Aimard Gustave

The Adventurers

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The Adventurers:

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PREFACE

With the publication of the present and the ensuing volume, "The Pearl of the Andes," I am enabled to perfect the most important series of Aimard's Tales of Indian Life and Adventure. To preserve uniformity, the volumes of this series should be arranged in the following order on the book-shelf; —

1. THE ADVENTURERS

2. THE PEARL OF THE ANDES

3. THE TRAIL-HUNTER

4. PIRATES OF THE PRAIRIES

5. THE TRAPPER'S BRIDE

6. THE TIGER SLAYER

7. THE GOLD SEEKERS

8. THE INDIAN CHIEF

introducing the same hero in a long range of volumes, and, like his great predecessor, he has so arranged, that each work should be complete in itself, and not necessitate the purchase of another. But Aimard has one marked advantage over Cooper; for while "Leather-Stocking" is but a creation of the fancy, or, at the most, the type of the Backwoodsman, the Count Louis who figures as the hero of Aimard's series, is a real man. Count de Raousset Boulbon, had he succeeded in his daring attempt of founding an independent kingdom in Mexico, would in all probability have become the Napoleon of the West. A gallant adventurer and thorough gentleman, he staked his life upon the issue, and ended his career the victim of unparalleled treachery, as Aimard has faithfully recorded. Hence Aimard's romances have the great merit of being founded on an historic basis, and but little fiction was required to heighten the startling interest of the narrative.

Valentine Guillois, there is very little doubt, is intended for the Author himself, with all his qualities and defects. When he first reached the New World, he was the true, reckless Parisian; but constant intercourse with nature rendered him a generous and thoughtful friend of humanity. So soon as he returned to civilization, he began recording the history of his past life; not so much as a livelihood, as for the pleasure he felt in living once again the life of excitement and adventure which he had known among the Indians. Hence his books are written without an effort; they flow spontaneously from his pen; and the absence of artistic effect is the best guarantee of their truthfulness.

It is not surprising, consequently, that M. Aimard's books have met with such extensive popularity. They have been translated into nearly every modern language, and the Author is now generally recognised as the French Cooper. The reception given to his stories in this country has been most flattering, and each day heightens their popularity. Hence it is not too much to assume that they will become standard works, especially with young readers, for whom they are especially adapted; because M. Aimard has never yet written a line which could prove offensive to the most delicate mind.

L. W.

CHAPTER I
THE CHAPARRAL

During my last sojourn in America, chance, or rather my good star, led me to form an acquaintance with one of those hunters, or wood rangers, the type of whom has been immortalized by Cooper, in his poetical personage, *Leather-Stockings*.

The strange circumstance by which we were brought together was as follows. Towards the end of July, 1855, I had left Galveston, terrified at the fevers prevalent there, which are so fatal to Europeans, with the intention of visiting the north-west portion of Texas, a country I was then unacquainted with.

A Spanish proverb somewhere says, "It is better to go alone than in bad company;" and, like all other proverbs, this possesses a certain foundation of truth, particularly in America, where the traveller is exposed at each instant to the chance of meeting rogues of every hue, who, thanks to their seducing exterior, charm him, win his confidence, and take advantage of the first occasion to remorselessly plunder and assassinate him.

I had profited by the proverb, and, like a shrewd old traveller of the prairies, as I knew no one who inspired me with sufficient sympathy to lead me to make him my travelling companion, I had bravely set out alone, clothed in the picturesque dress of the inhabitants of the country, armed to the teeth, and mounted

upon an excellent half wild horse, which had cost me twenty-five piastres – an enormous sum in those countries, where horses are considered as worth little or nothing.

I carelessly wandered here and there, living that nomadic life which is so full of attractions; at times stopping at a *toldería*, at others encamping in the desert, hunting wild animals, and plunging deeper and deeper into unknown regions. I had, in this fashion, passed through, without any untoward accident, Fredericksburgh, the Llana Braunfels, and had just left Castroville, on my way to Quichi. Like all Spanish-American villages, Castroville is nothing but a miserable agglomeration of ruined cabins, cut at right angles by streets choked with weeds, growing undisturbed, and concealing multitudes of ants, reptiles, and even rabbits of a very small breed, which spring up beneath the feet of the few passengers. The *pueblo* is bounded on the west by the Medina, a slender thread of water, almost dry in the great heat seasons; and on the east by thickly-wooded hills, the dark green of which forms a pleasing contrast with the pale blue of the sky.

At Galveston I had undertaken to deliver a letter to an inhabitant of Castroville. The worthy man lived in this village like La Fontaine's rat in the depths of its Dutch cheese. Charmed by the arrival of a stranger, who, no doubt, brought him news for which he had been long anxious, he received me in the most cordial manner, and thought of every expedient to detain me. Unfortunately, the little I had seen of Castroville had sufficed to

completely disgust me with it, and my only wish was to get out of it as quickly as possible. My host, in despair at seeing all his advances repulsed, at length consented to allow me to continue my journey.

"Adieu, then," he said, warmly pressing my hand, with a sigh of regret; "since you are determined to go, may God protect you! You are wrong in setting out so late; the road you have to travel is dangerous; the *Indios bravos* are up; they assassinate without mercy all the whites who fall into their hands – beware!"

I smiled at this warning, which I took for a last effort of the worthy man to detain me.

"Bah!" I replied gaily; "the Indians and I are too old acquaintances for me to fear anything on their account."

My host shook his head sorrowfully, and retreated into his hut, making me a last farewell greeting. I again set forward. I soon began to reflect that it was full late, and pressed my horse, in order to pass, before nightfall, a *chaparral*, or large thicket of underwood, of at least two miles in length, against which my host had particularly warned me. This ill-famed spot had a very sinister aspect. The mezquite, the acacia, and the cactus constituted its sole vegetation, while here and there, whitened bones and planted crosses plainly designated places where murders had been committed. Beyond that extended a vast plain, called the Leona, peopled by animals of every description. This plain, covered by grass at least two feet in height, was dotted at intervals with thickets of trees, upon which warbled

thousands of golden-throated starlings, cardinals, and bluebirds. I was anxious to reach the Leona, which I saw in the distance; but ere I did so, I had to cross the chaparral. After examining my weapons, and looking carefully in all directions, as I could perceive nothing positively suspicious, I resolutely spurred my horse forward, determined, if attacked, to sell my life as dearly as possible.

The sun, in the meantime, was sinking rapidly towards the horizon, the ruddy hues of closing day tinged with their changing reflections the summits of the wooded hills, and a fresh breeze agitated the branches of the trees with mysterious murmurs. In this country, where there is no twilight, night was not long in enveloping me in thick darkness, and that before I had passed through two-thirds of the chaparral.

I was beginning to hope I should reach the Leona safe and sound, when, all at once, my horse made a violent bound on one side, pricking up its ears, and snorting loudly. The sudden shock almost threw me out of the saddle, and it was not without trouble that I recovered the mastery over my horse, which displayed signs of the greatest terror. As always happens in such cases, I instinctively looked round me for the cause of this panic; and soon the truth was revealed to me. A cold perspiration bedewed my brow, and a shudder of terror ran through my whole frame, at the horrible spectacle which met my eyes. Five dead human bodies lay stretched beneath the trees, within ten paces of me. Among them was one of a woman, and one of a girl about

fourteen years of age. They all belonged to the white race. They appeared to have fought long and obstinately before they fell; they were literally covered with wounds; and long arrows, with jagged barbs, and painted red, stood out from the bodies, which they had pierced through and through. The victims had all been scalped. It was evidently the work of Indians, marked with their sanguinary rage, and their inveterate hatred for the white race. The form and colour of the arrows told me that the perpetrators of this atrocity were the Apaches, the most cruel plunderers of the desert. Around the bodies I observed fragments of both wagons and furniture. The unfortunate beings, assassinated with refined cruelty, had, no doubt, been poor emigrants on their way to Castroville.

At the aspect of this heartbreaking spectacle, I cannot express the pity and grief which weighed upon my spirits; high in the air, urubus and vultures hovered with lazy wings over the bodies, uttering lugubrious cries of joy, whilst in the depths of the chaparral the wolves and jaguars began to growl portentously.

I cast a melancholy glance around: all immediately near to me was quiet. The Apaches had, according to all appearances, surprised the emigrants during a halt. Gutted bales were still ranged in a symmetrical circle, and a fire, near which was a heap of dry wood, was not yet extinguished.

"No!" said I to myself, "whatever may happen, I will not leave Christians without burial, to become, in this desert, the prey of wild beasts."

My resolution, once formed, was soon carried into execution. Springing to the ground, I hobbled my horse, gave it some provender, and cast some branches of wood upon the fire, which soon sparkled and sent into the air a column of bright flame. Among the necessaries of the emigrants were spades, pickaxes, and other agricultural instruments, which, being of no use to the Indians, they had disdainfully left behind them. I seized a spade, and, after having carefully explored the environs of my encampment, to assure myself that no immediate danger need be apprehended, I set to work to dig a grave.

The night had now set in; one of those American nights, clear, silent, full of intoxicating odours, and mysterious melodies chanted by the desert in praise of God. Extraordinary to say, all my fears had vanished, as if by enchantment! Though alone in this sinister place, close to these frightfully-mutilated carcasses, watched in the darkness, no doubt, by the unseen eyes of wild beasts, and, perhaps, of the murderous Indians, some incomprehensible influence sustained me, and gave me strength to accomplish the rude but sacred task I had undertaken. Instead of thinking of the dangers which surrounded me, I found myself yielding to a pensive melancholy. I thought of these poor people, who had come from distant lands, full of hope for the future, to seek in the New World a little of the comfort and well-being which were denied to them at home, and who, scarcely landed, had fallen, in an obscure corner of the desert, by the hands of ferocious savages. They had left in their own country friends,

perhaps relations, to whom their fate would for ever remain a mystery, and who would for years reckon the hours with anxiety, looking for their much-wished return, or for intelligence of their success in their bold undertaking.

Except two or three alarms caused by the rustling of the leaves in the bushes, nothing occurred to interrupt my melancholy duty. In less than three-quarters of an hour I had dug a grave large enough to contain the five bodies. After extracting the arrows by which they were transfixed, I raised them one after the other in my arms, and laid them gently side by side at the bottom of the grave. I then hastened to throw in the mould again, till it was level with the sod; and that being done, I dragged upon the surface all the large stones I could find, to keep wild beasts from profaning the dead. This religious duty accomplished, I breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction, and bowing my head towards the ground, I mentally addressed a short prayer to the Almighty, for the unfortunate beings I had buried.

Upon raising my head, I uttered a cry of surprise and terror, while at the same time mechanically feeling for my revolver; for, without the least noise having given me warning of his approach, a man was standing within four paces of me, watching me earnestly, and leaning on his long rifle. Two magnificent Newfoundland dogs were lying carelessly but quietly at his feet. On observing my gesture, the unknown smiled with a kindly expression, and holding out his hand to me over the grave, said —

"Fear nothing! I am a friend. You have buried these poor

people; *I* have avenged them – their assassins are dead!"

I silently pressed the hand that was so frankly extended to me. Acquaintance was formed – we were friends – we are so still! A few minutes later we were seated near the fire, supping together with a good appetite, while the dogs kept watch against intruders.

The companion I had fallen in with in so curious a manner was a man of about forty-five years of age, although he did not appear to be more than thirty-two. He was tall and well made; his broad shoulders and muscular limbs denoting extraordinary strength and agility. He wore the picturesque hunter's costume in all its purity, that is to say, the *capote*, or surtout (which is nothing but a kind of blanket worn as a robe, fastened to the shoulders, and falling in long folds behind), a shirt of striped cotton, large *mitasses* (drawers of doeskin, stitched with hair, fastened at distances, and ornamented with little bells), leather gaiters, moccasins of elk skin, braided with beads and porcupine quills, and a checked woollen belt, from which hung his knife, tobacco pouch, powder horn, pistols, and medicine bag. His headdress consisted of a cap made of the skin of a beaver, the tail of which fell between his shoulders. This man was a type of a hardy race of adventurers who traverse America in all directions. A primitive race, longing for open air, space, and liberty, opposed to our ideas of civilization, and consequently destined to disappear before the immigration of the laborious races, whose powerful agents of conquest are steam and the application of mechanical inventions of all kinds.

This hunter was a Frenchman, and his frank, manly countenance, his picturesque language, his open and engaging manners, notwithstanding his long abode in America, had preserved a reflex of the mother country which awakened sympathy and created interest.

All the countries of the New World were familiar to him; he had lived more than twenty years in the depths of the woods, and had been engaged in dangerous and distant excursions among the Indian tribes. Hence, although myself well initiated in the customs of the redskins, and though a great part of my existence had been passed in the desert, I have felt myself often shudder involuntarily at the recital of his adventures. When seated beside him on the banks of the Rio Gila, during an excursion we had undertaken into the prairies, he would at times allow himself to be carried away by his remembrances, and relate to me, as he smoked his Indian pipe, the strange history of the early days of his abode in the New World. It is one of these recitals I am about to lay before my readers – the first in order of date, since it is the history of the events which led him to become a wood ranger. I do not venture to hope that my readers will take the interest in it which it excited in me; but I beg them to have the kindness to recollect that this narrative was told me in the desert, amidst that grand, vast, and powerful nature, unknown to the inhabitants of old Europe, and that I had it from the lips of the man who had been the hero.

