the girl’s side and unceremoniously flinging his ample garment over the slight poncho she already wore. She drew it round her at once, and silently accepted the offering with a smile and an inclination of her small head which, even in these uncomfortable circumstances, were full of grace.

“Why *was* she born a savage?” thought the youth, with almost petulant exasperation. “If she had only been white and civilised, I would have wooed and won—at least,” he added, modestly, “I would have *tried* to win and wed her in spite of all the opposing world. As it is, the—the—gulf is impassable!”

“You have anticipated me, senhor,” said the guide, who had reined in until the rest of the party overtook him. “I had halted with the intention of offering my poncho to Manuela. Poor girl, she is a daughter of the warm Pampas, and unused to the cold of the mountains.”

He turned to her, and said something in the Indian tongue which seemed to comfort her greatly, for she replied with a look and tone of satisfaction.

“I have just told her,” he said to Lawrence, as they resumed the journey, “that in half an hour we shall reach a hut of shelter. It is at the foot of a steep descent close ahead; and as the wind is fortunately on our backs, we shall be partially protected by the hill.”

“Surely the place cannot be a farm,” said Lawrence; “it must be too high up for that.”

“No, as you say, it is too high for human habitation. The hut is one of those places of refuge which have been built at every two or three leagues to afford protection to travellers when assailed by such snow-storms as that which is about to break on us now.”

He stopped, for the party came at the moment to a slope so steep that it seemed impossible for man or mule to descend. Being partly sheltered from the fitful gusts of wind, it was pretty clear of snow, and they could see that a zigzag track led to the bottom. What made the descent all the more difficult was a loose layer of small stones, on which they slipped continually. Before they had quite completed the descent the storm burst forth. Suddenly dense clouds of snow were seen rushing down from the neighbouring peaks before a hurricane of wind, compared with which previous gusts were trifles.

“Come on—fast—fast!” shouted the guide, looking back and waving his hand.

The first deafening roar of the blast drowned the shout; but before the snowdrift blinded him, Lawrence had observed the wave of the hand and the anxious look. Dashing the cruel Spanish spurs for the first time into the side of his no doubt astonished steed, he sprang alongside of Manuela’s mule, seized the bridle, and dragged it forward by main force. Of course the creature objected, but the steep road and slipping gravel favoured them, so that they reached the bottom in safety.

Here they found the first of the refuge-huts, and in a few moments were all safe within its sheltering walls.

Having been erected for a special purpose, the hut was well adapted to resist the wildest storm. It was built of brick and mortar, the foundation being very solid, and about twelve feet high, with a brick staircase outside leading to the doorway. Thus the habitable part of the edifice was raised well above the snow. The room was about twelve feet square, the floor of brick, and the roof arched. It was a dungeon-like place, dimly lighted by three loop-holes about six inches square, and without furniture of any kind. A mark in the wall indicated the place where a small table had originally been fixed; but it had been torn down long before, as Pedro explained, by imprisoned and starving travellers to serve for firewood. The remains of some pieces of charred wood lay on the floor where the fire was usually kindled, and, to Pedro’s great satisfaction, they found a small pile of firewood which had been left there by the last travellers.

“A dismal enough place,” remarked Lawrence, looking round after shaking and stamping the snow out of his garments.

“You have reason to thank God, senhor, that we have reached it.”

“True, Senhor Pedro, and I am not thankless; yet do I feel free to repeat that it is a most dismal place.”

“Mos’ horribble,” said Quashy, looking up at the vaulted roof.

“Ay, and it could tell many a dismal story if it had a tongue,” said the guide, as he busied himself arranging the saddles and baggage, and making other preparations to spend the night as comfortably as circumstances should permit. “Luckily there’s a door this time.”

“Is it sometimes without a door, then?” asked Lawrence, as he assisted in the arrangements, while Quashy set about kindling a fire.

“Ay, the poor fellows who are sometimes stormstaid and starved here have a tendency to use all they can find about the place for firewood. Some one has replaced the door, however, since I was here last. You’ll find two big nails in the wall, Manuela,” he added in Indian; “if you tie one of the baggage cords to them, I’ll give you a rug directly, which will make a good screen to cut off your sleeping berth from ours.”