CHAPTER II
THE FOSTER BROTHERS

On the 31st of December, 1834, at eleven o'clock in the evening, a man of about twenty-five years of age, of handsome person and countenance, and aristocratic appearance, was sitting, or rather reclining, in a luxurious easy chair, near the mantelpiece, within which sparkled a fire that the advanced season rendered indispensable. This personage was the Count Maxime Edouard Louis de Prébois-Crancé. His countenance, of a cadaverous paleness, formed a striking contrast with his black curly hair, which fell in disorder upon his shoulders, covered by a large-patterned damask dressing gown. His brows were contracted, and his eyes were fixed with feverish impatience upon the dial of a charming Louis Quinze clock, whilst his left hand, hanging carelessly by his side, played with the silky ears of a magnificent Newfoundland dog which lay by his side. The room in which the Count was sitting was furnished with all the refinement of comfort invented by modern luxury. A four-branched chandelier, with rose-coloured wax candles, placed upon a table, was scarcely sufficient to enliven the room, and only spread around a dim, uncertain light. Without, the rain was dashing against the windows violently; and the wind sighed in mysterious murmurs, which disposed the mind to melancholy.

When the clock struck the hour the Count started up, as if aroused from a dream. He passed his thin white hand across his moist brow, and said, in a dissatisfied tone —

"He will not come!"

But at that moment the dog, which had been so motionless, sprang up and bounded towards the door, wagging its tail with joy. The door opened, the *portière* was lifted by a firm hand, and a man appeared.

"Here you are at last!" the Count exclaimed, advancing towards the newcomer, who had great trouble to get rid of the caresses of the dog. "I had begun to be afraid that you, like the rest, had forgotten me."

"I do not understand you, brother, but trust you will explain yourself," the other replied. "Come, that will do, Cæsar; lie down! you are a very good dog, but lie down!"

And drawing an easy chair towards the fire, he sat down at the other side of the fire, in front of the Count, who had resumed his place. The dog lay down between them.

The personage so anxiously expected by the Count formed a strange contrast with him; for, just as M. de Prébois-Crancé united in himself all the qualities which physically distinguish nobility of race, the other displayed all the lively, energetic strength of a true child of the people. He was a man of twenty-six years of age; tall, thin, and perfectly well proportioned; while his face, bronzed by the sun, and his marked features, lit up by blue eyes sparkling with intelligence, wore an expression of

bravery, mildness, and loyalty of character that created sympathy at first sight. He was dressed in the elegant uniform of a quartermaster sergeant of the Spahis, and the cross of the legion of honour glittered on his breast. With his head leaning on his right hand, a pensive brow and a thoughtful eye, he examined his friend attentively, whilst twisting his long, silky light-coloured moustache with the other hand.

The Count, shrinking before his earnest look, which appeared trying to read his most secret thoughts, broke the silence abruptly.

"You have been a long time in responding to my message," he said.

"This is the second time you have addressed that reproach to me, Louis," the soldier replied, taking a paper from his breast; "you forget the terms of the note which your groom brought yesterday to my quarters."

And he was preparing to read.

"It is useless to read it," said the Count, with a melancholy smile. "I acknowledge I am in the wrong."

"Well, then, let us see," said the Spahi gaily, "what this serious affair is which makes you stand in need of me. Explain: is there a woman to be carried off? – Have you a duel on hand? – Tell me."

"Nothing that you can possibly imagine," the Count interrupted him bitterly; "therefore do not waste time in useless surmises."

"What the devil is it, then?"

"I am going to blow out my brains."

The young man uttered these words with so firm and resolute an accent, that the soldier started in spite of himself, and bent an anxious glance upon the speaker.

"You believe me mad, do you not?" the Count continued, who guessed his friend's thoughts. "No, I am not mad, Valentine; I am only at the bottom of an abyss from which I can only escape by death or infamy, and I prefer death."

The soldier made no reply. With an energetic gesture he pushed back his chair, and began to walk about the room with hurried steps. The Count had allowed his head to sink upon his breast in a state of perfect prostration of mind. After a long silence, during which the fury of the storm without increased, Valentine resumed his seat.

"A very strong reason must have obliged you to take such a determination," he said coolly; "I will not endeavour to combat it; but I command you, by our friendship, to tell me fully what has led you to form it. I am your foster brother, Louis; we have grown up together; our ideas have been too long in common, our friendship is too strong and too fervent for you to refuse to satisfy me."

"To what purpose?" cried the Count, impatiently; "my sorrows are of a nature which none but he who experiences them can comprehend."

"A bad pretext, brother," replied the soldier, in a rough tone; "the sorrows we dare not avow are of a kind that make us blush."

"Valentine," said the Count, with a flashing eye, "it is ill judged to speak so."

"On the contrary, it is quite right," replied the young man, warmly. "I love you, I owe you the truth; why should I deceive you? No, you know my frankness; therefore do not hope that I shall listen to you with my eyes shut. If you want to be flattered in your last moments, why send for me? Is it to applaud your death? If so, brother, farewell! I will retire, for I have nothing to do here. You great gentlemen, who have only known the trouble of coming into the world, know nothing of life but its joys; at the first roseleaf which chance happens to ruffle in your bed of happiness, you think yourselves lost, and appeal to that greatest of all cowardices, suicide."

"Valentine!" the Count cried angrily.

"Yes," continued the young man, with increased energy, "I repeat, that supreme cowardice! Man is no more at liberty to quit life when he fancies he is tired of it, than the soldier is to quit his post when he comes face to face with his country's enemy. Your sorrows, indeed! I know well what they are."

"You know?" demanded the Count with astonishment.

"All – listen to me; and when I have told you my thoughts, why, kill yourself if you like. Pardieu! do you think when I came here I did not know why you summoned me? A gladiator, far too weak to fight the good fight, you have cast yourself defencelessly among the wild beasts of this terrible arena called Paris – and you have fallen, as was sure to be the case. But remember, the

death you contemplate will complete your dishonour in the eyes of all, instead of reinstating you or surrounding you with the halo of false glory you are ambitious of."

"Valentine! Valentine!" cried the Count, striking the table forcibly with his clenched hand, "what gives you a right to speak to me thus?"

"My friendship," the soldier replied, energetically, "and the position you have yourself placed me in by sending for me. Two causes reduce you to despair. These two causes are, in the first place, your love for a coquettish woman, a Creole, who has played with your heart as the panther of her own savannahs plays with the inoffensive animals she is preparing to devour. – Is that true?"

The young man made no reply. With his elbows on the table, his face buried in his hands, he remained motionless, apparently insensible to the reproaches of his foster brother. Valentine continued —

"Secondly, when, in order to win favour in her eyes, you have compromised your fortune, and squandered all that your father had left you, this woman flits away as she came, rejoicing over the mischief she has done, over the victims she has left on the path she has trod, leaving to you and to so many others the despair and the shame of having been the sport of a coquette. What urges you to seek refuge in death is not the loss of fortune, but the impossibility of following this woman, the sole cause of all your misfortunes. I defy you to contradict me."

"Well, I admit all that is true. It is that alone which kills me. What care I for the loss of fortune? She alone is the object of my ambition! I love her – I love her – I tell you, so that I could struggle against the whole world to obtain her!" the young man exclaimed with great excitement. "Oh, if I could but hope! Hope – a word void of meaning, invented by the ambitious, always implying something unattainable! Do you not plainly see the truth of what I say? There is nothing left me but to die!"

Valentine contemplated him for some minutes with a sad countenance. Suddenly his brow cleared, his eye sparkled; he laid his hand upon the Count's shoulder.

"Is this, then, more than a caprice? Do you really love this woman?" he said.

"Have I not told you that I am ready to die for her?"

"Ay; and you told me at the same time that you would struggle with the whole world to obtain her."

"I did – and would."

"Well, then," continued Valentine, fixing his eyes earnestly upon him, "I can help you to find this woman again – I can."

"You can?"

"Yes, I can."

"Oh! you are mad! She has left Paris, and no one knows into what region of America she has retreated."

"Of what consequence is that?"

"And then, besides, I am ruined!"

"So much the better."

"Valentine, be careful of what you say," the young man remarked with a sigh; "in spite of my reason, I allow myself to believe you."

"Hope, man! hope, I tell you."

"Oh, no; no, that is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible; that is a word invented by the impotent and the cowardly. I repeat that I not only will find this woman for you again, but that she – she herself, mind – shall be afraid lest you should despise her love."

"Oh!"

"Who knows? You yourself may then, perhaps, reject it."

"Valentine! Valentine!"

"Well, to obtain this glorious result, I only ask two years."

"So long?"

"Oh, such is man!" cried the soldier, with a faint, pitying laugh. "But an instant ago, and you were anxious to die, because the word had never stood in its true light before you; and now you have not the courage to look forward, or wait two years, which constitute only a few minutes of human life!"

"Yes, but – "

"Be satisfied, brother – be satisfied! If in two years I have not fulfilled my promise, I myself will load your pistols – and then – "

"Well, and then?"

"And then you shall not die alone," he said coolly.

The Count looked at him. Valentine seemed transfigured: his countenance wore an expression of indomitable energy,

which his foster brother had never observed in it before; his eyes sparkled with unwonted brilliancy. The young man avowed himself conquered; he took his friend's hand, and pressing it warmly, said —

"I agree!"

"You now, then, belong to me?"

"I give myself entirely up to you."

"That's well!"

"But what will you do?"

"Listen to me attentively," the soldier said, sinking back into his chair, and motioning to his friend to resume his seat. At this moment the clock struck the hour of midnight, and, from a feeling for which they could not account, the young men listened silently and reflectively to the twelve strokes which resounded at equal intervals upon the bell.

When the echo of the last stroke had ceased to vibrate, Valentine lit a cigar, and turning towards Louis, whose eyes were intensely fixed upon him, "Now, then," he said slowly, emitting a puff of thin blue smoke, which went curling gracefully up towards the ceiling.

CHAPTER III
THE RESOLUTION

"I am listening," said Louis, leaning forward as if to hear the better.

Valentine resumed with a melancholy smile.

"We have now reached the 1st of January, 1835," said he; "with the last vibration of midnight your existence as a gentleman has come to an end. From this time you are about to commence a life of trials and struggles; in a word, you are about to become a man!"

The Count gave him an inquiring glance.

"I will explain myself," Valentine continued; "but in order to do that, you must, in the first place, allow me, in a few words, to recall your history to you."

"Surely, I am well enough acquainted with that," interrupted the Count, in a tone that displayed impatience.

"Well, perhaps you are; but, at all events, listen to my version of it; if I err, put me right."

"Follow your own humour," the Count replied, sinking back into his chair with the air of a man whom politeness obliges to listen to a tiresome discourse.

Though he saw it, Valentine appeared to take no notice of this movement on the part of his foster brother. He relit his cigar,

which he had allowed to go out, patted the dog, whose great head was lying upon his knees, and began, as if convinced that Louis gave him the most profound attention.

"Your history is that of almost every man of your rank," said he. "Your ancestors, whose name can be traced to the Crusades, left you at your birth a noble title, and a hundred thousand francs a year. Rich, without having had occasion to employ your faculties to gain your fortune, and consequently ignorant of the real value of money, you spent it heedlessly, believing it to be inexhaustible. This is just what has happened; only, one day, when you least expected it, the hideous spectre of ruin rose up suddenly before you, and you had a glimpse of want, that is, of the necessity for labour; and then you drew back terrified, declaring there was no refuge but in death."

"All that is perfectly true," the Count interrupted; "but you forget to mention, that before forming this last resolution, I took care to put my affairs in order, and to pay all my creditors. I then became my own master, and had a right to dispose of my life as I thought fit."

"Not at all. And it is this which your education as a gentleman has prevented you from understanding. Your life is not your own; it is a loan which God has made you. It is, consequently, nothing but an expectation, a *waiting*, a passage: for this reason it is short, but the profit of it is due to humanity. Every man who wastes the faculties which he holds from God in orgies and debaucheries, commits a robbery upon the great human family. Remember that

we are all mutually responsible for one another, and that we ought to employ our faculties for the advantage of the whole."

"For Heaven's sake, brother, a truce to your sermons! Such theories, more or less paradoxical, may succeed with certain people, but – "

"Brother," Valentine interrupted, "do not speak so. In spite of yourself, your pride of race dictates words which you will ere long regret. Certain people! there you have let slip the great word. Oh, Louis, Louis! how many things you have yet to learn! But that we may know what we are about, reckoning all your resources, how much have you left?"

"Oh, I scarcely know! A pitiful sum."

"Well, but how much?"

"Good Heavens! some forty thousand francs, I suppose, at most, which may amount to sixty thousand by the sale of these luxurious trifles," the Count said carelessly.

Valentine started up in his chair.

"Sixty thousand francs!" he cried; "and you are in despair! and have made up your mind to die! Senseless fellow! why, these sixty thousand francs, well employed, are a fortune! they will enable you to find the woman you love! How many poor devils would fancy themselves rich with such a sum!"

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"You shall see. What is the name of the lady you are in love with?"

"Doña Rosario del Valle."

"Very well. She has, you say, gone to America?"

"Ten days ago; but I, in justice, must observe to you, that Doña Rosario, whom you do not know, is a noble and amiable girl, who has never lent an ear to one of my flatteries, or given favourable heed to the ruinous extravagances which I committed to please her."

"Ah, that is very possible! why, then, should I seek to rob you of this sweet illusion? Only it makes me the more puzzled to perceive how, under these circumstances, you could manage to melt your fortune, which was considerable, like a lump of butter in the sun."

"Here! read this note from my broker."

"Oh!" said Valentine, pushing back the paper; "you have been dabbling on the Stock Exchange, have you! Everything is now easily explained, my poor pigeon; the kites have plucked you nicely! Well, brother, you must take your revenge."

"Oh, I ask nothing better!" said the young man, knitting his brows.

"We are of the same age; my mother's milk nourished us both; in the eyes of God we are brothers! I will make a man of you! I will help you to put on that armour of brass which will render you invincible. Whilst you, protected by your name and your fortune, allowed life to glide luxuriously away, only plucking its flowers as it passed, I, a poor wretch wandering over the rough pavement of Paris, carried on a gigantic struggle to obtain a mere existence; a struggle of every hour and every minute, where the

victory for me was a morsel of bread, and experience most dearly bought; for often, when I held horses, sold theatre checks, or acted clown to a mountebank – in fact, when I went through the thousand impossible shifts of the Bohemian, depression and discouragement nearly choked me; often and often have I felt my burning brow and throbbing temples clasped in the pinching vice of want; but I resisted, I girded myself up against adversity; never did I allow myself to be conquered, although I left upon the thorns of my rugged path many of the rags of my most fondly-cherished illusions; while my heart, writhing with despair, has bled from twenty wounds at once! Courage, Louis! henceforth there will be two of us to fight the battle! You shall be the head to conceive, I the arm to execute; you the intelligence, I the strength! Now the struggle will be equal, for we will sustain one another. Trust in me, my brother; a day will come when success will crown our efforts!"

"I can fully appreciate your devotion, and I accept it. Am I not, at present, your property? Entertain no fear of my resisting you. But I cannot help telling you that I fear all my attempts will be in vain, and that we shall be forced, sooner or later, to fall back upon that last means which you now prevent me having recourse to."

"Oh, thou man of little faith!" Valentine said, cheerfully; "on the road which we are about to take, fortune will be our slave!"

Louis could not repress a smile.

"We must, at all events, depend upon the aid of chance in what we are about to undertake," he said.

"Chance! chance is the hope of fools; the strong man commands it."

"Well, but what do you mean to do?"

"The lady you love is in America, is she not?"

"I have already told you so several times."

"Very well, then, we must go thither."

"But I do not know even in what part of America she resides."

"Of what consequence is that? The New World is the country of gold – the true region of adventurers! We shall retrieve our fortunes whilst searching for her; and is that so disagreeable a thing? Tell me – this lady was born somewhere?"

"She is a Chilian."

"Good! she has gone back to Chili, then; and it is there we shall find her."

Louis looked at his foster brother for a moment, with a species of respectful admiration.

"What! do you seriously mean that you will do this, brother?" he said, in an agitated voice.

"Without hesitation."

"Abandon the military career which offers you so many chances of success? I know that in three months you will be an officer."

"I have ceased to be a soldier since the morning; I have found a substitute."

"Oh, that is not possible!"

"Ay, but it is done."

"But your old mother, my nurse, whose only support you are!"

"Out of what you have left we will give her a few thousand francs, which, joined to my pension, will suffice for her to live on till we come back."

"Oh," said the young man, "I cannot accept of such a sacrifice – my honour forbids it!"

"Unfortunately, brother," Valentine said, in a tone which silenced the Count, "you have it not in your power to prevent it. In acting as I propose to do I am only discharging a sacred duty."

"I do not understand you."

"What is the use of explaining it to you?"

"I insist."

"Very good; and, perhaps, it will be better. Listen: – When, after having nursed you, my mother restored you to your family, my father fell sick, and died at the end of an illness of eight months, leaving my mother and myself in the greatest want; the little we possessed had been spent in medicines, and in paying the doctor for his visits. We ought to have had recourse to your family, who would, no doubt, have relieved us; but my mother would never consent to it. 'The Count de Prébois-Crancé has done as much as he ought,' she remarked, 'he shall not be troubled any more.'"

"She was wrong," said Louis.

"I know she was," Valentine replied. "In the meantime, hunger soon began to be felt. It was then I undertook all those impossible trades of which I just now spoke to you. One day, as I was

carrying my cap round in the Place du Trône, after swallowing sabres and eating fire, to the great delight of the crowd, I found myself face to face with an officer of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, who looked at me with an air of pity and kindness that melted my heart within me. He led me away with him, made me relate my history, and insisted upon being conducted to the shed where I and my mother lived. At the sight of our misery the old soldier was much affected; a tear, which he could not restrain, flowed silently down his sunburnt cheek. Louis, that officer was your father."

"My noble and good father!" the Count exclaimed, pressing his foster brother's hand.

"Yes! yes, noble and good! he secured my mother a little annuity which enables her to live, and took me into his own regiment. Two years ago, during the last expedition against the Rey of Constantine, your father was struck by a bullet in his chest, and died at the end of two hours, calling upon his son."

"Yes," the young man said, with tears in his eyes, "I know he did."

"But what you do not know, Louis, is, that at the point of death your father turned towards me – for, from the moment he had received his wound I had never left him."

Louis again silently pressed the hand of Valentine, whilst the latter continued —

"'Valentine,' he said to me, in a faint voice, broken by the rattle of death, for the mortal agony had commenced, 'my son is left

alone, and without experience; he has nobody but you, his foster brother. Watch over him – never abandon him! May I depend upon your promise? it will mitigate the pain of dying.' I knelt down beside him, and respectfully seizing the hand he held out to me, exclaimed – 'Die in peace! in the hour of adversity I will be always by the side of your Louis. Two tears of joy at that awful hour dropped from your father's eyes; he said, in a faltering voice – 'God has heard your oath and murmuring your name, and clasping my hand, he expired. Louis, I owe to your father the comfort my mother enjoys; I owe to your father the feelings that make me a man, and this cross which glitters on my breast. Can you not now comprehend, then, why I have spoken to you as I have done? While you held your course in your strength, I kept aloof; but now that the hour has arrived for accomplishing my vow, no human power can prevent me from doing so."

The two young men were silent for a moment, and then Louis, laying his face on the soldier's honest chest, said, with a burst of tears —

"When shall we set out, brother?"

The latter looked at him earnestly —

"You are fully resolved to commence a new life?"

"Entirely!" Louis replied, in a firm tone.

"Do you leave no regrets behind you?"

"None."

"You are ready to pass bravely through all the trials to which I may expose you?"

"I am."

"That is well, brother! it is thus I wish you to be. We will set out as soon as we have settled the balance of your past life. You must enter on the new existence I am about to open to you quite free from clogs or remembrances."

On the 2nd of February, 1835, a packet boat belonging to the Trans-Atlantic Company left Havre, directing its course towards Valparaiso. On board this vessel, as passengers, were the Count de Prébois-Crancé, Valentine Guillois his foster brother, and Cæsar their Newfoundland dog – Cæsar, the only friend who had remained faithful to them, and whom they could not think of leaving behind. Upon the quay a woman of about sixty years of age, her face bathed in tears, stood with her eyes intently fixed upon the vessel as long as it remained in sight. When it had disappeared below the horizon, she cast a desponding glance around her, and with a heavy heart bent her steps towards a house situated at a small distance from the beach, where she remained three days.

"Do what is right, happen what may!" she said, in a voice stifled by grief.

This woman was the mother of Valentine Guillois. She was the most to be pitied, for she was left alone!

CHAPTER IV
THE EXECUTION

Towards the end of the year 1450, Chili was invaded by Prince Sinchiroca, afterwards Inca, who gained possession of the valley of Mapocho, then called Promocaces, that is to say, the place of dancing and rejoicing. The Peruvian government, however, was never able to establish itself in the country, on account of the armed opposition of the Promocians, then encamped between the rivers Rapel and Maulé. Hence, though the historian Garcilasso de la Vega may place the limits of the territory conquered by the Incas upon the river Maulé, everything proves they were upon the Rapel, for, near the confluence of the Cachapeul with the Tingerica, which from this point takes the name of Rapel, start the ruins of an ancient Peruvian fortress, constructed exactly like those of Callao and Asseray, in the province of Quito. These fortresses served to mark the frontier.

The Spanish conqueror, Don Pedro de Valdivia, founded, on the 24th of February, 1541, the city of Santiago in a delightful position upon the left bank of the Rio Mapocho, at the entrance of a plain a hundred miles in extent, bounded by the Rio Parahuel, and the mountain of El Pardo, which has an elevation of not less than four thousand feet. This plain, which is also bathed by the Rio Maypo, forms a natural reservoir, in which the

light soil brought down from the neighbouring heights has found a level, and created one of the richest territories of the New World.

Santiago, which at a later period became the capital of Chili, is one of the finest cities in Spanish America. Its streets are broad, built in straight lines, and refreshed by *acequias*; or rivulets of clear and limpid water; while the houses, built of *adobes*, only one story high, on account of the earthquakes so frequent in this country, are vast, airy, and well situated. It possesses a great number of monuments, the most remarkable of which are the stone bridge of five arches, thrown over the Mapocho, and the Tajamar, or breakwater, formed of two brick walls, the interior one of which is filled with earth, and serves to protect the inhabitants from inundations. The Cordilleras, with their eternally snow-crowned summits, although eighty miles distant from the city, appear suspended over it, and present an aspect of the most majestic and imposing kind.

On the 5th of May, 1835, towards ten o'clock in the evening, stifling heat oppressed the city; there was not a breath in the air, or a cloud in the heavens. Santiago, generally so joyous at this hour of the night, when beams from black eyes and smiles from rosy lips are seen at every balcony, and each window seems to challenge the passer-by with the twanging of *sambecuejas,* and snatches of Creole songs, appeared plunged in the deepest sadness. The balconies and the windows were filled, it is true, with the heads of men and women, packed together as closely as possible, but the expression of every face was serious, every look

was thoughtful and uneasy: no smile, no joy could be witnessed; but on all sides were sorrowful brows, pale cheeks, and eyes filled with tears.

Here and there in the streets numerous groups were stationed in the middle of the causeway, or upon the steps of the doors, conversing in a low voice, but with great vivacity. At every instant, orderly officers left the government palace, and galloped off in various directions. Detachments of troops quitted their barracks, and marched, with drums beating, to the Plaza Mayor, where they formed in line, passing silently amidst the terrified inhabitants. The Plaza Mayor on this evening afforded an exceptional appearance. Torches, waved about by individuals mixed with the crowd, threw their red dull reflections upon the assembled people, who seemed to be in expectation of some great event.

But among all these people assembled on one spot, and whose number increased every second, not a cry, not a word could be heard. Only, at intervals, there arose a nameless murmur – a noise of the sea before a tempest – the whisper of a whole anxious people – the hoarse fury of a storm lashing all these oppressed breasts. The clock of the cathedral heavily and slowly struck ten.

Scarce had the *serenos*, according to custom, chanted the hour, ere military commands were heard, and the crowd violently driven back in all directions, with cries and oaths, accompanied by blows from gunstocks, divided in two nearly equal parts, leaving between them a wide, free space. At this moment arose

the sounds of religious chants, murmured in a low, monotonous tone, and a long procession of monks debouched upon the square. These monks all belonged to the order of the Brothers of Mercy. They walked slowly in two lines, with their hoods pulled down over their faces, their arms crossed upon their breasts, their heads hanging down, and chanting the *De Profundis*. In the middle of them ten penitents each bore an open coffin. Then came a squadron of cavalry, preceding a battalion of militiamen, in the centre of which body, ten men, bare headed, with their arms bound behind them, were conducted, each riding with his face toward the tail of a donkey, whose bridle was held by a monk of the order of Mercy; a detachment of lancers came immediately after, and closed this lugubrious procession.

At the cry of halt, given by the commander of the troops drawn up upon the Plaza, the monks separated to the right and left, without interrupting their funeral chant, and the condemned remained alone in the middle of the space left free for them. These men were patriots, who had attempted to overthrow the established government, in order to substitute another, the more broad and democratic basis of which would be, as they thought, in better accordance with ideas of progress and the welfare of the nation. These patriots belonged to the first families of the country.

The population of Santiago viewed with sullen despair the death of the men whom they considered as martyrs. It is even probable that a rising in their favour would have taken place,

if General Don Poncho Bustamente, the minister at war, had not drawn out a military force capable of imposing upon the most determined, and obliging them to be silent spectators of the execution of men whom they could not save, but whom they entertained a fierce hope of avenging at a future day.

The condemned alighted; they piously knelt, and confessed themselves to the monks of Mercy nearest to them, whilst a platoon of fifty soldiers took up a position within twenty paces of them. When their confession was completed, they rose up bravely, and taking each other by the hand, ranged themselves in a single line in front of the soldiers appointed to put them to death. In spite, however, of the great numbers of troops assembled on the Plaza, an ominous fermentation prevailed among the people. The crowd rocked about in all directions. Murmurs of sinister augury and curses, pronounced aloud against the agents of power, seemed to remind the latter that they had better finish the affair at once, if they did not wish to have their victims torn from their hands.

General Bustamente, who calmly and stoically presided over this dismal ceremony, smiled with disdain at this expression of popular disapprobation. He waved his sword over his head and commanded "right about face," which was executed with the rapidity of lightning. The troops faced the insurgents on all sides; the front rank pointing their muskets at the citizens crowded together before them, whilst the others appeared to take aim at the balconies encumbered with people. This was followed

by so dead a silence, that not a word was lost of the sentence read by the proper officer to the patriots – a sentence which condemned them to be shot as traitors, or accomplices in a conspiracy designed to overthrow the constituted government, and plunge their country into anarchy.