In a short time Quashy had a bright little fire burning, with the kettle on it stuffed full of fresh snow; the saddles and their furniture made comfortable seats and lounges around it; and soon a savoury smell of cooked meat rendered the cold air fragrant, while the cheery blaze dispelled the gloom and made a wonderful change in the spirits of all. Perhaps we should except the guide, whose calm, grave, stern yet kindly aspect rarely underwent much change, either in the way of elation or depression, whatever the surrounding circumstances might be. His prevailing character reminded one of a rock, whether in the midst of a calm or raging sea—or of a strong tower, whether surrounded by warring elements or by profound calm. Need we say that Pedro’s imperturbability was by no means the result of apathy?

“Blow away till you bust your buzzum,” said Quashy, apostrophising the gale as he sat down with a beaming display of teeth and spread out his hands before the blaze, after having advanced supper to a point which admitted of a pause; “I don’ care a butt’n how hard you blow now.”

“Ah! Quashy,” said the guide, shaking his head slowly, as, seated on his saddle, he rolled up a neat cigarette, “don’t be too confident. You little know what sights these four walls have witnessed. True, this is not quite the season when one runs much risk of being starved to death, but the thing is not impossible.”

“Surely,” said Lawrence, stretching himself on his saddle-cloths and glancing at Manuela, who was by that time seated on the opposite side of the fire arranging some hard biscuits on a plate, “surely people have not been starved to death here, have they?”

“Indeed they have—only too often, senhor. I myself came once to this hut to rescue a party, but was nearly too late, for most of them were dead.”

He paused to light his cigarette. The negro, after making the door more secure, sat down again and gazed at the guide with the glaring aspect of a man who fears, but delights in, the horrible. Manuela, letting her clasped hands fall in her lap, also gazed at Pedro with the intense earnestness that was habitual to her. She seemed to listen. Perhaps, being unusually intelligent, she picked up some information from the guide’s expressive face. She could hardly have learned much from his speech, as her knowledge of English seemed to be little more than “yes,” “no,” and “t’ank you!”

“It was during a change of government, senhor,” said Pedro, “that I chanced to be crossing the mountains. There is usually a considerable row in South America when a change of government takes place. Sometimes they cause a change of government to take place in order to get up a considerable row, for they’re a lively people—almost as fond of fighting as the Irish, though scarcely so sound in judgment. I had some business on hand on the western side of the Cordillera, but turned back to give a helping hand to my friends, for of course I try never to shirk duty, though I’m not fond of fighting. Well, when I got to the farm nearest to this hut where we now sit, they told me that a tremendous gale had been blowing in the mountains, that ten travellers had been snowed up, and that they feared they must all have perished, since travelling in such weather was impossible.”

“Have you made no effort to rescue them?” I asked of the farmer.

“No,’ says he, ‘I couldn’t get any o’ my fellows to move, because they’ve been terrified about a ghost that’s been seen up there.’

“What was the ghost like?” I asked; so he told me that it was a fearful creature—a mulish-looking sort of man, who was in the habit of terrifying the arrieros and peons who passed that way, but he said they were going to get a priest to put a cross up there, and so lay the ghost.

“Meanwhile,’ I said, ‘the ten travellers are to be left to starve?’

“It’s my belief they’re starved already,’ answered the farmer.”

At this point Pedro paused to relight his cigarette, and Quashy breathed a little more freely. He was a firm believer in ghosts, and feared them more than he would have feared an army of Redskins or jaguars. Indeed it is a question whether Quashy could ever have been brought to realise the sensation of fear if it had not been for the existence, in his imagination, of ghosts! The mere mention of the word in present circumstances had converted him into a sort of human sensitive-plant. He gave a little start and glance over his shoulder at every gust of unusual power that rattled the door, and had become visibly paler—perhaps we should say less black.

Manuela was evidently troubled by no such fears, perhaps because she did not understand the meaning of the word ghost, yet she gazed at the speaker in apparently rapt attention.