The conspirators listened to their sentence with silent firmness; but when the officer, who trembled in every limb, had finished reading it, they all cried, as with one voice,

"Viva la Patria! Viva la Libertad!"

The General gave a signal, and a loud rolling of the drums drowned the voices of the condemned. A discharge of musketry resounded like a clap of thunder, and the ten martyrs fell, once again shouting their cry of liberty, a cry doomed to find an echo in the hearts of their terrified compatriots.

The troops filed off, with shouldered arms, ensigns flying, and band at their head, past the dead bodies, and regained their barracks. When the General had disappeared with his escort, and the troops had left the Plaza, the people rushed in a mass towards the spot where the martyrs of their cause lay in a confused heap. Every one wished to offer them a last farewell, and to swear over their bodies to avenge them, or to fall in their turn.

At length, by degrees, the crowd became less compact, the groups dispersed, the last torches were extinguished, and the spot where, scarce an hour before, an awful drama had been accomplished, was left completely deserted. A considerable time elapsed before any noise disturbed the solemn silence which

brooded over the Plaza Mayor.

Suddenly, a heavy sigh escaped from the heap of bodies, and a pale head, disfigured by the blood and dirt which stained it, arose slowly from this human slaughterhouse, pushing aside with difficulty the carcasses which had covered it. The victim, who, by a miracle, survived this bloody hecatomb, cast an anxious look around him, and passing his hand over his brow, which was bathed in a dark perspiration, said vehemently —

"My God! my God! grant me strength to live, that I may avenge myself and my country!"

Then, with incredible courage, this man, too weak from the blood he had lost, and was still losing, to stand, or to escape by walking away, began to crawl along upon his hands and knees, leaving behind him a long wet track, and directing his course towards the cathedral. At every yard he stopped to take breath, and to place his hands upon his wounds, which motion rendered more painful. Scarce had he left the centre of the Plaza and its horrid sacrifice fifty paces behind him, and that with immense difficulty, when, from a street which opened just before him, issued two men, who advanced with hasty steps towards him.

"Oh!" the unhappy man cried, in utter despair, "I am lost! I am lost! Heaven is not just!" – And he fainted.

The two men, on coming up to him, stopped with great surprise; they leant over him, and examined him with care and in an anxious manner.

"Well?" said one of them, at the end of a minute or two.

"He is alive!" the other replied, in a tone of conviction.

Without uttering another word, they rolled up the wounded man in a *poncho*, lifted him on their shoulders, and disappeared in the gloomy depths of the street by which they had come, and which led to the Canadilla suburb.

CHAPTER V
THE PASSAGE

It is a long voyage from Havre to Chili. The man accustomed to the thousand agitations and the intoxicating whirlwind of the atmosphere of Paris, necessarily finds the life on shipboard, the calm and regular life, insipid and monotonous. It is certainly tedious to remain months together in a vessel, confined to a cabin a few feet square, without air and without sun, almost without light, and to have no walk but the narrow deck of the ship, no horizon but the rolling or the tranquil sea – at all times and everywhere nothing but sea.

The transition is very trying. The Parisian, accustomed to the noise and perpetual motion of a great city, cannot at once enter into or comprehend the poetry of the sailor's life, of which he knows nothing, or the sublime pleasures and keen enjoyments which those granite-hearted men, exposed incessantly to a struggle with the elements, constantly experience; men who laugh at the tempest and brave the hurricane; who, twenty times a minute, stand face to face with death, and at last feel such a contempt for it that they end by not believing in it. The hours are of interminable length to the passenger who pines for the land; every day appears an age to him. With his eyes constantly turned toward a point which he begins to imagine he shall never gain,

he sinks, in spite of himself, into a species of gloomy nostalgia, which the sight of the wished for port is alone powerful enough to dissipate.

The Count de Prébois-Crancé and Valentine Guillois had, then, undergone the dispersion of all the illusions and all the ennuis attendant upon a first sea voyage. During the first days they were employed in recalling the vivid remembrance of that other life from which they had parted for ever. They talked over the surprise which the sudden disappearance of the Count would cause in the fashionable society from which he had fled without warning, and without leaving any means of tracing him. Forgetting for awhile the distance which separated them from the America to which they were bound, they dwelt at great length upon the unknown pleasures which awaited them upon that golden soil, that land of promise for all sorts of adventurers, but which, alas! often offers those who go thither in the hope of gaining an easy fortune, nothing but disappointment and sorrow.

As every subject, however interesting it may be, must in the end grow exhausted, the two young men, to escape the fatiguing monotony of the voyage, had the good sense so to arrange their existence as to prevent tedium from gaining the influence over them which it had upon the other passengers. Twice a day, morning and evening, the Count, who was perfectly well acquainted with Spanish, gave his foster brother lessons in that language, lessons by which he profited so well, that after two months' study, he was able to carry on a conversation in Spanish.

When he had made such progress, the young men employed no other language, either between themselves or with the persons on board who understood it. This habit produced the desired result; that is to say, Valentine, in a very short time, spoke Spanish, which is not difficult to acquire, as fluently as French; and then, in return, Valentine occasionally became the professor. He made Louis go through gymnastic exercises, in order to develop his natural strength, accustom his body to fatigue, and render him capable of supporting the rude exigencies of his new position.

We will here, for a moment, return to the character of Valentine Guillois, a character of which the reader, from the young man's manner of acting and speaking, might form a completely erroneous opinion, and this we think it our duty to rectify. Morally, Valentine Guillois was a young fellow quite unacquainted with himself; hot-headed, giddy in the extreme, the surface had been slightly vitiated by reading chosen without discernment; but the foundation was essentially good. He united in himself all the characteristics of a class whose knowledge of the world is obtained from romances and the dramas of the Faubourg du Temple. He had sprung up like a mushroom upon *the pavé* of Paris, performing for bread, as he himself said, the most eccentric and impossible things. As a soldier, he had lived from hand to mouth, happy in the present, and careless of a future whose existence was so uncertain for him. But in the heart of this thoughtless *gamin* a new sentiment had germinated, and, in a very short time, taken deep root, – a hearty devotion

to the man who had held out his hand to him, had had pity on his mother, and who, by dragging him from the slough in which he was plunged, without hope of ever rising, had given him a consciousness of his own personal value. The death of this benefactor had struck him like a clap of thunder. He felt all the importance of the mission with which his dying colonel had charged him, the responsible burden he imposed upon him, and he swore, with the firm resolution of keeping his oath, cost what it might, to watch, like an attentive and devoted brother, over the son of him who had made a man of him equal to other men. The two most prominent points of Valentine's character were, an energy which obstacles only augmented instead of depressing, and an iron will.

With these two qualities, employed to the extent to which Valentine carried them, a man is sure to accomplish great things, and, if death does not surprise him on the road, to attain, at a given moment, the object, whatever it may be, which he has marked out for himself. In the present circumstances, these qualities were invaluable to the Count de Prébois-Crancé, a man of a dreamy, poetical nature, weak character, and timid mind, who, accustomed from his birth to the easy life of people of fortune, was entirely ignorant of the incessant difficulties of the new life into which he found himself suddenly cast. As always happens, when two men gifted with such opposite qualities meet, Valentine was not long in gaining over his foster brother a great moral influence, an influence which he employed with

infinite tact, without ever rendering his companion aware of it; he appeared to do everything according to his will, whilst imposing his own upon him. In short, these two men, who loved each other thoroughly, and had but one head and one heart, perfected each other.

The mode of speaking employed by Valentine in the early chapters of this history, was not at all habitual to him, and had truly astonished himself. Rising to the level of the situation in which the resolution of the young man he wished to save placed him, he had comprehended, with that sound common sense which he unwittingly possessed, that instead of desponding over the misfortune which struck his foster brother so unexpectedly, it was his duty, on the contrary, to endeavour to impart to him the courage he was deficient in. Thus, as we have seen, he found in his heart arguments so peremptorily decisive, that the Count consented to live, and gave himself up to his counsels. Valentine did not hesitate. The departure of Doña Rosario furnished him with the excuse he needed for dragging his foster brother from the Parisian gulf which, after having swallowed up his fortune, threatened to swallow up himself. Perceiving, before all else, the necessity for expatriating him, he persuaded Louis to follow the object of his love to America; and both set out gaily for the New World, abandoning the country which, like other emigrants, they fancied had been so ungrateful to them.

Often during the passage the young Count had felt his courage flag, and his faith in the future abandon him, when thinking

of the life of struggles and trials that awaited him in America. But Valentine, by his inexhaustible gaiety, his incredible store of anecdotes, and his incessant sallies, always succeeded in smoothing the wrinkles from the brow of his companion, who, with his habitual carelessness and want of energy, allowed himself to sink under that occult influence of Valentine which remoulded him, without his cognizance, and gradually made a new man of him.

Such was the state of mind in which our two personages found themselves when the packet boat cast anchor in the roads of Valparaiso. Valentine, with his imperturbable assurance, doubted of nothing: he was persuaded that the people he was about to have to do with were very much beneath him in intelligence, and that he could manage very well to attain the double object which he aimed at. The Count entirely depended upon his foster brother for finding for him the woman he loved, and whom he had come so far to seek. As to retrieving his fortune, he did not even dream of that.

Valparaiso – Valley of Paradise – so named probably by antiphrasis, for it is the filthiest and ugliest city of Spanish America – is nothing but a depot for foreigners, whom commercial interests do not call into Chili. Our young men only remained there long enough to equip themselves in the costume of the country; that is to say, to assume the Panama hat, the *poncho*, and *polenas*; then, each armed with two double-barrelled pistols, a rifle, and a long knife in his belt, they left the port, and,

mounted on excellent horses, took their course towards Santiago, on the evening preceding the day on which the execution we have described in the preceding chapter was to take place. The weather was magnificent; – the rays of a burning sun rendered the very dust golden, and made the stones of the road shine like jewels.

"Ah!" said Valentine, as soon as they found themselves upon the superb road which leads to the capital of Chili; "it does one good to breathe the air of the land —*caramba*, as they say here. Well, now, here we are in this boasted America, and now we must set about collecting our harvest of gold."

"And Doña Rosario?" said his foster brother, in a melancholy tone.

"Oh! we shall have found her within a fortnight," replied Valentine, with astounding confidence.

With these consolatory words, he animated his horse with the spur, and the distance before them rapidly diminished.

CHAPTER VI
THE LINDA.[1]

The night was gloomy; no star glittered in the heavens; the moon, concealed by clouds, only spread a wan, pale light, which, when it disappeared, rendered the darkness the denser. The streets were deserted; but at regular intervals the furtive steps of the serenos, who alone watched at this hour, were audible.

The two men whom we have seen upon the Plaza Mayor, bearing away the wounded man, walked for a long time, loaded with their strange burthen, stopping at the least noise, and concealing themselves in the depths of a doorway, or in the angle of a street, to allow the serenos to pass, as they would be sure to require a reason for their being in the streets at that unusual hour. Since the discovery of the conspiracy, orders had been given that at eleven o'clock every citizen should be within doors. After many turnings and windings, the strangers stopped in the street El Mercado, one of the most secluded and narrow in Santiago. They appeared to be expected, for a door was opened at the sound of their steps, and a woman, dressed in white, and holding a candle, the light of which she shaded with her left hand, appeared on the threshold. The two men stopped, and one of them, taking

[1] This word, which has no equivalent in English or French, is in the Spanish language the highest expression of physical beauty in woman.

a steel from his pocket, struck the flint so as to produce as few sparks as possible. At this signal – for it evidently was one – the woman extinguished the light, saying with a loud voice, but as if speaking to herself —

"Dios proteja a Chile (May God protect Chili)!"

"Dios lo ha protegido (God has protected it)," the man with the flint and steel replied, as he replaced his utensils in his pocket.

The woman uttered a cry of joy, which her prudence suddenly repressed.

"Come in, come in," she said in a low voice; and in an instant the two men were beside her.

"Is he alive?" she asked, with intense anxiety.

"He is alive," one of the strangers laconically replied.

"In Heaven's name, come in!" she exclaimed.

The bearers, guided by the woman, who had relighted her candle, disappeared in the house, the door of which was immediately and softly closed after them. All the houses of Santiago are alike, with respect to their internal arrangements. To describe one is to describe all. A wide doorway, ornamented with pilasters, leads to *the patio*, or great entrance court, at the end of which is the principal apartment, generally the dining room. On each side are bed chambers, reception rooms, and cabinets for labour or study. Behind these apartments is the *huerta*, or garden, laid out with taste, ornamented with fountains, and planted with orange trees, citron trees, pomegranates, limes, cedars, and palm trees, which grow with incredible luxuriance.

Behind the garden is the *corral*– a vast enclosure appropriated to horses and carriages.

The house into which we have introduced the reader, only differed from the others in the princely luxury of its furniture, which seemed to indicate that its inhabitant was a person of importance. The two men, still preceded by the woman, who served them as guide, entered a little room, whose window opened on the garden. They laid their burthen down upon a bed, and retired without speaking a word, but bowing respectfully.

The woman remained for a moment motionless, listening to the sound of their retreating footsteps; and when all was silent, she sprang with a bound towards the door, the bolts of which she fastened with an impetuous gesture; then, returning and placing herself beside the wounded man, she fixed upon him a long and melancholy look.

This woman, though really thirty-five years of age, appeared to be scarcely more than five-and-twenty. She was of an extraordinary, but a strange style of beauty; it attracted attention, commanded admiration, but created an instinctive repulsion. In spite of the majestic splendour of her graceful form, the elegance of her carriage, the freedom of her motions, full of voluptuous ease, – in spite of the purity of the lines of her fair face, slightly tinged by the warm rays of an American sun, which the magnificent tresses of her black hair beautifully enframed, her large black eyes, ornamented with long velvety lashes, and crowned by perfectly-arched brows, her straight nose, with its

mobile and rosy nostrils, her little mouth, whose blood-red lips contrasted admirably with her pearl-white teeth – in spite of all these rich endowments, there was in this splendid creature something fatal, which chilled the heart as you contemplated her. Her searching glance, the satirical smile, which almost always contracted the corners of her lips, the slight wrinkle, which formed a harsh, deep line along her white brow – everything about her, even to the melodious sound of her voice, with its strongly-accentuated pitch, destroyed sympathy, and produced a feeling of hatred, rather than respect.

Alone in that chamber, dimly lighted by one flickering taper, in that calm and silent night, face to face with that pale, bleeding man, whom she contemplated with stern, contracted brows, she resembled, with her long, black hair falling in disorder from her shoulders on to her white robe, a Thessalian witch, preparing herself to accomplish some terrible and mysterious work.

The stranger was a man of, at most, forty-five years of age, of lofty stature, strongly built, and well proportioned. His features were handsome, his brow noble, and the expression of his countenance proud, but frank and resolute.

The woman remained for a considerable time in mute contemplation. Her bosom heaved, her brows became more and more contracted, and she appeared to watch the too slow progress of the return to sensibility of the man her emissaries had saved from death. At length words forced their way through her compressed lips, and she murmured in a low, broken voice, —

"Here he is, then; this time, at least, he is in my power! Will he consent to answer me? Oh! perhaps I had better have left him to die."

She paused to breathe a deep, broken sigh, but almost immediately continued: —

"My daughter! my daughter! of whom this man has bereaved me! and whom, in spite of all my researches, he has hitherto concealed in some inviolable asylum! My daughter! he must restore her to me; it is my will!" she added with inexpressible energy. "He shall, even if I had to deliver him up again to the executioners from whom I have ravished their prey! These wounds are nothing; loss of blood and terror are the sole causes of this insensibility. But time passes – my absence may be noticed. Why should I hesitate longer? Let me at once know what I have to hope from him. Perhaps he will allow himself to be softened by my tears and prayers. What, he! he to whom all human feeling is unknown! Better for me to implore the most implacable Indian! He will laugh at my grief, he will reply by sarcasms to my cries of despair; – oh! woe, woe be to him if he do so!"

She looked earnestly at the wounded man, who was still motionless, for another instant, and then, adding resolutely, "I will try," she drew from her bosom a small crystal phial, curiously cut, and raising the head of the unknown, made him inhale the contents. This was followed by a moment of intense expectation; the woman watching with an anxious eye the convulsive movements which are the precursors of the return to

life, as they agitated the body of the wounded man. At length, with a deep sigh, he opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he murmured in a faint voice, then sank back, and closed his eyes again.

"In safety," the woman replied.

The sound of the voice produced upon the wounded man the effect of an electric shock. He raised himself quickly, and looking around him with a mixture of disgust, terror, and anger, asked in a hollow voice, —

"Who spoke?"

"I!" the woman replied haughtily, placing herself before him.

"Ah!" he said with a gesture of disgust, and sinking back upon the bed; "you again! ever you!"

"Yes, I! still I, Don Tadeo! I, whose will, in spite of your disdain and your hatred, has never faltered! I, in short, whose assistance you have always obstinately refused, and who have saved you, in spite of yourself."

"Oh! that is an easy matter for you, madam; are you not on the best possible terms with my executioners?"

At this reply the woman could not repress a movement of anger; a sudden redness flitted across her face.

"No insults, Don Tadeo de Leon!" she said, stamping her foot; "I have saved you! I am a woman, and you are under my roof!"

"That is true," he replied, rising and bowing to her with ironical respect; "I had forgotten that, madam; I am in your house. Have the goodness, then, to direct me the way out, that I

may be gone as quickly as possible."

"Do not be in such haste, Don Tadeo – you have not yet sufficiently recovered your strength. Within a few steps, you perhaps would fall again, to be raised up by the agents of the power which, this time, I swear to you, would not let you escape."

"And who told you, madam, that I should not prefer being retaken and executed a second time, to the chance of remaining longer in your presence?"

There was a moment of silence, during which the two interlocutors observed each other attentively. The woman was the first to speak.

"Listen to me, Don Tadeo," she said. "In spite of all your efforts, destiny, or, speaking more correctly, woman's genius, which nothing can resist, has brought us together once again. If you live, if you have received only slight wounds, it is because I lavished my gold upon the soldiers charged with your execution; I wished to force you to that explanation which I have so long demanded of you, which you so often have refused me, but which you can now no longer avoid. Submit, then, with a good grace. We will afterwards separate, if not good friends, at least indifferent, never to meet again. Though I do not wish to establish any claim upon your gratitude, you certainly owe your life to me; were it for that service alone, you are bound to hear me."

"What! madam," Don Tadeo replied, proudly, "do you think that I consider what you have done was rendering me a service? By what right have you saved my life? You know me but ill

if you fancied I should allow myself to be softened by your tears. No, no, I have been too long your dupe and your slave to do so. Heaven be praised! I know you well now; and the Linda, the mistress of General Bustamente, the tyrant of my country, the executioner of my brothers and myself, has nothing to expect from me! All that you can say, all that you can do, will be to no purpose. Spare yourself, then, I advise you, the trouble of pretending a gentleness which neither accords with your character nor your mode of life. I madly loved you, a young, pure, and prudent girl, in the cabin of the worthy *guaso,* your father, whose death was caused by your scandalous life; you were then called Maria. At that period, would I not have sacrificed my life and my happiness for you? – you know I would. Many times have I given you proofs of that boundless love; but the Linda, the shameless courtezan, the Linda, the woman branded on the brow like Cain with the seal of infamy, the miserable creature – I know her not. Away, madam! – away! There can be nothing in common between you and me."

And with a gesture of proud authority he waved her from him.

The woman had listened to him with flashing eyes and heaving bosom, trembling with rage and shame. Drops of perspiration stood upon her face, which glowed with a feverish redness. When he had finished, she seized his arm, pressed it with her utmost strength, and placed her face close to his.

"Have you said all?" she muttered from between her teeth. "Have you heaped insults enough upon me? Have you cast

sufficient mire in my face? Have you nothing more to add?"

"Nothing, madam," he replied, in a tone of cool contempt. "You can, when you please, summon your assassins – I am ready to receive them."

And throwing himself upon the bed, he waited with an air of the most insolent indifference.

CHAPTER VII
HUSBAND AND WIFE

Doña Maria, notwithstanding the fresh and bitter insult she had just received from Don Tadeo, did not yet renounce the hope of softening him. When she recalled to her mind the early years, already so distant, of her love for Don Tadeo, his devotion to her smallest caprices, when she could bring him trembling and prostrate to her feet by a glance or a smile, and the entire abnegation he had made of his will, in order to live for her and by her; notwithstanding all that had since taken place between them, she could not persuade herself that the violent and deeply-seated passion he had entertained for her, the species of worship he had vowed to her, could have entirely disappeared without leaving some slight traces behind. Her pride revolted at the idea of having lost all her empire over the lofty nature which she so long had moulded at her pleasure like soft wax, under the burning impression of wild caprices. She fancied that, like most other men, Don Tadeo, deeply wounded in his pride, loved her still without being willing to admit it, and that the virulent reproaches he had addressed to her, were flashes of that ill-extinguished fire which still smouldered in his heart, and whose flame she should succeed in reviving.

Unfortunately Doña Maria had never given herself the trouble

to study the man she had married, and whom her beauty had so long held in subjection. Don Tadeo had been nothing in her eyes but an attentive, submissive slave, and, under the apparent weakness of the loving man, she had not discovered the powerful energy which formed the foundation of his character. And yet the history itself of their love had been a proof of that energy, and of a will which nothing could control. Doña Maria, then fifteen years of age, dwelt with her father in a *hacienda*, in the neighbourhood of Santiago. Deprived of her mother, who had died in giving her birth, she was brought up under the care of an old aunt, an incorruptible Argus, who allowed no lover to come near her niece. The young girl, ignorant as all girls brought up in the country are, but whose warm aspirations led her to desire to know the world, and to launch into that whirlwind of pleasures the sound of which died without an echo in her ears, waited impatiently the arrival of the man who should introduce her to these delights, of which, although unknown, she had formed seducing ideas. Don Tadeo had only been the guide charged with initiating her into the pleasures for which she thirsted. She had never loved him; she had only said to herself, on seeing him and learning he was of a noble family, "That is the man I have been looking for."

This hideous and selfish calculation is made by more girls than we may fancy. Don Tadeo was handsome. Doña Maria's self-love was flattered by the conquest; but if he had been ugly and disagreeable, it would not have altered her course. In her

extraordinary character, a strange conjunction of the most abject passions, among which shone here and there, like diamonds gleaming in the mire, a few feelings which attached her to humanity, there was the spirit of two women of ancient Rome; Locusta and Messalina were united in her: ardent, passionate and ambitious, covetous and prodigal, this demon, concealed under the outward form of an angel, acknowledged no other laws but her own caprices; and all means, by which she could satisfy them, to her appeared good.

For a long time, Don Tadeo, blinded by passion, had submitted without complaining to the iron yoke of this infernal genius; but when the day arrived that the scales fell from his eyes, he measured with terror the depth of the abyss into which this woman had cast him. The frightful disorders to which, under the sanction of his name, she had abandoned herself, imprinted on his blushing brow a stigma of infamy: the world believed him to be her accomplice.

Don Tadeo had by Maria an only daughter, a fair girl of angelic beauty, at the period of our history fifteen years of age, whom he loved in proportion to the sufferings her mother had inflicted upon him. He trembled to think of the frightful future which lay before this innocent creature. For four years he had been separated from his wife; and during that time she had set no bounds on her irregularities. One day, Don Tadeo presented himself unexpectedly at the house of his wife, and without saying a word as to his ulterior intentions, took away his daughter. From

that time – nearly ten years – Doña Maria had never seen her child.

A strange revolution was effected by this step in the mother's feelings; a new sentiment, so to say, germinated in her soul. A thing, till that time unknown to her, happened; she felt the pulses of her heart beat for another – she grieved at the remembrance of the little angel who had been ravished from her. What was the sentiment? She, herself, knew not; she only ardently wished to see her child again. During six years she contended, publicly and privately, with Don Tadeo, to have her daughter restored to her. The father was deaf and dumb; she could never learn what had become of her. Don Tadeo, who, since he ceased to love her, had studied the character of the woman of whom he had made an implacable enemy, had taken his precautions so prudently that all Doña Maria's researches proved fruitless, and all her attempts to obtain an interview remained without a result. She imagined that he was afraid of yielding, if face to face with her; and she resolved, cost what it might, to force him to grant her the interview to which nothing had been able to make him consent.

Such was, at the moment we bring them on the scene, the position of the two personages who now doubtless met for the last time. It was an extraordinary position for both; an unequal contest between a wounded and proscribed man, and an ardent, insulted woman, who, like a lioness deprived of her whelps, was resolved to succeed, whatever might happen, and compel the man

whom she had forced to hear her, to restore her daughter to her.

Don Tadeo turned towards her.

"I am waiting," he said.

"You are waiting?" she replied, with a friendly smile. "What do you expect, then?"

"The assassins whom you doubtless have at hand, in case I should be unwilling to reply to your questions concerning your daughter."

"Oh!" she said, with an air of repulsion, "how can you, Don Tadeo, have so bad an opinion of me? How can you pretend to believe that, after having saved you, I should deliver you up to those who have proscribed you?"

"Who knows?" he replied, in a strongly ironical tone. "The heart of women of your class, Linda, is an abyss which no man can pretend to sound. You, who are incessantly seeking eccentric pleasures, perhaps would find an unknown enjoyment and a charm in this second execution, which, besides, would not at all compromise you, as I am already legally dead to the world."

"Don Tadeo, I know how unworthy my conduct towards you has been, and how little I deserve your pity; but you are a gentleman, and, as such, do you think it does you honour to load with insults, however merited, a woman who is your wife, and who, after saving your life, with no intention of reinstating herself in your favour, merely makes a claim, at least upon your pity, if not on your esteem?"

"Very well, madam; nothing can be more just than your

observations, and I subscribe to them with all my heart. I beg you to pardon me for having allowed myself to utter certain words; but, at the first movement, I was not master of myself, and I could not keep down in the depths of my heart the feelings which were stifling me. Now, accept my sincere thanks for the immense service you have rendered me, and permit me to retire. A longer sojourn, on my part, in this house, is a robbery of which I render myself guilty towards your numerous adorers."

And, bowing with ironical courtesy to his infuriated wife, he made a movement towards one of the doors of the room.

"One word more," she said.

"Speak, madam."

"Are you resolved to leave me ignorant of the fate of my daughter?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" she cried, in a voice of terror.

"For you – yes," he replied, with a cold smile.

"Oh, you are implacable!" she shrieked, stamping her foot with rage.

He bowed, without making any reply.

"Well, then," she resumed, "it is now no longer a favour I implore – it is a bargain I propose to you."

"A bargain?"

"Yes, a bargain."

"The idea strikes me as original."

"Perhaps it is; you shall judge for yourself."

"I listen, but time presses, and I – "

"Oh, I will be brief," she interrupted.