“You may believe,” continued the guide, “that I was disgusted at their cowardice; so, to shame them, as well as to do what I could for the travellers, I loaded a couple of my mules with meat, and said I would set off alone. This had the desired effect, for three men volunteered to go with me. When we reached the hut we found that six of the ten poor fellows were dead. The bodies of two who had died just before our arrival were lying in the corner over there behind Quashy. They were more like skeletons covered with skin than corpses. The four who still lived were in the corner here beside me, huddled together for warmth, and so worn out by hunger and despair that they did not seem to care at first that we had come to save them. We warmed and fed them, however, brought them gradually round, and at last took them back to the farm. They all recovered. During the time they were snowed up the poor fellows had eaten their mules and dogs. I have no doubt that if the ground were clear of snow you would find the bones of these animals scattered about still.”

This was not a very pleasant anecdote, Lawrence thought, on which to retire to rest, so he changed the subject by asking Pedro if there were many of the Incas still remaining.

Before he could reply Manuela rose, and, bidding them good-night in Spanish, retired to her screened-off corner.

“A good many of the Incas are still left,” replied the guide to his companion’s question; “and if you were to visit their capital city you would be surprised to see the remains of temples and other evidences of a very advanced civilisation in a people who existed long before the conquest of Peru.”

“Massa Pedro,” said Quashy, who would have been glad to have the recollection of ghosts totally banished from his mind, “I’s oftin hear ob de Incas, but I knows not’ing about dem. Who is dey? whar dey come fro?”

“It would take a long time, Quashy, to answer these two questions fully; nevertheless, I think I could give you a roughish outline of a notion in about five minutes, if you’ll promise not to stare so hard, and keep your mouth shut.”

The negro shut his eyes, expanded his mouth to its utmost in a silent laugh, and nodded his head acquiescently.

“Well, then, you must know,” said Pedro, “that in days of old—about the time that William the Conqueror invaded England—a certain Manco Capac founded the dynasty of the Incas. According to an old legend this Manco was the son of a white man who was shipwrecked on the coast of Peru. He married the daughter of an Indian chief, and taught the people agriculture, architecture, and other arts. He must have been a man of great power, from the influence he exerted over the natives, who styled him the ‘blooming stranger.’ His hair was of a golden colour, and this gave rise to the story that he was a child of the sun, who had been sent to rule over the Indians and found an empire. Another tradition says that Manco Capac was accompanied by a wife named Mama Oello Huaco, who taught the Indian women the mysteries of spinning and weaving, while her husband taught the arts of civilisation to the men.

“Whatever truth there may be in these legends, certain it is that Manco Capac did become the first of a race of Incas—or kings or chiefs—and, it is said, laid the foundations of the city of Cuzco, the remains of which at the present day show the power, splendour, and wealth to which Manco Capac and his successors attained. The government of the Incas was despotic, but of a benignant and

patriarchal type, which gained the affections of those over whom they ruled, and enabled them to extend their sway far and wide over the land, so that, at the time of the invasion by the Spaniards under Pizarro, the Peruvians were found to have reached a high degree of civilisation, as was seen by their public works—roads, bridges, terrace-gardens, fortifications, and magnificent buildings, and so forth. It is said by those who have studied the matter, that this civilisation existed long before the coming of the Incas. On this point I can say nothing, but no doubt or uncertainty rests on the later history of this race. Cuzco, on Lake Titicaca, became the capital city of a great and flourishing monarchy, and possessed many splendid buildings in spacious squares and streets. It also became the Holy City and great temple of the Sun, to which pilgrims came from all parts of the country. It was defended by a fortress and walls built of stone, some blocks of which were above thirty feet long by eighteen broad and six thick. Many towns sprang up in the land. Under good government the people flourished and became rich. They had plenty of gold and silver, which they used extensively in the adornment of their temples and palaces. But evil followed in the train of wealth. By degrees their simplicity departed from them. Their prosperity led to the desire for conquest. Then two sons of one of the Incas disputed with each other for supremacy, and fought. One was conquered and taken prisoner by the other, who is reported to have been guilty of excessive cruelties to his relations, and caused his brother to be put to death. Finally, in 1532, the Spaniards came and accomplished the conquest of Peru—from which date not much of peace or prosperity has fallen to the lot of this unhappy land.

“Yes,” said the guide in conclusion, “the Incas were, and some of their descendants still are, a very fine race. Many of the men are what I call nature’s gentlemen, having thoughts—ay, and manners too, that would grace any society. Some of their women, also, are worthy to—”

“Pedro!” interrupted Lawrence eagerly, laying his hand on the guide’s arm, for a sudden idea had flashed into his mind. (He was rather subject to the flashing of sudden ideas!) “Pedro! *she* is a daughter of a chief of the Incas—is she not? a princess of the Incas! Have I not guessed rightly?”

He said this in a half whisper, and pointed as he spoke to the screen behind which Manuela lay.

Pedro smiled slightly and tipped the ash from the end of his cigarette, but made no answer.

“Nay, I will not pry into other people’s affairs,” said Lawrence, in his usual tone, “but you once told me she is the daughter of a chief, and assuredly no lady in this land could equal her in grace or dignity of carriage and manner, to say nothing of modesty, which is the invariable evidence.”

“Not of high rank?” interrupted the guide, with a quick and slightly sarcastic glance.

“No, but of nobility of mind and heart,” replied the youth, with much enthusiasm. In which feeling he was earnestly backed up by Quashy, who, with eyes that absolutely glowed, said—

“You’s right, massa—sure an’ sartin! Modesty am de grandest t’ing I knows. Once I knowed a young nigger gal what libbed near your fadder’s mill—Sooz’n dey calls ’er—an’ she’s *so* modest, so—oh! I not kin ’splain rightly—but I say to ’er one day, when I’d got my courage screwed up, ‘Sooz’n,’ ses I. ‘Well,’ ses she. ‘I—I lub you,’ ses I, ‘more nor myself, ’cause I t’ink so well ob you. Eberybody t’inks well ob you, Sooz’n. What—what—’ (I was gitten out o’ bref by dis time from ’citement, and not knowin’ what more to say, so I ses) ‘what—what you t’ink ob *you’self* Sooz’n?”

“Nuffin’,’ ses she! Now, *wasn’t* dat modest?”

“It certainly was, Quashy. Couldn’t have been more so,” said Pedro. “And after that we couldn’t, I think, do better than turn in.”

The fire had by that time burned low, and the gale was still raging around them, driving the snowdrift wildly against the hut, and sometimes giving the door so violent a shake as to startle poor Quashy out of sweet memories of Sooz’n into awful thoughts of the ghost that had not yet been laid.

Each man appropriated a vacant corner of the hut in which to spread his simple couch, the negro taking care to secure that furthest from the door.

Lawrence Armstrong thought much over his supposed discovery before falling asleep that night, and the more he thought the more he felt convinced that the Indian girl was indeed a princess, and owed her good looks, sweet disposition, graceful form and noble carriage to her descent from a race

which had at one period been highly civilised when all around them were savage. It was a curious subject of contemplation. The colour of his waking thoughts naturally projected itself into the young man's dreams. He was engaged in an interesting anthropological study. He found himself in the ancient capital of the Incas. He beheld a princess of great beauty surrounded by courtiers, but she was *brown*! He thought what an overwhelming pity it was that she was not *white*! Then he experienced a feeling of intense disappointment that he himself had not been born brown. By degrees his thoughts became more confused and less decided in colour—whitey-brown, in fact,—and presented a series of complicated regrets and perplexing impossibilities, in a vain effort to disentangle which he dropped asleep.

Chapter Seven.

Things begin to look Brighter—The Guide's Story

It was bright day when our travellers awoke, but only a dim light penetrated into their dungeon-like dormitory, for, besides being very small, the three windows, or loop-holes, had been so filled up with snow as to shut out much of the light that would naturally have entered.

That the gale still raged outside was evident enough to the sense of hearing, and sometimes the gusts were so sudden and strong that the little building trembled, stout though it was. Indeed, Lawrence at first thought they must be experiencing the shocks of an earthquake, a mistake not unnatural in one who, besides having had but little experience in regard to such catastrophes, knew well that he was at the time almost in the centre of a region celebrated for earthquakes.

It was with mingled feelings of interest, anxiety, and solemnity that he surveyed the scene outside through a hole in the door. It seemed as if an Arctic winter had suddenly descended on them. Snow completely covered hill and gorge as far as the vision could range but they could not see far, for at every fresh burst of the furious wind the restless wreaths were gathered up and whirled madly to the sky, or swept wildly down the valleys, or dashed with fury against black precipices and beetling cliffs, to which they would sometimes cling for a few seconds, then, falling away, would be caught up again by the tormenting gale, and driven along in some new direction with intensified violence.