"I am at your service," and he reseated himself, smiling, exactly like a friend on a visit. The Linda followed his motions with her eye, without appearing to attach any importance to them.

"Don Tadeo," she said, "during the many years we have been separated a great number of events has taken place."

"Quite correct," said he, with a gesture of polite assent.

"I will say nothing to you of myself – my life is known to you."

"Very little of it, madam."

She cast a savage look at him.

"Let that pass," she said, "it is of you I would speak."

"Of me?"

"Yes, of you, whose moments are not so completely absorbed by patriotism and the effervescence of political ideas as not to leave you a few for more intimate joys and emotions."

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you feign ignorance?" she said, with a perfidious smile; "I am sure you understand me."

"Madam!"

"Do not deny it, Tadeo! Tired of the ephemeral love of women of my class, as you have just now so well said, you seek in the pure heart of a young girl emotions more in accordance with your tastes; in a word, I know you are in love with a charming young creature, worthy in all respects of being the wife of your choice,

if I, unfortunately, did not exist."

Don Tadeo fixed upon his wife a scrutinizing look while she was pronouncing these words. As she finished, a sigh escaped him.

"What, are you aware?" he exclaimed, with well-feigned surprise. "You know – "

"I know that her name is Doña Rosario del Valle," she replied, satisfied of the effect she thought she had produced upon her husband; "why, it is the freshest news in Santiago! all the world is talking of it. How was it likely it should escape me, when I take such an interest in you?"

The Linda interrupted herself, and laid her hand on his arm.

"It is of very little consequence," she added; "restore me my daughter, Don Tadeo, and this new love of yours shall be sacred to me – if not – "

"You are mistaken, madam, I tell you."

"Beware, Don Tadeo!" she remarked, with a glance at the clock; "by this time the woman we were speaking of is in the hands of my agents."

"What do you mean?" he cried, in great agitation.

"Yes," she replied, in a husky tone, "I have had her carried off. In a few minutes she will be here. Beware! I repeat, Don Tadeo! if you do not tell me where my daughter is, and if you continue to refuse to restore her to me – "

"Well," he said, haughtily, looking her full in the face, and crossing his arms, "what then will you do?"

"I will kill this woman!" she replied, in a gloomy but firm tone.

Don Tadeo looked at her for a moment with an undefinable expression, and then burst into a dry, nervous laugh, which chilled the woman with fear.

"You will kill her!" he cried, "unhappy woman! Well! – kill that innocent creature! – Call in your executioners – I will be mute."

The Linda sprang up like a lioness, and rushed towards the door, which she opened violently.

"This is too much! – Come in!" she called out, loudly.

The two men who had brought in Don Tadeo appeared, poniard in hand.

"Ah!" the gentleman said, with a contemptuous smile, "I know you again at last."

At a motion from the Linda the assassins advanced towards him.

CHAPTER VIII
THE DARK-HEARTS

As we have seen, the people had dispersed almost immediately after the execution of the patriots. Everyone carried away in the depths of his heart the hope of avenging, at an early day, the victims who had so nobly died, with the cry for a time left without an echo, of Viva la patria! A cry checked by the bayonets of the soldiers of Bustamente, but which must soon give birth to fresh martyrs.

And yet the square, though it seemed a desert, was not so. Several men, folded in dark cloaks, and with broad-brimmed hats, pulled down over their eyes, were grouped in the recess of the coach entrance of a house, and were conversing earnestly together in a low voice, keeping an anxious lookout the meanwhile. These men were patriots.

In spite of the terror which hovered over the city, they had, by dint of prayers, obtained from the archbishop of Santiago, who was a true priest according to the gospel, and at heart devoted to the liberal cause, permission to pay the last rites to their unfortunate brethren.

No part of the dismal drama which followed the execution had escaped them. They had seen Don Tadeo rise like a phantom from the heap of carcasses which covered him; they had heard

the words he had pronounced, and were preparing to go to his succour, when the two strangers, appearing suddenly, raised his body and bore it away. This carrying off of a half dead man had surprised them exceedingly. After exchanging a few words, two of them went in pursuit of the mysterious strangers, probably in order to learn to what house the wounded man was taken, whilst the others, twelve in number, advanced to the middle of the square.

They anxiously bent down and examined the bodies stretched at their feet, hoping, perhaps, that another victim might have escaped the slaughter. Unfortunately, Don Tadeo was the only one saved by some inexplicable mystery. The nine other victims were all dead. After a long examination, the patriots stood up again with a painful sigh of regret, and one of them went and knocked at a lower door of the cathedral.

"Who is there?" was immediately asked from the interior.

"*One for whom the night hath no darkness*," the man who had knocked replied.

"What do you want?" the voice asked again.

"*Is it not written: Knock and it shall be opened to thee*?" the stranger added.

"*Our country!*" said the voice.

"*Or vengeance!*" the man promptly replied.

The door opened, and a monk appeared. His cowl pulled down over his face, prevented his features being seen.

"Well," he said, "what do the *Dark-Hearts* require?"

"A prayer for their murdered brothers."

"Return to those who sent you; they shall be satisfied."

"Thanks for all!" the unknown replied; and, after bowing respectfully to the monk, he rejoined his companions. During his absence they had not been idle, but had placed the bodies upon hand barrows concealed under the arcades of the place.

At the expiration of a few minutes a brilliant light inundated the place; the cathedral doors were opened. The interior was seen to be splendidly illuminated, and from the principal door issued a long procession of monks, each bearing a wax light in his hand; they chanted, as they walked, the service of the dead. At the same moment the gates of the government palace were thrown open as if by enchantment, and a squadron of the Ceras, with General Bustamente at their head, advanced, at a trot, towards the procession.

When the monks and soldiers met, they stopped as of one accord. The twelve unknown men, folded in their cloaks, and grouped round the fountain which forms the centre of the square, anxiously awaited the denouement of the scene about to take place.

"What is the meaning of this procession, at such an unusual hour?" the general haughtily demanded.

"It means that we have come," the monk who walked first replied, with a firm voice, but in a melancholy tone, "to take up the victims you have struck down, and give them honourable burial."

"And who, pray, are you?" the general asked, sharply.

"I?" the monk replied, in the same firm tone, and throwing back his cowl upon his shoulders – "I am the archbishop of Santiago, primate of Chili, invested by his holiness the Pope with the power of binding and unbinding on earth."

In Spanish America, all persons yield without hesitation to the religion of Christ. The only power that is real is that of the priests. No one, however high he may be placed, ventures to struggle against it: he knows beforehand that, if he did, he would be sure to be crushed. The general knitted his brows, struck his forehead forcibly with his hand, but was constrained to admit himself conquered.

"My lord!" he said, with a bow; "pardon me! In these times of civil discord, we often, in spite of ourselves, confound our friends with our enemies. I was ignorant that your lordship had given orders for prayers to be offered up for these criminals, and still more so that you would deign to perform this task in person – I beg leave to retire."

During this scene, the patriots had concealed themselves behind the pillars of the place, where, thanks to the darkness, they remained unseen by the general. As soon as the military had disappeared, at a sign from the archbishop the bodies were borne into the cathedral.

"Beware of that man, my lord," whispered one of the unknown in the archbishop's ear; "he darted at you the glance of a tiger as he retired."

"Brother!" the priest replied calmly; "I am prepared for martyrdom."

The service commenced. As soon as it was terminated, the patriots retired, after warmly thanking the archbishop for his kindness towards their dead brethren. Scarce had they proceeded a few steps along a narrow street, edged by mean dwellings, when two men rose from behind an overturned cart which concealed them, and coming towards them, said in a low voice —

"Our country!"

"Vengeance!" one of the unknown replied. "Come on!"

The two men approached.

"Well!" said he who appeared to be the chief. "What have you learnt?"

"All that it is possible to know," one of the newcomers replied.

"Whither have they transported Don Tadeo?"

"To the mansion of the Linda."

"To the residence of his wife! Of the woman who is now the mistress of the General Bustamente!" the chief replied anxiously. "By the holy Virgin! my comrades, he is lost, for she hates him mortally. Shall we allow him to be assassinated without an effort to save him?"

"That would be base cowardice," they replied unanimously.

"But how can we introduce ourselves into the house?"

"Nothing more easy; the garden walls are very low."

"Come on, then! there is not a minute to be lost!"

Without another word, they all hastened off in the direction

of the Linda's house, which, as we have said, was situated in the faubourg of the Canadilla, the handsomest quarter in Santiago. The windows, hermetically closed, did not allow one ray of light to pass; not a sound could be heard, and the house seemed deserted. The patriots stole silently round the walls, and when they reached the back, they easily climbed the fence by sticking their poniards between the bricks, and sprang into the garden. Here they looked carefully about them, and, after a short pause, proceeded with stealthy steps towards a pale, trembling light, which sent a feeble beam through the chink of a shutter. They were within a few paces of this window, when they suddenly heard the noise of what appeared a scuffle, and a terrible cry was uttered, mingled with the crash of furniture and imprecations of rage and pain. Bounding forward like panthers, the strangers, who had covered their faces with masks of black velvet, dashed at the window, which flew in a thousand fragments around them, and entered the salon.

And it was time for them to arrive. Don Tadeo, with a stool, had split the head of one of the bandits, who lay lifeless upon the floor; but the other had got him down, and, with his knee upon his breast, was on the point of stabbing him. With a pistol shot, one of the unknown blew out his brains, and the wretch rolled in his agony close to his dead companion. Don Tadeo sprang up quickly, exclaiming —

"By the Virgin! I thought my hour was come!" Then, turning towards the masked men, he said – "Thanks, caballeros! thanks

for your very timely succour! One minute more, and it would have been all over with me! The Linda is expeditious!"

The courtesan, with features contracted by rage, and clenched teeth, looked on without appearing to see, overwhelmed, confounded by the scene which had so rapidly taken place, and which had, in a few minutes, ravished from her the vengeance which she thought had this time been so certain.

"Without bearing malice, madam," said Don Tadeo in a jeering tone, "this is a match deferred. Your fertile imagination will no doubt soon furnish you with the means of taking your revenge!"

"I hope so," she said with a sardonic smile.

"Seize this woman," the leader of the unknown commanded; "gag her, and bind her securely to the bed."

"Bind me!" she cried in a paroxysm of anger; "me! do you know who I am?"

"Perfectly well, madam," the stranger replied drily. "You are a woman for whom honourable people have no name. Libertines have given you that of the Linda, and your present lover is General Bustamente. You see, madam, that we are not unacquainted with you."

"Beware, sir," she hissed; "I am not to be insulted with impunity."

"We do not insult you, madam; we only wish, for a time, to put it out of your power to do mischief. In a few days," he continued, in a quiet, firm tone, "we will determine what shall be done with

you."

"Done with me! – me! – who then are you, with faces you dare not reveal, and who presume to speak to me thus?"

"Who we are, – learn! – We are the *Dark-Hearts!*" At this terrible announcement, a convulsive trembling shook the limbs of the woman, who, retreating to the wall, a prey to intense terror, exclaimed in a faint voice; "My God! my God! I am lost," and sank down fainting.

At a sign from the leader, one of his companions bound her securely, and after gagging her, fastened her to the foot of the bed. Then, taking Don Tadeo with them, they departed by the same way they had entered, without taking any heed of the two assassins lying upon the floor. Before he left the room, the chief pinned a piece of parchment to a table with a dagger. Upon this parchment were written a few words of terrible import: —

"*The traitor Pancho Bustamente is cited at the expiration of ninety-three days!"*
THE DARK-HEARTS.

CHAPTER IX
IN THE STREET

As soon as they were outside of the house, the masked men, at a sign from the leader, dispersed in various directions. When they had disappeared round the corners of the neighbouring streets, the chief turned towards Don Tadeo, who, scarce recovered from the trying emotions he had successively gone through, and weakened by the blood he had lost, as well as by the prodigious efforts his last struggle had cost him, was leaning, half fainting against the wall of the house he had been so fortunately enabled to quit. A flood of bitter reflections rushed upon his brain; the incidents of that terrible night almost unsettled his reason: in vain he tried to recover the train of his ideas which had been so often and so violently broken. The stranger looked at him for a few minutes with profound attention; then approaching him, he laid his hand quietly upon his shoulder. At this sudden touch, the gentleman started as if he had received an electric shock.

"What!" the unknown said in a tone of reproach, "scarcely entered on the good fight, and you despair already, Don Tadeo?"

The wounded man shook his head.

"You, Don Tadeo, whose lofty brow has never bent before revolutionary storms; you, who in the most trying circumstances have always remained firm, are now pale and cast down, without

faith in the present, or hope in the future, and have lost strength and courage through the vain threats of a woman!"

"That woman," he replied mournfully, "has always been my evil genius. She is a demon!"

"And suppose," the unknown exclaimed energetically, "that this woman should succeed in getting up another of the infamous schemes in which her brain is so fertile, a man of heart takes courage in a struggle? Forget these impotent hatreds that can never reach you; remember what you are; look boldly at the glorious mission which is imposed upon you."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you not understand me? Can you believe that God, who has this night allowed you so miraculously to escape death, has not great designs in store for you? Brother," he added, in a tone of authority, "the existence that has been restored to you is not your own, it belongs to your country!"