“No prospect of quitting the hut to-day,” observed Lawrence, turning away from the bewildering scene.

“None,” said Pedro, stretching himself, and rising sleepily on one elbow, as men are wont to do when unwilling to get up.

“Nebber mind, massa; lots o’ grub!” cried Quashy, awaking at that moment, leaping up like an acrobat, and instantly setting about the kindling of the fire.

Having, as Quashy truly said, lots of grub, possessing a superabundance of animal vigour, and being gifted with untried as well as unknown depths of intellectual power, also with inexhaustible stores of youthful hope, our travellers had no difficulty in passing that day in considerable enjoyment, despite adverse circumstances; but when they awoke on the second morning and found the gale still howling, and the snow still madly whirling, all except Pedro began to express in word and countenance feelings of despondency. Manuela did not speak much, it is true, but she naturally looked somewhat anxious. Lawrence began to recall the fate of previous travellers in that very hut, and his countenance became unusually grave, whereupon Quashy—whose nature it was to conform to the lead of those whom he loved, and, in conforming, outrageously to overdo his part—looked in his young master’s face and assumed such an aspect of woeful depression that his visage became distinctly oval, though naturally round.

Observing this, Lawrence could not restrain a short laugh, whereupon, true as the compass to the Pole, the facile Quashy went right round; his chin came up, his cheeks went out, his eyes opened with hopeful sheen, and his thick lips expanded into a placid grin.

“There is no cause for alarm,” observed Pedro, who had risen to assist in preparing breakfast. “No doubt it is the worst storm I ever met with, or even heard of, at this season of the year, but it cannot last much longer; and whatever happens, it can’t run into winter just now.”

As if to justify the guide’s words, the hurricane began to diminish in violence, and the pauses between blasts were more frequent and prolonged. When breakfast was over, appearances became much more hopeful, and before noon the storm had ceased to rage.

Taking advantage of the change, without delay they loaded the pack-mules, saddled, mounted, and set forth.

To many travellers it would have been death to have ventured out on such a trackless waste, but Pedro knew the road and the landmarks so thoroughly that he advanced with his wonted confidence. At first the snow was very deep, and, despite their utmost care, they once or twice strayed from the road, and were not far from destruction. As they descended, however, the intense cold abated; and when they came out upon occasional table-lands, they found that the snow-fall there had been much less than in the higher regions, also that it had drifted off the road so much that travelling became more easy.

That night they came to a second hut-of-refuge, and next day had descended into a distinctly warmer region on the eastern slopes of the great range, over which they travelled from day to day with ever increasing comfort. Sometimes they put up at outlying mountain farms, and were always hospitably received; sometimes at small hamlets or villages, where they could exchange or purchase mules, and, not unfrequently, they encamped on the wild mountain slopes, with the green trees or an overhanging cliff, or the open sky to curtain them, and the voices of the puma and the jaguar for their lullaby.

Strange to say, in crossing the higher parts of the Andes not one of the party suffered from the rarity of the air. Many travellers experience sickness, giddiness, and extreme exhaustion from this cause in those regions. Some have even died of the effects experienced at the greater heights, yet neither Manuela, nor Lawrence, nor Quashy was affected in the slightest degree. We can assign no reason for their exemption—can only state the fact. As for the guide, he was in this matter—as, indeed, he seemed to be in everything—invulnerable.

One afternoon, as they rode along a mountain track enjoying the sunshine, which at that hour was not too warm, Lawrence pushed up alongside of the guide.

“It seems to me,” he said, “that we are wandering wonderfully far out of our way just now. We have been going due north for several days; at least so my pocket compass tells me, and if my geography is not greatly at fault, our backs instead of our faces are turned at present towards Buenos Ayres. I do not wish to pry into your secrets, Senhor Pedro, but if it is not presuming too much I should like to know when we shall begin to move in the direction of our journey’s end.”

“There is neither presumption nor impropriety in your wish,” returned the guide. “I told you at starting that we should pursue a devious route, for reasons which are immaterial to you, but there is no reason why I should not explain that at present I am diverging for only a few miles from our track to visit a locality—a cottage—which is sacred to me. After that we will turn eastward until we reach the head-waters of streams that will conduct us towards our journey’s end.”

With this explanation he was obliged to rest content, for Pedro spoke like one who did not care to be questioned. Indeed there was an unusually absent air about him, seeing which Lawrence drew rein and fell back until he found himself alongside of Quashy.

Always ready—nay, eager—for sympathetic discourse, the negro received his young master with a bland, expansive, we might almost say effusive, smile.

“Well, massa, how’s you gittin’ along now?”

“Pretty well, Quashy. How do you?”

“Oh! fuss-rate, massa—only consid’rable obercome wid surprise.”

“What surprises you?”

“De way we’s agwine, to be sure. Look dar.” He pointed towards the towering mountain peaks and wild precipices that closed in the narrow glen or gorge up which they were slowly proceeding.

“In all our trabels we’s nebber come to a place like dat. It looks like de fag end ob creation. You couldn’t git ober de mountain-tops ’cept you had wings, an’ you couldn’t climb ober de pres’pisses ’cep you was a monkey or a skirl—though it *am* bery lubly, no doubt.”

The negro’s comments were strictly correct, though somewhat uncouthly expressed. The valley was apparently surrounded in all directions by inaccessible precipices, and the white peaks of the Andes towered into the skies at its head. Within rugged setting lay a fine stretch of undulating land,

diversified by crag and hillock, lake and rivulet, with clustering shrubs and trees clinging to the cliffs, and clothing the mountain slopes in rich, and, in many places, soft luxuriance. It was one of those scenes of grandeur and loveliness in profound solitude which tend to raise in the thoughtful mind the perplexing but not irreverent question, “Why did the good and bountiful Creator form such places of surpassing beauty to remain for thousands of years almost, if not quite, unknown to man?”

For, as far as could be seen, no human habitation graced the mountain-sides, no sign of cultivation appeared in the valley, though myriads of the lower animals sported on and in the waters, among the trees and on the ground.

Perchance man over-estimates his own importance—at least underrates that of the animal kingdom below him—and is too apt to deem everything in nature wasted that cannot be directly or indirectly connected with himself! Is all that glows in beauty in the wilderness doomed to “blush unseen”? Is all the sweetness expended on the desert air “wasted?”

As the guide rode slowly forward, he glanced from side to side with thoughtful yet mournful looks, as if his mind were engaged in meditating on some such insoluble problems. As he neared the head of the valley, however, he seemed to awake from a trance, suddenly put spurs to his mule, and went off at a canter. The rest of the party followed at some distance behind, but at so slow a pace, compared with that of the guide, that the latter was soon lost to sight among the trees.

Somewhat surprised at his unusual state of mind Lawrence pushed on and soon reached an open glade which showed some signs of having been cultivated. At the end of it stood a pretty little cottage, in front of which Pedro was standing motionless, with clasped hands and drooping head.

Lawrence hesitated to disturb him, but as Quashy had no such hesitations, and rode smartly forward, his companions followed.

Pedro turned with a grave look as they came up, and said—

“My home. I bid you welcome.”

“Your home!” echoed Lawrence, in surprise.

“Ay, a happy home it once was—but—desolate enough now. Come, we will sleep here to-night. Unload the mules, Quashy, and kindle a fire. Go into the room on the right, Manuela. You will find a couch and other civilised comforts there. Senhor Armstrong, will you come with me?”

Without even awaiting a reply, the guide walked smartly into the bushes in rear of his lonely dwelling, followed by our hero. In a few minutes they reached a mound or hillock, which had been cleared of trees and underwood, and from the summit of which one could see over the tree-tops and the cottage roof away down the valley to the horizon of the table-lands beyond. It was a lovely spot, and, as Lawrence saw it that quiet sunny afternoon, was suggestive only of peace and happiness.

There was a rustic bower on the mound, in which a roughly-constructed seat was fixed firmly to the ground. In front of the bower was a grave with a headstone, on which was carved the single word “Mariquita.”

Lawrence looked at his companion, but refrained from speech on observing that he seemed to be struggling with strong emotion. In a few seconds Pedro, having mastered his feelings, turned and said, in a tone that betrayed nothing save profound sadness—

“The body of my wife lies there. Her pure spirit, thank God, is with its Maker.”

Lawrence’s power of sympathy was so great that he hesitated to reply, fearing to hurt the feelings of one for whom, by that time, he had come to entertain sincere regard. He was about to speak, when Pedro raised his head gently, as if to check him.