A moment of silence followed this appeal, during which Don Tadeo appeared a prey to profound despair. At length, looking at the unknown, he said with bitter despondency —

"What is to be done? Heaven is my witness that my only desire, my sole happiness, would be to see my country free. But during the twenty years we have been struggling we have done nothing, alas! but pass from one tyranny to another, each time riveting afresh the chains which bind us. No! Heaven itself seems to forbid our contending longer against an implacable destiny. You know well from experience that citizens cannot be

improvised from slaves. Servitude destroys moral virtue, abases the soul, and degrades the heart. Many generations must pass away before the inhabitants of this unfortunate country will be fit to form a people!"

"By what right do you presume to fathom the designs of Providence?" the unknown replied, in an imposing tone of voice. "Do you know what is reserved for you? Who tells you that the passing triumph of our oppressors is not granted by God, in His boundless wisdom, in order to render their future fall more terrible?"

Don Tadeo, restored to himself by the manly words of his disguised friend, drew himself up proudly, and looked attentively at the speaker.

"And who are you," he said, "whose sympathetic voice has stirred the most secret fibres of my heart? Who authorizes you to speak thus? Answer! Who are you?"

"Of what importance is it who I am," the unknown remarked, calmly, "if I succeed in persuading you that all is far from being lost – that the liberty which you believe for ever destroyed has never been so near triumphing, and that it only perhaps requires one sublime effort to recover it!"

"But still?" the wounded man said, persistently.

"I am he who, a few minutes ago, saved your life. That ought to suffice."

"Not so," Don Tadeo said, warmly, "for you conceal your features under a mask, and the very circumstance you named

gives me a right to see them."

"Perhaps it does," the unknown said, slowly removing his mask, and revealing to Don Tadeo, in the pale beams of the moon, a countenance with manly, marked features, and wearing a frank and loyal expression.

"Oh! my heart did not deceive me!" Tadeo cried – "Don Gregorio Peralta!"

"Yes, it is I, Don Tadeo!" the young man, he was scarcely thirty, replied – "and cannot comprehend the depression of the man whom the avengers have chosen as their chief."

"How do you know? Notwithstanding our friendship, I have always concealed from you – "

"Were you not condemned to death?" Don Gregorio interrupted. "Your companions elected me *King of Darkness* in your place, that is, they placed in my hands an immense power, as they had done in yours, of which I was left the uncontrolled disposal. Death unbound the oath of silence imposed upon the brethren. Your name was unknown to all; I was as ignorant that you were the energetic chief who had made our society a power, as you were, my dear friend, that I was one of your soldiers. But, thanks be to God, you are saved, Don Tadeo! Resume your place. You alone, under present circumstances, are able to fill worthily the post which our confidence has assigned you. Become again the King of Darkness! But," he added, in a deep, concentrated tone, "remember that we are the avengers; that we ought to be without pity for ourselves as for others; that one feeling, and one

alone, ought to live in our souls – the love of our country!"

Then followed a short silence; the two men appeared to be reflecting deeply. At length Don Tadeo raised his head proudly.

"Thanks, Don Gregorio!" he said, in a firm voice, and pressing his hand – "thanks for your rough words; they have restored me to myself. I will prove myself worthy of you. Don Tadeo de Leon no longer exists; the hired assassins of a tyrant have shot him tonight upon the Plaza Mayor. No one is left but the King of Darkness! the implacable leader of the Dark-Hearts! Woe be to them whom God shall bring across my path! for I will crush them without pity. We shall triumph, Don Gregorio; for from this day I am no longer a man, I am the avenging sword, the exterminating angel, fighting for our country!"

While uttering these words, Don Tadeo had drawn his imposing stature up to its full height; his handsome, noble features became animated, and his eyes sparkled in accordance with his speech.

"Oh," Don Gregorio exclaimed, cheerfully, "I have found my friend again! Thank God! thank God!"

"Yes, my brother," the leader continued, "from this moment the real struggle between us and the tyrant begins – a struggle without pity, without truce, and without mercy, which can only terminate in the complete extinction of our enemies. Woe be to them! Woe!"

"No time is to be lost; let us begone!" Don Gregorio said.

"But whither am I to go?" Don Tadeo asked, with a sardonic

smile. "Am I not legally dead in the eyes of all? My house is no longer mine."

"That is true," the lieutenant of the Dark-Hearts murmured. "Well, never mind that! Tomorrow the news of your miraculous resurrection will be a thunderclap to our enemies! Their awaking will be terrible! They will learn with stupor that the invincible athlete, whom they thought they had for ever crushed beneath their feet, is up again, and ready to renew the contest."

"And this time, I solemnly swear," Don Tadeo cried, with energy, "the fall of the tyrant alone shall terminate it. But you are right; we cannot remain longer here. Come home with me; for a time you will be there in safety; unless," he added, with a smile, "you prefer asking an asylum of Doña Rosario?"

Don Tadeo, who had taken Don Gregorio's arm, stopped suddenly at this question, of which his friend did not suspect the terrible extent. A convulsive shudder darted through his frame, a cold perspiration inundated his face.

"Oh," he exclaimed, in a tone of agony, "my God! I had forgotten!"

Don Gregorio was terrified at the state he beheld him in.

"In heaven's name, what is the matter?" he asked.

"What is the matter!" the chief replied, in a voice choked with emotion, "that woman – that serpent whom we have weakly failed to crush – "

"Well, what of her?"

"Oh, I have but this moment recollected a horrible threat she

made. Good heavens! good heavens! What is to be done?"

"Explain yourself, my friend; you quite terrify me."

"By her orders, Doña Rosario this very night, was to be carried off; and who knows if, furious at my escape from her assassins, that woman has not by this time put her to death?"

"Oh, that is frightful!" Don Gregorio cried. "What is to be done?"

"Oh, that woman!" the wounded man replied; "and not to be able to act, or to know how to thwart her horrible schemes."

"Let us fly to Doña Rosario's residence!" Don Gregorio said.

"Alas! you see I am wounded; I can scarcely support myself."

"Well, when you can no longer walk, I will carry you," his friend said, resolutely.

"Thanks, brother! May God help us!"

And the two men, the one leaning upon the other, set off, as fast as the state of Don Tadeo would permit, towards the residence of the lady whom they were so anxious to save. But, in spite of the earnest will that animated him, Don Tadeo felt his strength fail him; and, notwithstanding all his efforts, it was with extreme difficulty he sustained himself. Whilst labouring on thus, the noise of horses' footsteps reached them from a distance. Torches gleamed up the street, and a troop of horsemen appeared in sight.

"Oh, oh!" Don Gregorio said, stopping, and endeavouring to make out who those persons could be, who, in defiance of the police regulations, dared to be passing along the streets at this

hour of the night.

"Let us stop," Don Tadeo replied; "I see the glitter of uniforms. They are the spies of the minister of war."

"By Saint Jago!" cried Don Gregorio, "it is General Bustamente himself! The two accomplices are going to have a little chat together."

"Yes," the wounded man said, in a faltering voice; "he is going towards the residence of the Linda."

As the horsemen were but at a short distance, the two men, fearing to be surprised, turned quickly into a side street, and the General and his suite passed by without seeing them.

"Let us begone as fast as possible," Don Gregorio said; and his companion, aware of the urgency for prompt flight, made a desperate effort. They resumed their course, and had walked for about ten minutes, when they heard the steps of more horses coming towards them.

"What can this mean?" the wounded man said, endeavouring to smile; "Are all the people of Santiago running about the streets tonight?"

"Hum!" said Don Gregorio, "I will find out this time."

All at once a female voice was heard in a lamentable tone imploring help.

"Make her hold her tongue, *carajas!*" a man said, coarsely.

But the sound of that voice had reached the ears of Don Tadeo and his friend. At that voice, which both had recognized, they were roused to feelings of deep interest and anger. They pressed

each other's hand firmly; their resolution was formed – to die or to save her who called upon them for help.

"Holloa! what is this about?" another individual said, pulling up his horse.

Two men, standing firmly in the middle of the street, seemed determined to bar the passage of the horsemen, of whom there were five. One of them held a woman before him on his horse.

"Holloa!" cried the one who had just spoken, "get out of the way, if you don't wish to be ridden over."

"You shall not pass," a deep voice replied, "unless you release the woman you are bearing off."

"Shan't we?" the horseman remarked with a laugh.

"Try," said Don Gregorio, cocking his pistol; a movement silently imitated by Don Tadeo, whom he had supplied with firearms.

"For the last time, stand out of the way!" the horseman shouted.

"We will not!"

"We will ride over you, then!" and turning towards his companions, "Forward!" he cried angrily.

The five horsemen advanced with uplifted sabres upon the two men, who, firmly fixed in the middle of the street, made no effort to avoid them.

CHAPTER X
SWORD-THRUSTS

In order to make the facts that follow intelligible, we must leave Don Tadeo and his friend in their critical position, and return to the two principal personages of this history, whom we have so long neglected. We saw in a preceding chapter the two foster brothers gaily leaving Valparaiso, to repair to the capital of Chili, like Bias, carrying all their fortune with them, but possessing over the philosophical Greek the immense advantage of being amply furnished with hopes and illusions, two words which, in this life, have but too frequently the same meaning.

After a rather long ride, the young men had stopped for the night in a miserable *rancho* constructed of mud and dry branches, the dismal skeleton of which stood out on one side of the road. The inhabitant of this miserable dwelling, a poor devil of a peon, whose life was passed in guarding a few head of lean cattle, gave our travellers a frank and hospitable reception. Quite delighted at having something to offer them, he had cheerfully shared with them his *charqui*– strips of meat, dried in the sun – and his *harina tostada*– roasted corn – the whole washed down with cups of detestable *chicha*.

The Frenchmen, who had been literally dying of hunger, were glad of even these humble viands, however little savoury

they might be, and after ascertaining that their horses were comfortably provided for, they lay down, wrapped in their ponchos, upon a heap of dry leaves, a delicious bed for fatigued men, and upon which they slept soundly till morning.

At daybreak, our two adventurers, still accompanied by their dog Cæsar, who, whatever he might think, expressed no astonishment at this new kind of life, but trotted seriously beside them, saddled their horses, bade farewell to their host, to whom they gave a few reals in return for his hospitality, and set forward again, looking with earnest curiosity at every object that presented itself to their view, and surprised to find so little difference between the New World and the Old. The life they were beginning, so different from that they had hitherto led, was, for them, full of unexpected charms, and they felt like schoolboys in holiday time. Their lungs seemed to expand to inhale the fresh, sharp breeze of the mountains. Everything, in their eyes, wore a smiling aspect; in a word, they felt they lived.

It is about thirty-five leagues from Valparaiso to Chili, as the people of the country are accustomed to call the capital of the Republic. The handsome, broad, and well-kept up road, which was formerly cut through the mountain by the Spaniards, is rather monotonous, and completely devoid of interest for tourists. Vegetation is rare and poor; a fine and almost impalpable dust arises with the least puff of wind. The few trees, which stand at long distances from each other, are slender, stunted, dried up by both wind and sun, and seem, by their wretched appearance, to

protest against the efforts at cultivation which have been made on this plateau, which is rendered sterile by the strong sea breezes and the cold winds of the Cordilleras which sweep over it.

At times may be seen, at an immense height, like a black dot in space, the great condor of Chili, the eagle of the Andes, or the savage vulture in search of prey. At long intervals pass *recuas* of mules, headed by the *yegua madrina*, whose sonorous bells are heard to a great distance, accompanying, well or ill, the dismal chant of the muleteer, who thus endeavours to keep his beasts going. Or else it is a *guaso* of the interior, hastening to his chacra or his hacienda, and who, proudly mounted upon a half wild horse, passes like a whirlwind, favouring you as he goes by, with the eternal "Santas tardes, caballero!"

With the exception of what we have described, the road is dull, dusty, and solitary. There is not, as with us, a single hostelry affording accommodation for horse and foot; these would be useless establishments in a country where the stranger enters every house as if it were his own home. Nothing! Solitude everywhere and always; hunger, thirst, and fatigue must be expected and endured.

But our young men perceived nothing of this. Enthusiasm supplied the place of all they wanted; the road appeared charming to them; the journey they were making, delightful! They were in America; beneath their feet was the soil of the New World, that privileged land, of which so many surprising accounts are given; of which so many people talk, and about

which so few know anything. Having landed only a few days before, while still under the impressions of an endless passage, the weariness of which had weighed down their spirits like a mantle of lead, they beheld Chili through the enchanting prism of their hopes; reality did not yet exist for them. What we have here said may appear a paradox to many people; and yet, we are satisfied that all travellers of good faith will acknowledge the exact truth.

At times travelling at a steady foot pace, at others enjoying a laugh and a gallop, our young men, to whom the political events of the Chilian Republic were very uninteresting, and who, consequently, knew nothing of what was going on, arrived quietly within a league of Santiago, at about eleven o'clock in the evening, just at the moment when the ten Chilian patriots were falling on the Plaza Mayor, beneath the balls of General Bustamente's soldiers.

"Let us pull up here," Valentine said cheerfully; "it will give our horses time to breathe."

"Pull up! what for?" Louis asked. "It is late; we shall not find a single hotel open."

"My dear friend," Valentine replied, with a laugh, "you are still a Parisian to the backbone! You forget that we are in America. In that city, of which the numerous steeples dimly stand out on the horizon before us, everybody is long since asleep, and all the doors are closed."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Pardieu! why, we will bivouac. The night is magnificent. The heavens display all their jewelry; the air is warm and balmy; what better could we desire?"

"Oh, nothing, of course!" Louis replied, laughingly.

"Well, then, we have, as you see, time to chat a little."

"Chat, brother! why, we have done nothing else since morning."

"Pardon me, I don't agree with you. We have talked much, about all sorts of things, of the country in which we are, and of the manners of the inhabitants, little as we know about them; but we have not talked in the manner I mean."

"Explain yourself more clearly."

"Look you, brother; an idea has just struck me. We know not what adventures await us in that city, yonder, before us. Well! before we enter it, I should like to have a sort of final conversation with you."

The young men took off their horses' bridles, that the animals might have the advantage of a few tufts of grass which sprang up here and there; and, stretching themselves luxuriously upon the ground, they lit their cigars.

"We are in America," Valentine resumed; "in the country of gold, upon that soil where, with intelligence and courage, men of our age can in a few years amass princely fortunes!"

"Do you know, my friend – " interrupted Louis.

"Oh, perfectly!" said Valentine, cutting him short. "You are in love, and you are seeking the object of your love; that's

understood: but that does not at all interfere with our projects – quite the contrary."

"How is that?"

"Pardieu! that's plain enough. You know, do you not, that Doña Rosario – that's her name, I think – "

"Yes."

"Very well, then; you know she is rich, do you not?"

"There's no doubt of that."

"Ay, ay! but be it understood, not rich as with us: that is to say, some fifty thousand francs a year – a paltry pittance! – but rich as people are here – a dozen times over millionaires!"

"Probably she may be," the young man said impatiently.

"That's capital! You must understand, then, that when we have found her, for we *shall* find her, and that soon, you can only demand her hand by producing a fortune equal to her own."

"The devil! I never thought of that," said the young man.

"I know you did not; you are in love; and, like all other men afflicted with that disease, you think of nothing but the person you love. Fortunately, however, I am with you, to think for both; and whenever you have spoken to me of love, I have replied by reminding you of fortune."

"That is true. But how is fortune to be made so promptly?"

"Ah! ah! you have come to that question at last," Valentine said, laughing.

"I know no profession," Louis continued, following his own idea.

"Nor I either. But let not that alarm you; people succeed best in things they don't understand."

"What's to be done?"

"I will think of it; so set your mind at rest. But you must be well convinced of one thing, and that is, that we have set foot in a land where the ideas are quite different from those of the country we have left; where the manners and customs are diametrically opposite."

"You mean to say – "

"I mean to say that we must forget all we have learnt, in order that we may remember but one thing – our desire quickly to make a colossal fortune."

"By honourable means?"

"I am acquainted with no other," Valentine replied, seriously. "And remember, brother, that in the country in which we at present are, the point of honour is not at all the same as in France, and many things which with us would appear false coin are here deemed good and passable. On this point a word to the wise! You understand me, don't you?"

"Nearly, I think."

"Very well! Imagine we are in an enemy's country, and must act accordingly."

"But – "

"Do you wish to marry the woman you love:"

"Can you ask me such a question?"

"Allow me to act, then, as I see best! But, above all, when

chance throws a good opportunity in our way, let us be careful not to miss it."

"Act just as you please."

"Well, that is all I had to say to you;" and throwing away the remains of his cigar, he rose from his recumbent position.

They were soon again in the saddle, and, at a foot's pace, resumed their way towards the city, chatting as they went.

Midnight was striking by the clock of the Cabildo at the moment when they entered Santiago by the Canada. The streets were deserted and silent.

"Everybody is asleep," said Louis.

"So it seems," Valentine replied. "Let us look out, notwithstanding. If we find no door open, we can then but compound for a night's bivouac, as I suggested."

At this moment two pistol shots were heard, mingled with the gallop of horses.

"What can that be?" said Louis. "Assassination is going on here!"

"Forward! cordieu!" replied Valentine.

They clapped spurs to their horses, and galloped at full speed in the direction whence the sound proceeded. They soon reached a narrow street, in the middle of which two men on foot were bravely contending with five on horseback.

"Have at the horsemen!" Valentine shouted; "help the weaker party!"

"Be of good heart, gentlemen!" said Louis; "help is at hand!"

And timely help it was for Don Gregorio and his friend. A minute later, and they must have succumbed. The providential arrival of the Frenchmen quickly changed the appearance of the fight. Two horsemen fell dead from pistol shots fired by the young men; while a third, knocked down by Don Gregorio, was silently strangled by Cæsar. The other two thought it high time to decamp, leaving their fair prisoner behind them. She had fainted; and Don Tadeo, leaning against the wall of a house, was upon the point of following her example. Valentine, with the presence of mind acquired in his old profession of a Spahi, secured the horses of the bandits killed in the skirmish.

"Quick, gentlemen! to the saddle!" Valentine said to the Chilians.

Louis had already dismounted, and was attending to the young lady.

"Do not leave us," Don Gregorio remarked; "we are surrounded by enemies."

"Fear nothing!" said Valentine, "we are quite at your service."

"Many thanks! – A little assistance, if you please, to place my friend, who is wounded, on horseback."

Once in the saddle, Don Tadeo declared he felt sufficiently strong to keep his seat without help. Don Gregorio placed the still inanimate young lady before him.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "nothing remains for me but to thank you most cordially, if your business will not allow you to remain longer with us."

"I beg to repeat, caballeros, that we are at your service."

"We have no pressing demand upon our time; we will not leave you till we are assured you are in safety," Louis said, with animation.

"Follow me, then," said Don Gregorio, with a bow; "and do not spare the horses; it is an affair of life and death."

And the four horsemen set off as fast as their horses could bear them.

"Eh! eh!" said Valentine, in an undertone to his foster brother. "Here is an adventure that promises something! We are losing no time at Santiago! What think you?"

"We shall see!" Louis replied, in a more thoughtful tone.

No light had gleamed out, no window had been opened, during the combat. The streets remained silent and gloomy; the city seemed abandoned. Nothing was to be heard but the clatter of the horses' feet upon the rough pavement of the streets through which they galloped. The cathedral clock struck two as they passed across the Plaza Mayor. Don Tadeo could not repress a sigh of relief when glancing at the spot where on, only a few hours before, he had so miraculously escaped death.

CHAPTER XI
GENERAL BUSTAMENTE

Don Tadeo was right, when, on seeing General Bustamente pass, he said he was on his way to visit his mistress. It was, in fact, to the residence of the Linda the General was going. On arriving at the gate, one of his men dismounted, and knocked. But no one answered; and at a sign from the General, the soldier knocked louder. But still all remained silent; there was no movement within. He began to feel uneasy. This silence was the more extraordinary from the General's visit having been announced, and he was, consequently, expected. "Oh! oh!" he said, "What is going on here? Knock again, Diego, and knock in a way to make yourself heard!"

The soldier knocked with all his strength, but still uselessly. Don Pancho's brow contracted; he began to fancy some misfortune must have occurred.

"Break open the door!" he cried.

The order was instantly obeyed; and the General, followed by his escort, entered the house. In the Patio all dismounted.

"Be prudent," said the General in a low voice to the corporal who commanded the escort; "place sentinels everywhere, and keep a sharp look-out whilst I search the house."

After giving these orders, the General took his pistols from his

holsters, and, followed by some of his lancers, entered the house; but everywhere the silence of death prevailed. After passing through several apartments, he arrived at a door, which, being a little ajar, allowed a stream of light to pass. From the other side of this door proceeded something like stifled groans. With a kick of his foot, one of the lancers dashed open the door; the General entered, and a strange spectacle presented itself to his astonished eyes! Doña Maria, tightly bound, and gagged, was fastened to the foot of a damask bed, saturated with blood. The furniture was broken and disordered, whilst two dead bodies, lying in a pool of blood, made it evident that the room had been the scene of a desperate conflict.

The general ordered the dead bodies to be removed, and then desired to be left alone with the lady. As soon as the lancers had departed he shut the door, and approaching the Linda, he hastened to release her from her bonds. She was senseless.

On turning round to place the pistols he had retained in his hands on the table, he drew back with astonishment, and almost with terror, as he perceived the dagger standing erect in the middle of it. But this instinctive feeling lasted only a moment. He went quickly up to the table, seized the dagger, which he carefully drew out, and eagerly took up the paper it had pinned down.

"*The tyrant Don Pancho Bustamente is cited at the expiration of ninety-three days!*

"THE DARK-HEARTS."

he read in a loud, harsh tone, and then crushed the paper

violently in his hand. "Sangre de Dios! Will these demons always make a mock of me? Oh! they know that I show no mercy, and that those who fall into my hands – "

"Escape!" said a hollow voice, which made him start involuntarily.

He turned sharply round, and beheld the Linda, with her vicious eye fixed upon him with a demoniacal expression. He sprang towards her.

"Thank God!" he cried warmly, "you are again restored to your senses. Are you sufficiently recovered to explain the scene that has taken place here?"

"A terrible scene, Don Pancho!" she replied, in a tremulous voice; "a scene, the bare remembrance of which still freezes me with terror."

"Are you strong enough to describe it to me?"

"I hope so," she replied. "Listen to me attentively, Don Pancho, for what I have to tell concerns you, perhaps, more than me."

"You mean this insolent summons, I suppose?" he remarked, showing it.

She glanced over it, and replied —

"I did not even know that such a paper had been addressed to you. But listen to me attentively."

"In the first place, have the goodness to explain to me what you just now said."

"Everything in its turn, General; I will not fail to explain

everything, for the vengeance I thirst for must be complete."

"Oh!" he said, a flash of hatred gleaming from his eye, "set your heart at ease on that head, – whilst avenging myself, I will avenge you."

The Linda related to the General what had passed between her and Don Tadeo in the fullest details – how the Dark-Hearts had snatched him from her hands, and the threats they had addressed to her on leaving her. But, with that talent which all women possess, of making themselves appear innocent in everything, she represented as a miraculous piece of awkwardness on the part of the soldiers charged to shoot him, the fact of Don Tadeo being alive after his execution. She said that, attracted by the hope of avenging himself upon her, whom he suspected of being no stranger to his condemnation, he had introduced himself unseen into her house, where by a strange chance she happened to be alone, having that evening permitted her servants to be present at a *romeria* (a fête), from which they were not to return before three o'clock.

The General had not for an instant the idea of doubting the veracity of his mistress. The situation in which he had found her, – the incredible news of the resurrection of his most implacable enemy, altogether so confused his thoughts, that suspicion had no time to enter his mind. He strode about the room with hasty steps, revolving in his head the most extravagant projects for seizing Don Tadeo, and, above all, for annihilating the Dark-Hearts, – those never-to-be-caught Proteuses, who so

incessantly crossed his path, thwarted all his plans, and always escaped him. He plainly saw what additional strength the escape of Don Tadeo would give to the patriots, and how much it would complicate his political embarrassments, by placing at their head a resolute man who could have no longer any considerations to preserve, but would wage war to the knife with him. His perplexity was extreme; he instinctively felt that the ground beneath him was mined, that he was walking over a volcano, but he had no power to denounce to public opprobrium the enemies who conspired his ruin. The recital made by his mistress had produced the effect of a thunderclap upon him; he knew not what measures to employ in order to counteract the numerous plots in action against him on all sides, and simultaneously. The Linda did not take her eyes off him for a moment, but watched upon his countenance the various feelings aroused by what she told him.

We will, in a few words, introduce to the reader this personage, who will play so important a part in the course of the following history.[2] General Don Pancho Bustamente, who has left in Chili a reputation for cruelty so terrible that he is generally called *El Verdugo*, or the executioner, was a man of from thirty-five to thirty-six years of age, although he looked near fifty, a little above the middle height, well made, and of good carriage, announcing altogether great corporeal strength.

[2] Reasons of the highest consideration oblige us to change the names and the portraits of the personages of this history, as the majority still exist. But we vouch for the correctness of the facts we relate.

His features were tolerably regular, but his prominent forehead, his grey eyes deeply set beneath the brows, and close to his hook nose, his large mouth and high cheek bones, gave him something of a resemblance to a bird of prey. His chin was square, an indication of obstinacy; his hair and moustache, beginning to be streaked with grey, were trained and cut in military fashion. He wore the magnificent uniform, covered at every seam with gold embroidery, of a general officer.

Don Bustamente was the son of his own works, which was in his favour. At first a simple soldier, he had, by exemplary conduct and more than common talents, raised himself, step by step, to the highest rank of the army, and had in the last instance been named minister-at-war. Then the jealousy which had been silent whilst he was confounded with the crowd, was unchained against him. The General, instead of despising calumnies which might have died out of themselves, gave them some degree of foundation, by inaugurating a system of severity and cruelty. Devoured by an ambition which nothing could satisfy, all means were deemed good by him for the attainment of an object he secretly aimed at, which was the overthrow of the republic and government of Chili, and the formation of Bolivia and Araucania into one state, of which he would cause himself to be proclaimed Protector – an object which, besides the almost insurmountable difficulties it presented, ever appeared – owing to the universal hatred which the General had aroused against himself – to slip further from his grasp each time he thought he was about

grasping it.

At the moment we bring him on the scene, he found himself in one of the most critical circumstances of his political career. He had in vain shot the patriots *en masse*– conspiracies, as always happens in such cases, succeeded each other without interruption, and the system of terror which he had inaugurated, far from intimidating the population, appeared, on the contrary, to urge them on to revolt. Secret societies were formed; and one of these, the most powerful and the most terrible, that of the Dark-Hearts, enveloped him in invisible nets in which he struggled in vain. He foresaw that if he did not hasten on the *coup d'état* he meditated, he should be lost beyond redemption. After a rather long silence, the General placed himself by the side of the Linda.

"We will be avenged!" he said, in a deep tone; "be but patient."

"Oh!" she replied, bitterly, "my vengeance has commenced!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.