“Sit beside me, senhor,” he said, seating himself on the rustic seat already referred to. “You have from our first meeting given me your confidence so frankly and freely that the least I can do is to give you mine in return—as far, at least, as that is possible. You are the first human being I have invited to sit *there* since Mariquita left me. Shall I tell you something of my history, Senhor Armstrong?”

Of course Lawrence assented, with a look of deep interest.

“Well, then,” said Pedro, “it may perhaps surprise you to learn that I am an Irishman.”

To this Lawrence replied, with a slight smile, that he was not very greatly surprised, seeing that the perplexing character of that race was such as to justify him in expecting almost anything of them.

“I’m not sure whether to take that remark as complimentary or otherwise,” returned Pedro; “however, the fighting tendency with which my countrymen are credited has departed from me. I won’t quarrel with you on the point. At the age of sixteen I was sent to America to seek my fortune. My mother I never knew. She died when I was a child. My father died the year after I left home. How I came to drift here it would be difficult, as well as tedious, to explain. Many of the men with whom I have chummed in years gone by would have said that it was chance which led me to South America. I never could agree with them on this point. The word ‘chance’ fitly describes the conditions sometimes existing between man and man, and is used in Scripture in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but there can be no such thing as chance with the Almighty. I must have been led or guided here.

“At all events, hither I came, and wandered about for some years, with that aimless indifference to the future which is but too characteristic of youth—content to eat and sleep and toil, so that I might enjoy life, and get plenty of excitement! I went to Peru first, and of course I joined in the fights that were so frequently stirred up between that country and its neighbour, Chili. A very little of that, however, sufficed. The brutal ferocity of the soldiery with whom I was mixed up, and their fearful disregard of age, sex, infirmity, or helpless childhood during war disgusted me so much that I finally cut the army, and took to hunting and doing a little trade between the countries lying on the east and west sides of the Andes. It was while thus engaged that I became acquainted with your good father, Senhor Armstrong, who has more than once helped me over financial difficulties and set me on my legs.

“At last came the grand crisis of my life. One evening when travelling over the pampas of La Plata, I, with a dozen Gauchos, arrived at a post-house where we meant to put up for the night. On coming in sight of it we saw that something was wrong, for there were a number of Indians fighting about the door. On seeing us they made off; but one, who was in the house struggling with the postmaster, did not observe the flight of his comrades, or could not get clear of his enemy. We all went madly after the savages. As I was about to pass the door of the house, I heard a woman shriek. The Gauchos paid no attention, but passed on. I glanced inside, and saw the Indian in the act of cutting a man’s throat, while a girl strove wildly to prevent him. You may be sure I was inside in a moment, and I brained the savage with the butt of a pistol. But it was too late. The knife had already done its work, and the poor man only lived long enough to bless his daughter, who, covered with her father’s blood, sank fainting on the floor. It was my first meeting with Mariquita!

“Around her,” continued Pedro, in deepening tones, “lay her mother and two brothers—all slaughtered. I will not describe the harrowing scene. I tried to comfort the poor girl, and we took her on with us to the next post, where the postmaster’s wife attended to her.

“On seeing her next morning I felt that my life’s happiness or sorrow lay in her hands. She was innocence, simplicity, beauty, combined. With artless gratitude she grasped and kissed my hand, regarding me, she said, as her deliverer, and one who would have saved her father if he had been in time.

“Often before had my comrades twitted me with my indifference to the female sex. To say truth, I had myself become impressed with the feeling that I was born to be one of the old bachelors of the world—and I cannot say that the doom gave me much concern. But now—well, if you understand me, senhor, I need not explain, and if you don’t understand, explanation is useless! Mariquita was left alone in the wide world. I would not, for all the gold and silver of Peru, have spoken of love to her at that time; but I made arrangements with the postmaster and his wife to take care of the poor girl till I should return. In time I did return. She accepted me. We were married, and I brought her up here, for I wanted no society but hers. I was content to live in absolute solitude with her. She was much of the same mind, dear girl, but God had touched her heart, and in her sweet talk—without intending

it, or dreaming of it—she showed me how selfish I was in thinking only of our own happiness, and caring nothing for the woes or the joys of our fellow-men.

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